WESTERN SYDNEY UNIVERSITY

THE HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED-APPROACH TO DEVELOPMENT

A CASE STUDY OF A DEVELOPMENT PROJECT IN THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS OF VIETNAM

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my family, my brother, Phong Dang, my grandfather, who already passed away, for I know that they have always been with me in different ways throughout my journey. Thank you so much for being my constant companions. May God bless you always!
Acknowledgements

I like to frame my PhD studies as a learning journey. For me, it is actually a learning process in its fullest sense. Throughout the journey, sometimes, I had fun and hopefulness, but at times exhaustion and hopelessness. However, if I had to sum up, I must say it has been a useful learning journey that I have traveled.

As I am now reflecting on this journey, I realise that I have picked up many useful skills. This gives me the confidence and knowledge to embark upon new projects in the future. On reflection, what is definitely true for me was that I was not alone, but always had constant companions, who include my family, my respectful and devoted supervisors, friends, and staff at the School of Social Sciences and Psychology (SSAP). They have helped me greatly in different ways as I moved through this journey. Therefore, I need to thank them all.

To begin with, I want to thank my own family that consists of: my wife: Phuong Tran, and my two children: Tina Dang and Tony Dang, for their endless and constant love, and support for me. They boosted my confidence when I most needed it. I saw so much sacrifice and at times, suffering. I feel so guilty and tormented that at times I ‘abandoned’ them. But I know they forgive me, and that they never give up on me.
as I will never on them. Any successes I have achieved are also their successes.

I am also blessed to have my parents back home in Vietnam. I want to thank them because I know that, despite their distance, they are always with me and in our prayers. Their constant love has added to the strength that I needed to complete this journey. May God keep blessing and protecting them as He has always!

I started this journey and I did not know what awaited me. All that I had was determination and perhaps some little experience. Now that I have completed this journey, it marks the beginning for many others. One thing I know for sure is that I was not able to complete this journey without the guidance of my respectful supervisors: Dr. Gerda Roelvink, Professor Chris Sidoti and Professor Michael Darcy. They are the ones who have walked with me patiently through this journey. I know I can never thank them enough for their tremendous help and guidance.

I was fortunate to start my research with Professor Michael Darcy, who was appointed to be my primary supervisor in my first year of candidature. I want to acknowledge his assistance in facilitating the completion of the COC (confirmation of candidature), the first step leading to my official doctoral candidature. I also appreciate his
continued assistance in the later stages of my candidature when he stepped down from the supervisory panel as the prime supervisor as he retired from Western Sydney University.

I would like to thank Dr. Gerda Roelvink, my primary supervisor for her extraordinarily effective guidance. I know that I just can’t thank her enough for the enormous work she has done for me that has enabled me to get this far on the journey. What I can tell now with confidence is that she is such a great supervisor, and for whom I have always had my highest respect. Her expertise and devoted assistance really helped me to shape this thesis. Every time I received her comments on my chapters, I realised that she had spent so much time reading the chapters carefully. Her comments were so useful and paved the way for me to improve this thesis. In preparation for our meetings to discuss the comments, she always sent me her comments days before we met. This allowed me to come to the meeting better prepared. I also discovered that she is such an understanding person. If I ever had to do a PhD again, I would definitely like to have her as my supervisor again, and I would highly recommend her to other students. I must say that she is a favorite teacher of mine, and I am so honored to have studied under her supervision. I sincerely wish her all the best in her career and life.
It would be an unforgivable oversight if I did not mention and thank Professor Chris Sidoti, my co-supervisor. I appreciate the tremendous and devoted assistance he has given me, and it has been a great honour to have him on the panel. His broad and in-depth knowledge, coupled with his forty years of experience about the subject of rights-based development, has benefitted me so much. The comments he gave me were extremely useful, enabling me to better shape and complete this thesis. Chris travels overseas often on international missions, and I know that, many times, he read and commented on my chapters during flights or while waiting for a connected flight. For this and many other things, I want to extend my sincerest thanks, deepest appreciation and gratitude.

Professor Sidoti is such a humble, patient, sympathetic and understanding person. These are among his many beautiful traits that I saw in him, and I try to embody his spirit in my life and work. What also makes me appreciate his assistance much more is that, although he worked on this project on a voluntary basis, his devotion to my work was outstanding. He never refused any little request from me. He always tried to arrange his busy schedule to meet with me to discuss my thesis. He was also generous to buy me a cup of coffee every time we met. I really appreciate his generosity.
When in a difficult time during the journey, I was fortunate enough to meet Dr. Peter Bansel, HDR convenor with SSAP. It is true to say that there were times I was just like a drowning person fighting for life. Peter came as a boat that saved my life and took me onshore so that I was able to continue the journey. To me, he is an amazing person I met at WUS. The encouraging words he gave me added to the little confidence I had to keep moving on the journey. Although not on my panel, he was always willing to read my chapters and discuss them with me. As I met with him, I realised that he is such a humble and understanding person. I really appreciate his willingness to assist me, and I wish him all the best in his future.

It would be an oversight if I did not thank Professor Kevin Dunn, the Dean of SSAP, Professor Adam Possamai, Director of HDR and Mrs. Vicky Fox, Senior Research Administrative Officer at SSAP for their excellent leadership and tremendous support. I really appreciate the financial support they provided for me to attend the conferences in the United States and Australia, from which I have drawn useful experience and knowledge that helped further my research. I think I am so much in love with SSAP. It is such a wonderful place to do research. Its staff is so friendly and helpful. I frequently worked with Mrs. Chantelle Young, one of the staff in charge of PhD students.
Chantelle is such an amazing person. She is so friendly, understanding and extremely efficient. I really enjoyed working with her. I wish her greater success in her career.

I would also like to thank Dr. David Ip, my supervisor in my masters degree studies at Queensland University, for his editorial assistance in this thesis. I feel so guilty that he edited my thesis while unwell, and this makes me appreciate his efforts so much more. I sincerely wish him well and long to be reunited with him.

I would also like to express my sincerest thanks to DFAT (The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade) for the generous scholarship they provided me with to take up this journey. It has actually opened up a new beginning for me to move on to the journey to come. So, thank you!

Last but not least, I want to thank Judith Coleman, whom I was blessed to meet accidentally on a flight to Vietnam. I am honoured to have the relationship that we have. I appreciate the gifts that she sometimes sent us. It has added to our limited family budget. The Ortegas are another beautiful family that we knew, and you all provided us with great support while my family lived in Australia. We enjoy and appreciate our friendship. I want to wish them all well.
I know that there are many other people who have been with me on this journey. They include Theresa—a good friend of our family—fellow colleagues in the HDR room, Angerine at the International Unit at the University, Jeremy Finch, Kevin, Patrick and John (University shuttle bus drivers at Bankstown campus), and especially the community people in Daklak who participated in my research. I want to thank them all and wish them all the best in whatever they do.

I am now towards the end of my PhD studies. This, however, does not imply an end. Rather, it is a new beginning to a new learning journey. At this stage I don’t know what it looks like, what form it will take, and where it will take me. What I can tell you is that it will be another challenging one. I accept this challenge for I know that if it does challenge me, it will not change me. Your continued assistance and support will enable me to better travel on this journey. I look forward to the continued assistance and support from you all. So, thanks in advance for your help.

Toan Ngoc Dang
February 2018

Statement of Authentication
The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original, except as acknowledged in the text. All of my sources of information have been acknowledged in the bibliographies. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

Toan Ngoc Dang

February 2018
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AAI</td>
<td>Action Aid International</td>
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<td>AAV</td>
<td>Action Aid International Vietnam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADB</td>
<td>Asian Development Bank</td>
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<tr>
<td>DARD</td>
<td>Department of Agriculture and Rural Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>CH</td>
<td>Central Highlands</td>
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<tr>
<td>COC</td>
<td>Confirmation of Candidature</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPC</td>
<td>Commune People’s Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DPC</td>
<td>District People’s Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IEC</td>
<td>Information, Education and Communication</td>
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<tr>
<td>HRBA</td>
<td>The Human Rights-based-Approach</td>
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<td>HRD</td>
<td>Higher Research Degrees</td>
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<tr>
<td>FA</td>
<td>Farmers’ Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>MoU</td>
<td>Memorandum of Understanding</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
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<td>---------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGOs</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organizations</td>
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<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organization of Economic and Cooperation Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPA</td>
<td>Participatory Project Appraisal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPC</td>
<td>Provincial People’s Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PMU</td>
<td>Project Management Unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PO</td>
<td>Project Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PMU</td>
<td>Project Management Unit</td>
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<tr>
<td>SSAP</td>
<td>The School of Social Sciences and Psychology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UDHR</td>
<td>The Universal Declaration on Human Rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td>The United Nations Development Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>The United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>The United Nations</td>
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<td>YU</td>
<td>Youth Union</td>
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<td>WB</td>
<td>World Bank</td>
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<tr>
<td>WUS</td>
<td>Western Sydney University</td>
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<tr>
<td>WU</td>
<td>Women’s Union</td>
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Abstract:

The Human Rights-based Approach (HRBA) to development is based on the international human rights framework, and its key principles are participation, empowerment, accountability and non-discrimination. The HRBA has been endorsed by the United Nations (UN) and development agencies as the approach to development that has the capacity to adequately address poverty in the developing world. However, while much has been written about the HRBA as a viable approach to development, little is known about how the HRBA is implemented in practice, especially in non-western settings like Vietnam. This research explores the implementation of the HRBA in two ethnic minority communities in the Central Highlands of Vietnam by investigating the views and experiences of local stakeholders who were involved in the project, highlights the lessons learned and explores the implications for advancing rights-based poverty reduction strategies in non-Western societies.

The thesis begins by providing a contextual background to the HRBA project in Vietnam. I then move to explore what poverty means in this context and how this fits with the local perception of recent development approaches. To do so I draw on a range of in-depth interviews undertaken with local stakeholders. Through an in-depth
case study of one poverty reduction project, I argue that the successful implementation of the HRBA relies on appropriate adaptation to local settings. More specifically, the findings from this study highlight many difficulties that arose during the implementation of the HRBA in the Central Highlands of Vietnam including a limited capacity of project staff members, especially in terms of their understanding of the HRBA principles and their ability to effectively implement the principles in the communities. The research also found an inability of the HRBA to provide material assistance to the community, in conjunction with capacity building.

In light of the issues identified in this case study, I recommend that flexibility be viewed as the fourth principle of the HRBA. Adding flexibility to the core HRBA principles of participation, empowerment and accountability is key to the successful implementation of the HRBA in local settings. This is because poverty is not universally the same, but a context-specific phenomenon associated with local contextual specificities. In other words, there is no universal development model that can deliver universal success.

In this thesis, I also discuss different modes of cooperatives as potential strategies that could better enable the adaptation of the HRBA to local settings for these modes of cooperatives could link
between capacity building and economic development. They could also be an effective empowering strategy, which is a central component of a development project that aims to implement HRBA to development in the communities.
Chapter 1: Human Rights Based Approach to development in the Central Highlands of Vietnam

The research issue:

Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA) to development is founded on the international human rights framework and the key principles of participation, empowerment, accountability and non-discrimination (Scheinin & Suksi 2002b; Schmidt & Traub 2009). It is endorsed by the United Nations (UN) as a viable development approach with the ability to address adequately the issue of poverty in the developing world (Scheinin & Suksi 2002b; Schmitz 2012a). Since emerging in development theory in the 1990s, the HRBA has been adopted by many international development agencies, including UN agencies such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations International Children’s Fund (UNICEF), and various Non-Government Organizations (NGOs), including Care International, Oxfam and Action Aid (Uvin 2007b). However, while the HRBA has become a well-known development approach, and much has been written about its effectiveness, little has been done to document how it has been adopted and implemented as a tool for poverty reduction.
in local communities, such as the Central Highlands of Vietnam where ethnic minorities congregate (Dang, TN 2018; Destrooper 2016; Oestreich 2017).

This chapter introduces my research on the effectiveness of the HRBA as implemented in the Central Highlands of Vietnam. Specifically, to illustrate how it works in the local context, two ethnic minority communities of Cu Hue and EaDar in the district of Eakar of Daklak province in the Central Highlands of Vietnam are selected. These two communities are part of an HRBA initiative undertaken by Action Aid International Vietnam (AAV), a non-governmental organization operating in Vietnam since 1992 with the aim to assist local communities to overcome persistent poverty through HRBA development programs. Like other development agencies, AAV believes that poverty is commonly associated with the denial of human rights (Archer 2011) and is not a simple economic phenomenon as commonly perceived (Alston & Robinson 2005). Therefore, it believes that, in addressing poverty, attention must be paid to protecting human rights, for which the HRBA is essential (Archer 2011). This involves, in particular, participation, empowerment, accountability and non-discrimination in
development (Alston & Robinson 2005; Redclift 2005; Scheinin & Suksi 2002b; Schmidt & Traub 2009).

This focus of this research is thus an examination of how the HRBA is implemented for poverty reduction in a non-Western local community. This will help to clarify further the strength and limitations of the HRBA, not only as a practical strategy but also in advancing its future conceptual development as an effective means towards poverty reduction.

**Research aim:**

There are two specific objectives for this research:

1. To investigate the views and experiences of local stakeholders who were involved in the HRBA poverty reduction project initiated by AAV in the Central Highlands of Vietnam;
2. To highlight the lessons learned from the project and the implications for advancing rights-based poverty reduction strategies in non-Western societies.
**Research questions:**

This research investigates the HRBA to development using the AAV supported project in the communities as a case study. The research aims to answer the following questions:

3. How poverty is perceived in the Central Highlands of Vietnam?

4. How is poverty addressed in the AAV project under examination?

5. How might the AAV project in the Central Highlands of Vietnam be better adapted to better address poverty while reflecting the HRBA to development?

6. How might the HRBA itself be modified to reflect the local specificities and complexity of poverty, while maintaining its human rights objectives?

**Overall argument of the thesis:**

This thesis argues that, although the HRBA is widely accepted by the UN and other international development agencies as a preferable approach to poverty reduction in developing countries, its successful implementation requires appropriate adaptation to suit the local social, economic, cultural and political settings. The experiences of these two local communities demonstrate this point. Without taking into consideration these contextual settings adequately the implementation of the HRBA is ineffective in reducing poverty. In
addition, without adequate adaptation to local circumstances and needs, a project will not in fact be a truly HRBA project and cannot meet its HRBA goals. It is also important to pay attention to being flexible in implementing the HRBA in order to enhance adaption of the HRBA in the local context. Put it another way, effective implementation of the HRBA also requires flexibility in implementing key principles: participation, empowerment, accountability and non-discrimination.

The introduction of the HRBA to development in the 1990s has reshaped thinking about development in many ways (Scheinin & Suksi 2002b; Schmitz 2012a). In light of the HRBA, poverty is no longer seen through the narrow lens of physical survival or economic growth alone (Sen 1999b) but from a broader perspective that incorporates human rights, human freedom, gender equity, social equality, participation, accountability, empowerment and sustainability (Alston & Robinson 2005; Reichert 2007; Sen 1999b). The approach subsequently has been endorsed by UN bodies and many development agencies as an approach to development that has the potential to better address poverty in communities (Aaronson et al. 2006; Scheinin & Suksi 2002a; Schmitz 2012b). Many scholars and development practitioners, including Alston (2005-7) and myself, believe that the
HRBA has better ability to address poverty in the communities because it promotes the key principles of participation, empowerment, accountability and non-discrimination.

**Research significance:**

This research builds upon current scholarly research on the HRBA to development. Review of the literature shows that, while there is a significant amount of research on the theory of the HRBA, there is little research on how the HRBA has been implemented in practice in different contexts (Kindornay, Ron & Carpenter 2012; Oestreich 2017), apart from Oestreich JE *Development and Human Rights: Rhetoric and Reality in India*, published in mid 2017. Few, if any, studies explicitly explore the applicability of the HRBA to development in Vietnam. This research contributes to the knowledge base of the existing research about the HRBA to development and, in particular, to its implementation in Vietnam.

No previous research on the HRBA has collected data from a wide range of local stakeholders. The present study investigates the views of local stakeholders, including villagers, local leaders, the AAV project staff, representatives of local mass organizations, participants of NGOs and public institutions and their experiences of the HRBA and its links.
to poverty reduction in the local communities. Their views and experiences about the HRBA are critically important because they provide insight into how the HRBA has been locally perceived and how the HRBA has addressed the issue of poverty in the local communities. Importantly, these local stakeholders will have to own and implement the HRBA in the Central Highlands region, especially when the AAV project has withdrawn, and so their level of commitment is critical to the future sustainability of the AAV project. Such a wide range of local views and experiences of the HRBA has also provided diverse perspectives of the HRBA and its links to poverty reduction in the Central Highlands region.

On a practical level, this research will also help development organizations, including AAV, that adopt the HRBA as a development approach, to improve their implementation in practice. This research will be a useful means for organizations to learn more about how to improve implementation of the HRBA and in that way enhance the adoption and implementation of the HRBA among state development bodies in Vietnam as an effective alternative approach to development.

This chapter:
In the first part of this chapter, I introduce the HRBA to development by highlighting participation, empowerment and accountability as its key principles. I describe how the approach entered Vietnam as an approach to development and how it is currently implemented in the local community.

Part two of this chapter explicitly focuses on Vietnam. I present a contextual background with a focus on the Doi Moi (Renovation) policy that Vietnam adopted in the late 1980s as a fundamental policy milestone, structurally paving the way for today's dynamic development in the country.

Finally, part three of this chapter presents an overview of the structure of the thesis. I present an argumentative summary of each of the following chapters.

**Part one: the HRBA to development**

**An introduction:**

The HRBA to development emerged in the 1990s as a viable development approach with the ability to effectively resolve the issue of poverty in the community (Schmitz 2012a). The core principles of the HRBA include participation, empowerment, accountability and non-discrimination (Alston & Robinson 2005; Hamm 2001; Nyamu-
Musembi & Cornwall 2004). These principles are an integral part of the universal instruments on human rights, such as the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR) and the various UN conventions on human rights (Alston & Robinson 2005). Therefore, the implementation of the HRBA in practice seeks to align current development practice and goals with these universal human rights instruments (Alston & Robinson 2005; Forsythe 1989; Frankovits & Earle 2001). In doing so, the proponents of the HRBA argue that in development attention has to be placed on promoting and achieving the fundamental human rights principles of participation, empowerment, accountability and non-discrimination (Sarelin 2007; Scheinin & Suksi 2002b; Schmitz 2012a; Sen 1999a).

Many scholars argue that the HRBA aims to replace earlier conventional approaches to development, including the “top-down” approach, that had failed to adequately address poverty in developing countries (Schmitz 2012b; Sen 1999b). According to Sen (1999), conventional development strategies framed poverty purely through the lens of economic growth or national product alone. Sen (1999) argued that the problem with the purely economic approach is that the approach highlights and measures development using monetary indicators alone. That approach does not take into consideration other
elements of development, such as human rights, gender, participation, empowerment, capacity and equality, that Sen sees as fundamental in development, providing a more comprehensive view of development. The “top-down” approach prevents us from viewing development from other perspectives (Sen 1999b). The HRBA emerged in this context (Mahoney 2008; Nyamu-Musembi & Cornwall 2004; Reichert 2007). It attempts to address not only the dimensions ignored by conventional strategies, such as human rights, participation, empowerment, gender, non-discrimination and equality, but new dimensions resulting from unfair trade, global climate change and political conflicts (Sen 1999b).

As an approach to development, the HRBA aims to transform local people from powerless stakeholders into powerful actors, so that they can claim their rights and entitlements, such as the right to participate in development and especially the right to make their own decisions regarding development (Cornwall & Nyamu-Musembi 2004; Nyamu-Musembi & Cornwall 2004; Wilson 2005). Ultimately, it aims to enable them to question critically, negotiate better and engage effectively with local structures within the community and outside it (Scheinin & Suksi 2002b).
The arrival of the HRBA marked a radical perceptual change for development practitioners, researchers and development agencies (Alston & Robinson 2005). These institutions became convinced that, rather than poverty being seen as a purely economic phenomenon measured in terms of income alone, poverty needs to be viewed in association with such other aspects as human rights, gender inequity, the lack of participation in development, and empowerment (Alston & Robinson 2005). Sen’s work on capabilities also made it clear that poverty needs to be viewed beyond the narrow view of the economic perspective (Alston & Robinson 2005). Forsythe (1989) argues that many development programs failed because of the neglect of these issues, especially human rights. According to Forsythe (1989), these issues of participation, empowerment and gender are fundamentally associated with development and therefore they must be properly addressed within development programs and projects.

Participation is critical to the HRBA because the HRBA sees participation as critical to development (Cornwall & Nyamu-Musembi 2004; Filmer-Wilson 2005; Oestreich 2017). Local people need to fully participate in the development process in their own right, to learn from, contribute to and effectively manage development outcomes (Cornwall & Nyamu-Musembi 2004; Oestreich 2017). Without
participation development outcomes may fail to address gender, for example, and so fail to reflect local women’s concerns and priorities. In other words, development then further marginalizes local women rather than being inclusive. Lack of participation can jeopardize development (Meinzen et al. 1997).
**Development and human rights:**

The rationale for the HRBA is thought to be very straightforward (Sarelin 2007). As Sarelin (2007) describes it, the HRBA aims to protect local people’s relevant human rights in the process of development. One of those rights is their right to participate effectively in development and shape and make their own decisions regarding local development (Hamm 2001; Kiwanuka 1986; Li 1992). According to Kiwanuka (1986), this type of right is underpinned by universal human rights instruments, such as the Declaration on the Right to Development (United Nations General Assembly Resolution 41/128 of 4th December 1986). For Powell (2005) and Wilson (2005), in the light of the HRBA, human rights must be placed at the heart of the development process. UNDP (2003) insists that in addressing the issue of poverty, attention must be paid to addressing the issue of human rights. This is because poverty is an outcome of denied human rights (UNDP 2006). Forsythe (1989) regards this as fundamental to development for, by placing human rights at the center of development, local people have the opportunity to actively participate in and make their own decisions regarding development.

Proponents of the HRBA further argue that, because of human rights, people must be viewed as major stakeholders in their own
development rather than as mere recipients as they are often portrayed in conventional strategies, such as the “top-down” approach to development. According to Cooke and Kothari (2001), the “top-down” approach is characterized by externally imposed initiatives and planning. It does not treat local people with sufficient respect but, at times, with disdain (Tonkens & Duyvendak 2003). It regards them as immature stakeholders unable to participate in development or to make their own decisions (Tonkens & Duyvendak 2003). In contrast to the conventional “top-down” approach to development, the HRBA stresses that local people must not be viewed as victims or mere recipients but as actors, right-holders and claimants (Wilson 2005). Therefore, rather than being viewed as peripheral, they must be placed at center of the development process, so that they can participate fully and function effectively in the development process in their own right (Uvin 2007a). Wilson (2005) argues that this is a fundamental difference between the HRBA and the conventional “top-down” approach to development.

This thesis highlights the core principle of participation in the HRBA. Along with participation, as Musembi & Cornwall (2004) and Scheinin, M and Suksi, M (2002) have explained, the HRBA’s key principles also include empowerment, accountability and non-discrimination. By
implementing effectively these principles, it is argued that the HRBA not only addresses the dimensions of poverty that the conventional strategies have failed to do, but also has the ability to resolve the new ones, such as violation of human rights, lack of participation, gender inequity, the lack of transparency and accountability, and institutional reforms (Cornwall & Nyamu-Musembi 2004; Filmer-Wilson 2005; Sarelin 2007; Sen 2005).

**The implementation of the HRBA to development in practice:**

Although the HRBA has been endorsed as an approach to development that has the potential to better address poverty in the community, the implementation of the HRBA in practice is not always easy (Dang, TN 2018; Reichert 2007). In fact, it often encounters difficulties, making the way to its greater acceptance and uptake more challenging (Dang, TN 2018; Reichert 2007; Schmitz 2012a). Examination of the case study of the AAV project in the Central Highlands shows that the HRBA’s path to adapt successfully to local contexts for poverty reduction is filled with myriad challenges. These range from the inability of the project staff to effectively implement the HRBA principles, the inability of the project itself to effectively respond to
local needs for material assistance in conjunction with capacity building, and cultural contradictions between individualist values associated with the HRBA, the dominant collectivist culture in the communities and the local political culture (Dang, TN 2018). This thesis confirms that the implementation of the HRBA in practice in the local context of the Central Highlands of Vietnam is not always easy or smooth. In fact, the path the HRBA takes is challenging.

In light of the HRBA’s promise in theory and challenges in practice, since its entry into the developing world and particularly in Vietnam (Banik 2010), the HRBA has been subject to intense debate among development practitioners, researchers and political leaders (Dang, TN 2018; Reichert 2007; Schmidt & Traub 2009). According to Dang (2018), Forsythe (1989), Skegg (2005) and Vaughan (2008), the HRBA is a concept of Western origin that may not be adaptable to non-Western societies like Vietnam with their own unique contextual specificities (such as culture, social conditions and politics). Some scholars, including Kindornay, Ron & Carpenter (2012), even argue that, although well endorsed as an alternative development approach, the HRBA is just another fad that will make little difference to development in practice. These scholars further argue that the HRBA is merely another label in development that does not change the
content at all. Its content is the same as any previous development approach, including the “top-down” approach to development (Kindornay, Ron and Carpenter 2012).

Despite different views, the HRBA’s principles of participation, empowerment, accountability and non-discrimination are distinctive to the approach to development (Cornwall & Nyamu-Musembi 2004; Sarelin 2007). Against the claim that the HRBA is just a development fad, the HRBA is underpinned by these powerful development principles (Sarelin 2007; Schmitz 2012b; Wilson 2005). As discussed above and especially in chapter two, these fundamental principles not only have the ability to strengthen and sustain development outcomes in the community, but also align on-going development work with universal human rights instruments, such as the UDHR and the UN human rights conventions (Aaronson et al. 2006; Frankovits & Earle 2001; UNDP 2003; Wilson 2005). The proponents of the HRBA argue that implementing and achieving these fundamental principles in development is essential to resolve the issue of poverty in the developing world and also universalize the instruments (Sarelin 2007; Scheinin & Suksi 2002b; Schmitz 2012a; Sen 1999a).

However, a development strategy that may be successful elsewhere will not necessarily be successful in Vietnam with its specific local
context, including social conditions, culture and political culture (Forsythe 1989). This research investigates how the HRBA to development is implemented in the local context of the Central Highlands in Vietnam through an intensive examination of the AAV development project, which is framed as a HRBA. Although implemented in the communities since 2007, no studies before this have attempted to explore how the project’s HRBA has been adapted in the local context for poverty reduction. Therefore, this research explores the adaptation of the HRBA in an entirely new location.

In taking this approach, this research asks whether the HRBA, which is of Western origin (Panikkar 1982), can actually be adapted effectively to the local specificities of poverty reduction. Other scholars and development practitioners have examined the extent to which the HRBA is an effective development tool and whether the approach can be universally applied to resolve the issue of poverty, as well as whether the approach aligns with current universal human rights instruments (Kindornay, Ron & Carpenter 2012). However, fewer scholars have asked about its applicability in different contexts, especially in the communities in the Central Highlands of Vietnam.
Part two: the HRBA in Vietnam

Vietnam leading up to the application of the HRBA to development:

In the late 1980s, Vietnam undertook a fundamental shift in economic policy, and therefore in development policy, with the adoption of the Doi Moi (Renovation) policy (Arkadie & Mallon 2003; Dang, TN 2018; Forbes et al. 1991; Truong, DH & Gates 1996). Under this policy Vietnam has achieved enormous success in its effort to reduce poverty nation-wide (Arsenio et al. 2003; Beresford 1989; Dang, TN 2018; Fritzen 2002). It reduced the poverty rate¹ (against the poverty line standards of the Government) in the country and contributed to Vietnam meeting the UN-initiated Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by the target date of 2015 (Imai, Gaiha & Kang 2011). Central to Doi Moi is a structural shift from a planned economy to a market economy (Truong, DH & Gates 1996; White 1985). As such Doi Moi has been characterized as the de-collectivization, de-centralization and privatization of the economy that paved the way for the dynamic liberalized economy seen in Vietnam today (Arkadie & Mallon 2003; Migheli 2012). Thus scholars (Gamble 2001; Boothroyd and Pham

¹ Poverty in Vietnam is often measured in terms of monetary income per households against the poverty line standards established by the Government.
describe the period of Doi Moi as a retreat of the state-owned sector, giving way to the fast-growing involvement of the private sector and foreign investment. This has had positive and negative impacts.

On the positive side, Forbes et al. (1991) and Nguyen & Nguyen (2011) argue that the structural changes of the Doi Moi period have enabled enormous economic development and growth in Vietnam (often measured in terms of GDP). These structural changes have also led to Vietnam’s deep integration into the global economy (Truong, DH & Gates 1996). The country is now an active member of many international trade organizations, including the World Trade Organization (WTO), and has entered multiple multilateral and bilateral partnerships, such as with Japan, the European Union and the United States of America (Avery 1993; Pham & Fry 2004; Stiftung & Gutersloh 2012; Thoburn 2004). According to Imai, Gaiha & Kang (2011), Vietnam’s success in economic development in the Doi Moi period is internationally recognized, contributing to achieving the MDGs that reflect the universal endeavor and commitment to end poverty across the globe (Hopper 2012).

The negative impacts of Doi Moi, however, cannot be overlooked. In particular, the liberalized economy has not benefited all population
groups in the country equally. According to Boothroyd & Pham (2000) and Dang (1984), while the liberalized economy has benefited the majority of the population, it has marginalized ethnic minority communities, including the Central Highland communities included in this research. This is in part because liberalization does not recognize or acknowledge the collectivist values or traditions of ethnic minority communities, such as those the subject of this study (Eversole, Mcneish & Cimadamroe 2005). Because of a difference in values and cultures, and especially by the way the global economy operates, these communities have not been able to effectively participate or function in Vietnam’s development process under Doi Moi. In fact, they are becoming increasingly isolated socio-economically despite targeted government assistance programs\(^2\). (Baulch et al. 2008; Dang, VN 1984; Forbes et al. 1991). These programs aimed to reduce poverty nationwide by providing material assistance, such as rice, seeds and fertilizer, and infrastructure, such as education, health care stations, water supply, housing and electricity (Arsenio et al. 2003; Fritzen 2002; Pham & Fry 2004). Yet these ethnic communities struggle with poverty and face many other developmental problems in addition to

\(^2\) These programs adopting the “top-down” approach to development as framed by the Government known as national target programs that aim to reduce poverty in the communities across the country mainly through provision of material assistance, such as agricultural seeds, animal seeds, arable land, capital and infrastructure, such as housing, water supply, health care stations, school, bridges and roads.
the need for material assistance, such as denied access to arable land for production, limited access to loans to expand production, increasing socio-economic disparity, under-representation in policy-making and the loss of collectivist rights and practices (Eversole, Mcneish & Cimadamroe 2005).

For Baulch et al. (2008), in spite of investment in infrastructural facilities, such as water supply, housing and irrigation schemes, there are cases showing that Vietnam’s socio-economic achievement is not sustainable because fundamental issues, such as participation, empowerment, gender equity and cultural specificities, have been neglected. As a result, the majority of rural and ethnic communities in Vietnam’s mountainous and remote regions continue to live in abject poverty or have merely entered a new form of poverty (Stiftung & Gutersloh 2012). According to Wagstaff & Nguyen (2002), the approach that Vietnam adopted could be framed as a conventional paternalistic “top-down” approach that basically aimed to address poverty through material assistance. Banik (2010), Sen (1999) and Tokens & Duyvendak (2003) argue that, as a result of such a paternalistic approach to development, not only do the “old” problems remain but also new ones have emerged, such as increasing social
disparity between population groups and between regions and the violation of elementary human rights.

In this context, many scholars, development agencies and practitioners, including Alston (2005), Scheinin & Suksi (2002) and UNDP (2003), argue that the HRBA can be an alternative approach to development with the ability to address poverty adequately in a more sustainable way. AAV has sought to implement the HRBA in its development projects in Vietnam, including the subject of this research.

The introduction of the HRBA in Vietnam:

As discussed in chapter two, the HRBA emerged as a new approach to development in the late 1990s (Kindornay, Ron & Carpenter 2012; Scheinin & Markku 2005; Schmidt & Traub 2009).

In Vietnam, the HRBA was introduced and implemented by a number of NGOs, such as Oxfam and Care International in the early 2000s and AAV in 2005 (Dang, TN 2018; Kindornay, Ron & Carpenter 2012). As described in chapters three and six, AAV began implementing the HRBA in the strategic Northern provinces of Lai Chau, Hoa Binh and Cao Bang. Although lacking experience in implementing the HRBA in a local community, because AAV had not implemented the HRBA
previously, internal AAV evaluation reports showed significant success in the Northern region (Archer 2011). On the basis of this initial success and with the progressively opening political and economic environment in Vietnam, AAV expanded its work to the Central Highlands. However, the implementation of the HRBA in this particular region encountered significant challenges, including conflicting views regarding the HRBA as an approach to development, specific local needs for material assistance for the purpose of survival and political culture associated with a one-party state in Vietnam. These and other factors have affected successful implementation of the HRBA in these communities.

Part three

Overview of thesis structure:

This thesis consists of eight chapters. This introduction is the first.

Chapter two is the theoretical chapter where I discuss key concepts, such as the historical origins of rights, human rights, development, key characteristics of human rights and the HRBA to development. I also discuss the theory of development as freedom developed by Amartya Sen, the Nobel Prize winner for economics in 1998. I use his theory as the basis for the arguments I make in this research. These concepts
(human rights and, development), along with the theory of development as freedom offered by Amartya Sen, are explored in some details and linked to the chapters that follow. Sen argues that central to development is enhancing and expanding human freedom (Sengupta, Neg & Basu 2005). In doing so, Sen (1999) suggests placing local people at the centre of the development process with the opportunity and ability to shape and make their own decisions regarding development. His perspective of development is central to the HRBA to development.

I argue that, although having a long history, the concept of human rights remains controversial and highly contested, especially between Western scholars and Eastern politicians (Hettne 1995; Panikkar 1982). This makes the implementation of rights-based development initiatives, such as the HRBA, difficult and even challenging. I also argue that applying Western concepts of development is not an effective strategy because development itself is not understood universally in the same way. We have to take into consideration local contextual issues. This issue is further discussed in chapter four, where I analyze the concept of poverty using responses collected from research participants.
Having developed the conceptual groundwork for the thesis, **chapter three** moves on to present the methodology and methods that I applied to investigate how the HRBA is implemented in the local context for poverty reduction. As my research is exploratory aiming to gather local views and experiences of poverty in the communities, I used a qualitative methodology (Lazarsfeld 1979). I discuss here the in-depth interview method that I used in the field as part of an ethnographic research methodology. This method allowed me to enter into conversation with the interview participants and conduct observational research, an important part of data gathering (Minichiello et al. 1995). This further contributes, along with the data I gather directly from the research participants, to the exploration of how the HRBA project can adapt to the local context.

**Chapter four** then moves on to examine the various definitions of poverty in literature and local perceptions of poverty in the communities, using the data I gathered from local participants. I argue in this chapter that poverty is a complex phenomenon. It is not universally the same. It needs to be locally defined if poverty reduction is to be effective, especially when involving economically and socially deprived groups, including women, children and ethnic minority people. Poverty is associated with particular contextual specificities,
such as climate change, denied access to arable land and capital, domestic violence, culture, history and political system (Escobar 2005 and 2007). This perspective can be aligned with Sen’s theory (1999). Escobar (2005 and 2007) also suggests that development begins with existing social movements in the community. He especially highlights alternative strategies for the community to choose from rather than imposing an external initiative, which he claims has been a failure in the last fifty years. I explore Escobar’s view in chapter eight.

Having discussed local perceptions of poverty, in chapter five I review local perceptions of the Government’s “top-down” approach to development. The Rural Water Supply and Sanitation (RWSS) project is examined to illustrate whether the “top-down” approach works in an ethnic minority community in the Central Highlands of Vietnam. Then, local views of the HRBA are investigated further by a close examination of how the AAV-framed HRBA poverty reduction project was implemented. In this chapter, I argue that, in development or poverty reduction, there have been heated debates on “top-down” vs “bottom-up” approaches, as well as survival vs human rights concerns. The implementation of the AAV-framed HRBA project is a case in point. The divergent views and the tensions and contradictions between various groups of local stakeholders illustrate the complexity
and difficulties in resolving poverty in a developing country like Vietnam.

**Chapter six** presents a case study of the AAV development project. AAV frames this project as a HRBA project. This chapter does two important things. First, it provides a descriptive picture of the AAV project and how the project is implemented in the local context. Second, it critically discusses implementation of the core principles of the HRBA in practice in the communities and assesses the extent to which the project can be viewed as a HRBA model. Although AAV claims that the project embodies the HRBA principles focusing on four themes – right to education, right to food, women’s rights and children’s right – and that capacity building is the key empowering strategy across the four themes, I conclude that the project has only achieved partial success by the standards of the HRBA.

**Chapter seven** focuses on the adaptation of the HRBA for contextually sensitive poverty reduction work. I argue that, to implement the HRBA to development in the communities effectively, the principles of the HRBA will need to be compatible with local specificities of poverty and local needs. I discuss in this chapter one possible way to better enable the HRBA to be adapted to the local context is implementing models of cooperatives, for example, community revolving finance schemes,
community laundries and agricultural cooperatives. These community-based initiatives could also be effective ways of empowering local people, which is the central element of the HRBA.

Having analyzed the data gathered from local participants, and especially having explored the case study in chapter six, chapter eight, the concluding chapter, discusses the concept of development as a highly contested phenomenon (Hettne 1995). Some scholars maintain that the only approach for developing countries to become developed is by taking the same Western industrialization pathway. Other scholars, including Escobar (1995 and 2007) and Sen (1999), argue that there is no universal development model that can deliver the same success universally (Forsythe 1989). They see poverty as culturally and contextually specific. This chapter argues that, no matter what approach is promoted to tackle poverty in local communities, it must be flexible in development and in implementation. Being flexible does not necessarily mean a delay or a change in implementing the principles of the HRBA, but it should mean that careful consideration is given to how best to adapt the principles to actual local contextual specificities.

Therefore, flexibility could even be framed as the fourth fundamental principle of the HRBA, alongside the existing principles of
participation, empowerment and accountability. It enables adaptation of the HRBA to specific circumstances in specific local communities. This aligns well with Escobar (1995 and 2007) who calls for a post-development perspective that gives power to alternative discourses for local people to make their voices heard and have their own rights recognized rather than blind acceptance of imposed external ideas of development. It also aligns well with Sen’s theory of development as freedom (1999) that is the basis of this thesis. Although not explicitly stated, his notion of freedom in fact endorses the priority that development must give rights to individuals on a micro level. Development requires flexibility on a broader, socio-cultural level because, while individual enjoyment is central to Sen’s theory, he also implied that, in enhancing and expanding human freedom, local conditions should be respected as a source of enjoyment by local people.
Chapter 2: The Human Rights Based Approach to Development: Where it came from, what it is and what it offers?

Introduction:

Both human rights and development are highly contested concepts (Hettne 1995; Sidoti 2012). Researchers, practitioners and governments differ greatly in how they view them. Despite their conceptual differences, however, many human rights and development experts and practitioners agree today that development is best approached from the perspective of human rights (Alston & Robinson 2005; Forsythe 1989; Hettne 1995). They see development as so closely associated with human rights as to be impossible without human rights. This agreement has come from the realization, based on experience over many decades in many developing countries, that development based on an economic growth perspective alone is ineffective and unsustainable (Forsythe 1989; Nelson, N & Wright 1995). Indeed, many scholars and development practitioners go further and say that development is a direct result of the denial of human rights (Hopper 2012; Schmidt & Traub 2009; UNDP 2003).
The Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA) to development arose as the response to the realization of the links between human rights and development (Filmer-Wilson 2005; Nyamu-Musembi & Cornwall 2004; Schmidt & Traub 2009). This approach is widely endorsed by the United Nations (UN) and by government and non-government international development agencies (Clarke 2012; Rosas & Scheinin 1999). They are now aligning development work with universal human rights instruments, such as the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR) (1948). Understanding the HRBA to development requires an understanding of human rights, including their historical origins and their key characteristics, how human rights are linked to development as a concept, and the origin of the HRBA.

This chapter begins with an examination of the concept of human rights through an historically based discussion of the origins of the concept – ancient religious thought, the Enlightenment, the Age of Revolutions and the period after the World War Two. I discuss the perspectives of John Locke (1632-1704) in particular, a well-known philosopher of human rights, whom many scholars consider to have laid a solid foundation for the discussion and development of human rights today. Although the concept of human rights has a long history, it is still debated today.
Having explored these historical origins of human rights, this chapter moves on to discuss the fundamental characteristics of human rights: universality, indivisibility, interrelatedness and interdependence. I argue that, despite any conceptual differences and while acknowledging cultural particularities, it is essential to acknowledge that human rights are universal and indivisible. The realization of one right depends on the realization of others. These key characteristics of human rights are underpinned by the international human rights instruments.

In exploring some contemporary issues with the concept of human rights, I discuss how some, particularly some governments, have used the categorisation of human rights to argue for a hierarchy of rights, contrary to the indivisibility and interdependence of all human rights.

In developing the argument in the thesis, I became increasingly convinced of the relevance of Amartya Sen’s theory of development as freedom. Sen was the Nobel Prize winner for economics in 1998. While not explicitly referring to human rights, his theory provides the link between human rights and development, which is key to my thesis. The results of my case study research can be understood in terms of this theory. By suggesting that development needs to go beyond the purely economic perspective of growth, and that central to development is enhancing freedom, Sen’s theory implies putting local people at the centre of the development process. This
is how people can enjoy development, which, in his view, is the principal end of development. Sen’s perspective is well aligned to a key principle of the HRBA to development that my thesis explores, participation.

Having explored where rights came from and what they are, and Sen’s theory, I then move to look at how development as a concept entered debates on human rights, and in particular the emergence of the HRBA to development. I argue that, despite any difference in views regarding the HRBA, researchers and development practitioners now widely agree that the HRBA was developed as a response to the perceived failure of traditional approach that considered development in terms of economic growth alone, and of the new global economic order that has resulted in many problems in developing countries, such as persistent poverty, the violation of human rights and greater socio-economic marginalization. In discussing the HRBA to development I highlight that the HRBA ultimately aims to deal with the power relationships between stakeholders, such as the government and the community. In doing so, the HRBA focusses particularly on promoting participation, empowerment and accountability as key principles, and that these three principles make the HRBA distinctive from other approaches to development.

The main argument of this chapter can be summarized in three points: that human rights are universal, indivisible, interrelated and interdependent and
apply to all countries, taking local cultural specificities into account; that development is freedom, that is, human rights, and there can be no sustainable development without human rights; and that the HRBA provides a means to put this theory into practice.
The concept of human rights:

Different scholars trace the origins of the concept of human rights to different historical periods or different philosophical traditions (Sidoti 2012). What is clear is that this concept has been incrementally developed, with many traditions and cultures contributing to what we understand today as universal human rights (Morgan & Turner 2009; Sidoti 2012).

Ancient religious history:

Some scholars see the origins of human rights in religious thought, particularly in the fundamental principle of respect for human dignity that is common to many religious traditions (Sidoti 2012). The nature of the traditions varies but the principle of human dignity is common to many. These principles are very ancient in many traditions and are reflected in the sacred writings of the traditions.

Judaism, Christianity and Islam, for example, have a shared approach coming from their common traditions (Ishay 2008; Lee & Lee 2010). According to Shestack (1998), the concept of human rights is rooted in these religions because all three believe in common that every human being is sacred, created in the image and likeness of God and, therefore, naturally and equally endowed with human rights, to liberty and freedom. Nell (1953) claims that Christian teaching affirmatively maintains that every human person has the
right to the means necessary to attain salvation, implying also that every person has the right to live as a human being endowed by God with intelligence and freedom of will. Therefore, such a right cannot be trampled upon by others. In these religions, all human beings have one universal parent (Nell 1953). As Thomas Jefferson, one of the drafters of the American Constitution, observed:

..., By natural birth, all men are equally and alike born to like propriety, liberty and freedom; and as we are delivered of God by the hand of nature into this world, everyone with a natural innate freedom and propriety, even so we are to live, everyone equally and alike, to enjoy his birthright and privilege.

Shestack (1998) argues that, by believing in one common universal ‘father’ people share a common humanity, from which the initial sense of the universality of human rights emerged. Therefore, the concept of rights was perceived as a sacred concept flowing from the Divinity itself (Langlois 2001a).

This belief in human dignity led to a code of moral law governing relations between human beings. In the Judeo-Christian scriptures the code was the Ten Commandments, which prohibited killing, stealing, deceiving and coveting the property and spouse of another person (Lee & Lee 2010). According to Lee and Lee (2010), children were often made to learn by heart
all the Ten Commandments and not to break them because of their centrality to human dignity.

While we can see elements of human rights implied in the Ten Commandments, such as the right to life, the right to property, the right to truth, the right to mutual care and support, and the right to respect (Lee & Lee 2010), there was no specific mention or specific concept of rights as such. However, the implied rights were subsequently conceptualized in terms of natural law or natural rights rather than the essential humanity that is common contemporary conceptualization of rights (Goodhart 2009). Another issue to note here is that the language of rights in religious texts is not specifically used in religious texts and thus the concept to rights remains somewhat unclear (Shestack 1998). Rather, the emphasis in the texts is on duty (Shestack 1998). As Leo Strauss explained,

....Ancient natural right is grounded in civic duty whereas modern natural theories assert an entitlement to individual liberty that holds independently of and prior to any civic obligation (Leo Strauss in Gray p. 4 1986).

In religious traditions, then, duties are specified and rights arise as the necessary implication from duties. Nonetheless the foundations of modern human rights can be identified here (Shestack 1998).
The Enlightenment:

Mahoney (2008) jumps centuries and sees the origins of human rights in the European Enlightenment. Ishay (2008) argues that human rights began when Christian ethics shifted from a passive dependence on revealed knowledge toward an embrace of religious freedom and freedom of opinion in general. This was a product of the Protestant Reformation in the sixteen and seventeenth centuries.

The great shift brought about by the Enlightenment, which had originated in and affected Europe and then the so-called periphery of Europe, was a shift from faith to reason as the basis of understanding and interpreting the social world (Outram 2013b). Outram (2013), a Professor of history at the University of Rochester in New York, USA, argues that central to the Enlightenment thinking is a radical use of reason in explaining and understanding the real world in which people live. This relates to the epistemological concept of how we know what we know (Wallerstein 2006). Knowledge came to be seen as ultimately a unitary phenomenon that is guided by rationality rather than faith, superstition, or revelation (Outram 2013a). Enlightenment philosophers at this time insisted that human beings can acquire and enrich their understanding and knowledge of the world through their minds rather than through revealed truth or some religious authority (Wallerstein 2006). Simply put, Enlightenment thinking is a
reflection of a world view that is based on science rather than on tradition or religious faith (Outram 2013a). It is a world view in which the human person is central and so human rights are seen as entitlements that are inherent and innate (Alston & Robinson 2005). They are inherent in humanity and not endowed by a deity. Some scholars suggest that the concept of human rights has its roots in the Enlightenment (Armitage & Sanjay Subrahmanyam 2009; Goodhart 2009).

John Locke (1632-1704) was one of the most influential Enlightenment philosophers of rights (Donnelly 2007; Lee & Lee 2010). He had a great influence on developments in human rights during the Age of Revolutions and since. He was well-known for his intellectual efforts in protecting the rights of individuals and challenging the traditional views of the divine rights of kings (Donnelly 2007; Lee & Lee 2010). When speaking about rights, Locke tended to speak of rights as natural rights or the law of nature (Langlois 2001a; Lee & Lee 2010). He spoke of the law of nature “which obliges everyone; and reason, which is that law, teaches all humankind who will but consult it that, being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty or possessions” (Lee & Lee p. 6 2010). According to Locke, under these natural laws, people should have the right to liberty and also to acquire property naturally and equally and no one is allowed to interfere (Gray 1986). Locke also argues that the law of nature or
natural rights exist independent of all legislative systems and governments (Lee & Lee 2010).

Thomas Jefferson is said to have referred to Locke’s views about rights when he drafted the statement in the US Declaration of Independence in 1776 that “every human being is born equal and is endowed naturally with certain inalienable rights including the rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” (Lee & Lee 2010). It is also considered that, thirty years later, the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen of 1789 was written on the basis of Locke’s theory (Lee & Lee 2010). Locke laid a solid philosophic foundation, upon which further understanding and knowledge about human rights are built (Donnelly 2007; Lee & Lee 2010).

**Revolutions and sovereignty:**

The end of the 18th century can be described as the Age of Revolutions (Armitage & Sanjay Subrahmanyan 2009). This period saw the secessionist independence of the America Revolution and the anti-monarchical and anti-aristocratic regime change of the French Revolution in 1789. New ideas about political legitimacy and the concept of sovereignty emerged from the American and French revolutions. These events led to a series of attempted revolutions in Europe in the first half of the 19th century (Wallerstein 2006).
Before these revolutions political legitimacy was seen as coming from God or from the monarch or, in fewer cases, the Parliament but the revolutions asserted that legitimacy came from the people alone (Wallerstein 2006). Armitage and Subrahmanyam (2009) and Israel (2006) argue that, the birth of the notion of sovereignty of the people brought the language of rights with it. This was reflected in the adoption of the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen soon after the revolution and of the amendments incorporating the Bill of Rights into the United States Constitution in the 20 years after independence.

There was a third, more general, revolution during this period, the Industrial Revolution. According to Armitage and Subrahmanyam (2009), the Age of Revolution was a time of increased productivity and prosperity that can be attributed to the Industrial Revolution. Hoffmann (2011) and Landman (2006) argue that the concept of human rights was born at this time.

Goodhart (2009), an Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Pittsburgh, USA, argues, alongside the emergence of the language of rights, that industrial and technological advancements during this time in Europe also formed and shaped the concept of development. People were now considered as free individuals with human rights and the freedom to engage in institutional structures and development processes, while public institutions, such as government, secured and advanced their freedom (Gray
1986). In this period, liberalism became the leading ideology in Western thinking (Cornelius & Murphy 1980; Doyle 1986). Liberalism places individuals at the center of social, political and legal theories (Cornelius & Murphy 1980). Therefore, the concept of human rights not only reflects liberal thinking (Goodhart 2009) but also emphasizes a social order in which the states, as a legal and moral obligation, are required to secure and maximize the freedom of individuals as a necessary fundamental condition for people to enjoy (Brown 2003).

**Nineteenth and twentieth centuries:**

After its rapid development in the 18th century, the concept of human rights, both politically and legally, almost disappeared in the 19th century (Hoffmann 2011). Scholars believe that the emergence and domination of other concepts, such as civilization, nation, race and class displaced human rights discourse (Hoffmann 2011). These other concepts (civilization, nation, race and class) are also closely linked to the Industrial Revolution of the late 18th century, during which the language of human rights was subordinated (Hoffmann 2011). According to Mann (1993), during this time, theorists paid too much attention to the claims of monarchical ideologists and international relations specialists who were interested only in
sovereignty and sovereign powers in terms of relations between States, that is, foreign policy.

The concept of human rights began to regain attention only in the second half of the 20th century when the violation of human rights became a priority concern in relation to many countries, first Nazi Germany and Nazi occupied Europe and then the Soviet bloc (Hoffmann 2011; Shirer 1991). According to Landman (2006) and Hoffmann (2011), the language of rights did not become widespread until after World War Two, which is described as a period of “transformation [of human rights] from the exclusive realm of philosophy and moral reflection into the domain of law” (Alston p.8 1988). As Hoffmann (2011) explains, this period marked the end of the conventional notion that human rights are an internal issue of individual states, where external intervention was considered to be inappropriate or even an interference in another state’s business. During this post War and Cold War period, the language of human rights has gained wider attention from researchers, development practitioners, the United Nations and international development agencies and become commonplace. It is no longer seen as an internal issue for states but instead an international and universal concern (Langlois 2001b).

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3 A commonly referred way for the National Socialist German Workers’ Party that was established by Adolf Hitler and that was active between 1920 and 1945. This period was also known as the Third Reich, meaning Third Realm or Third Empire (Shirer 1991).
Many scholars have argued that human rights discourse returned because people started to “understand the atrocities committed by Germany in the Jewish Holocaust” as well as many other painful tragedies resulting from the War (Langlois p. 74 2001b). They have also argued that rights stayed prominent after the 1940s because of the rise of totalitarian governments in the Soviet bloc (Langlois 2001b). Scholars claim that the language of rights was re-addressed and became more pronounced and a critical subject in the international political agenda, because the violation of rights was increasing sharply in the Cold War era (Cingranelli & Richards 1999). During this time Western powers and scholars saw a structural cause in the fact that many governments attempted to prevent the quick spread of democracy and the globalization process of capitalism (Cingranelli & Richards 1999). This made the language of rights uncommon or even unspoken in some countries, even as it became a priority on the agendas in international forums (Hoffmann 2011). Since regaining attention, the language of human rights has become commonplace and human rights are no longer an internal issue but universal (Langlois 2001b).

Although the exact origins of human rights remain contested and multiple, human rights have become firmly imbedded in international instruments and, in this legal context, are seen as the entitlements of all human beings which States are required to respect by protecting, securing and fulfilling
their obligations (Brems 2001; Cerma 1994; Donnelly 1982a; Lee & Lee 2010; Otto 1997). It is to this understanding that I now turn.

**Contemporary understandings of human rights:**

Although the content of human rights is settled in international law, many issues about human rights remain contested. The basic understanding of human rights remains one of those contested issues (Morgan & Turner 2009; Sidoti 2012).

Bobbio (1996), a political scientist/philosopher looking at the subject of human rights, claims that the debate over the meaning of rights in the expression of human rights remains highly confused, with differences of perspective, especially between Anglo Saxon lawyers and lawyers in the continental tradition. These lawyers tend to use different words to say the same things, and the same words to say different things. For example, when speaking of rights, continental lawyers tend to speak of natural rights and positive rights, while those in Britain and the United States speak of moral and legal rights. Bobbio (1996) argues that in fact morality and legality are two different spheres of life. The former is based on principles and the latter on origin. However, despite any differences in the understanding of human rights, Bobbio acknowledges a common understanding that human rights
relate to obligations that have a precise meaning in normative language and universal instruments on human rights.

To promote a common understanding of human rights, Landman (2006), and Orend (2002) (both are Professors of Political Science at Universities) all argue that human rights are primarily morality-based and are claimable by everyone against everyone. This suggests that human rights should be founded in the moral rather than legal sphere of life. From this perspective human rights concern the human value of a human person, such as their dignity (Donnelly 1982b). In this contemporary view every human being, regardless of racial, ethnic, political, religious and social backgrounds, has rights and is entitled to claim their rights (Merino 2011). Human rights thus extend beyond the legal and political systems of the State (Donnelly 1982b). However, all parties involved, such as nation states, have the moral responsibility to ensure that human rights are respected, protected and fulfilled (Brems 2001; Donnelly 1982b). According to Landman (2006) and Merino (2011), human rights thus have legal implications. All States are required to ensure that their legal systems protect human rights, in terms of both moral and legal responsibilities (Landman 2006), and that their legal and political structures or systems can be held accountable for violating or failing to ensure human rights (Merino 2011).
Both views of human rights highlight two same facts, that human rights are
totally claimable (Orend 2002) and refer to normative systems (Bobbio 1996). ‘Claimable’ is key to the human rights-based approach to
development (Alston & Robinson 2005; Orend 2002). This means that
everyone has the right to claim human rights. It makes human rights not
mere matters for attention or recognition, but entitlements that must be
respected in practice (Orend 2002).

On this analysis, on one side of the human rights relationship is the
individual person and on the other side is the State. Human rights are the
entitlements of individuals that constitute claims individuals can make on
the State (Cornwall & Nyamu-Musembi 2004; Nyamu-Musembi & Cornwall
2004). The line runs from human dignity (Goodhart 2009) to institutional
responsibility (Pogge 2008) and ultimately to development as freedom (Sen
1999a).

**Human rights, human dignity and institutions:**

The second issue in the contemporary understanding of human rights is
acceptance of the fundamental value of human dignity and the consequent
responsibilities of institutions (Sidoti 2012). For Goodhart (2009), human
rights are grounded in the dignity of the individual human person and of
humanity generally. Every human person should be considered as an
independent or autonomous entity whose needs, equality, capacities and freedom must be respected. Here, human dignity is regarded as a basic value to which every human person is entitled because “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights” (UDHR Article 1). This article of the UDHR proclaims that all human beings are endowed with reason and conscience and therefore they should act towards one another in a spirit of “brotherhood” (Secretariat 2008).

The first and most fundamental aspect of human dignity is respect for the “intrinsic worth” of a human person (Donnelly 1982b). Respecting the “intrinsic worth” and “inherent dignity” of a person must be supplemented by the necessary political, social and legal structures or arrangements, so that individuals can access and make choices regarding what to believe, lifestyle and attitudes (Schachter 1983). In this regard, Pogge (2008) builds on the dignity perspective and contends that attention must be given to promoting institutional changes as fundamental steps to pave the way for human rights compliance and further development. He considers the concept of human rights from an institutional reform perspective. In fact, it has been shown that a reformed institution or structure can not only increase local participation, but also institutional accountability and transparency (Banik 2010 and Schmitz 2012a). Therefore, a State’s
responsibility for securing human rights extends to ensuring human rights are adequately addressed in institutions and systems (Tonkiss 2015).

However, this focus on institutions in the discussion of human rights has resulted in significant tensions for States that have failed to reflect human rights in their institutional structures (Tonkiss 2015). Current institutional structures in many developing countries, including Vietnam, have not been reformed sufficiently, constitutionally and politically, to ensure human rights. This constitutes an obstacle to development (Davis 2004; Sen 1999a).
Key characteristics of human rights

Universality, indivisibility, interrelatedness and interdependence:

There is widespread agreement amongst scholars that human rights must be viewed as universal and indivisible (Morgan & Turner 2009; Sidoti 2012; Whelan 2010). According to Brems (2001), a scholar/researcher on human rights whose valuable publications include Human Rights: Universality and Diversity, Human Rights and Development – Legal perspectives from and fro Ethiopia and Human Rights and Civil Liberties in the 21st Century, universality and indivisibility are two fundamental characteristics of human rights and central to understanding human rights. These characteristics have been affirmed globally by the UN’s Second World Conference on Human Rights, in the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action adopted by 186 States in 1993 (Sidoti 2012).

Universality means that all human persons, regardless of their social, racial, political and other backgrounds, are equally entitled to human rights; indivisibility means that rights cannot be separated or ranked because of their interrelatedness and interdependence (Hamm 2001; Russell 2010; Sidoti 2012). In accordance with the international human rights instruments and jurisprudence, all people have equal rights regardless of their race, age,
income, sex orientation, gender, skin color, nationality and other status (Powell 2005).

Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, or social origin, property, birth or other status (Secretariat 2008) and (Morgan & Turner 2009).

Much of the discussion in this chapter relates to the characteristic of universality.

Russell (2010) argues that the realization of one right depends wholly or partly on the realization of others – the interrelatedness and interdependence of rights. For example, if one wants to exercise one’s social and economic rights to access education or health care, one also needs to have solidarity rights to access good development and an enabling environment so that these social services exist (Gedda 2003). Therefore, in development it is important that attention is given to all rights and not only to certain specific rights or types of rights (Forsythe 1989).

The characteristic of indivisibility is more contested in practice. Indivisibility means that rights cannot be divided one from another or prioritized one over another (Sidoti 2012; Whelan 2010). It also means that rights are interrelated and, therefore, one cannot focus on one specific right without paying attention to addressing another rights (Whelan 2010).
Indivisibility means that all rights have to be considered together if they are to be achieved (Morgan & Turner 2009). The project may focus on four rights as priorities, for strategic or pragmatic reasons, but it cannot ignore other rights as they are dependent on each other. So, the project’s objectives in relation to women’s right to a livelihood and to participation will be unattainable unless attention is paid as well to their right to education. Perhaps another example could be that women won’t be physically able to participate in the project’s education programs if they are sick and so, although the priority is women’s education, some attention to women’s health is essential. It is not possible to pursue one right without considering the relevance of others. This example should further demonstrate and reinforce the view that rights are not indivisible because they are by nature interrelated and interdependent on each other. If attention is paid to promoting right to education alone, children are still denied right to education because of unaffordability. This means that attention is also needed on promoting other rights in parallel with rights to education. In this case, it can be right to participate in an economic opportunity.

In the context of the AAV project, this characteristic of human rights really means that, while the project focused on four specific rights (right to food, right to education, women’s rights and child rights), it is important to be aware that attention to other rights, such as right to participate in development, is also required. This means that, while the project focuses on promoting these four rights, it is noted that focus on these four rights alone might not be able to help the project achieve the project objective of addressing poverty in the community effectively. Because of indivisibility of rights, attention is, therefore, needed on promoting other rights, including collective rights. An example of this can be taken from chapter four of the
thesis (p.153-4). It clearly shows that, although education is fee-free for locals, in practice, parents are required to pay in other ways. Most importantly, if parents are not able to meet the additional expenses, their children would be humiliated by others in schools with their names openly announced in class or in the school’s assembly that often takes place every Monday. As a result, many parents decided not to send their children to school or children would quit school because they felt so embarrassed.

This example should further demonstrate and reinforce the view that rights are not indivisible because they are by nature interrelated and interdependent on each other. If attention is paid to promoting right to education alone, children are still denied right to education because of unaffordability. This means that attention is also needed on promoting other rights in parallel with rights to education. In this case, it can be right to economic opportunity.

However, a focus on these four rights (the AAV project) can pave the way for promoting other rights. While this better enables the project to address poverty in the community, doing so is also consistent with AAV’s belief and claim that poverty is a result of denial of rights. By promoting indivisibility of rights, the project can better address complexity of poverty and also the work is aligned with international human rights instruments.

Human rights have been organised into categories for analytical reasons. Categorisation is intended to promote better understanding of rights but it has led to disputes about divisibility and indivisibility.

According to Donnelly (1986), human rights can be grouped into specific types that he identified as personal rights, legal rights, civil liberties,
subsistence rights, economic rights, social and cultural rights, and political rights. Personal rights refer to rights such as rights to life, nationality, recognition before the law or protection against cruel, degrading or inhumane treatment or punishment. Legal rights include access to remedies for violation of basic rights, the guarantee of fair and impartial justice and freedom from arbitrary arrest. Civil liberties include rights to freedom of thought, opinion, expression and religion, while subsistence rights refer particularly to rights to a standard of living adequate for the maintenance of normal well-being. Economic rights are principally about rights to work, rest and leisure, while social and cultural rights highlight the rights to education and access to cultural life. Political rights are principally about rights to participate in and represent in governmental bodies and also elections.

Landman (2006) arranges human rights into three different categories: civil and political rights; economic, social and cultural rights; and solidarity rights. Goodhart (2009) used the same categories but called them first, second and third generation rights respectively. The first category upholds right holders before the law and provides a kind of guarantee that people have the ability to participate freely in civil and political society, and that they can exercise rights such as the right to life, liberty, personal security and due process, and the right to equality in and before the law (Landman 2006). Central to the second category are such rights as the right to family and the
rights to education, health care and well-being, whereas the third category of rights refers to public goods, such as development and environment (Landman 2006). Because rights are interdependent (Sidoti 2012), a proper understanding and implementation of economic, social and cultural rights requires the promotion of civil and political rights (Oestreich 2017).

**Civil and political rights versus economic, social and cultural rights:**

Categorisation becomes problematic when it is used to support the division of rights and the subsequent prioritization of one category over another (Brems 2001). The historic Cold War conflict between East and West, for example, led to arguments over the prioritization of economic, social and cultural rights over civil and political rights (the view of the Soviet bloc) or the prioritization of civil and political rights over economic, social and cultural rights (the view of the Western group) (Cerma 1994; Mahoney 2008; Otto 1997). While the UDHR (1948) itself was drafted and adopted by the UN as a single instrument, when it came to drafting a treaty to implement the UDHR the Cold War divisions were such that two treaties (the Covenants) emerged, one on civil and political rights and the other on economic, social and cultural rights (Bayefsky 1996; Mahoney 2008; Nyamu-Musembi & Cornwall 2004). This conflict is continued today in arguments between developing and developed countries and so it remains relevant to
human rights in development. Singapore, for example, has argued that pursuing greater economic development justifies its continued inhibition of democracy and civil and political rights (Langlois 2001a). It argues that the approach to human rights must be compatible with the unique social, economic, historical and cultural conditions of each country (Panikkar 1982).

While it may not necessarily be the case for Vietnam, in many developing countries, the institutional structures are often seen as authoritarian, lacking three core institutional components: democratic elections, human rights and freedom of expression, and the rule of the law (Davis 2004). These States can promote economic rights over civil and political rights. In the past, this may have meant socialist economic policies taking precedence over democratic institution building. Today it often takes the form of pursuing economic liberalisation while ignoring political reform or political democratization (Davis 2004). This means that these States focus on establishing an economic policy that encourages rapid economic development but without political and institutional changes or true socio-economic reform (Davis 2004). Failure to incorporate universal norms of human rights into the State’s structures and systems limits the capacity to promote and advance the delivery of the obligatory human rights outcomes, both political and
economic (Frankovits & Earle 2001). This is an example of the failure to accept that human rights are indivisible and interdependent.

It is generally agreed that a focus on economic reform can result in significant economic achievements (Davis 2004; Trotsky 2001). However, a focus on economic development alone neglects other rights, such as civil, political and social rights, and can produce many economic and social problems, such as poverty, inequality, lack of transparency and accountability, and corruption (Ashley & Maxwell 2001; Oestreich 2017). This is well demonstrated by Oestreich’s (2017) recent work. Oestreich argues that to implement human rights, especially the HRBA to development, attention needs to be paid to promoting civil and political rights. If these rights are neglected, existing problems, such as poverty, inequality, lack of transparency and accountability in development, may grow worse. Additionally, when people develop a better sense of their rights as a result of higher education they will demand greater accountability and transparency from the government (Davis 2004). All human rights are indivisible and so reformed structures and adequate rights provisions are fundamental for fostering development in all areas (Tonkiss 2015). Because rights are indivisible and interdependent, properly understanding and implementing economic, social and cultural rights requires promoting
civil and political rights (Oestreich 2017). The HRBA is the key to accomplishing this, as we shall see.

**Individualism versus collectivism:**

The issue of prioritisation of rights is one human rights issue of contemporary relevance. Another is the application of human rights in collectivist cultures. As we have seen, human rights as the product of the Enlightenment is often perceived as individualistic (Pogge 2008). In this perspective, this means that human beings are viewed as autonomous, atomized, secular, independent individuals ready to demand their rights even at the cost of others (Pogge 2008).

When it comes the HRBA to development, many scholars and researchers including Sen (2009-12) and Alston (2005-7) agree that the HRBA to development aims to enable individuals to claim their own rights and entitlements in the process of development (Clarke 2012), the HRBA specifically aims to empower the individuals, assisting them in their full realization of their basic rights and freedom, such as right to speak out, right to pursue their personal desire and goals, and rights to participate in all aspect of life including political, and from then, making them capable and powerful stakeholders who can demand public institutions to respond to their needs. While the HRBA does not necessarily aim to tackle collectivist
values, the HRBA really aims to build capacity of individuals, believing that once individuals have sufficient capacity, they will be able to challenge public stakeholders in development and hold them to account for decisions that affect their livelihoods. Viewed in this way, it can be argued that human rights promote a particular set of values, such as the independent self, self-freedom, independence, personal liberty and self-realization (Lukes 1973). For Triandis (1995), individuals tend to regard themselves as an end, that is, as an autonomous entity independent of the community and social pressure, such as social conformity. An individual then acts according to their personal wishes rather than following social norms and social expectations (Triandis 1995). As such, instead of being defined by family, kin or community, an individual tends to seek and emphasize the self (Merry 2003). For example, a person in an individualistic society can choose a marriage partner without approval from parents, relatives or friends. Even when married, the couple will consider themselves as two different entities, equal to and independent of each other (Triandis 1995; Triandis, Bhawuk & Gelfand 1995). Given this emphasis on the self, in an individualistic culture individuals pursue self-achievement even at the expense of the group or community (Triandis 1989, 1995).

By contrast, many societies and cultures, particularly those in developing countries, are collectivist (Triandis 1995). In a collectivist culture,
individuals are considered part of the community with responsibility to work toward the community’s goals, even at the sacrifice of their own goals. (Triandis 1995; Triandis, Bhawuk & Gelfand 1995). Individuals in collectivist societies are also expected to act according to social norms that are passed down to them by their ancestral generations (Triandis 1995).

Portraying human rights as individualist presents difficulties in these societies. If human rights are perceived as individualist, they may be rejected by societies that are collectivist. There is need to ensure an understanding of human rights that can include collectivist cultures and not conflict with them.

**Universal human rights and cultural specificities:**

These contested issues can be resolved within the context of the universality and indivisibility of human rights through recognition that human rights must be promoted and protected within specific cultural settings, taking into account historical, cultural and religious particularities (Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action paragraph 5).

Some scholars argue that some States use cultural specificities as an excuse for the violation of human rights (Cerna 1995). In response to those criticized claim it is wrong to impose a singular concept of human rights upon all cultures; what development bodies need to do, they argue, is to be
patient and to demonstrate a greater willingness to assist States in their development process according to their own policies and priorities (Langlois 2001a). This response was expressed extensively at an ASEAN–EC Conference in 1999 by Mr. Ali Alatas, then Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Suharto New Order Government of Indonesia. He argued that, when defining the concept of human rights, the cultural and historical characteristics of each society must be taken into consideration as each country has unique socio-cultural settings (Cerna 1995; Horowitz & Schnabel 2004; Mauzy 1997). He further argued that human rights are not natural as such but depend on contingent variables such as social, economic, historical and cultural characteristics that are specific to each country (Langlois 2001a).

Rather than viewing human rights through the political lens as often held and advanced by international bodies, he argued, it is more important to judge human rights based on each country’s actual social, economic, historical and cultural characteristics (Vaughan 2008). Hence, development bodies should not use human rights as a political tool to demand changes in the so-called developing societies, such as Indonesia (Cerna 1995). Mr. Alatas remarked:

*The characteristic problems of developing countries in general as well as the specific problems of individual societies should be taken fully into account (Cerna, 1995, p. 204).*
Certainly the specific cultural, social, political and ethnic characteristics of societies (Panikkar 1982) are important because they are crucial in the formation of identity (Cornelius & Murphy 1980) and identity needs to be adequately recognized and considered in the process of development. In addition, although human rights are universal, how they are applied and interpreted by different cultures needs to be carefully considered (Cornelius & Murphy 1980). The formulation in the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action sought to do this (Sidoti 2012). In doing so, it repudiated the earlier Bangkok Declaration of Asia Pacific States that promoted cultural relativism and emphasised that adherence to human rights standards ought to be encouraged by consensus and "not through confrontation and the imposition of incompatible values" (Otto 1997).

Although arguments continue, there is now clarity and agreement on the basis of the formulation in the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (Sidoti 2012).

The consensus is clear and well balanced. Human rights are universal, indivisible and interdependent and interrelated and cultural particularities are to be taken into account in implementation of human rights (Bayefsky 1996; Brems 2001; Sidoti 2012).
Sen’s Theory of Development as Freedom:

In this thesis, I draw primarily on Amartya Kumar Sen’s theory of development as freedom to support the arguments I develop about the HRBA to development.

Sen was born in India in 1933 and was brought up in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Despite a difficult childhood during the Great Bengal Famine and the Partition of India, Sen became one of the most respected intellectuals of our time (Corbridge 2002). Sen has since become most renowned for his works on savings and capital in developing countries, surplus labor in peasant economies, and the relationship between farm size holdings and productivity in Indian agriculture. His work on poverty and the causes of famines gained him the Nobel Prize for economics in 1998 (Corbridge 2002).

I chose Sen’s theory for two main reasons. The first reason relates to the emphasis that Sen places on freedom in development. Freedom is central to development. This was illustrated to me in my discussions with villagers about poverty. Sen (1999) suggests enhancing and expanding human freedom as key to development. To do this, he suggests putting local people

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4 the most calamitous famine in Bangladesh in 1943 that was claimed to have taken away lives of two million people. It was the result of a war raging in many parts in the world, including the British empire and the Japanese army, in collaboration with Indian National Army, that caused a serious shortage in rice production in 1942. Due to the shortage of rice, the price of rice started rocketing from the beginning of 1943 in all parts of Bengal, which prior to the partition of India which covered the state of West Bengal of India and Bangladesh (Padmanabhan 1973).
at the centre of the development process so that they can make their own decisions. This is key to the HRBA to development because the HRBA highlights local people as key actors in development.

As discussed in detail in chapter four, as an alternative solution to the denial of loan access at the local bank, local people turned to local private traders for capital to invest in expanding their production. However, there is one condition with which local people must comply in order to access loans. They must sell their produce to the traders only. This means that local people are not allowed to access the ‘free’ market where they may find a better offer for their produce. In other words, local people access loans from local traders at the expense of freedom. As a result, they cannot step out of poverty even when they have access to loans. Sen is right on this point that development is not just about accessing capital, and as demonstrated in chapter four, capital alone is unable to help the community people to escape persistent poverty. It can even drive them into more persistent poverty. Freedom is key to development because freedom is actually a human right. In this case, it is the right to access ‘free’ market for a better offer. Sen (1999) suggests enhancing and expanding human freedom as key to development. To do this, he suggests putting local people at the centre of development process so that they can make their own decisions. This is key to the HRBA to development because the HRBA highlights local people as key actors in development.
The second reason I draw on Sen’s theory of development as freedom is the strong connection between development in terms of ‘freedom’ and human rights. Scholars have in fact directly linked freedom to key aspects of human rights. Gray (1986), for example, argues that freedom is an intrinsic value associated with all human beings and is a necessary ingredient of a good life characterised by human dignity (O'Donnell & Kennedy 2001). He argued that freedom is to be placed at the heart of all development and political agendas.

Sen’s work extends the concept of development far beyond the conventional notion of economic growth or GDP. His view on development is well aligned with the view that was highlighted in the World Development Report (2000-01) which defines poverty by extending beyond the conventional economic growth-based definition to include the lack of opportunity, empowerment and security as central elements of development (Alston & Robinson 2005). For Sen, an understanding that focuses solely on development as an economic problem not only prevents consideration of other ways of addressing development issues, but also ignores many of the problems commonly observed in the development process, such as growing social disparity and the violation of freedom and human rights. Sen argues that development must be addressed through the perspective of human freedom, which encompasses the power of people to make a choice (O'Donnell &
Kennedy 2001) and the capacity of people to do and enjoy things that they consider worthwhile (Nell 1953). Hence, Sen (1999) defines development as a process of enhancing and expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy. He suggests that freedom needs to be considered as a fundamental condition which allows local people to act freely or independently of and without interference by an external party, such as local government or development agencies (Gray 1986). As (Sen 1999a) observed:

“Development can be seen as a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy. Focusing on human freedoms contrast with narrower views of development such as identifying development with the growth of gross national products, or with the rise in personal incomes or with industrialization, or with technological advance or with social modernization”.

**The importance of freedom in development:**

Sen (1999) places human freedom at the centre of the understanding of development: “expansion of freedom is viewed, in this approach, both as primary end and the principal means of development” (Sen p. xii 1999). He suggests that, if development is about ensuring that everyone has the right to do things they enjoy, then not only should real human freedom be promoted and enhanced but human rights must be secured (Sen 1999a). However, he is mindful that there is no guarantee that people can exercise their rights unless they have the entire freedom to do so. To demonstrate this point, he gives an example from his childhood in Dhaka:
I was playing one afternoon -- I must have been around ten or so -- in the garden in our family home in the city of Dhaka, now the capital of Bangladesh, when a man came through the gate screaming pitifully and bleeding profusely; he had been knifed in the back. Those were the days of communal riots (with Hindu and Muslims killing each other), which preceded the independence and partitioning of India and Pakistan. The knifed man, called Kader Mia, was a Muslim daily laborer who had come for work in a neighboring house – for a tiny reward – and had been knifed on the street by some communal thugs in our largely Hindu area. As I gave him water while also crying for help from adults in the house, and moments later, as he was rushed to the hospital by my mother, Kader Mia went on telling us that his wife had told him not to go into the hostile area in such troubled times. But Kader Mia had to go out in search of work and a bit of earning because his family had nothing to eat. The penalty of his economic unfreedom turned out to be death, which occurred later on in the hospital” (Sen p. 8 1999).

Sen argues that freedom allows people to access a wide range of choices from which they can choose the best for themselves. Kader Mia, in the example above, had very few choices available to him. From this perspective development is not about the number of outcomes that are delivered. Rather, it is about how much freedom has been enhanced and expanded in the delivery of these outcomes and whether people have enjoyed development. Development here gives people freedom, that is, the opportunity and the capacity to live the life they want.

Sen’s work has been taken in many directions in development literature and has been especially picked up by scholars concerned with gender and development. Gasper and Staveren (2003), for example, suggest that Sen’s
idea of freedom as capacity has impacted significantly on economics in that it highlights the many struggles women have made in development and in particular the necessity of freedom from patriarchy (Gasper & Staveren 2003). Like men, women need to be considered as independent actors capable of making their own choices and decisions. Thus, Sen believes that in economic development, women should have total freedom in accessing the market without constraint. More specifically, Sen refers this to the concept of “freedom from”, that is, in this case, freedom from any intervention in making one’s own decisions on where, when or whom to sell their products to. In this context, freedom is about being sensitive to gender inequalities in economic structures and social norms (Gasper & Staveren 2003). For women Sen’s idea of freedom is nothing short of revolutionary because it enables women to exercise their rights to choose different options and make their own decisions on personal or structural issues, such as abortion or education.

**The link between Sen and Human Rights:**

In discussing the link between Sen and rights, I had a discussion with Professor Chris Sidoti⁵, who commented:

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⁵ I had this important material out of a personal conversation with Mr. Chris Sidoti, who is an international human rights lawyer specializing in human rights and mechanisms nationally and internationally. Additionally, he is an adjunct professor at the Western Sydney University, Griffith University (Queensland), University of the Sunshine Coast.
Sen and the HRBA were coming from different directions and different perspectives in the early 1990s. He was an economist, and an especially eminent one as the Nobel Prize reflects. He was coming from economic experience with an economist’s perspective and analysis. The HRBA was being developed by human rights experts, coming from a legal angle. In fact, both were challenged by the evident failures in past models of development and so came to the issue from that conclusion. And both strands were developing their ideas at the same time. Sen provided the economics (Development as Freedom), HR lawyers provided the legal and human rights analysis (the HRBA) and we now have theory and practice! That’s how I see and understand the 1990s developments, any way.

In Sen’s theory freedom is not only a right in itself but also a factor that can uphold and secure human rights. Therefore, Sen considers it necessary to defend and advance freedom in development, especially in removing obstacles standing in the way of development (Sen 1999a). These obstacles include:

- poverty as well as tyranny,
- poor economic opportunities as well as systematic social deprivation,
- neglect of public facilities as well as intolerance or overactivity of repressive states (Sen, 1999, p. 3).

Importantly, Sen (1999, p3) argues that obstacles, if not removed, will “rob people of the freedom to satisfy hunger, or to achieve sufficient nutrition, or to obtain remedies for treatable illnesses, or the opportunity to be adequately clothed or sheltered, or to enjoy clean water or sanitary facilities”.

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(Queensland) and the Australian Catholic University and an Affiliate at the Sydney Centre for International Law at the University of Sydney.
Therefore, for Sen, development can be framed as a process of removing sources of unfreedom because they prevent local people from making their own choice in development. In this view, strategies aimed at enhancing economic growth or per capita income alone should be replaced by a human rights approach because persistent poverty is caused by the violation of elementary human rights, the neglect of freedom, social disparity and rising hunger. Therefore, those in power and authority must promote and safeguard freedom as a fundamental right if they are serious about development.

Sen (1999, p. 36) argues that freedom needs to be viewed both as a primary end and the principal means of the development process. That is, freedom has both a constitutive role and an instrumental role in development. It is both the ends and the means of development, with people at the center, echoing the central element of the HRBA framework (Uvin 2007b). Instead of people being seen as passive recipients of development, they should be given the opportunity to participate actively in shaping their own destiny (Sen 1999, p. 31, 34). The local government and public institutions should ensure an enabling social environment to create and strengthen current institutional structures for encouraging people’s engagement in shaping their development (Sen 1999a).
Sen (1999, p 18) presents two distinct benefits from promoting and enhancing human freedom in development. The first is evaluation. Sen suggests that, in the assessment of development progress, it is not enough to judge development through tangible outcomes that are delivered in the community. Rather, attention must be paid to whether freedom is enhanced and expanded. The second is effectiveness. Attention must be directed to the issue of human agency in development. Simply put, the focus should be on whether development aid is enhancing the free agency of people (Sen 1999, p 18).

**Development and human rights:**

In discussing the relationship between development and human rights, many scholars agree that, although development and human rights as concepts appeared as interrelated objectives in the 1945 Charter of the United Nations, it was not until the late 1980s that they were considered as interrelated. Prior to this period (1980s), these two concepts were considered as two separate spheres with diverging strategies and objectives (Filmer-Wilson 2005). Many governments, international donor agencies, including the United Nations (UN) agencies were reluctant to recognise the relationship between the two. They generally viewed human rights outside the domain of development. From this dichotomous perspective of human
rights and development, they placed little emphasis on the promotion and protection of human rights in their development work, simply because they did not see it as part of their work (Filmer-Wilson 2005).

In their edited work on Human Rights in Development in 2005, Scheinin and Suksi argue that there were fundamental changes in the relationship between development and human rights from the early 1980s. This trend emerged very clearly with the adoption of the African Charter on Human and People's Rights (in 1981). It was also to better reflect the increasing realization worldwide that poverty reduction and development without human rights is not sustainable (Scheinin & Suksi 2005).

Scheinin and Suki (2005) claim that, prior to this conceptual shift, development was perceived as linked to purely economic growth alone, and that human rights had nothing to do with development. According to these scholars, it was mainly because economic growth and free trade was a priority during this time period but, now that these goals have been achieved, and it is now realised that economic growth alone, without addressing human rights adequately, is not sustainable. Therefore, attention has shifted to human rights in development.
Uvin (2007) sees the trend manifesting in the UN's adoption of the Declaration on the Right to Development in 1986, 14 years after it was first proposed by the Senegalese jurist M’Baye (Bayefsky 1986; Cerma 1994).

The right to development is an inalienable human right by virtue of which every human person and all peoples are entitled to participate in, contribute to, and enjoy economic, social, cultural and political development, in which all human rights and fundamental freedoms can be fully realised (www.unhch.ch/html/menu3/b/74.htm).

This Declaration not only acknowledges the relationship between development and human rights, but ultimately recognises development as a human centred, participatory process and links human development to the realisation of international human rights obligations (Li 1992). This perspective of development is clearly restated by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in 2010 that:

anti-poverty policies are more likely to be effective, sustainable, inclusive, equitable and meaningful to those living in poverty if they are based upon international human rights (p.21 in Scheinin and Suksi 2005).

By the early 2000s, perspectives on the relationship between human rights and development had changed. On the one hand, development was seen as a right in itself. On the other hand, development could only be achieved sustainably through the full enjoyment of human rights. This period, according to Nelson (2003), saw increasing adoption of the concept of rights to development, especially in the work of NGOs, such as Oxfam USA and
others, when they redefined their missions and adopted new approaches to development. According to Nelson (2003), development organizations, including NGOs, shifted their perception of development from seeing development as a need or even a gift to seeing development as a right that is measured by international instruments on human rights, such as the UDHR (1948). They saw development bodies as obligated to assist people in fulfilling their individual entitlements and rights, especially civil and political rights. Nelson (2003) further claims that the peak time that witnessed an increasing adoption of the concept of rights to development was in 1990s. At this time, the HRBA to development entered the development world as the preferred strategy to development.

**The HRBA enters development:**

The origins of the HRBA can be traced back to the early 1990s, basically as a response to many failures that conventional approaches to development have been unable to address, such as sustainability, violation of human rights, social disparity and also problems arising from the new order of international trade and economics works, such as climate change, violation of human rights, conflicts and inequality (Alston & Robinson 2005; London 2008; McGoldrick 1996; Nelson, PJ 2007).
Many scholars suggest that, while the 20th century witnessed the emergence of many different development approaches most were more concerned with increasing economic growth than with related issues such as persistent poverty, lack of sustainability, growing hunger and most importantly, violation of human rights, freedoms and inequity (Nyamu-Musembi & Cornwall 2004; Sen 1999b, 2005). These are structural issues of development that also involve institutional reform, power dynamics, gender and participation concerns which are complex, multi-dimensional and culturally specific. Economic growth is necessary for development but it is not sufficient alone to address structural issues (Alston & Robinson 2005).

It is in this context that the HRBA was introduced by the UN as a viable alternative approach to addressing all of these development issues fully and holistically (Banik 2010; Reichert 2007).

The HRBA ultimately seeks to deal with the structural issues in development, in particular power relationships that lead to human rights violations (Destrooper 2016; Nelson, PJ & Dorsey 2003). In doing so, the HRBA works on both the supply side and the demand side, in the sense that it places moral pressure upon both duty-bearers, including the government states, and rights holders (people) at the same time (Destrooper 2016).

Nyamu-Musembi and Cornwall (2004, p.2) propose at least three good reasons for adopting the HRBA to development: Its normative rational, its
pragmatism and its ethncial basis. This third aspect of the HRBA to development, the ethical basis, emphasizes the need to deal with the power relationships between stakeholders in development, the ethical basis, emphasizes the need to deal with the power relationships between stakeholders in development as the central component of development. The HRBA actually seeks to locate human rights at the centre of development work (Clarke 2012).

The HRBA has received greater attention from international development actors as a development framework (Destrooper 2016) but there has been a growing discussion among development practitioners and organizations about the HRBA exactly means (Nyamu-Musembi & Cornwall 2004). It is clear, however, why it has been so well received within the development world.

The HRBA has attracted strong endorsement from the UN organizations, particularly UNDP and UNICEF, for its ability to address the inadequacies and failures commonly observed in other development approaches, such as the ‘top-down’ strategies (Clarke 2012; Russell 2010; Schmitz 2012a). As a universal development approach, according to Clarke (2012), the HRBA has the potential to assist the UN agencies in fulfilling their key development objectives by promoting greater integration of human rights into development and locating human rights at the centre of development
process. In so doing, the HRBA aligns development work with key universal human rights instruments, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the international Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the international Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights that were adopted by the General Assembly in 1966 and the General Assembly Resolution on the Right to Development (1986).

As a result of this endorsement, many international NGOs, such as Care International and ActionAid International, have adopted the HRBA in their programming, despite their different perceptions of the HRBA and different starting points (Cornwall & Nyamu-Musembi 2004; Schmitz 2012b). By 2005, many official development agencies, including those of Denmark, Norway and Switzerland, also expressed commitment to implementing the HRBA in their development programs (Kindornay, Ron & Carpenter 2012). This period also marked a rise in the HRBA to development (Clarke 2012).

As commented by a practitioner:

“...as the traditional development discourse loses its political and financial attraction, a broad process of rethinking development aid has started, and a search for new paradigms is the human rights approach to development” (UNICEF 2004:2)
**What does the HRBA to development offer?**

Clarke (2012) argues that the HRBA to development is the approach that has the ability to translate into practice key developmental values, such as inclusion, participation, dynamics and adaptation of a responsive system of development processes and outcomes. It also has the potential to promote a meaningful level of receptiveness on political agenda. So, application of the HRBA to development leads to greater appreciation for addressing social disparities in development and especially promoting empowerment in development. This approach to development has the potential to enable the UN agencies to address increasingly intense challenges in the fulfillment of their development mission (Clarke 2012).

Many scholars agree that the HRBA has the potential to better deal with powers relationships in development as compared to conventional approaches to development, including the ‘top-down’ (Hickey & Mitlin 2009). The HRBA ultimately approaches development by transforming local people from powerless objects of development into powerful actors (Nyamu-Musembi & Cornwall 2004). In other words, its ultimate aim is to achieve positive transformation of power relationships among stakeholders in development (Nyamu-Musembi & Cornwall 2004). Thus to speak of rights in this context is to discuss power relationships and the obligations of all actors involved in the development process (Nyamu-Musembi & Cornwall ...
What is distinctive about the HRBA to development is its powerful normative framework to guide and shape development work in community. In so doing, the HRBA emphasizes the ethical and moral dimensions of the development process. It also provides a stronger basis for the community people to make claims on the State and to hold the State to account to ensure access to full realization of rights (Nyamu-Musembi & Cornwall 2004). For Schmitz (2012), the HRBA also promises to tackle problems of inequity, social disparities and the violation of human rights and freedoms through aligning development work with universal norms and standards.

Nyamu-Musembi and Cornwall (2004) argue that, although the HRBA has been endorsed by the UN and adopted by many development organizations and agencies, the key concern to be addressed is whether the HRBA actually succeeds in addressing poverty in the community. Otherwise it has little meaning. This is the concern of many scholars and politicians who are skeptical about the HRBA (Kindornay, Ron & Carpenter 2012). These scholars and politicians see the approach as another fad or label that does not make any significant contribution to development and is not by nature distinctive from other development approaches which also value participation, gender, capacity building and empowerment (Kindornay, Ron & Carpenter 2012). Furthermore, there are scholars and development practitioners who are doubtful of the effectiveness of the approach,
especially when it is implemented in non-western societies like Vietnam, where development priorities are more focused on the physical survival of the community or on economic growth rather than human rights (Reichert 2007).

However, in debates about what the HRBA to development means, it is generally argued that the introduction of the HRBA implies a re-conceptualizing of the conventional development thinking about the nature of human development and the process by which this is realised (Filmer-Wilson 2005).

**The key principles of the HRBA:**

Although the HRBA to development has grown in popularity in the last couple of decades, debates about certain aspects of the HRBA to development persist (Hickey & Mitlin 2009). However, despite the debates, there is consensus on its four core principles of participation, empowerment, accountability and non-discrimination (Destrooper 2016; Nyamu-Musembi & Cornwall 2004). All four are equally important and my numbering here does not in any way refer to a hierarchy.

Central to the notion of rights to development is the right of local people to participation (Clarke 2012; Destrooper 2016; Frankovits & Earle 2001; Nelson & Dorsey 2008; Sidoti, Frankovits & Earle 2001). This notion of
development is also highlighted in the Programme of Action of the Social Summit (http://www.un-documents.net/poa-wssd.htm) that states that:

\[...\textit{poverty can be characterized as the lack of participation in decision-making}...\textit{(p.23 in Scheinin and Suksi 2005)}.\]

The quote above shows that poverty is linked to participation. This is also the focus of the HRBA to development. The approach places emphasis on local participation in the entire development process as the first core principle (Hunt et al. 2005). The approach recognizes that participation is a right in itself. Uvin (2007) argues that, when local people’s voices are not heard in decision-making processes, their rights are denied. In a study by the World Bank ‘Voices of Poor: Crying Out for Change’, the ultimate importance of participation in development is also stressed.

‘The poor want desperately to have their voices heard, to make decisions, and not always receive the law handed down from above’. This all further demonstrates that the HRBA emphasizes participation of local people in a development process as a key principle, which can also be framed as the first (Powell 2005).

Participation in development does not mean simply informing local people of already planned projects as a way to gain their acceptance (Sidoti, Frankovits & Earle 2001). Rather, participation must involve local people exercising their ability to deliberate and control the entire development process (researching, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation) (Gaventa 2002; Hamm 2001). Many scholars, including Alston (2005) and Uvin (2007), argue that local people must have the right to participate in making and shaping the decisions which affect their human rights and lives. These scholars suggest that participation, therefore, must be active, free, meaningful. To enable local people to participate in this process effectively and meaningfully, attention must be given to issues of accessibility, including
access to information in a form and a language which can be easily understood by them (Kapoor 2008-2009; Schmitz 2012b). Participation is, therefore, an integral part of the HRBA to development (Sidoti, Frankovits & Earle 2001). The HRBA requires that local people must be considered as the subjects rather than the objects of development (Barsh 1991). As the subjects of development people must be able to participate fully and actively from the outset in developing and implementing the strategies to tackle poverty in their communities (Hamm 2001). This implies that relevant stakeholders, such as development agencies, NGOs and the local government, should have the responsibility to secure every opportunity for locals to participate effectively in making development decisions rather than designing and implementing development projects alone (Hamm 2001; Oakley 1991).

Under the HRBA to development, the principle of participation is intricately linked to the empowerment (Uvin 2007). Many scholars and development practitioners, for example Alston (2005), Uvin (2007) and Scheinin & Suksi (2002), agree that the HRBA to development is based on the empowerment of socially and economically disadvantaged people. These scholars and practitioners also agree that empowerment is a fundamental principle of the HRBA to development (Sarelin 2007; Uvin 2007). It can mitigate the powerlessness of the community (Kapoor 2008-2009). The HRBA to development ultimately aims to empower the community by enabling its members to access, claim and enjoy their rights and entitlements. Put it another way, the HRBA to development is all about transforming the community from powerless stakeholders into powerful actors (Kapoor 2008-2009; Scheinin & Suksi 2002b). This is the one reason why the HRBA to development is compelling in the context of poverty reduction.
Empowering people is a challenging task for it requires not only a special capacity of project staff, but also local support (Scheinin & Markku 2005). Therefore, empowerment, while linked to participation, is key to the HRBA and can be taken as a second principle (Destrooper 2016). Local people can make their own decisions when they are empowered (Scheinin & Suksi 2002b). Empowerment occurs only when powerless locals become powerful actors who are able to question, challenge and negotiate with other stakeholder groups in development (Narayan, Deepa 2002; Scheinin & Suksi 2005). And development is strengthened and sustainable only when locals can challenge the hierarchical power relationship between them and public stakeholders in the local government (Kabeer 2005; Narayan, Deepa 2002; Scheinin & Suksi 2005). Empowerment thus requires that public stakeholder groups are transparent in their decision making and can be held accountable for these decisions (Narayan, Deepa 2002; Scheinin & Suksi 2002b).

Accountability is then the third principle of the HRBA (Destrooper 2016). This principle requires responses from other stakeholders, especially the government or State (Nyamu-Musembi & Cornwall 2004). It demands that these stakeholders are able to explain and justify to the community why a decision was made and how it was made. The principle of accountability is also recognized clearly in the Draft Guidelines for Poverty Reduction Strategies of the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights:

*...perhaps the most important source of added value in the HRBA to development is the emphasis it places on accountability of policy-makers*
and other actors whose actions have an impact on the rights of people. Rights imply duties, and duties demand accountability... (UN OHCHR 2002: paragraph 23).

For Gaventa (2002) and Clark (2002) when locals can hold public stakeholder groups accountable for their decisions and policies, especially those affecting their livelihood, they are also protecting themselves from public institutions that may seek to deny their rights to participate in development. This in turn enables locals to demand structural changes in institutional design to allow better governance and effective responsiveness (Gaventa 2002).

While participation is linked to empowerment, scholars agree that empowerment is linked to non-discrimination (Alston & Robinson 2005; Scheinin & Markku 2005). These scholars claim that discrimination needs to be seen as a cause of poverty. Poverty originates from discrimination because it could leave out vulnerable groups, such as ethnic minority, women, marginalized, poor children (Clark 2002; Hickey & Mitlin 2009; Scheinin & Suksi 2002b, 2005).

In her work Principles and Guideline for a Human Rights Approach to Poverty Reduction, Arbour (2012) argues that non-discrimination is a key principle to the HRBA framework by highlighting that poverty originates from discriminatory practices centered on race, ethnicity, colour, sex, language, political, religion or other differences in identity. The principle of non-discrimination prohibits any form of discrimination in development on the basis of these factors (Alston & Robinson 2005). Alston (2005) further claims that non-discrimination is fundamental to international human rights laws and framework. Therefore, it is vital that in addressing poverty or development in the community, attention be paid to promoting the principle of non-discrimination alongside other principles of the HRBA that are
participation, empowerment and accountability. In doing so, when addressing poverty in community, we also align development work with the international human right framework (Forsythe 1997).

The four principles are therefore fundamentally and intrinsically interrelated and need to be promoted effectively in addressing developmental issues, such as poverty in community (Alston & Robinson 2005; Scheinin & Suksi 2002b; Schmitz 2012b; Wilson 2005).

**Conclusion:**

This chapter began with a discussion of the historical origins of the concept of human rights, highlighting that the origins of human rights can be dated back to antiquity and that the concept of human rights was later developed during the Enlightenment and the Age of Revolutions in the West. However, despite this long history, the discussion of human rights has been and still is controversial. This chapter attends to this controversy.

Moving on from the historical origins, this chapter discusses contemporary perceptions of the concept of human rights and argues that, while cultural particularities need to be acknowledged, universality, indivisibility, interrelatedness and interdependence have to be viewed as key
characteristics of human rights. I have also discussed several other important characteristics, including different ways to group rights.

This chapter also discusses the different perspectives of human rights held by different groups of nations, which are variously characterized as East/West or developing/developed. These differences have had significant implications for the development and the implementation of the HRBA to development, the introduction of which I also outline in this chapter. As I discuss in the chapters that follow, this has made the implementation of the HRBA to development challenging, especially when it comes to the empowerment of local people in a way that enables them to claim their rights and entitlements and to participate in the questioning and negotiating with local and outside structures (Scheinin & Suksi 2002b).

This chapter also provides a critical discussion about Sen’s theory of development as freedom that offers a theoretical basis for the argument I develop in this thesis. By highlighting freedom as a principal end of development, Sen implies that local people must be placed at the center of development so that they shape and make decisions of their own. Sen’s theory requires that attention be placed on promoting local participation and right of people in development. This well aligns with the HRBA to development, the focus of this thesis, that considers participation as a key principle.
I end this chapter with a critical discussion of issues related to the HRBA to development, including how human rights entered the development sphere, the HRBA to development itself, how the HRBA entered development and the three key principles of the HRBA. I argue that the introduction of the HRBA to the development is primarily in response to the failure of an economic growth centered development objective, and also to addressing the consequences of globalization and a new global economic order that saw weaker communities and countries face a greater degree of poverty and marginalization (Filmer-Wilson 2005; Nyamu-Musembi & Cornwall 2004).

I also argue that the HRBA aims to deal with the power relationships between stakeholders in development through its three key principles of by participation, empowerment, accountability and non-discrimination. In doing so, the HRBA seeks to address development challenges more effectively and more sustainably as compared to other conventional approaches, such as the ‘top-down’. This is what the HRBA could offer development and makes the HRBA distinctive from other approaches to development including the “top-down” approach.
Chapter 3: Research methodology

Figure 1: Map of Vietnam with the Central Highlands region in purple, numbered 25, 36, 40 and 43. Source: Author's data.
This research aims to explore how the HRBA is implemented on the ground in development work. To achieve this aim, I undertook a case study through which I explored local views and experiences about the HRBA in two communities in the Central Highlands of Vietnam.

The concept of community is a complex, usually unanalyzed, abstraction. The concept has become increasingly important in debates in defining development and over discussions on roles of community people (Bakker 2008). For Greer (2017), the concept is often a source of confusion for it stands for many things, and when it is used with interchangeable meanings very elementary errors creep into our discourse. The concept of community can be defined as people residing in a shared area, for example a village, within which they have developed a more or less complete socio-cultural system imbued with collective identification and by means of which they solve problems arising from the sharing of the area (Sutton Jr & Kolaja 1960). This way of defining community is supported by David (1973). According to David, social spatial and environmental characteristics are key elements that need to be used in defining community.

I use the concept of community in this thesis to refer to the local people living in the two researched communes. These people share not only the spatial and environmental features, but developmental issues such as the lack of participation and empowerment in the decision-making process and/or influence the process. They have also developed social, cultural and economic roles and relationships with each other in their
endeavour to escape poverty, as well as with public stakeholders, such as the local government at commune and district levels.

I chose the region because it is where one poverty reduction project guided by the HRBA to development has been implemented. The two fieldwork sites were the Cu Hue and Eadar communes of Eakar district in Daklak province (see figure 2 below). These two communes are poor and are mainly populated by local ethnic minority people – the Ede. Both communes have been involved with other development projects in the past, including poverty reduction projects supported by the government. However, although a great deal of resources has been invested in the communes, poverty remains, suggesting that the outcomes of these projects have not been sustainable. This makes these two communes ideal sites in which to explore local peoples’ views of poverty and past development work, as well as to investigate the implementation of a new development project guided by the HRBA.

Last but not least, my engagements with these projects in these two communes not only provided me with an understanding about the communities, but a good relationship with local stakeholders, including local people. This further enabled me to approach the participants easily for they had confidence in me and were willing to
participate actively in my research. This should form another reason for why I chose the sites for my research.

This chapter discusses the methodology and methods that I employed in this research. First, it presents an epistemological understanding of this research with a focus on the qualitative methodology and in particular the observation and in-depth interview methods that I used to explore the local views and experiences of with the HRBA. Then the chapter describes the process of data collection and analysis which includes a critical discussion of the local context.
**Research methodology and methods:**

As I have made it clear as above/right in the opening of this chapter on methodology, my research aims to explore local views and experiences about poverty and the HRBA project, given this exploratory nature of the research, qualitative is most suited. Therefore, this research employed a qualitative methodology as the major strategy for data collection and analysis. According to Boeije (2010) and Hennink, Hutter and Bailey (2011), qualitative methods are especially useful for obtaining an in-depth understanding of the participants’ complex cultural norms as well as their beliefs and behavior. In addition, the methods allow local participants to bring forward how they see their local social contexts, including their own values and meanings in interpreting their local events (Denzin, Norman K & Lincoln 2000). Fetterman (2002) likewise concurs that qualitative methods would allow participants to speak for themselves, presenting their views in their own perspectives. For this reason, Lazarsfeld (1979) preferred qualitative methods when conducting explanatory investigations-based research as they enable the researcher to engage directly with the participants in conversation and interact with them freely and comfortably, and to explore their views and experiences about the issue under investigation (Hay 2010;
Similarly, as Dooley (1984) suggest, when qualitative research often involves direct participation in one’s fieldwork, it is sometimes considered as participation research. In this research, I conducted direct field visits, engaging and interacting with participants using qualitative methods. I also had the advantage of observing the participants while collecting data and the participants could actively respond and lead the research process (Dooley 1984). Qualitative methods encourage the researchers to immerse themselves in the everyday life of the participants, making sense of their views and experiences and capturing the urgency and significance of the issues they raise in their natural settings (Marshall & Rossman 1989).

Qualitative methods are most compatible with the nature of my research as my aim was to explore local participants’ views and experiences about their experiences with a development project framed as a HRBA in their communities. This research methodology allowed me to tap into the local participants’ imagination, especially in understanding how they constructed and interpreted the social and cultural meanings of events in their own environment. In conducting this research, I applied a semi-structured in-depth interview method. Often associated with ethnographic research, this interview method
aims to discover and investigate how local community members assign social and cultural meanings and beliefs and to investigate behavioral patterns responding to the daily events and realities (Schensul, Schensul & LeCompte 1999). This is also the method upon which researchers can test their observations and build their theories (Nachmias & Nachmias 1996) using data collected directly from participants (Denzin, Norman K. & Lincoln 2011).

I normally conducted these in-depth interviews as conversations with the participants in their home or workplace where they felt more confident and secure rather than in an unfamiliar setting that would give them the feeling of being interrogated. The conversations we had usually began with general everyday life issues, such as their family, their children’s education or their crops, before moving onto investigating my participants’ experiences and views of poverty and the HRBA project in their communities. This usually made them more at ease, relaxed, comfortable and free to articulate their views and lived experiences in their lives.

While discussion groups may have been another good strategy to collect data from the community, having a conversation with different participants on their own enabled me to more directly achieve my research aim to explore participants’ views and experiences of poverty
and the AAV project in the communities. I believe that the participants also might have felt pressured in discussion groups either to say less or to present views acceptable to the project or to the authorities. I also believe that different participants had different views and experiences of poverty and the AAV project which a focus or discussion group may have not brought to the fore. Therefore, approaching each participant separately was important to the methodology.

Unlike structured and unstructured interviews, the semi-structured interview method also has the benefit of having specific key guiding questions that provide directions throughout the interview while allowing both the researcher and participants to diverge when necessary to investigate an unanticipated idea in-depth. Gill et al. (2008) argue that this flexibility has been previously ignored by many researchers.

In addition, according to Brewer (2000), by engaging the participants directly the researcher can observe not only verbal language but also non-verbal, contextual expressions. In my fieldwork, for example, I could observe facial expressions that the participants made while sharing their views and experiences. This was a helpful technique to use, especially when participants had to fully express themselves. By
observing my participants, I was able to understand what they were trying to convey. Beal et al. (2004) confirm that direct engagement with participants could also help them to be more communicative and establish better rapport with the researcher.

Therefore, a combination of direct engagement and contextual observation is ideal for exploring sensitive and complex issues from the participants’ context (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey 2011). And a combination of verbal and non-verbal communications would also reflect a more in-depth understanding of development views and experiences about the HRBA to development (Hay 2010), including social structural messages such as gender and women’s voices in development (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey 2011).

This method gave me a good opportunity to unpack participants’ concerns about development in their communities, such as the denied access of education to local women, the issue of domestic violence and the dominant role of men in families and communities. I also had a chance to double check or ask for clarity on any issue. This saved me a great deal of time when I analysed my data upon returning to the University. I could see that the local participants were genuinely happy to share their views and experiences about their HRBA-based development project in their communities when they willingly and
tirelessly explained to me any issue I wanted to explore in-depth, including how they were engaged and included as part of the AAV project.

The research method also allowed me to establish good rapport with the participants, which was most important to make them feel comfortable and relaxed before they were willing to extend their trust to me and revealed their life stories, including their problems with domestic violence and their critical views on the project, without fear or doubt. Of course, it was also essential to explain and emphasise confidentiality and research ethics to win over my participants’ trust. For example, I mentioned to the participants that none of their personal details, such as their names and contact details, would be revealed in the research. Instead, each of them would be given a fictitious name when their views are written up. These and other practices and University research protocols will help to protect their identity, especially when sensitive problems were discussed.

Field sites:

The field site for this research was conducted in the Central Highlands of Vietnam. This site was chosen because it was where the poverty reduction project that promoted the HRBA to development was
implemented. The two fieldwork sites were in Cu Hue and Eadar of Eakar district in Daklak province (see figure 2 below). While these are two different communes, both the communes are poor communes and are mainly populated by local ethnic minority people – the Ede. Both the communes have had other projects, include the ones that are supported by the government, that aimed to deal with poverty. However, although a great deal of resources has been invested in the communes, poverty remains and the outcomes are not sustainable.
As shown in the map (Figure 2), the Central Highland region is located in the Southwest of Vietnam and is made up of five provinces: Kon Tum, Gia Lai, Daklak, Dak Nong and Lam Dong. In 2007, the region had a total population of about 4,935,200. The Central Highlands region has a large population of ethnic minorities, including the Ede and Jarai,
who speak Malayo-Polynesian languages, and the Bahnar and K’Hor, who speak Mon-Khmer languages.

Geographically, the Central Highland is a plateau bordering the lower part of Laos and north-eastern Cambodia. It has an average altitude of 500 to 600 meters with basalt soil, which is widely thought to be most suited for growing commercial crops such as coffee, rubber, cacao and pepper. Of these crops, coffee is the most economically important produce in the region, especially centred in Daklak Province, although it is not grown traditionally by the local ethnic minority people. The ethnic people living in this area have traditionally relied on wet rice cultivation, vegetables collected from forests, fishing and hunting for subsistence. This, in part, explains why they have normally chosen to live close to the forests and rivers.

The two communes of Cu Hue and Eadar of Eakar district are where AAV implemented its HRBA-framed development project in 2007. These communes had an average population of about 10,000 each and are considered as the poorest communes in the district of Eakar. In 2014, the poverty rate of Eadar was about 36% as compared to 55% of the Central Highland (Eakar district socio-economic development

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6 A sub group of the Austronesian living in the islands in Southeast Asia.  
7 A large language family residing throughout the continental Southeast Asia, also scattered throughout India, Bangladesh and part of China.
In Cu Hue the poverty rate was about 21% in 2015, compared to 11% in Eadar commune (Eakar district socio-economic development report 2015). Today, both communes are agriculture-based\footnote{http://baochinhphu.vn/Dia-phuong-tong-ket-nam-2014/Bao-cao-tinh-hinh-phat-trien-KTXH-nam-2014-tinh-Dak-Lak/216507.vgp.} with income derived mainly from rice, coffee, pepper, pigs and chicken (Eakar district socio-economic development report 2015).

**Key cultural features:**

The major ethnic population in these two communes is the Ede people. Like other ethnic groups in Vietnam, the Ede people have their own language and culture. They can be culturally characterized as an extended ethnic group in that they have lived together for generations under the same roof as a collective tradition (Nguyen, HH, Messé & Stollak 1999). The Ede people practice mutual help, especially in times of difficulty, such as when a community member passes away or by assisting in agricultural production. Many believe that the Ede peoples’ practice of shifting cultivation was not only been essential in keeping them together but was also environmentally sustainable as they have not used chemical fertilizers in growing their crops. Because
they moved regularly from one place to another to grow their crops, the Ede people only lived in their cultivated area for a couple of years before moving on to a new area for a few years. This would leave enough time for the old land to lie fallow and restore its fertility.

The Ede people have a matriarchal culture where the power of decision-making on matters like purchasing or selling family property, including cows or animals, was usually made by women in the family. However, the power to make decisions on other matters lies with men.

**Community structure:**

The Ede people have their own community structure. Each village was traditionally led by a village head. Traditionally, the village head was an elderly male person with good knowledge of the history and culture of the community. He was regarded as a spiritual leader with the responsibility to protect the community’s traditions. He often commanded fullest respect and cooperation from the whole community. Under this traditional structure, he was also legitimately responsible for making decisions on community matters.

However, the community structure has recently changed. In the past, the village head was nominated by the community and worked for the community on a voluntary basis. At present, village heads are
appointed by the local government or the Commune People’s Committee (CPC). Because they are appointed by the CPC, the role has become a paying job and the village head now serves as a bridge between the community and the CPC. Under this structure, the community can still have a say in the CPC-led nomination process but this does not necessarily mean that the person finally appointed is the one nominated by the people to represent them.

**Data collection process**

**Research participants:**

For this research, I recruited thirty-six participants. The sample size is small (Kearney 2007) but, for a qualitative study aiming at exploring local stakeholders’ views and experiences on the HRBA, a large sample is not necessary (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey 2011).

The participants recruited in my research came from a wide range of backgrounds. They were local community villagers, local officials at commune and district level, HRBA project staff members, participants from public institutions, including a local university staff member and an employee of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD), and representatives from both local and international NGOs operating in the local region which do not adopt the HRBA to
development (see table 1 below). While most participants participated directly in the implementation of the HRBA project in the communities but some, such as persons from public institutions (DARD and a local university) and the local and international NGOs, did not directly participate in the project. The latter participants, however, were situated in the Central Highland and have engaged in different development projects in the region. These participants shared their experiences and views regarding poverty in the Central Highlands and especially the HRBA to development. This provided a wider range of responses to the HRBA and how it worked in the region, especially in addressing poverty.

This research also had participants from local organizations, such as the Women’s Union (WU), the Farmers’ Associations (FA) and the Youth Union (YU). These organizations are presented as mass organizations. However, they are not open to public membership. Mass organizations are part of the local political apparatus, working on behalf of the local government in the communities rather than representing the community within the governmental system.

**Table 1: Participant categories**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Main criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Villagers</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Men and women with involvement in the HRBA project</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Commune leaders 02
District leader 02
Mass organizations 04
AAV 01
AAV 04
Local NGO 01
International NGO 01
Department of Agriculture & Rural Development (DARD) 01
Tay Nguyen University 01
Local NGO 01
International NGO 01

Commune Leadership representatives
People’s Committee
Women’s Union & Youth Union leaders
Regional
Fieldworker
Leader
Leader
Country Director
Provincial
In charge of development work
Institution
Not necessarily knowledgeable about HRBA, but with development expertise

| Total population | 36 |

Table 1: Table of participants grouped according to backgrounds.

Of the thirty-six participants, nineteen (19) were local villagers, sixteen (16) females and three (3) males. This was just the accidental result when I visited the participants in their homes. Among the villagers, eighteen (18) are Ede people living in the two research communes, while one male participant is Nung, an ethnic group migrating from a Northern province. Of the three male participants, two lived in Eadar commune, while one lives in Cu Hue.

I recruited participants randomly by door-knocking on family homes. When I met someone in the family, I introduced myself and explained to him/her why I was in the community and that I would like to chat with him or her about poverty and the AAV project. If I did not meet an adult at the door and instead was greeted by a child, I asked the
child for help so that I could find a parent in their field. When this occurred, I had a chance to better understand local context, including livelihoods of the participants that I would be meeting. This method of recruiting participants was very useful because it provided me with insight into the community and my participants’ lives.

The two male participants in Eadar commune completed their college education, while the one in Cu Hue only completed primary school. However, he could express himself very well in Vietnamese. None of the female participants have had any formal education and most cannot read or write in Vietnamese, which is the official language and used in schools and in legal documents. Some of these women also found it difficult to communicate fluently in Vietnamese. In this case, I had my associate researcher interpret for me. These community participants were involved in the AAV project in the communes for many years, some starting in 2007 and others in later years.

I also recruited two participants from the leadership of the two communes. These participants are of Vietnamese background. They are under the supervision of the District People’s Committee (DPC) and participated in the AAV project for many years. They are generally supportive of the HRBA that the AAV implemented in the communes.
The research also recruited two participants from the leadership at district level. These participants are male and are ethnic Vietnamese. They have completed college and university education. One also had a masters degree from a local university. They have participated in the AAV projects for many years.

I also recruited four participants from the commune and district mass organizations WU and YU. In implementing the project, the AAV had to establish partnerships with these organisations as WU had a special interest in gender related issues in the project in their communities, while YU wanted to find out how the local youths perceived and implemented the HRBA in the community projects, especially in understanding and overcoming poverty in the communes.

Of these four participants, two are female and two are male. One female participant came from the Cu Hue WU where she was a vice director. She is Vietnamese and has completed college education. The other female participant, also a high-ranking WU staff member, was from the district WU. She is also Vietnamese and has a college degree. One male participant is from the Cu Hue YU and is an Ede man with a college education. The other male participant is the director of the district YU. He is Vietnamese and has completed university education.
Two participants came from provincial level institutions (DARD and the university). They were male, Vietnamese and have overseas doctoral degrees. The participant from DARD earned his degree in Eastern Europe. He was the provincial coordinator of an agricultural diversity project funded by the Asian Development Bank (ADB). The participant from the local university obtained his doctoral degree in South Korea and spent six months doing post-doctoral research in America.

I also had two participants came from NGOs other than AAV. These NGOs do not use the HRBA, although they know what it is. The purpose of interviewing these participants was to find out how familiar they are with HRBA. One of the participants is a country director of an international organization, while the other is a director of a Vietnamese established organization. They are both ethnic Vietnamese men with university degrees.

In addition, five participants from the AAV project were recruited – three women, all from the commune level, a man from the district level (district coordinator) and a man from the regional level. They were with the project for many years. However, while the district coordinator held a university degree for some time, the three female participants received their college degrees recently. Among the three
female participants, one is Ede, a fieldworker in Cu Hue commune, and the other two are of ethnic Vietnamese background. The last participant representing the AAV is Vietnamese and based at regional level of the organization. This participant has a university degree and is in charge of the regional program in the Central Highlands. While all the other participants are from Daklak province, this regional participant is from Nghe An province in the middle region of Vietnam. He is based in the regional office in Buon Ma Thuot City and visits the project communes only irregularly. While in the field, his focus is to monitor the local project activities to ensure that the project is not running behind schedule and to check that the project’s progress is in line with AAV’s policies in terms of costs, norms and approved budget.

**Meeting with associate researcher:**

To undertake this research, I recruited a research assistant from the district of Eakar. My main criteria for recruiting a research assistant was that they must be a local person and have good knowledge about the communities under research. This person also had to be able to provide some translation from the local language into Vietnamese so that I could understand. This was important, ensuring that my
participant was unable to articulate his/her views in the local language.

The participant I recruited did not engage directly in the research. Rather, the scope of his role was limited to administrative work and interpretation. This included making sure the motorbike (his own bike) used to access the communities was safe, kept in good condition, and was filled up with fuel and ready to use. He took me by bike to visit the villages. In some cases, he helped me to find a participant by randomly knocking on doors, while I was in conversation with another participant. Having a local research assistant is a tradition in doing research in the communities, especially for those researchers who do not know the communities very well. Having a local assistant was of great help in making local arrangements.

On arriving in Daklak, I met with my assistant to discuss and work out the protocols for conducting fieldwork. I also explained my expectations of him as an associate researcher. This ensured that we could work smoothly and effectively throughout the fieldwork. I also discussed with my assistant the importance of maintaining the safety and confidentiality of participants as an ethical requirement. Having discussed these all issues and agreed on the protocols, we checked the facilities we needed for fieldwork.
*Finding participants:*

On arrival at the villages, we approached the first people we came across and asked how and where we could locate the village heads to discuss the fieldwork. I was aware that the village heads might want to find out the details of my participants which posed a potential risk to them. For this reason, I did release any personal information about participants to the heads. I simply told him that I was interested in visiting their community and in talking with some of the villagers about poverty reduction related issues, including the current HRBA project in his community. I also indicated to the village heads that I would be approachable during the fieldwork, so that they or any villagers who had an interest in sharing their stories could easily find me. I provided my contact details.

My assistant went around the community doing the same thing. I also met some potential participants working in the fields (Kinh families) to earn extra cash. Many were hired to harvest peppercorns in the community. For these participants, I often had to wait until they had their lunch break to meet with them.

In recruiting a participant, I usually introduced myself first and then I discussed the objectives of my presence in the community with them.
Usually this provided an opportunity to invite the participant to have a chat with me about my project. As I did my visits mostly in the daytime, I sometimes ended up finding no one at home as people had already left for work early in the morning. In this case, I revisited the household following the same procedures. When I could not make contact with a participant, I usually would leave a message indicating that I would return in the next day or two.

When a participant was located, I would introduce myself and explain the objective of my presence in the community and interest in talking with them about their experiences and views about the project. If they had no objection, I would the suggest that we talked with them in their house to avoid any external interruption by an unexpected visitor.

I spoke to most participants in their homes. However, sometimes I had to locate them in the fields according to instructions from their family members (such as their children or others I came across). Their fields were usually quite far from their homes. Some villagers worked as peppercorn pickers for Vietnamese growers to earn extra money as their basic living conditions were quite low. This was what I observed when visiting these participants, noticing that the quality of their houses, sanitary facilities, hygiene around the house and water system
were below standard. This suggested to me that their economic life was difficult.

Typically the interviews conducted in the fields were interrupted because the participants had to return to work after a short tea break. I then had to wait until they had another break, which was normally at lunchtime, to continue our conversation. However, this was only possible where the participants were working on their own fields. For those who worked for other people, I had to make an appointment to see them in the evening.

I offered all the participants an information sheet and a consent form to read, followed by more detailed explanations on the key issues they found difficult to understand. Then I would explain the research objectives and asked for their permission to record the interview if they decided to continue. For those who were interested and agreed to be interviewed, I asked them to sign the consent form. As illiteracy was quite high in the community, I would read out all the ethical requirements and I had someone else in their family sign the form on their behalf. I also stressed to the participants that their participation was completely voluntary and they could withdraw at any time if they felt uncomfortable without any consequences. They were also advised that any information that they would supply would be treated as
confidential and that they would remain anonymous to protect their identity. This aimed to ensure that their identity and privacy are protected and hopefully made them to feel safer and more comfortable in the interview. I also explained to participants that they would receive a small token of appreciation of 120,000 VND (7 AUD) to compensate them for expenses associated with their participation. The same amount was offered to all participants regardless of their background.

**Interviewing participants:**

According to Hay (2010), this ice-breaking is necessary for developing rapport to collect in-depth data. It also helps to reduce shyness and ease the participants comfortably into the interviews (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey 2011). For participants who already knew me, I normally spent time chatting with them about our past common experiences of the project. I felt it was important to renew rapport in this way.

Typically an appointment was made with institutional participants with a phone call before the appointment time to ensure the interview was going ahead. This work was conducted by my research assistant. While most institutional participants agreed to be interviewed in their
offices, some preferred to meet in a café adjacent to their office or in another venue, probably because they did not feel comfortable being interviewed in the office, especially when the issues of rights and poverty were considered somewhat sensitive to discuss. From my personal experiences, they may be fearful that their conversations might be overheard and their views would be later used against them.

During the data collection process, depending on the availability of the participants, I often had to travel back and forth between the villages and also between the villages and the district main town, where I met with participants from the district, such as district leaders, and mass organizations, such as WU and YU. I often had to travel back and forth between district main town of Eakar and the regional city of Buon Ma Thuot, where I met with participants from the university, the provincial DARD and NGOs (both local and international NGO). The wide array of participants has provided me a breath of views on how the HRBA in the Central Highlands of Vietnam.

**Data recording:**

For this particular research, audio-recording was used as the main technique to record the interviews while note-taking was also employed as a secondary strategy. According to Hay (2010), the
audio-recording technique allows for natural interaction with research participants as the researcher is not preoccupied with note-taking. For my research, this technique gave me more time to prepare for the next prompt or question without losing key responses. I felt more relaxed, which helped me to further explore the participants’ responses and also capture their non-verbal expressions and make contextual observations. I also became an attentive listener to what was being said by the participants, and maintained a high degree of concentration throughout the entire interview. However, audio-recording alone could not capture non-verbal data, and I applied note-taking to record the non-verbal responses of the participants. This technique is suitable for real-life situations in the community (Boeije 2010).

Each interview ran from forty-five minutes to an hour on the average. Some interviews, however, did lasted longer, up to an hour and a half or even two hours. The local leaders’ interviews were shorter than those from the institutions and community villagers. The main reason for this was that the former was busier with other assignments and were frequently engaged with phone calls or unexpected visitors. The interviews with the participants from both institutions and villages
ran much longer as they were conducted either off villages or after business hours.

**Data analysis:**

According to Bryman (2012), the focus of data analysis is fundamentally placed on incorporating and also reducing the data that has been collected to make sense of it. Hay (2010) argues that the main objective is to search for in-depth meaning from the data. Upon my return from the fieldtrip, I developed a set of five steps for data analysis.

First, I listened to the recorded interview in parallel with going through the notes that I had made for each of the interviews. This enabled me to develop a better understanding of the responses the participants had provided. While doing this work, I also made a few cross-checks with some of the participants via email and Skype. This was to ensure that I had understood their responses correctly.

Second, I transcribed the data collected. I did not use any software for transcribing. Having fully transcribed the interviews, I went through the transcript several times until I had an adequate understanding of the data and I was ready to go to the next stage, which was theme identification.
Third, I identified the themes. As I asked different participants the different questions, they responded differently depending on their context, situation and position. Local villagers, for example, responded that they participated in the AAV project because it was a good opportunity for them to build up their capacity, while other simply joined the project because it was implemented in their communities. Still others from a commune or district level suggested that they were involved in the AAV project because they were assigned to do so, but they did not see any clear benefits generated by the project.

I realised that by undertaking a thematic analysis approach, I was able to better structure and shape my entire research in a systematic manner. According to Fereday & Muir-Cochran (2006), thematic analysis involves a search for key themes that emerge as important to the description of the data or phenomenon. Braun & Clarke (2006) argue that this is a method that researchers can employ to identify, analyze and report their research themes within data. This method often involves the identification of the themes by going thoughtfully through the data (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane 2006). These scholars further argue that thematic analysis is also a form of pattern recognition within the data, where emerging themes become the categories for analysis. According to Braun & Clarke (2006), this
method has the ability to organize minimally and then describe the data set in depth. It interprets various aspects of the research topic. Due to these advantages, thematic analysis is often a preferred choice for qualitative analysis method (Braun & Clarke 2006).

**Conclusion:**

This chapter has discussed the processes involved in my data collection, including methods of recruitment, data collection and analysis.

This is a qualitative research project and the main method used is in-depth interviews. The method is best suited to explore the views and experiences of local people (Hay 2010). It allowed me to explore fully the application of the HRBA in the two Central Highlands communities by directly interacting with participants and making close observations of the life-world of the communities.

In the next two chapters, I will begin to investigate my participants’ perceptions of poverty and various development projects that I gathered through the methods discussed in this chapter.
Chapter four: Local perceptions of poverty

Introduction:

Poverty is a very complex phenomenon (Chambers 2006). For Chambers (2006) poverty can be clustered into different groups, such as income-poverty, material lack or want, capability deprivation and in a broader dimension of being vulnerable, marginalized and powerless. While scholars still argue about what it means by poverty, they generally agree that poverty is complex for it not only links to a specific social, cultural and political context, but also involves the socially and economically marginalized people and communities, especially the poor, ethnic minorities and women (Callan & Nolan 1991; Eversole, Mcneish & Cimadamroe 2005). For example, the poverty found in one ethnic minority community in a rural area in the Central Highlands of Vietnam is different from that in another community in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam. While local people in the Central Highlands may struggle for everyday subsistence, those in the Mekong Delta are faced by increasing salinity in their rice fields. Outside Vietnam, poverty in Haiti, for example, is again very different from poverty in another country in the same hemisphere. In any event, there are always more people in the world living in poverty than those who are not (Vaughan 2008). This makes it difficult to define and address poverty, especially in terms of who the poor
are or why they live in poverty and how to help them to escape from it (Eversole, Mcneish & Cimadamroe 2005; Vaughan 2008).

This chapter will explore the local views of poverty in the two communities being studied. The aim is to understand how poverty is locally defined.

The chapter is structured into the two sections:

a) Definitions of poverty in literature; local perceptions of poverty: physical survival and individualistic views of poverty; going beyond physical survival: taking land into account; and impact of climate change on environmental survival

b) Barriers to development with a focus on: (1) perception of psychological dependency; (2) denied access to capital and education.

The main argument in this chapter is that, rather than framing poverty as universally the same, poverty is better seen as a context-specific phenomenon because it is physically, historically and culturally based. The definition of poverty should reflect those contextual specificities.
Definitions of poverty:

According to Vaughan (2008), poverty can be perceived as something absolute or something more relative. Bradshaw (2007) argues that the absolute perspective tends to refer to the lack of minimum necessities, such as food, clothing, water, shelter, health access, to ensure a human person’s physical survival or a life of dignity. For Vaughan (2008), the relative perspective is more concerned with the issues of social inequality and local participation. It argues that those who have less in society, also have their social voices and participation in institutional systems ignored (Laderchi, Saith & Stewart 2003). In other words, poverty can be seen from a material or econometric perspective and it can be seen as going beyond the econometric aspect towards a multi-dimensional phenomenon (Eversole, Mcneish & Cimadamroe 2005). The latter perspective recognises the significance of non-material aspects, such as access to education, health care, human rights, participation and gender (Corconran et al. 1985).

Seeing poverty as a multi-dimensional phenomenon highlights its complexity and its perceptions over time. In the post-war period, poverty was regarded purely as the absence of economic growth alone, hence economic development and lifting people from subsistence were considered essential (Scheinin & Suksi 2005). Hagenaars (1986), however, claims that
subsistence in fact carries two meanings: one reflects a situation in which people lack basic means to stay physically alive, but the other is one where people lack necessary means to lead a full life. Yet when physical survival itself is difficult, understanding poverty as physical survival is simpler than the focusing on the more abstract aspects of norms and rights as essential elements of a full life (Hertel, Burke & Lobell 2010).

As discussed in detail in chapter two, Amartya Sen, a Nobel Prize winner for economics, broadened the understanding of poverty and suggested that the definition of poverty should go beyond economic development (Corbridge 2002). The material or economic perspective on poverty began to shift. According to Sen (1999), the conventional view of poverty was too simplistic and failed to see the complexity of non-economic elements, such as human rights, participation, freedom, gender and equality, a reflection of lack of power, social relations, self-esteem and freedom to engage effectively in development among locals who are affected by poverty. He asserted that human freedom is central to development. Only with freedom, can people make the best choice among the many (Sen 1999a). Hence a more useful indicator for development is how much freedom people have rather than the tangible economic outcomes delivered in the local community (Sen 1999a).

Sen’s view of poverty has now been accepted in others’ perspectives. For example, the OECD (2001) defines poverty as the lack of necessary ability of
people to sustain standards of well-being, including the social and economic dimensions, referring to the basic conditions that keep people living with a full standard. However, the World Bank (WB) regards poverty as an unacceptable human deprivation in terms of economic opportunity, education, nutrition, empowerment and security (Clark 2002). UNDP defines poverty as the lack of essential capabilities, such as local participation in the development process and access to resources, to ensure good well-being (UNDP 2006). According to Sen (2001), these are fundamental capabilities of a human person without which the person cannot challenge, question, propose and especially usher in desired new ways in development as capabilities that allow local people to become the way they want to be (Nussbaum 2000). However, while OECD, UNDP and WB tend to view these capabilities as an end of development, Sen views them as a primary vehicle to achieve development, which in the end will be human freedom (Sen 1999a). In these contexts, poverty becomes more complex because of its multiplicity (Misturelli & Heffernan 2010). It remains a challenge among researchers and development practitioners to come to a consensus (Ife 2002). As Dulal (2013) admits, although much has been discussed and written about poverty, what it is meant by ‘poverty’ still seems divergent and contentious.
Currently literature in the field has shown that, while material assistance in development is still considered important to keep the poor physically alive, the emphasis on framing poverty beyond material assistance, as Sen (1999) and others promoted, is gaining more widespread recognition and the conventional view is increasingly looking narrow (Reichert 2007). This is particularly relevant with the emergence of the HRBA, which is based on the view that poverty is closely associated with the denial of human rights in development, such as having the right to participate in shaping and making their own decisions for their own development (Kindornay, Ron & Carpenter 2012). And hence the poor are seen not as aid recipients, but rights holders and right claimants, while public institutions and local governments must act as duty bearers to help the poor to claim their rights (Green 2012).

This point is important. While it is commonly accepted that poverty is socially perceived, the HRBA highlights that rights should not be seen as context-specific and bounded by social and cultural difference (Vaughan 2008) as persistent poverty is the outcome of basic human rights being denied (Schmidt & Traub 2009). This view has gained support from UNDP that now makes rights and entitlements its core development strategy and business (UNDP 2003).

Still, for some scholars, the HRBA may seem to underplay the importance of social context, and some may fear that it may not address local persistent
poverty sufficiently in a country like Vietnam (Reichert 2007). Furthermore, literature in the field has also shown that human rights as a concept in development remains a topic of heated debate among Western and non-Western researchers, especially when few practical cases have shown clearly the success of HRBA in development.

In view of the abstract nature of rights in relation to poverty, other scholars (Addison, Hulme & Kanbur 2009) argue that poverty could be better indicated on a grounded community level, although communities are contextually different (Dulal 2013; Eversole, Mcneish & Cimadamrooe 2005). As when it comes to the concept of community, many scholars agree that this concept is a complex, usually unanalyzed, abstraction. It is often a source of confusion for it stands for many things, and when it is used with interchangeable meanings very elementary errors creep into our discourse (Greer 2017). The concept of community can be defined as people residing in a shared area, for example a village, within which they have developed a more or less complete socio-cultural system imbued with collective identification and by means of which they solve problems arising from the sharing of the area (Sutton Jr & Kolaja 1960). This way of defining community is supported by David, B (1973). According to David, social spatial and environmental characteristics are key elements that need to be used in defining community.

By referring to the concept of community in this thesis, I also meant the local people living in the two researched communes sharing not only the spatial and environmental features, but developmental issues such as the lack of participation and empowerment in decision-making process and/or
influence the process. I also referred to their social, cultural and economic roles and relationship with each other in their endeavours to escape poverty and also with public stakeholders, such as the local government at commune and district levels. Their relationship with the AAV project. And given that there is not consensus among researchers on a universal definition (Callan & Nolan 1991), a context-specific approach to understanding poverty seems appropriate for this research as it would help to acknowledge and clarify how social and cultural contextual characteristics of community could determine the forms of poverty (Lepenies 2008).

**Local perceptions of poverty**

**Physical survival and individualistic views of poverty:**

The Central Highlands of Vietnam has its own distinctive social, ethnic, cultural and political characteristics (Eversole, Mcneish & Cimadamroe 2005). Not surprisingly, poverty in this particular geographic location as perceived by local stakeholders, including the institutional and community participants, reflects a much simpler, unidimensional lens focusing on physical survival rather than a complex and multi-dimensional phenomenon as poverty is commonly understood in the academic field (Niimi et al. 2004). The lack of basic necessities for everyday physical survival (Roelen, K, Gassmann & Neubourg 2009), such as food, water, shelter, clothes and health
care (Nguyen, PT & Nguyen 2011), is the major challenge according to the local participants, especially those with institutional backgrounds, (Imai, Gaiha & Kang 2011).

*In my understanding, poverty is simply about the lack food to eat everyday. This well reflects the situation in my commune. Many of the households have to struggle for food to keep themselves alive. I think it is realistic enough that people do not care about other things, but survival now (Ho).*

Ho is an ethnic Vietnamese commune leader who has lived and worked in the same commune for many years. In speaking of poverty, he quickly associated it with the basic resources that local people need to keep them alive every day. His view was similar to Nguyen, a district leader who insisted that meeting local needs for survival was the most effective strategy to address poverty in the community. He especially highlighted the importance of measurable outcomes of development which is typical of the government’s “top-down” approach to development.

*I think the community cares more about (if they have enough) “real cash and real rice” to live on because they are in poverty. To be frank, they need enough food on the table for everyone in family (Nguyen).*

Duc, who had completed his PhD in South Korea and spent a year as a post-doctoral researcher in America, is a participant from a local university where
he now teaches economics. Like Ho and Nguyen, Duc liked to prioritise development goals. And according to him, survival comes first.

*I think first of all, poverty is about the lack of food to eat. So, it is very important that survival is adequately addressed in a development project (Duc).*

With their similar views of poverty, the implication for development projects like the AAV project is that, in resolving poverty in local communities, the paramount concern is addressing and providing material assistance and resources for the community people to survive, particularly in the form of measurable outcomes. When compared to Sen (1999), their views on poverty are certainly conventional and even narrowly focused by economic concerns alone. This view is not confined to leaders. Every year, especially between crops and on important occasions, such as the Tet (lunar New Year) and National Day of September 2\textsuperscript{nd}, the government often provides the community people with basic materials (such as rice, cooking oil and instant noodles). The main aim is to people to keep them going, while it is also to add to the enjoyment they may have over the festive occasions. This aid-based approach to development indeed reflects the importance of physical survival to most people, and why to local leaders reduction of poverty means giving more basic resources to people for subsistence. At the same time, this also indicates how the national government sees poverty. Poverty as
commonly perceived by the government is measured by monetary income (Baulch, B & Masset 2003); (Roelen, K, Gassmann & Neubourg 2009).

Some participants from other backgrounds (the community) held different views.

*Well, I think poverty is about lack of capacity and capital (H’ Hoa).*

H’ Hoa, a forty-five-year-old female villager, perceived poverty differently. She defined poverty as being denied of access to capacity and capital to expand cultivation. For her, poverty in the communities is not a complex problem but it is also not an easy issue to deal with, as focusing on material assistance alone is unable to effectively resolve poverty.

And the more I talked to participants from local community level, the more common it is that they see the issue as one of capacity, with capacity being as important as capital. This can be illustrated by the statement of H’ Lan, another female villager.

*In my opinion, poverty is about lacking capacity to improve productivity of crops and capital to invest in expanding production (H’ Lan).*

The comments of the two women participants are most interesting as their views seem to differ so much from the two community leaders and the person from the local university. The two women participants see poverty from an insider perspective in the sense that they are the ones who have to face and confront everyday poverty regularly, while Ho and Nguyen and the
person from the local university could be seen as outsiders. Poverty for them is only their work. They do not have to deal with poverty itself, but only with the consequences of poverty, that is, people not having sufficient physical resources. In other words, only the insiders realise that they need both resources/materials and capacity to get out of persistent poverty (Potter et al. 2012). In addition, as outsiders, it is also too easy for them to characterize local people as lazy, backward and psychologically dependent and to blame them for perpetuating poverty. This is individualizing the issue of poverty by holding the community individuals responsible for creating and keeping themselves in poverty.

Findings from in-depth interviews have shown that it is common among the outsiders to expect the insiders to be more active, innovative and responsive in addressing their development problems (Zucker & Weiner 1993).

*I think locals are lazy to work. They have the resources to get them out of poverty, but they just do not exploit the resources. They always want to wait for government support (Ngoc).*

Ngoc, a participant from a local mass organization (YU), is a case in point. He said that, in his work, he always found that locals were not working hard enough to lift themselves out of poverty, even though all the resources they needed were there for their use -- e.g., arable land, water and capital. His view is clearly in contrast to that held by the insiders (H’ Hoa and H’ Lan),
making it even more difficult for them to arrive at a shared agreement for dealing with poverty.

Locals felt that, while the leaders had power to make decisions on development matters, they lacked a historical perspective and past development experiences of various programs implemented was a case in point. I was told in the interviews that in the past, local people had not been given any opportunity to participate in any development programs that aimed to give them only physical materials/resources. As a result, a status of psychological dependence was created, which local leaders at different levels and institutional participants in turn interpreted as laziness and psychological dependence to change. Some locals felt they had been regularly blamed and victimized (Zucker & Weiner 1993). In reality, however, blaming local people is perhaps the “safest” way for the outsiders to avoid any accusation of being unable to properly resolve poverty in local communities.

**Going beyond physical survival: Taking land into account**

The concept of survival itself can be perceived differently (Crow & al. 1988). Survival can simply mean physical subsistence. However, it can also be broadened to include social, cultural and environmental factors in addition to economic survival or sustainability (Graham, Cameron & Healy 2013).
Addressing these factors requires not only individual responsibility, but more importantly collective responsibility (Graham, Cameron & Healy 2013).

In an agrarian society like Vietnam, arable land is the most crucial means for people to survive and make their livelihood, especially among the ethnic minority people (Jane et al. 2009; Nguyen, TQ 2014). However, according to the participants, locals still had difficulties in accessing sufficient land for cultivation. In addition, their existing land was gradually being reduced both in size and in quality. As one participant commented:

*I think one of the main causes of poverty is that many of the households in the community do not have land for cultivation. They have sold their land for cash or divided it into a smaller plot to give to their married daughter. I do not know how they can survive in the future without land (Truong).*

Truong, a female project staff responsible for the project in one of the communities (Eadar commune), claimed that many of the local households do not have land to cultivate at all. She explained that, although there were financial and cultural associations, when local households suffered from financial difficulties, many had to sell their properties for cash. Other households subdivided their land into smaller plots when it was time for their daughters to get married, to allow the daughters to start their own household according to their matriarchal cultural tradition.
However, according to Ngoc and Nguyen, not having arable land is not the only reason for local poverty.

*I think a main cause was that the community do not have enough land for cultivation. Also, their existing area is getting deteriorated recently because of their backward practice. The new allocated areas are not accompanied by a water system for irrigation. They are situated away from their community as well (Nguyen).*

For Ngoc and Nguyen, land was available for use by local people. However, their land deteriorated because they used backward cultivation methods, and eventually their land became virtually useless, like having no land to grow their crops.

Interestingly the local project staff saw the problem of poverty from a cultural perspective, while the governmental participants blamed the locals for making their land unviable for cultivation. If the historical and cultural contexts are taken into consideration, a clearer picture of how poverty emerged in this Highlands region would become much clearer.

Historically, the lack of land can be traced back to the change in new land use policy under the *Doi Moi* (Renovation) policy in the late 1980s (Dinh 1993). *Doi Moi*, as outlined in chapter one, marked an end to the central planning economy and the beginning of the liberalized economy (Bonanno & Lyman 1999; Kokko 1998). Simply put, the policy marks the emergence of the
market economy in Vietnam (Roelen et al. 2010). Its major rationale was that the government believed that economic liberalization would fix many problems in the economy, including the shortage of food and low productivity (Bonanno & Lyman 1999). It was a radical change in the social and economic structure of Vietnam because it also involved the removal of collectivization of agriculture land to facilitate more flexibility in farming (Arkadie & Mallon 2003; Roelen et al. 2010; Vo 1992).

What is most important is that under Doi Moi a new statutory control replaced the customary laws and traditions in the local communities. This was a radical change for land use (Dinh 1993; Jane et al. 2009), ending the long-established practice of collective land ownership and institutionalizing the new pattern of privatization. Free access to land for cultivation as traditionally practised under the customary laws is no longer valid. Local people are no longer allowed to practise their rotational cultivation method passed down to them from ancestral generations because land access is now regulated by statutory provisions (Jane et al. 2009). This change caused enormous shock to local communities.

_In the past, we could easily access land for cultivation by applying the rotational practice. However, we no longer can do this because the government does not allow us to do it (H’ Nghin)._
H’ Nghin, a female villager, illustrates well why the change in land access policy suddenly created a new problem of farmers not having sufficient land to live on. Her comment also highlights the historical significance of the issue of denied land access rather than individual backwardness of farmers as a major factor in rural poverty.

H’ Nghin, H’ Ly, another female villager, concurred in another interview.

We are no longer allowed to practice our traditional way of farming. In the past, we could easily build our houses by getting the wood from the forests. This is, however, not allowed anymore (H’ Ly).

_Doi Moi_ not only made the traditional crop rotation method of farming impossible for local people. It also prevented locals from accessing other natural resources for their livelihood, including wood for building houses. The impact of the policy on local farmers was severe, especially given their community is dependent on natural resources. It has made farmers’ lives a struggle, although _Doi Moi_ did benefit most other population groups in Vietnam and has paved the way for the country to impressively move from a poor country to a low middle-income country, and the fastest growing economy in the world today (Arsenio et al. 2003; Fritzen 2002; Thayer & Marr 2017).
Certainly, local government came to realise the predicaments that local people faced. In response, the government launched programs to provide additional arable land for local farmers. However, according to participants who were given additional farmland, like H’ Nga and H’ Huong, the land given was simply not suited for agriculture because there was no water for irrigation.

As far as I know, many households who had been allocated an additional piece of land for cultivation have now either returned the land to the district, or they just left it unattended mainly because of the lack of water (H’ Nga).

The district has allocated additional land to households that lack farmland. However, I do not think it is a sustainable strategy because the land does not come with any water system (H’ Huong).

This has an important implication for local government. In responding to local needs for additional land for farming, the mere provision of land alone is insufficient as it must be accompanied by having a water system for the land to be effectively used. This experience shows that poverty is a complex phenomenon that goes beyond the offering of material goods – and in particular, that must take into account whether the resources given are appropriate for the recipients.

The impact of climate change on environmental survival:

In part poverty’s persistence arises from some external factors. One of those is climate change, which impacts on sustainable development (Vlassopoulos
2012) not only in a single country but globally (Hertel, Burke & Lobell 2010), as highlighted by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) (Maarten K. van Aalsta, Cannon & Burtonc 2007). The UNFCCC stresses that industrialized nations need to mitigate their greenhouse gas emissions which are the major contributing factor to climate change (Vlassopoulos 2012). However, these countries evidently do too little in response to the increasing impact of climate change (Hanjra & Qureshi 2010). Many States have made political commitments (Hertel, Burke & Lobell 2010), acknowledging that climate change is real and is rapidly affecting global sustainable development, and that it is essential that collective actions be taken in response to the impact of climate change (Hertel, Burke & Lobell 2010). However, implementation of these commitments is far more problematic.

Climate change especially affects countries dependent on agriculture, like Vietnam, because agricultural activities are heavily dependent on climate (Hertel, Burke & Lobell 2010). These countries often lack necessary capacity for effective adaptation because they are already socially, economically and institutionally vulnerable (Hanjra & Qureshi 2010) and their governments prefer to give a higher priority to economic matters to ensure subsistence (Dawson & Allen 2007). Climate change impact has received attention from governments and NGOs in Vietnam (Maarten K. van Aalsta, Cannon &
and it has been included in the development and political agenda in recent years.

My research revealed that climate change was a great concern for some participants, especially local leaders, project staff and villagers.

I think climate change has become a factor that negatively impacts on local development. We have in recent years faced the lack of water for irrigation. As a consequence, local people often end up with crop losses due to the lack of water (Loi).

I think climate change, in particular droughts, has become severe recently, affecting badly our local community’s crops. Our agriculture-based economy is at a higher risk every year because of the weather conditions (Nguyen).

The comments from Loi, a commune leader and Nguyen, a district leader, indicate the effects of climate change in the district, making it harder for local people to get out of poverty. However, while climate change is acknowledged as having an increasingly severe impact, it seems that locals are yet to develop any specific strategies for mitigation and most are left to cope and manage the risks and their livelihoods on their own.

H’ Lien and H’ Nga, villagers, and Tien, a project staff, described the current situation:

I think the weather has changed in recent years. Water has become a rarity nowadays. We often run short of water for domestic use and also for our crops. Look at our dug wells now, they have run dry for weeks (H’ Lien).
Well, the weather condition is getting more severe. What we clearly realise is that it is getting drier and drier every year. We do not have enough water to irrigate our crops and as a result, we lose the crops. Also, we do not have water for domestic use. We do not know what to do with this. There is not any support from the government regarding how to mitigate climatic impact (H’ Nga).

I think the weather has been unfavorable in recent years. Local people often lack water to irrigate and even to cook in dry season, but some parts of the district are flooded in rainy season (Tien).

Caught in this new situation, many locals lacked capacity to adapt other than to cut back on production. Some even stopped farming due to the lack of water, making it virtually impossible to escape from poverty and the subsequent multiple social and human consequences.

Ho, a commune leader, observed that climate change in fact was caused by the recent massive deforestations in the region. First, while some deforestation was done by locals to obtain extra farm land, a huge natural forest area was cleared for industrial purposes, with rivers and streams being blocked to construct hydropower structures. Second, as more and more local farmers are shifting from subsistence crops to industrial farming, growing coffee and black pepper, the demand for water for irrigation had also increased enormously.

I think that the lack of water drives from the fact that many households keep changing their crops from short-term to long-term such as coffee and pepper. They do it because pepper especially enjoys a good price now (Ho).
According to Ho, the expansion of production not only caused the forest area to diminish, but the greater consumption also began to deplete the source of underground water, making the supply of water more scarce in the local areas.

Not surprisingly many local households have been driven into further persistent poverty, while those who were just about to get over the threshold of poverty are falling back to chronic poverty. Climate change can also disrupt achieved development outcomes (Dawson & Allen 2007). For example, it can drive non-poor households back into persistent poverty (Hibbard & Tang 2004).

**Barriers to development**

**Perception of psychological dependency:**

In addition to land, water and climate issues, local people also identified psychological dependency as a concern.

According to Zucker and Weiner (1993), in development, psychological dependency is often referred to as an individualistic view of poverty. Local people are often portrayed as lazy and psychologically dependent, although institutional and structural failures could be just as important (Zucker & Weiner 1993).
Many local participants still insisted that psychological dependence is a deep concern that needs to be addressed.

*I assume that people are not aware of their problem of poverty. They want support from outside (H’ Loan).*

H’ Loan, for example, is a villager who identified a type of psychological dependence among people in the local communities that had stopped them from moving themselves out of poverty. However, a closer examination of the responses given by this participant shows that the psychological dependence is the outcome of past development strategies when people received materials and became material/resources dependent, not culturally dependent as some district leaders or a person from a district mass organization (YU) had claimed. Ho, a commune leader, was clear that the government initiated development programs in the communities mainly delivered food, rice and seeds and that this may have created psychological dependence among local people.

*I think that mental dependency is a common phenomenon in the community. People for so long have been used to the subsidy mechanism of the government (Ho).*

Ho made it clearer why psychological dependence exists among locals but he refused to acknowledge that psychological dependence is not a common cultural attribute among the local people. Still other participants, such as Le,
a project staff, believed that, if psychological dependence is a problem, it must be removed to enable people to get out of poverty.

\[I \text{ think poverty is linked to the people themselves. They need to be aware of their situation and strive to escape poverty themselves. What I see is that they rely too much on external assistance (Le).}\]

Le clearly saw poverty as an individualistic problem associated with the local villagers who had not been doing enough to decide whether they were to stay in poverty or escape from it. He felt that, if they had decided to end their poverty, they would have done something about their current status of psychological dependence.

Ngoc, from the district YU, seemed even more certain that psychological dependence is a local cultural attribute among the people.

\[I \text{ think people are poor because many people are mentally dependent. I do not know why. It can be their nature or part of their culture. I think they are poor because they depend too much on the government. They cannot think in long term (Ngoc).}\]

While Le and Ngoc have similar views that local people choose to stay in poverty, they never explained how and why such psychological dependence was created.

Like Ho, Le and Ngoc, Hoang, another participant from a public institution (DARD), blamed local people for their persistent poverty because of psychological dependence.
I think that the local people are generally mentally dependent. They do not have a strong will to escape poverty. If you compare them to the migrant groups, you can see that they tend to depend on government and projects while the migrants try themselves and they escape poverty quickly and some even become rich. I think when people decide to leave their home village for a new land, they already have a strong will and determination (Hoang).

However, unlike other institutional participants, Hoang highlighted the strong will or determination of individuals to succeed as an important element in escaping poverty. He used the particular case of migrant groups to back up his view. However, while credit should be given to migrants for their achievement in getting out of poverty, their experience does nothing to prove that locals do not have strong determination or that cultural and historical factors do not have a role in creating persistent poverty.

**Denied access to capital:**

One factor in determining whether the poor could escape from poverty is access to capital or microfinance to expand cultivation. This is part of the changed approach to poverty reduction, moving from a conventional paternalistic model to a more capitalistic mode (Morduch 2002). At the same time, the changed approach re-conceptualizes the poor, from being passive aid recipients incapable of making decisions in development to being active agents playing a major role as investors in shaping their own development (Morduch 2002). The more capitalist mode sees it as best for the poor to
have the freedom to use capital in the best way they can, but first they must have proper access to capital.

According to Do and Nguyen (2015), access to capital is especially important for vulnerable communities relying upon agriculture as the main livelihood. However, loan access in reality remains difficult for local people, in particular for those living in poverty and the ethnic minority people (Do & Nguyen 2015). Morduch (2012) observed that often they are not seen as potential candidates for loans because the loan providers fear that they cannot make regular repayments.

My fieldwork found that local bankers in general do not see local people as suitable candidates for loans and, as a result, despite the availability of funds, access for locals is not automatic or easy. In fact, it remains a formidable challenge for them.

*We do not have capital to invest in our crops. It is difficult to borrow money from the bank (H’ Lan).*

As H’ Lan, one of the villager participants indicated, the process and procedures of obtaining a loan is paradoxically complex and difficult. Her comment was supported by H’ Trinh, another villager.

*We can’t get money from the bank. It is so difficult and complex (H’ Trinh).*
It is an institutional issue that excludes ordinary people because, according to both H’ Lan and H’ Trinh, the loan procedure is far too complicated and beyond locals’ capacity to complete. Prospective borrowers need to have the ability to read and understand the forms, the ability to write properly in Vietnamese, to show that they can understand the loan conditions. In reality, most locals are illiterate and not many minority people could read or write in Vietnamese. Many cannot even speak Vietnamese fluently.

Truong, a project staff, said the banks have little trust in local people’s ability either to make use of the loans effectively or to repay their loans on time. Hence, they preferred not to give loans to local people, which is basically a business decision.

I think people are poor because they do not have money to invest in their production but it is the bank which refuses to give them a big loan (Truong).

According to Truong, in addition to the technical difficulties in obtaining loans for farming, there is also ethnicity-based discrimination. Certain ethnic groups experience discrimination, putting them into an even more hopeless situation. Khang, from the WU, and H’ Linh, a villager, claimed that the banks’ distrust was actually based on discrimination rather than an assessment of locals’ capacity.
I think people are poor not just because they lack capital to invest in their crops. Not like the enterprises or the Kinh households, local households could not get a big loan from the banks as the bank can provide a loan only up to 15,000,000 VND (1,000 AUD). This is not enough for them for investment. Also, it is difficult to approach the bank (Khang).

I think one of the reasons why we are poor is because we do not have capital to invest in our crops while the bank provides only small loan up to 15,000,000 VND (H’ Linh).

According to Khang and H’ Linh, the banks were offering small loans, though they were insufficient to increase farm production and returns, and in any case ethnicity-based discrimination meant that Vietnamese enterprises or farmers/households could obtain their loans both more easily and far bigger in amount.

However, two other villagers, H’ Truc and H’ Trinh, agreed that minority people were not able to make effective use of loans even if they get them. H’ Truc, for example, said she used to run a small business, but soon had to close it because of loss.

I think the minority people are not suitable to do business because they are not smart enough and especially they are not tricky (H’ Truc).

I do not think we can do business because we do not have capital and we cannot compete with the Vietnamese (H’ Trinh).
While both of them admitted that they were not able to run their business as well as the Vietnamese, this does not necessarily mean that all local minorities are incapable or cannot make effective use of loans.

For Do, from an international NGO, there was another good reason why locals were not considered as preferred candidates for loans. Do explained that the banks, when giving loans to Vietnamese enterprises or farming households, are often paid commission in return for the loans. However, local borrowers often refused to pay a commission.

_You know that the bank does not want to lend money to the ethnic people because they receive nothing back. However, if they lend money to the enterprises or the Kinh households, they often receive an amount of money in return for their support (Do)._ 

This practice in fact is another institutional and structural issue that requires serious attention.

Still, local people did not give up despite the setbacks. They kept looking for alternative means of financing which refutes the view that local people do not have strong will and determination to confront poverty, and that local people are psychologically dependent. Many locals turned to private traders for help.

_Many people choose to borrow money from local traders although at a higher interest rate. When we harvest, we have to sell our products to the traders in return for the loans (H’ Nhu)._
The comment from H' Nhu, a villager, reveals the efforts of local people to find and formulate their own strategies to cope with the unfriendly banks. There are good reasons for them to turn to private lenders/traders because the procedures are simpler and less time consuming. However, in borrowing from private lenders/traders, they must accept a condition that their produce will be sold only to the lenders/traders. Local access to loans is accompanied by loss of access to a wider market which may offer a far more competitive price for the produce. In this context, these private loans deprive them of what Sen called freedom in development and this will in turn become a source of unfreedom if it continues to disadvantage the locals’ development process (Sen 1999b). In other words, access to loans is not the only thing that would guarantee locals’ escape from persistent poverty. Loans, if they are to be effective, must be accompanied with freedom for the borrowers to sell their produce in the open, competitive market.

**Limited access to education:**

Another important issue which researchers have considered in poverty reduction is education. Many believe that the way education is organized reflects a structural and institutional perspective of a society (Vaughan 2008). If educational services are arranged in a way that discriminates
against a certain population group, such as the ethnic minority, it often contributes to the poverty trap of that community (Vaughan 2008). Therefore, educational access is a structural issue closely linked to poverty (Khan 2015; Sen 1999a), not only as a cause of poverty but also as a capacity in escaping poverty (Vaughan 2008). However, despite the rhetoric, proper access to education remains a daunting challenge for certain population groups, such as ethnic minorities and the rural poor (Vaughan 2008).

Participants in my research have acknowledged this, regardless of their backgrounds -- villagers, commune leaders and project staff all considered it a most serious concern.

> In my opinion, the community is poor because they do not have education or training (H’Nghin).

For example, H’ Nghin, a villager, asserted that poverty was closely related to not having access to education. Even when education is available, no or few appropriate educational facilities are likely to be available for locals to use. H’Luyn, another villager, concurred.

> I think we are poor because we can’t read or write Vietnamese properly so we can’t understand technical instructions. Also, we can’t go out and communicate with other people (H’Luyn).
In their minds, not having an education has another deeper meaning. Some local people were aware of the many scientific and technical advancements but they were unable to make good use of these advancements because they are unable to understand what these advancements do or how to access them. As H’ Luyn, observed earlier, a simple example is their farming. While they all know chemical fertilizer would help to increase productivity, they do not have sufficient education to enable them to understand the technical details correctly, both in terms of instructions to use and the cautions normally printed on fertilizer bags they purchased.

Not knowing how to read and write Vietnamese properly also had another major implication for the local people: they are literally isolated socially and economically from the larger society as they cannot speak and communicate fluently in Vietnamese, the official language in use in schools, in writing legal documents and in interacting with people.

Ho, the commune leader, and H’Re, the project staff (H’Re), said:

*Another reason why people are poor is that they do not have skills. They cannot understand and apply improved knowledge in their production. As a result, they have to rely on their experience (Ho).*

*I think that people are poor because they do not have skills and knowledge that they can apply in the development of livelihoods. Many cannot read or write. As a result, they cannot understand technical instructions on fertilizer bags etc. (H’Re).*
However, they did not mention the question of affordability and how it could deprive local children in accessing education in the communities. H’Oanh, a villager, used her own experience to illustrate the situation.

We cannot send all our children to school because we do not have enough money. You see that education is free here, but we have to make contributions to school, and not to mention we also have to buy uniforms and textbooks, school bags, shoes and etc. for our children (H’Oanh).

Although education is fee-free for locals, in practice, parents are required to pay in other ways. Most importantly, if parents are not able to meet the additional expenses, their children would be humiliated by others in schools with their names openly announced in class or in the school’s assembly that often takes place every Monday. As a result, many parents decided not to send their children to school or children would quit school because they felt so embarrassed. H’Oanh’s comment shows that it was not the fault of local people for not having education and that more needs to be done to understand how they have been victimized. This is why the HRBA is critical, because it would help local people to reclaim their rights to education which are so easily denied by the schools involved.

We have found in our recent research that education of the community is the most important factor to help them reduce their poverty. However, many of the local people remain illiterate. They cannot access education. It can be because they are not aware of the importance of education, or it is because the matter of
affordability or language issues etc. I do not know. But, I think this is the cause of poverty (Duc).

In other words, denied access to education for local children is not an isolated issue as it involves a complex of institutional and structural gaps that require systematic mitigation. Sen (1999) describes it as a structural issue of freedom that cannot be properly achieved through the provision of physical materials alone, but only with more appropriate socio-cultural rearrangements (Sen 1999b).
**Conclusion:**

This chapter has examined the various definitions of poverty in literature and the views of local communities which are context-specific. The finding is that poverty is complex and needs to be locally understood when poverty reduction becomes operational, especially when involving economically and socially deprived groups, including women, children and ethnic minority people (Callan & Nolan 1991).

In examining poverty on the ground, I found that participants of governmental or institutional backgrounds, that is, local leaders and persons from public institutions such as the local university and DARD, tended to see poverty from a perspective of material deprivation, while NGO respondents, such as project staff, regarded poverty as associated with capacity. Local villagers, however, considered poverty as linked to both capacity and material deprivation. I concluded that poverty is too complex to be reduced into a simple definition.

Poverty should not be seen as a simple matter of physical survival or economic growth but as a multi-dimensional problem that requires more than the provision of material resources. As discussed in the chapter, material provision alone is unable to resolve poverty properly. More importantly, poverty reduction should be framed as a strategy in removing
barriers, such as difficulties in access to education, arable land, loans and knowledge in dealing with the impact of climate change. Ultimately the objective in addressing poverty is to allow vulnerable people to attain their rightful freedom in making development decisions for themselves.

How, in practice, can local communities mitigate poverty? This will be the focus of the next chapter.
Chapter 5: Local perceptions of approaches to development in the Central Highlands of Vietnam

Introduction:

Different stakeholders have different views on how to see poverty, in particular whether it is a result of individual material/resource deprivation, or a structural issue that must be dealt with collectively by governments or institutional organizations with a mindset of protecting rights of individuals, so that they could regain their freedom of decision making in the development or poverty reduction process. Defining poverty is complex and finding the appropriate approaches to poverty reduction is likewise fraught with contentions and disagreements as people hold onto their own visions and assessments.

This chapter focuses on three issues: first, how local people of different backgrounds, based on their observations on how poverty is formed, perceive different approaches to poverty reduction; second, how they assess the diverse and sometimes opposing frameworks for poverty reduction, particularly in context-specific terms; third, what
implications their perceptions would have on strategies for poverty reduction in practice and especially on the HRBA and Sen’s conceptualization of freedom.

More specifically, this chapter will examine:

a) How the government’s “top-down” approach to development in Vietnam is perceived by various stakeholders, especially whether it is considered effective or ineffective in relation to past development experiences;

b) How the HRBA to development is perceived by local people and whether it is an appropriate alternative model for developing societies, especially in terms of its locally specific approach.

Hence, this chapter will first review the local perceptions of the government’s “top-down” approach before the past development experiences of a Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Project in an ethnic minority community in the Central Highlands of Vietnam is examined to assess whether the “top-down” approach has worked. Then the local views of the HRBA will be investigated further, followed by a close inspection of how the AAV project was implemented.
Moving on from the preceding chapter on local views of poverty that shows that local perceptions of poverty varies depending on participants’ background, the main focus of this chapter is to test whether the government’s “top-down” approach to development is preferred by participants with government and public institution backgrounds, such as local leaders and persons from of the local university and DARD, while the HRBA approach is more accepted by participants of NGO and community background and the AAV project staff. It asks whether there is a high level of tension between these groups, making it more difficult for them to arrive at a shared understanding of how poverty should be best addressed. If tension is high, would it be more difficult for local people to escape poverty?

Furthermore, the participants’ focus on the role and importance of material assistance will be closely scrutinized, especially if local participants generally agreed that the HRBA is a more promising approach to development. Does it mean that HRBA should put in more material assistance as most of the local participants perceived poverty in the preceding chapter as a way to respond to local needs for poverty reduction or should it be focusing on capacity building, or both? How would the AAV project learn from local past experiences when a “top-down” approach was common?
**View of the “top-down” approach to development**

**Views of government participants:**

The government-initiated “top-down” approach to development has been implemented in many communities for many years through the government-initiated development programs that were often known as 134⁹ and 135¹⁰, but different people hold different views on its effectiveness. In this study, however, comments gathered from participants with a government background all seem to be quite positive about it. For example, Ho, a commune leader, saw it as an effective approach to reduction of local poverty.

*I think that the government’s approach is very effective because it really meets the immediate needs and concerns of the local people in offering them rice, capital, seeds and fertilizer (Ho).*

In some ways, offering people material assistance is always effective to ensure short-term survival and, as a community leader, Ho understandably saw it as most important to demonstrate effective leadership by providing for those in need when they cannot afford to

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⁹ This program, which was among the Vietnam government initiated poverty reduction programs, was aimed to provide water supply, arable land and housing to poor ethnic minority communities in poverty in mountainous areas.

¹⁰ This program, one of the poverty reduction programs initiated by the Government of Vietnam, was aimed to promote socio-economic development in mountainous ethnic minority communities through provision of materials, such as seeds, and infrastructures such as electricity, drinking water, and schools. The program was approved for implementing by Vietnam Prime Minister in 1998 and was implemented into two phases with the first phase starting from 1998-20 followed by the second phase from 2001-05.
buy anything. Moreover, in doing so the outcomes are visible and measurable (for example in terms of number of seeds provided for the households or amount of cash the households received), which are important considerations in governance or management. Not surprisingly other governmental participants, like Nguyen, a district leader, shared this view.

_The government’s approach aims at supplying local people with basic materials such as rice, seeds and some facilities like educational and health facilities. I think the approach is realistic for it helps local people access basic materials for survival and production (Nguyen)._  

However, unlike Ho, Nguyen made it clearer that the “top-down” approach was needed especially when educational facilities are needed and the “top-down” approach is perhaps best for meeting this type of long-term needs that are necessary for development by providing access to loans and arable land. This view was also supported by Duc, the person from a local university.

_In my opinion, the government’s approach is good and effective for it focuses on assisting local people in accessing basic, practical things, such as arable land, housing and loans for them to invest in their production (Duc)._  

H’ Ly, from one of the local communities, had the same view, particularly in relation to meeting people’s basic need for arable land, money and housing.
I think that the government’s approach is very good for it provides for people arable land for cultivation, housing and capital (H’ Ly).

However, in approving of the government’s “top-down” approach, they also agreed that a material-based assistance approach by itself can only meet the elementary needs of local community (Reichert 2007; Sen 1999a). Yet, if the goal of development is poverty reduction, whether meeting material needs alone is sufficient remains debatable.

**Views of non-governmental participants:**

Some participants – Hoang (from DARD), Thuy (project staff) and Tien (project staff) – held a different view and saw the “top-down” approach’s inability to properly resolve poverty in the local communities, especially in meeting needs that are beyond the material.

*I think the “top-down” approach has a big problem because it tends to do everything for the local community. As a result, when the project is finished, everything gets worse again. I just feel that we are only giving people fish to eat rather than teach them how to catch fish themselves (Hoang).*

In elaborating his view, Hoang, from DARD, saw this approach to development as ineffective because it is paternalistic, treating local people as passive recipients and not putting local people at the centre.
of the development process as active agents. This is in line with the view of Trotsky (2001) that a paternalistic approach can be successful in achieving short-term economic development goals but not long-term ones, because people are denied an opportunity to fully participate and function in the process as witless victims of poverty (Reichert 2007). According to Hoang, the “top-down” approach, in addition, could even create a “new” type of poverty which he identified as psychological dependency as discussed in the preceding chapter, which weakens people rather than strengthening their sense of self-reliance (Adrianna 2012; Fonchingong & Fonjong 2002). This is particularly evident when the government’s assistance is withdrawn and local people are unable to carry on for they do not know what to do, how to do it or even where to start. In other words, the “top-down” approach is not only unsustainable but also hinders local people in developing their own wisdom and capacity to deal with their own development problems.

Thuy, a participant working as a project staff, seemed to agree. She gave credit to the critical role of provision of material assistance but she said:

*I do not think that the government’s approach is effective for it focuses on the hardware and does not attempt to build the capacity for local people. As a result, my observations*
show that in many cases local people do not know what and how to do with the materials they are given (Thuy).

To her, when people do not have their own capacity, they are unable to make the most effective use of the material assistance they receive. She believes that material assistance could only be effective if it is accompanied by capacity building. This view was supported by Son, another commune leader.

I’ll tell you what … You might find it funny or a joke, but believe me, it is a true story. We have witnessed cases where local villagers having received money from the government to invest in expanding agricultural production, but no one knew what to do with the money. Some even thought that since it was the government’s money, they decided not to do anything with it but just keeping it in a safe place. They then put the money in the kitchen cabinet. Then they returned it to the government later when a commune staff came to their houses to collect the interest and the loan (Son).

Another project staff, Tien, also had his story to tell.

I see in my community that when the government’s support remains, poverty is reduced. However, when the support is terminated, people go back into poverty. What I want to say is that the approach is ineffective because it does not help local people try themselves (Tien).

These participants further reflect the thinking in recent literature on development by scholars such as Nussbaum (2000), who advocated that attention must be paid to capacity building if the community
people are to be helped to step out of poverty. Their views were also similar to Eade (1997), who has observed that material assistance should go hand in hand with capacity building if development is to be effective (Eade 1997). In other words, they echo the recent development thinking that, without paying attention to building the software of development in local community, people will not be able to participate effectively and meaningfully in the development process and take ownership of their current complex community structures (Brady 2003; Nussbaum 2000).

Summarizing people’s view on the “top-down” approach to development, it seems evident that participants with institutional or government backgrounds, that is, local leaders (at commune and district levels) and in public institutions (like the local university and DARD), tended to speak positively about the approach. This is perhaps because they need to work closely with the government or government’s system. As a result, the “top-down” approach may continue to be the dominant model and strategy in tackling poverty in these local communities, which would present a challenge to the AAV project.

Participants who spoke less favorably of the “top-down” approach were those who work for NGOs, the AAV project and local
communities. The evident division may mean that development projects like the AAV project may have to deal with the tension imposed on them by the government approach while also needing to mobilize local resources, including local support, in implementing their projects effectively.
A community participation in response to the “top-down” approach to development

Reflection on my past development work:

My past engagement with different development projects has shaped my thinking about development in local communities. While I realise and acknowledge the importance of securing access to basic necessities for local people to survive, I realise also that material assistance alone is unable to adequately address poverty. Even if it were, it would not be a sustainable approach to local development. What needs more attention is a sense of local ownership, and this cannot be achieved if local people are not placed at the center of the development process where they have the opportunity to participate effectively in the process (Nelson, N & Wright 1995). Having a sense of ownership of development not only can foster sustainability of development, but also can guarantee local commitment by related stakeholders to maintain, develop and duplicate the successful development outcomes (Ampiah 2012; Connell 2010; S.Homan 2008). In contrast, the lack of a sense of local ownership may lead to a quick disruption of the development process (Ampiah 2012; Bain, Prokos & Liu 2012; S.Homan 2008). This is because local people do not see the
outcomes as their own, but as the project or the government-owned achievement (Nelson, N & Wright 1995). When they do not feel they have a role or responsibility for achieving, protecting or maintaining the development outcomes (Connell 2010; Nelson, N & Wright 1995; S.Homan 2008; Scheinin & Suksi 2002b), they even do not want to make use of the outcomes (Ampiah 2012; Bain, Prokos & Liu 2012).

My past experiences from a foreign-funded project, the Rural Water Supply and Sanitation (RWSS) project, have taught me the importance of local participation in relation to sustainability of development outcomes. The aim of this RWSS project was to prevent water borne diseases from continuing to increase in an ethnic community in the Central Highlands of Vietnam through provision of clean water supply and sanitation (2001-05). The RWSS project adopted a “participatory” approach to development. Like in other minority communities across the globe, access to safe drinking water and hygienic latrines in the community was problematic (Dombroski 2015).
Background to the Rural Water Supply and Sanitation project:

In an attempt to reduce the increasing rate of water borne diseases spreading in a local ethnic minority community as a result of the lack of access to safe drinking water and hygienic latrines, the RWSS project staff went to the community to set up a water supply and sanitation project. The RWSS project consisted of two components: software and hardware. The software was about building information, education and communication, which was normally referred to as the IEC in the project; and the hardware was about establishing and installing a piped water system and flushable septic tank latrines for local households.

The IEC, which was expected to be a step ahead of the construction of the hardware, was designed to prepare the local community to participate in the project through awareness raising and capacity building, especially in promoting local awareness about the importance of using safe drinking water and practising hygienic behaviors in health. The safe, chlorinated water was expected to come from the piped scheme as the water source that local people were using was considered unsafe because it was not chlorinated. Most importantly the IEC team had to advise local people not to use water collected directly from the stream because traditionally people also defecated near the water source and hence it was not good for health
and the environment. So, the RWSS project aimed to encourage people to get access to safe drinking water from the water supply piped scheme and have access to hygienic latrines. Water use groups were established for this purpose and later developed into a water supply cooperative.

**Project implementation:**

Although the IEC was identified as an important first step, the RWSS project placed greater emphasis on getting the hardware constructed, installed and operated. This was in part because the RWSS project was under strong pressure from the provincial and central governments as well as the donor for quick, measurable outcomes. Therefore, the RWSS project was under pressure to follow the instruction to get the hardware constructed and installed, either before or in parallel with the promotion campaign. This meant that local people might have had to make choices without understanding the full implications.

The RWSS project staff eventually established a modern water system with many septic tank latrines for people to use. For the water system, the RWSS project established a piped scheme with a pumping station installed at the upper stream of a river at the foot of a mountain at the rear end of the community. Water was then pumped through the piped scheme to a water station in the community where the water was chemically treated to meet
the national standards for safe drinking water. However, a water fee was applied and, to measure the volume of water used by the households, water meters were installed at every household.

It is important to note that the technology used in the RWSS project, including the water pump, was very modern and was imported from Europe. The latrines were also “modernized” as flushing latrines.

Completion of the project:

After five years, the project was “successful” because it was able to deliver what it was supposed to deliver in the local community, which would result in a proper solution to ending the increasing rate of water borne diseases in the community. The local government leaders and public institutions, such as the Provincial People’s Committee (PPC), the District People’s Committee (DPC), the provincial Department of Health (DH) and the Department of Preventative Health (DPH), as well as the project staff, believed that the system would be effectively operated and managed and local people would make good use of it to reduce the spread of water borne diseases.

Soon things did not work as they were expected. The modern piped scheme malfunctioned because of poor management and maintenance and finally it fell apart totally. Many problems, ranging from technical to managerial issues, became evident. Local people were not happy with the fees charged
for using the water and the fees collected were not effectively and transparently managed. As a result, many people stopped using piped water. The water pump began to malfunction and the water piped network began to leak because of human and animal activities. Water supply then was interrupted frequently, causing many households problems in getting enough water for daily use and for flushing the latrines. In short, when small problems were not properly fixed, the whole system became dysfunctional, leading to increased tensions in the community and between the community people and the cooperative, especially when people were not happy with the facilities that had been installed for them. Ultimately people returned to their tradition of collecting water from the stream for domestic use and continued to do open defecation when there was no water to flush.
Reflections on the Rural Water Supply and Sanitation project:

To find out why the system went wrong, an investigation was carried out to consult a wide range of local stakeholders, including local villagers, especially older people, and local government, the CPC and DPC. It soon became clear that one of the main reasons leading to the failure of the project was that the local culture and tradition of water use had been ignored altogether. Rather than getting to know how locals see the issue of safe water, the project design and implementation were based on unfounded assumptions.

First, the perception of safe water among locals was very different. For them, safe water was running or flowing water, which could be collected safely from rivers or streams rather than from chlorinated pipes. Hence, even when the project was in full operation, some locals were still collecting water from rivers for domestic use. They were very confident that the untreated water was safe as they had been using the same water sources for generations with few health problems of which they were conscious.

Secondly, although the project was labeled as a participatory project, local participation in the project was not strongly promoted, especially in the decision-making process. This was in part because the project was under pressure to achieve quick, measurable outcomes. Hence locals were only
informed of the decisions and everything else had been done for them. Moreover, because the technology used in the project was not locally available, it became very expensive. When it went wrong, it was impossible for the locals to purchase the spare parts quickly and inexpensively, as they were not locally made, or to fix the problem themselves, as the system was beyond their technical capacity.

In addition, soon after people withdrew from the project, many parts of the piped system, such as the pump and the water treatment station, started to deteriorate and became dysfunctional because people did not have a sense of local ownership. Local people just did not think the system was theirs, but rather a local government project. For these reasons, even when people saw human and animal activities damaging the system, no one really cared and that led to the quick collapse of system.

My experience of this project was valuable. Too often decisions in development were made based on false assumptions, that is, from the top echelon people rather from the users or recipients. These groups in fact live in different lifeworlds and face different realities, including the ways safe drinking water, hygiene and health practices are perceived and evaluated. People at the top were assuming that “modern” is best and safest for everyone but it is not necessarily so. The subjective interpretations of the vulnerable people in the reality in development are often ignored. This
“post-development” way of thinking and reflecting, which I return to discuss in the final chapter of this thesis, should be a timely reminder that the voices of the poor deserve proper recognition and inclusion (Dombroski 2015).
Views on the HRBA:

Views of non-governmental participants

How is the HRBA to development viewed given these other two approaches (participatory approach in the RWSS project and the ‘top-down’ approach by the government)?

According to some participants in this study, the HRBA is an appropriate poverty reduction approach. These participants included two villagers, H’ Nhu and H’ Lien, and a person from a mass organization (YU), Ngoc.

*I have heard about the HRBA. I see that it is a good approach that is appropriate locally because local women have a chance to participate in training events both in classes and in the field (H’ Nhu).*

In her comment, the advantage of the HRBA was not only allowing local participation, which is its key principle (Scheinin & Suksi 2002b), but also giving local women access to training classes, so that they could make equal contributions to the project and local community as the local men.

For H’ Lien as well, the HRBA’s main appeal is its attention to gender issues.

*In my opinion, the HRBA project is very good because the project focuses on improving local people’s knowledge and understanding and techniques. The project also focuses on women’s rights, making them feel more confident and better in communication (H’ Lien).*
More specifically, she seemed to see that the HRBA did not just provide an approach for women to gain practical knowledge and increase their capacity to improve their livelihoods, but it also enabled local women to understand their own rights, making them feel more confident and comfortable in communicating their needs effectively when engaging with the development process.

In addition to local villagers, others with different backgrounds also seemed to appreciate what the HRBA could do for poverty reduction. For example, Ngoc, the person from the district YU, liked the HRBA because it promoted local participation. Yet his concept of participation was not quite the same as that of some other participants, like H’ Nhu and H’ Lien. Ngoc saw that the HRBA provided local stakeholders, like his organization, with the opportunity to engage in the project.

I think that the current HRBA project is good because the project has a mechanism to facilitate local people to participate in the project. The project also promotes participation of other stakeholders in the implementation (Ngoc).

What appealed to him most was that local participation included not only local villagers but also mass organization (YU) whose voices had been totally
ignored and this is a marked difference as it means approaching poverty from “bottom-up”.

For Ho, a commune leader, the HRBA also has merit because it aims to build and strengthen local capacity, something he considered most significant in tackling poverty.

*I think the current HRBA is good because the project focuses on building capacity for local people. However, I think that the project also needs to focus on material assistance for the project to be more effective in addressing poverty in the community (Ho).*

However, although he considered the HRBA a suited approach to development, Ho did not necessarily consider it sufficient to address poverty in the local communities, especially if it only aims to build local capacity. In his view, resolving poverty also requires material assistance in parallel with capacity building. To him, this may be the HRBA’s limitation and hence, for him, the HRBA should pay more attention and learn to how best to use material assistance to supplement its effectiveness.

Although in general the HRBA seemed to enjoy a fair share of positive support, the acknowledgement that it should not ignore the critical role of material assistance seems to indicate that, in future implementation, the tension of different opinions will arise. Unless these tensions are dealt with effectively to come up with a more balanced approach, especially one that
can also protect and uphold women’s rights, it will probably encounter some serious challenges along the way even when it emphasizes a “bottom-up” methodology.

**Views of government-background participants:**

An interesting issue emerged from the interviews with some participants from the district leadership (Nguyen and Van). They commented that the HRBA would be more suited for developed countries than developing countries. Their views seemed to imply that the HRBA is something more complex and requires a high level of knowledge to understand and implement, that it is not appropriate in their communities where the struggle for everyday subsistence remains and illiteracy among locals is still high.

*I have participated in the HRBA project as a manager on behalf of the local district government. I think that the HRBA is very complex and is appropriate for advanced and well-developed countries because in those countries, people often have a high level of knowledge and especially they do not have to worry about having enough food to keep them going as we do here (Nguyen).*

This comment also seemed to suggest that the HRBA is not practical and talking to the locals about rights is inappropriate, especially when the burden of survival still rests heavily on their shoulders. Although not explicitly stated, he, like other participants, seemed to believe that the HRBA
will need to learn from the government’s “top-down” approach to development. This means that the HRBA needs to provide material assistance to meet the locals’ immediate needs for survival.

Van, another district leader, made his view much clearer. He felt that the HRBA could only be applied conditionally. According to him, the HRBA can be implemented only when local people do not have to struggle for daily survival.

*I think it makes sense talking about human rights in poverty reduction, but we have to take into consideration the particular local social contexts. I mean if it is a very poor community where people are still struggling for resources for daily survival, it would make more sense for the project to focus on assisting them to access material assistance rather than rights (Van).*

In closer examination of Van’s comments, it shows that he seemed to suggest that human rights should come after survival -- that is, in his view, the importance of human rights should be ranked rather than blindly accepted. This is a challenge to the AAV project and, in some ways, to the key concept of human rights proclaimed by the UDHR (1948) (Brems 2001). The universality and indivisibility of human rights suggest that rights cannot be ranked because all rights are globally applicable and equally important and that the realization of any human right depends on the realization of other human rights (Brems 2001). However, when suggesting daily survival must
come first before human rights are promoted, though there was not a direct mention of Maslow’s hierarchy, these participants seemed to refer to the view of Maslow, who argued that there is a hierarchy of needs, with the concept of human rights (Kiel 1999; Wahba & Bridwell 1976). Interestingly they also seemed to see this hierarchy of needs as a justification for using the “top-down” approach to development (Reichert 2007). This is another significant point of contention (Brems 2001; Whelan 2010).

Many participants of other backgrounds, such as in public institutions and the project, also regarded the HRBA as not suited as a strategy for dealing with local poverty reduction but for other different reasons. For example, Duc, who is from a public institution (a local university), was more worried about sensitivity associated with the HRBA.

*I think that we need to be careful when promoting the HRBA in the local context for it can be very sensitive (Duc).*

Examination of this comment shows that the participant’s concern about the HRBA does not lie in the real capacity of the HRBA for development. Rather, it is its political sensitivity or its association with human rights, which are often seen as being used by an external party as a political tool to advocate social and political changes in Vietnam, sometimes not in the way that the Vietnamese government wants it seen happening.
Another participant, Le, from the AAV project, supports Duc’s sentiment.

_The HRBA is a sensitive approach. We do not talk about the approach when promoting activities in the community (Le)._ 

He gave examples to illustrate why it was sensitive: when locals made claims for more land for farming, they always resort to using the rights approach and it created much social disorder and tension in the district.

However, while most participants from government or public institutions did not see the HRBA as appropriate, those from the communities, local mass organizations (YU and WU) and commune leadership tended to hold an opposing view. If anything, these diverging views indicated that, should the HRBA be implemented, the path it takes to adapt to local communities will not be easy.
Conclusion:

In development or poverty reduction, there have been heated debates on “top-down” vs “bottom-up” approaches as well as survival vs human rights concerns. The implementation of the HRBA by the AAV project in the two communities in the Central Highlands is a case in point. The divergent views and the reported tensions and contradictions between various groups of stakeholders have illustrated precisely the complexities and difficulties in implementing the HRBA in a developing country like Vietnam.

The complexities and difficulties are not only conceptual, but also real. Different stakeholders in different sectors, from government and public institutions, from community organizations, and even as individuals, all have their own concerns, interests and agendas. Viewed in this context, it is less important to conclude whether “top-down” or “bottom-up” is better, or whether survival should come before human rights. In development, reality always dictates a more pragmatic or contextual approach rather than conceptual purity. It is necessary for saving lives, but also for preparing a sounder platform to move forward and farther ahead, because development or poverty reduction is not just about short-term relief. Development’s objective is the achievement of long-term welfare and better quality of life, for reclaiming freedom and choices to determine one’s future life paths.
The road to reaching a consensus in terms of how best to realise these goals is necessarily bumpy, contradictory and full of tension. What needs to be learnt is how these challenges can be mitigated, and managed to take care of survival (relief) and capacity building (rights-based), so that these two dimensions complement one another to bring the best outcomes for those who are in need. It is clear that both survival and capacity needs to be addressed adequately in development work.

The AAV project will be examined within this perspective in the rest of the study.
Chapter six: The Action Aid Vietnam Project in the Central Highlands of Vietnam

Given the divergent views local stakeholders hold on the HRBA to development, and in particular the different rights my discussion with these stakeholders suggests need to be addressed, how does an existing development project modelled on the HRBA hold up? In this chapter I examine in detail an Action Aid Vietnam (AAV) initiated project in the Central Highlands of Vietnam.

I ask, to what extent has this project followed the HRBA model? I am interested in to what extent the project does and does not meet the principles and goals of the HRBA discussed in chapter two.

I begin by discussing the background to this project, including the involvement of Action Aid International (AAI) and Action Aid International Vietnam (AAV) and a history of the AAV project under examination. I then move on to provide a detailed account of the project, including the key themes and how they compare to the HRBA model. Finally, I discuss some emerging institutional issues from this project, such as the lack of capacity of project staff to effectively promote the HRBA in practice.
Action Aid International: An Introduction

*Action Aid is a global movement of people working together to further human rights and defeat poverty for all*.\(^{11}\)

Action Aid International (AAI) began in 1972 as a British charity organization aiming to promote education for children as a development intervention. It is now an international non-governmental organization operating in over forty countries across the globe. Its headquarters is in South Africa\(^{12}\). Today the aim of AAI is more ambitious, with the website stating that AAI works “*towards a world without poverty and injustice in which every person enjoys the right to a life with dignity*\(^{13}\)”

As Gready (2009), an independent consultant to Action Aid International, describes, the organization links poverty to rights because it sees poverty as a symptom of structural inequality and unequal power relationships between local people as rights-holders and public institutions (such as government) as duty-bearers. AAI sees poverty as neither natural nor inevitable but something that is done to people.

*Poor is not what they are, but what they have been made* (Mander, 2005:240).

\(^{11}\) [http://www.actionaid.org/vietnam](http://www.actionaid.org/vietnam)

\(^{12}\) [http://www.actionaid.org/south-africa](http://www.actionaid.org/south-africa)

\(^{13}\) [http://www.actionaid.org/](http://www.actionaid.org/)
Gready (2013) also suggests that AAI has held a notion of rights-based-development since its establishment. Poverty is seen as a direct consequence of the denial of human rights (Archer 2011; Gready 2013).

*We believe that poverty will remain until the fundamental rights are secured*\(^{14}\)

Action Aid International has taken the three HRBA’s principles of local participation, empowerment, accountability and non-discrimination as its main targets (Archer 2011; Gready 2013). This is because these principles are believed to deal with the root causes rather than the symptoms of poverty (Gready 2009). The vision of AAI is that by building capacity and empowering local people they will become more powerful participants in the development process, not only making independent decisions regarding their own development, but also able to hold public institutions accountable for their decisions in development.

*The HRBA, which guides us on programming and defines all our work. The focus of our work is to ensure that the rights of poor and excluded people are respected, promoted, protected, and fulfilled*\(^{15}\).

\(^{14}\) [http://www.actionaid.org/vietnam/what-we-do](http://www.actionaid.org/vietnam/what-we-do)

\(^{15}\) [http://www.actionaid.org/vietnam/what-we-do](http://www.actionaid.org/vietnam/what-we-do)
In practice, Action Aid tries to ensure key elements such as local participation, empowerment and accountability in its works in community\textsuperscript{16}.

In addition to children’s rights, the original focus of AAI, AAI also considers the right to food and women’s rights as equally important:

*Women’s rights are a key focus area for ActionAid because we believe ending poverty and injustice will only be possible when we secure equality and rights for women and girls*\textsuperscript{17}

Therefore, *ActionAid puts women and women’s rights at the centre of all our work. And we believe that gender is critical to understanding the causes of poverty and injustice*\textsuperscript{18}.

**Funding and sponsorship:**

Action Aid International is not a donor but has to raise funds for its operation worldwide. While it has formed a partnership with funding bodies such as the European Commission’s Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection department (ECHO) and the United Nations Development Programs (UNDP), its most common funding-raising strategy is the child sponsorship scheme\textsuperscript{19}. In this scheme individuals are asked to sponsor children in a community to regain their rights to education. Technical and administrative assistance is organized in the funding countries. For example, when Action Aid Vietnam

\textsuperscript{16} http://www.actionaid.org/vietnam/what-we-do
\textsuperscript{17} http://www.actionaid.org/australia/learn
\textsuperscript{18} http://www.actionaid.org/what-we-do/womens-rights
\textsuperscript{19} http://www.actionaid.org/who-we-are/our-funding-partners
(AAV) decided to start a new community development project in the Central Highlands they had to communicate with the Action Aid Country Office to indicate their intention to raise funds. When approval was granted the Country Office launched a fund-raising program to appeal for financial support from international citizens. The number of sponsors can vary depending on the project. While some may have a thousand individual donors, others may have far fewer.

To help raise funds, Action Aid Vietnam produces and sends potential donors a report about the community. This report is often referred to as participatory appraisal report (PAR). Along with the provision of a picture on local community development issues, an important part of the report is pictures drawn by local school children as depicted in figure 3 below. Children are organized into classes in school to draw their pictures and receive help from Action Aid Vietnam staff and some schoolteachers who have been trained regarding picture drawing by the AAV staff. These AAV staff members and schoolteachers explain to and remind that, while the children have the freedom to draw whatever they like, they must follow technical instructions regarding drawing. For example, they must not cross the lines that frame the pictures. Pictures are collected by the Action Aid.

http://www.actionaid.org/vietnam
Vietnam staff, who often undertake a final check to ensure that the message is clear. This ensures that each picture carries a clear message to donors.

![Image of children drawing pictures](image)

*Figure 3: Children are guided by the AAV and the project staff to draw pictures at the children’s school. Source: Authors’ data.*

Different AAI supported countries have different donor countries. However, in the case of Vietnam most donors are individuals in Europe. When donors have confirmed their commitments to financially support the proposed development initiative, Action Aid Vietnam then announces the project province and prepares for the implementation of the project in the local
community by approaching the local authorities. I will return to consider this part of the process later in this chapter. However, it is important to note from the outset that local stakeholders are not involved in the process to identify the kind of project that should be implemented in their area. This stage of the project does not reflect the key principles of the HRBA, especially participation in decision making as a form of empowerment.

**Action Aid Vietnam: An Introduction**

Action Aid Vietnam (AAV) is a member of Action Aid International. Officially operating in Vietnam since 1992, AAV has its Country Office located in the capital city of Hanoi. In its early years of operation in Vietnam, AAV focused on communities in the northwest mountainous provinces such Ha Giang, Cao Bang and Lai Chau. AAV promotes the HRBA as its main approach to development with an emphasis on promoting the principles of local participation, empowerment and accountability. These principles are reflected to varying degrees in AAV’s planning, implementation and evaluation of development projects. In planning, local stakeholders, especially local community villagers, are encouraged to participate in the development of an activity plan for their community with technical assistance from AAV. During the implementation process, AAV aims to train

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21 [http://www.actionaid.org/vietnam](http://www.actionaid.org/vietnam)
local people so that they can participate more effectively in the development process in their community. Local stakeholders, such as villagers, are also consulted during the evaluation process. However, the extent to which these principles are promoted varies between communities and, as my examination below of one project shows, largely depends on the capacity of project staff members. In addition, the HRBA principles are not easily measured.

In recent years, AAV has expanded its operation to other regions of Vietnam, such as the Southwest and the Central Highlands. This follows AAV’s development strategy to focus on the most socially and economically vulnerable regions in the country, particularly those with a large ethnic minority population22.

In 2007 AAV launched a development project that employs a HRBA in the communes of Cu Hue and Eadar in district of Eakar of Daklak province in the Central Highlands of Vietnam. By employing a HRBA framework, AAV believes strongly that poverty in the local communities is caused by the denial of human rights and that only a HRBA can adequately address poverty.

Action Aid Vietnam (AAV) was not the only International Non-Governmental Organization (INGO) working in the Central Highlands of Vietnam that aims

22 http://www.actionaid.org/vietnam
to address poverty in ethnic minority communities. However, AAV was the only organisation that claimed to promote the HRBA to development. AAV is committed to tackle poverty in community through addressing issue of fundamental human rights (p.3).

‘Action Aid is a global movement of people working together to further human rights and defeat poverty for all’ (http://www.actionaid.org/vietnam/what-we-do).

‘We believe that poverty will remain until the fundamental rights are secure’(http://www.actionaid.org/vietnam/what-we-do).

These quotes above demonstrate and reinforce the view that Action Aid pursues rights-based development in its strategy to address poverty in the community. This orginates from its well-established belief that poverty is linked to human rights. Therefore, for Action Aid, to address poverty in community properly, the issue of rights must be addressed. Action Aid believes and pursues the HRBA in its programming.

(“The HRBA, which guides us on programming and defines all our work. The focus of our work is to ensure that the rights of poor and excluded people are respected, promoted, protected, and fulfilled (http://www.actionaid.org/vietnam/what-we-do).

Today the aim of AAI is more ambitious, with the website stating that AAI works “towards a world without poverty and injustice in which every person enjoys the right to a life with dignity”( http://www.actionaid.org/vietnam/what-we-do).

I chose the Action Aid Vietnam (AAV) supported poverty reduction project implemented in the two communes (Cu Hue and Eadar) in the Central Highlands to examine for several interrelated reasons.
First, the AAV project was implemented in these two communes only, having gone through a long and challenging process of negotiating with and obtaining approval from the local authority (PPC), and for the first time the HRBA was introduced to local stakeholders, including the PPC, as an approach to development that had a better ability to address poverty in the community.

Second, while the project aimed and claimed to promote the HRBA to development in the community, I wanted to explore local views and experiences regarding how the HRBA was locally perceived; how the HRBA was implemented in the local context; how the HRBA could actually deal with poverty in the community; and whether the HRBA actually has a better ability to do so as compared to conventional approaches to development, such as the ‘top-down’ approach (with which the communities also had experience).

Third, I chose the project because I believe that there is a relationship between poverty/development and fundamental human rights, such as right to participate in development, decision-making processes and access to resources. The principles of the HRBA (participation, empowerment, accountability and non-discrimination) appealed to me as a better approach to development than those I had previously seen. My previous engagement in different development projects, including one I examine in this thesis, demonstrated that poverty needs to be dealt with differently. These projects clearly showed me that the success of development work depends on local participation. It made sense to me that genuine local participation requires empowerment. Indeed, research shows that empowerment can better enable local people to participate effectively in development projects, and
also to be able to hold public stakeholders, such as local government, to account for decisions that affect local livelihoods (Narayan 2002, 2006).

In addition, I chose the AAV project because I was interested to explore how the HRBA was actually perceived by different categories of local stakeholders (such as community people, participants from public institutions, including the government) in two different communes. While the aim was not to compare or contrast the differences between the two communes regarding the implementation of the HRBA, I was interested to find out if the contextual differences of the two communes add anything or forms any obstacles to effective implementation of the HRBA. I was, of course, also interested in exploring how the HRBA was implemented in the local context that place a strong emphasis on collectivist culture, and what kind of contextual obstacles, if any, face the implementation of the HRBA and how the obstacles could be dealt with locally so that the HRBA to development could be better adapted to the local context for poverty reduction.

Ultimately, I wanted to be able to promote and advocate the adoption of the HRBA to development in Vietnam. It is my belief that it is impossible to promote sustainable development without paying attention to addressing the issue of fundamental human rights, such as right to participate, right to negotiate, right to hold public institutions to account, and right to make decisions. Denial of these basic rights of the community in development will continue to result in the failure of development/poverty reduction in the community.

A Background to the AAV project in the Central Highlands:
In order to officially begin its operation in the province, AAV signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Daklak Provincial People’s Committee (PPC), the highest provincial form of government in the area. This MoU provides a legal framework which includes the commitments of AAV and those of the PPC, as well as their mutual responsibility and obligations regarding the AAV development project in the two communes. In addition, AAV also signed an agreement with the Eakar District People’s Committee (DPC), the local form of government at district level where the project would be implemented. This agreement with the DPC provides a more concrete picture of the project to be undertaken. Following the agreement, AAV and the DPC established a Project Management Unit (PMU) located in the premises of DPC. The PMU is headed by the vice deputy chairperson of the DPC. As per the agreement, the DPC provides a workspace for the project staff during the implementation of the project. AAV also provides facilities such as the Internet, computers, a photocopy machine and a telephone line, while the DPC has to cover costs for the maintenance of these facilities with a budget approved by AAV\(^\text{23}\).

\(^{23}\text{http://www.actionaid.org/vietnam}\)
Planning for the implementation of AAV projects:

Staff recruitment is an important aspect of project implementation. AAV’s recruitment process is, in general, quite transparent. AAV and the PMU discussed the staff they would need, developed a job description for the positions and then advertised these positions in a local newspaper. Information about the vacancy was also posted on the website of AAV. The job description included the qualifications needed for the position (at least a college degree), the gender preference, and a minimum work experience requirement. It was close to impossible to find a qualified candidate who fit these requirements because qualified people were already employed. In addition, the experienced development workers tend to live and work in Ho Chi Minh City or in the provincial capital city of Buon Ma Thuot, which is 60 kilometers away from the district. Another impediment to hiring eligible staff was that, although the positions paid a competitive salary, they were often only short-term contracts. This exposed a challenge to the project and the PMU because it is commonly thought that working for the project is sustainable because the project is a short-term one. It is generally felt less secure than the government job, though the latter pays less. Being less secure than a government job means that many would choose to work for the government. However, there are not always government jobs on offer, and that it is not easy to get a government job because there are normally
more applicants than the number of offers. Also, in some cases, there is the lack of transparency in the recruitment process.

Once new staff was found no initial training was offered. AAV relies on on-the-job training. While this might be a good strategy for some jobs, the new AAV staff did not have enough training to work effectively on the project, especially in terms of the principles of the HRBA.

AAV often assigns a full-time program officer to work with project staff in the communities and to ensure that projects are implemented effectively and in accordance with AAV’s policies, especially the financial policy. The program officer is based in the city of Buon Ma Thuot, where the AAV regional office is. They often visit the district to work with the local staff and partners once or twice a month, while spending most of their time in the regional office in Buon Ma Thuot city and in the AAV office in Hanoi to attend workshops or training activities at the request of AAV leadership.

Apart from the staff members recruited to work for the project at the community level, AAV works with other local stakeholders such as schools, local extension centers and mass organizations such as the Women’s Unions (WU), the Youth Union (YU) and Farmers’ Associations (FA). Mass organizations are part of the government apparatus and not open to public membership. Staff members working in mass organizations are recruited,
nominated and paid by the government as governmental employees. Although labeled as mass organizations, then, these organizations do not represent local voices. Rather, they act on behalf of the government in the community, promoting the government, monitoring compliance and are ultimately the voice of the government. This is a significant political challenge for the AAV given its intention to adopt a HRBA to development and the key principles of participation, accountability and empowerment.

**Implementing AAV projects in communities:**

Prior to beginning the development project that I discuss below, AAV conducted a participatory project appraisal (PPP) in the local community. While PPP offers AAV and local stakeholders, such as PMU, DPC and CPC, a snapshot about what would be covered in the project, the PPP was ultimately aimed to provide an image about local development for potential individual donors in Europe. This was part of the fund-raising process that AAV implemented. While AAV adopts the HRBA in its work in the community, the appraisal process does not reflect the key principles of the HRBA.

To carry out the PPP, AAV formed an appraisal team consisting of technical staff from its Country Office in Hanoi. These staff members are Vietnamese and none are from the local region. Local stakeholders were not consulted on their views during the formation of the appraisal team. The team then
went to the local community to conduct the appraisal. At this stage, local stakeholders including local people were only informed of the appraisal plan. The aim was for local stakeholders to make necessary arrangements and to provide local support for the team when it arrived in the community. On arrival in the community, the team met with key local stakeholders such as the Commune People’s Committee (CPC), the District People’s Committee (DPC) and mass organizations such as the Women’s Unions and the Youth Union. This enabled the team to request some local assistance from these stakeholders to complete the appraisal in the community. The team also invited representatives from the DPC, CPC and mass organizations to participate the appraisal process. However, while the representatives from the local mass organizations participated in the team as official appraisal members, those from the DPC and the CPC tended to act as local helpers. These helpers mainly provided assistance in arranging meetings in the community, especially meetings with local authorities. Their involvement in the team helped with access to the community. It has also become a common practice in the district to send staff members from the CPC or the DPC to participate in appraisals. Having formed the appraisal team, the team then went to each of the project communes and met with CPC prior to going into the community to meet local villagers and community organizations about their views on poverty. These discussions were framed by pre-established
themes, such as women’s rights, child rights, rights to food. These themes were decided by AAV at the national level prior to the appraisal.

The team applied a qualitative strategy to conduct the appraisal. While in the community, the team met and talked with individual villagers at their homes. In addition to this the team conducted group discussion. There were female, male and mixed groups. Group consultations often took place in a community house. The appraisal process took about three days. The team also took pictures and made some observations on the community.

![Figure 4: The project team (left foreground) consulting individual villagers at their home in one of the communities. Source: Author's data.](image)
Although local stakeholders were consulted, they were not given the chance to decide which rights should be included in the project to be implemented in their communities. This means that prior to consulting with local stakeholders such as villagers, AAV had already decided on what rights would be addressed in the community. These selected rights reflect the four key themes of AAV as an organization.

While these pre-determined themes and rights could reflect local needs in the communities, the process by which they were selected does not reflect the principles of participation and accountability that are core to the HRBA. Rather than being given an opportunity to decide on what rights should be implemented in their communities, local villages were only consulted for views regarding AAV’s pre-determined themes.
The perspective of a project staff on the implementation of the AAV project:

Tien, a Vietnamese man with a university degree in agriculture and who had been in charge of the AAV project since 2007, described the project to me in these words:

I have been working for the current HRBA project since its first arrival in the district. Therefore, I think I can tell you something about the project according to what I personally know about it.

The current project was launched in district in 2007 in two communes, Eadar and Cu Hue. These communes are among the poorest in the district and are populated mostly by ethnic minority people, mainly the Ede. The project basically aims to build capacity for local people. The project focuses on promoting four rights: right to education, women’s rights, right to food and child rights.

I think the project is generally a good poverty reduction initiative because it pays attention to improving capacity for local villagers. It trains local villagers on different topics. For example, under child rights, the project emphasized raising public awareness on the importance of education for children. The target group for this particular activity often includes local villagers, parents, local authority and schoolteachers.

The local children cannot speak Vietnamese fluently because at home, they communicate with their family members in their own language. Those who can communicate in Vietnamese choose to communicate with their family members in their own language. Therefore, it is very often to see children in the local community not able to communicate well in Vietnamese. The project sees this as a significant obstacle preventing them from getting an education. Therefore, the project also pays a great deal of attention to help local children improve their language skills in preparation for them to start their school more confidently.

When the project carries out activities promoting other rights, the foci and target groups are different. For example, in promoting
women’s rights, it focuses on domestic violence and gender inequity. It organizes local women into different groups that are often referred to as groups of preferences in the project. Local women choose to join a group of their preferences. For example, they can join the group for raising cattle, pigs and cows, or for farming.

For promoting the right to food, which the project pays a lot of attention to because it is closely linked to local people’s livelihoods. In promoting it, the project trains local villagers to improve their skills and knowledge for farming. The trainings are often done in-door and on the field with the aim to allow participants to practice the new skills they have gained. The trainers are often from the district extension center.

For promoting the right to education, the focus is generally on promoting REFLECT classes in villages. Participants in these classes are mainly local poor women. They are encouraged to participate in the classes to improve their literacy and numeracy skills. To help them attending the classes, the classes are often held in the evening and in the community house. Where access to the community house is not available, the classes would take place in a participants’ property I think that the REFLECT model is a suitable model to use in the local community. Participants really enjoyed it because they were encouraged to discuss openly, freely and also pick up useful skills. However, the classes no longer exist because funding ran out. Because these classes are held in remote villages in the evening, it was difficult to monitor their progress.

Regarding the planning process, I have to say that there is a significant change in the way we do the planning. While in the first couple of years, local stakeholders such as villagers and leaders had a chance to participate in planning, discussing and deciding on what to do in the following year, they no longer have the chance now. I mean the planning process in the past was very participatory indeed, and the process is not that participatory in recent years. I do not know why AAV decides to make such a change. The way planning is done in recent years is that AAV develops an annual plan/framework with all the activities arranged under different themes (rights) and then have it circulated around the project provinces for them to select what to implement. The framework/plan is not open to change. So, the process has moved from allowing us to decide what we want to do ourselves to asking us to select from what has been already
decided for us. I do not see this a good way of doing things because AAV cannot develop a plan that can suit all local contexts in the entire province. As a result, the activities can hardly reflect our local needs or priorities.

Changing the planning method is one thing ... The process to get our activities approved now becomes very complex and time consuming. In some cases, it takes months to obtain approval from AAV. Unlike before, the system now is very bureaucratic. There are so many procedures to complete and so many “doors” for us to go through to get our plan approved. Sometimes, I wonder if AAV is doing development because everything has become more complex and paperwork-driven. Our local stakeholders have lost much of their enthusiasm in participating in the project. Some of them have complained about this as well (Tien).

While the narrative provided by Tien above has provided a snapshot about the project, to be able to examine the project, it requires a more comprehensive and insightful picture about the project with a focus on how it is implemented, how rights are promoted and how the HRBA are delivered in dealing with poverty in the communities, it is important to take a close look at the project. In the next session, I will focus on provision a descriptive picture of the project and also a critical examination of the project.
A Closer Look at an AAV project in the Central Highlands of Vietnam:

The AAV project I examined during my field work was delivered in two communities in the Central Highlands of Vietnam as discussed in chapter three. The project focused on promoting four rights: the right to education, the right to food, and women’s and children’s rights. In what follows I take a close look at how each of these rights were addressed during the project.

The Right to Education:

Central to AAV’s work on the right to education in the communities was the REFLECT classes run in the villages. Reflect is:

“an innovative approach to adult learning and social change, which fuses the theories of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire24 with participatory methodologies. It was developed in the 1990s through pilot projects in Bangladesh, Uganda and El Salvador and is now used by over 500 organizations in over 70 countries worldwide25.

The aim of the REFLECT classes was to help local women improve their literacy and numeracy skills so that they could participate in the development process. These classes were seen as an effective tool to

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24 Freire is an influential educator, especially in the development of REFLECT. Central to his educational theory is that education is not neutral. It is either for domestication or liberation. Fundamental to his educational philosophy is collective action on the part of the oppressed to fight to liberate themselves from all forms of domination (http://www.reflect-action.org/freire).

25 http://www.reflect-action.org
promote women’s rights. The aimed at empowering and transforming women into active agents in development that can make decisions for themselves about development in the local communities.

The participants were central to the learning process in the REFLECT classes. They were organized into small groups to decide on when and where to learn literacy and numeracy skills. It was common that participants met in the evening at a communal place like a community house, or in a participant’s house if nothing else was available. Furthermore, instead of sitting in row as often seen in conventional class rooms, in these classes participants would sit in a circle on the floor, often without using tables or black boards. This enabled them to learn from one another, aligning to the non-hierarchical educational philosophy that Paulo Freire advocated in his educational theory\(^2\)\(^\text{6}\).

Furthermore, there were no official learning materials like textbooks in these classes and it was up to the participants to decide on what was available at the venue, such as local newspapers, a leaflet or a poster, that would help them to learn about topics or subjects most relevant to their everyday lives. The aim was to build on the knowledge and experiences

\(^{26}\)\texttt{http://www.reflect-action.org/}
participants already had rather than focusing on what they did not know\textsuperscript{27}. By empowering participants through this decision-making process, these classes did more than promoting their right to participation and self-determination but also helped participants to be more aware of what they knew, what their needs were and what they had learned. As Freire observed, this practice

\textit{can have a wider meaning to include acquiring and communicating through speaking, listening, ICT, numeracy, pictures, diagrams, visuals and other creative ways}\textsuperscript{28}
Participants were taught basic skills (such as reading, writing and performing simple calculations) in a very informal way using objects available in the class venue (such as beans, small stones or corn seeds). Participants could also use a stick or chalk provided by the facilitator to practice their writing on the floor or ground. While one participant was practicing, others would watch and take turns to do the same with help from the facilitator.
In these classes, the facilitator adopted a learner-centered process, using Freire’s active learning principle that treat learners as active and creative subjects with their own needs. As the REFLECT website states:

*Learners must see the needs for learning one's life and writing one's reality*.

Participants were acknowledged as capable and mature stakeholders. This aligns with the HRBA model that emphasizes the key role of local people in development, arguing that local people must be placed at centre of the development process so that they can shape and make their decisions regarding local development.

The facilitators were recruited from the local community. They were required to have good literacy and numeracy skills, ability to communicate fluently in both the local language and Vietnamese, and have a willingness to work as a schoolteacher or officer. It was important for the facilitator to be a local person because it was clear that participants felt more comfortable learning with a facilitator from a similar background who spoke the same language and understand the local culture. This also reduced the hierarchical gap that arises for local learners when they interact with teachers from the Vietnamese school system. However, it was not always easy to recruit a

[29](http://www.reflect-action.org/freire)
facilitator from the local community who met the selection criteria because most poor communities had a low rate of literacy. When this was achieved, however, the facilitators would be provided with training in facilitation skills and the REFLECT principles, by staff members from AAV’s Country Office. In most of the cases, unfortunately facilitators were not sufficiently trained because of the lack of budget and also training of facilitators were not a priority.

In general, local participants immensely enjoyed the adult education program because it suited their time and they understood the methods and contents.

*We really liked attending the classes because we could pick up new skills and meet other people in the community. The class was organized in the evening, so we could attend after dinner and when the housework was done (H’ Nga).*

The comment above was from a forty-seven-year-old woman. She had difficulty in writing and reading in Vietnamese because she never went to school. She is a mother of four children and had been busy all day doing housework and farming. However, when the classes were offered she participated with passion.

According to H’ Nga, one of the participants from the community, the main appeal of the REFLECT classes was not only that they taught women useful skills but also they gave them the opportunity to meet and share ideas.
Despite the successes of these classes they have now been terminated. This is primarily because the project does not have sufficient funds to run the classes in the villages. As one of my participants, Tien from the AAV project, told me:

*We have ceased the REFLECT classes because AAV does not allocate us budget to run the classes (Tien).*
There were also other difficulties related to the remoteness of the villages which could not be easily accessed unless there were good roads. As Tien further explained,

*Apart from lack of funding to run the classes, we also found it difficult to manage the classes because they are often in remote villages and are operated at night time (Tien).*

**The Right to Food:**

The AAV project aimed to advance the right to food by encouraging the community to apply new knowledge and skills on existing development models. For example, while coffee production may be key to some households in a particular village, pig farming, cassava and wet rice could be central in another village. These latter practices are mainly based on subsistent farming and are not seen as productive enough for local households to sustain themselves. In the eyes of AAV this is because local people are seen to lack knowledge and skills. Through training it is hoped that the community would increase and strengthen their capacity by not only acquire new knowledge and skills but also through meeting and interacting with fellow community members and eventually forming network for support and production.

From the outset, however, the training undermined the self-determination of local people. The training topics, for example, were commonly centered
around husbandry related production, such as how to improve the productivity of current crops and livestock such as coffee, pepper and rice and chickens and pigs), and how to deal with an epidemic or diseases. While these topics may be relevant to the local people, they were predetermined by AAV and the community was not able to determine what they wished to learn. As a result, although the villagers joined the training activities, the training they received did not necessarily meet their needs or priorities. Local people were thus disempowered and had no input into deciding on what economic strategies, collective or individualized, were best for them to adopt. This is a significant limitation of the project. This was most evident when the project set up groups of preferences in the community, such as a coffee production group or pig-raising groups, as a way to assist their production. While these groups were consistent with the economic practices in the communities, the community was not offered a chance to determine their priorities and their participatory rights were thus undermined.
The AAV project often offers both indoor and field-training. While the indoor training aims to equip the community with “theoretical” or “abstract” knowledge and skills, the field-training aims to provide an opportunity for the learners to apply this knowledge. For example, after villagers were taught how to vaccinate a chicken in order to prevent an epidemic, participants were sent to the field to observe the trainer performing such a vaccination. They also took turns to perform this skill with the trainer.
Figure 8: A trainer from the local extension department is demonstrating vaccinating skill in front of a villager at her home in order for her to be able to apply the skill to her chicken. Source: Author’s data.
Figure 9: Participants from a training workshop on coffee cultivation practice how to apply fertilizer to coffee trees in a participant’s coffee garden. Source: Authors’ data.

Figure 8 and 9 depict participants applying new skills and knowledge they had learned earlier in classes in the field. Those who could not make it to the field missed this opportunity.

Participants found themselves consolidating their knowledge through this training:

_We often get the local community people gathered in the field. In the field, participants often have a chance to watch their trainer demonstrate the skills they have shared in the class. Especially, trainer often asks some of the participants to practice while the others watch and can_
take a turn (Thuy). We really enjoy practicing in the field because it helps us understand better (H’ Nga).

Thuy is a Vietnamese female project staff member with a college degree. She has worked on the project for many years and is in charge of one of the communities. According to Thuy, the learners became owners of the skills they had learned when they went to the field. The positive feedback from the community indicated that not only were the methods used successful but the HRBA had built empowerment and capacity through participation in activities, such as training and meetings.

However, on closer inspection, I also found that in implementing these kind of training projects in community, AAV often contracted the local Extension Department to deliver the training for the Right to Food program. This department is part of the local government and is managed by the District People’s Committee (DPC). Therefore, the department does not necessarily represent the voices of the local community. Moreover, the trainer is of Vietnamese ethnic background as there are few technical staff members who are of minority background. As a result, the trainer could not communicate in the local language and most participants found hard to communicate fluently with him in the Vietnamese language. This greatly affected learner-trainer interactions and sometimes the motivation of learners to actively
engage in the training process. I gained this information why talking to H’ Leo, who said:

> Our teacher speaks Vietnamese, while some of us cannot understand very well Vietnamese. So, it is difficult for us to follow what the teacher says in the class” (H’ Leo).

H’ Leo, a forty-year-old mother of five, was one among the many who were unable to fluently write or read in Vietnamese. She joined being part of the AAV project for many years but she felt the language was a significant barrier to local participation in the training classes.

H’ Nga provided another important insight in reflection on this project:

> I think the skills we have received from the training are good and useful, however, the project did not provide material assistance for us. For example, if the project trains us in chicken raising, the project should provide some chickens for the households. Without the material assistance for putting what we have learned to practice, some of us may forget the skills soon (H’ Nga).

As commented by the participant (H’ Nga), in addition to language barrier that prevents the participants from benefiting adequately from the training, local people are short of practical chances to practise and apply the new knowledge on improving their existing livelihoods. This means that, despite local capacity is improved, it does not necessarily mean that local people can escape poverty. As commented by the participant, local people also needs
materials in addition to new knowledge and skills. However, as discussed in previous chapters, material assistance is not the focus of the AAV project in the community. The project’s focus is on capacity building. My interviews with some of the local participants, including persons from the leadership at the commune and district levels implied that material assistance is a limitation of the AAV project in the local community. Linking this to Sen’s theory of development as freedom as discussed in detail in chapter two shows that if material assistance is not addressed these obstacles to learning properly among local people in learning, it will become another form of unfreedom (Sen 1999b) as poverty in the community remains unresolved.

**Women’s Rights:**

It is commonly acknowledged in the development literature that rural women make a larger contribution to both the family and society than men to food security. Yet women are also often denied equal access to the resources (such as arable land and capital) needed for production (Quisumbing et al. 1995). Kabeer (2005) argues that this stems from a gender-discriminatory attitude that exists widely in rural communities, leading to continued marginalization of women (Meinzen et al. 1997). Action Aid International is well aware of this situation:

*Women and girls around the world face widespread violence, sexual harassment and abuse in many of the spaces that they*
populate – their homes, workplaces, on the streets and on public transport. Women’s fear of violence is an attack on their basic rights and prevents them from living full and equal lives. 

My in-depth interviews with participants has indicated the women in the two communities under examination here face a similar situation. Participants told me that they suffer from frequent and brutal domestic violence inflicted on them by their husbands without any official mechanism or organization to provide them with assistance. As H’ Nghin told me:

_Some of our fellow colleagues are often beaten by their husbands. They tend to suffer in silence because they dare not to speak to anyone about their problem. They think it is just a family issue. There is no organization that can help them to resolve the problem. I think domestic violence is an issue in our community here (H’ Nghin)._ 

H’ Nghin is a fifty-year-old villager with six children and also a victim of domestic violence. She has been part of the AAV project for many years now and has faced gender discrimination and domestic violence for years. She attributes this to the local culture.

In the AAV project Women’s Rights are a central concern:

_ActionAid works with women across the world to identify the changes they want to see and to empower them to claim their rights. ActionAid also defends the rights of women and girls to live_ 

free from gender-based violence; to secure a fairer division of care work and to control their own sexuality\textsuperscript{31}. 

Central to the work of Action Aid is to empower local women so that they can claim their own rights and entitlements in development. Women are in fact seen as a central part of the development strategy in general:

\textit{We believe that women are powerful forces for change. In everything we do, ActionAid believes the best way to end poverty is to strengthen women in their own struggles, helping them to unleash their own potential to change the world}\textsuperscript{32}.

This view is in line with the HRBA to development that emphasizes empowerment as a key principle in development. The AAV project was also targeting local women for a chance under Women’s rights. The AAV project, through training, adopted strategy such as organizing REFLECT classes or children groups so that they learned more about women’s rights in everyday life. In addition to the training focused on capacity building that I have discussed above (such as the REFLECT classes), women involved in the AAV project were provided with some material assistance, such as piglets or small cattle, as an additional way to build their capacity and confidence.

\textsuperscript{31} http://www.actionaid.org/what-we-do/womens-rights

\textsuperscript{32} http://www.actionaid.org/what-we-do/womens-rights
enabling them to gain respect and greater decision-making power in their
own families and the community.

The AAV project also aimed to provide local women a basic understanding
of their rights in light of current laws in Vietnam, such as the law on domestic
violence legislated in 2007 and international conventions to which Vietnam
is a party (including the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all
Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)). In doing so, the hope
was to put domestic violence on the development agenda in the local
community (Rydstrøm 2003). This was attempted through training and
discussions with local women on women’s rights. Local men were also
invited to attend these training and the discussion sessions. The aim in
inviting men was to get local men to understand the implications of current
laws, particularly such as the law against domestic violence, and to see that
if they continued to abuse women they would be prosecuted

I discussed this aspect of the AAV project with Truong who told me:

Many local women in the community suffer from domestic
violence caused by their husbands. Normal forms of violence
include beating and verbal abuse. I think that it is very serious.
Local women tend to suffer silently. We have encouraged local
women to voice up when they get beaten by their husbands, so that
the local Women’s Unions staff can come and help them solve the
problem. We have also trained them and their husbands on
domestic violence. However, domestic violence remains (Truong).
Truong is a college graduated, ethnic Vietnamese woman who has been a project staff member in charge of a commune for many years. She believes that domestic violence is a significant problem in the community and that little was done about the situation. In some cases, the commune Women’s Union (WU) has become involved as a mediating party between an abused woman and her abuser but there is really no strategy to end the problem, particularly no strategy which tackles domestic violence as a gender and structural issue.

According to Luke et al. (2007), both men and women in Vietnam tend to hold the traditional view that supports inequitable gender-based attitudes in family and society. Violence against women is even seen as socially acceptable because women tend to perceive their role in the family as secondary while their husbands, being the breadwinners, should have the final say in decision-making and have the right to beat their wives.

Although capacity building for women is a core part of AAV’s work in Vietnam, it does not pay sufficient attention to addressing the issue of domestic violence from a structural perspective. For example, nothing has been done to ensure that victimized women have access to legal services. This is a serious limitation of the project and women remain disempowered.
Another issue is the double burden women face in the communities. As H’ Ly explained to me:

_We have to do the housework and also participate in the field like men. However, men get to sit down and watch TV when they reach home or go visiting friends when they are off work. We still have to cook and do the washing (H’ Ly)._  

H’ Ly is a forty-five-year-old mother with six children. She has participated in the AAV project for many years. In addition to performing household chores like cooking and washing every day, she also works in the field to help her husband, carrying a double or dual workload without support from her husband. As a result of this double burden, scholars (such as Rydstrom (2003)) have observed that women do not have enough time to take care of themselves or participate in social activities in the community such as community meetings. H’ Nghin confirmed this in her conversation with me:

_We can’t go to meetings, our husbands do. We do not actually have enough time because we have to do the housework like feeding the pigs and chicken (H’ Nghin)._  

The heavy workload carried by women reinforces gender inequalities. Men have more time to attend community activities and thus their views are seen more important.
Figure 10: A local woman doing the washing as part of her daily work in the home. Source: Author’s data.
Moreover, although the AAV project was committed to advancing gender equality through the development process local women were not invited to share their views on what should be the focus or subject for the activities aimed at their empowerment. In this context, women were treated as passive subjects rather than as active agents of development. Their role was to be informed rather than being an informer in decision-making.

*Figure 11: A training activity under the theme of Women's rights where both men and women are encouraged to participate taking place in a community house. Source: Author's data.*
During the project implementation phase, AAV signed a contract with local mass organizations, such as WU, to deliver training workshops on domestic violence and gender equity. When it came to training on laws and conventions, AAV engaged individual consultants from the provincial level or WU. While this was understandable because AAV staff did not have the necessary knowledge and skills to deliver this training, this indicates that the capacity of AAV needs attention. This would better enable the AAV project to implement the HRBA in the community.

While participants enjoyed the project activities and found them most useful, they also wished that the project could provide them with better material assistance, such as by providing them with a washing machine or rice-cooker, so that they could free themselves from their household chores and have more time for social and community activities. As commented by H’ Nghin, a community participant:

*We are very interested in participating in the activities regarding Women’s rights because we think the activities are linked to us and our daily lives. We come to know more about our rights and entitlements’ (H’ Nghin).*

Another community participant also commented that:

*I think that the project is very good, because we have a chance to attend training courses and groups. But I think the project also needs to focus more on helping the community people with*
material assistance such as animal breeds and rice-cook. This would allow us to grow our crops easier and also give us more time to go out to the community (H’ Loan).

H’ Loan is a fifty-two-year-old mother of six children with a very heavy work load of domestic chores as well as work in the field. While she found the AAV project most useful in helping her to improve her capacity, she was particularly appreciative of the opportunity to meet and interact with other women in the village as she never had much of a social life. Likewise, H’ Huong expressed the following to me:

*We are so busy with lots of work like cooking, washing and serving our husbands. We do not have access to a washing machine. We have to do it manually, which takes away from us lots of energies and time (H’ Huong).*

H’ Huong is a thirty-five-year-old woman with four children. She has a full daily schedule performing household chores and weeding in the field. Her comments illustrate that time for training among local women was in short supply.

This suggests that AAV may have been too focused on the technical aspects of training and overlooked the needs of local women; that they are deprived of a social life (and even for some an opportunity to attend training) because of their heavy work burden. One of the ways to women to reclaim their rights
to a social life, then, might be to assist them with time-saving devices to manage domestic chores thereby freeing up their time to be part of the community.

**Children’s Rights:**

The promotion of children’s rights by AAV focused on the right to education, especially by increasing school attendance. According to AAV, the current of dropout rate is quite high, about seven percent in Cu Hue commune and six percent in Eadar (Eakar district socio-economic development report 2015). However, the drop-out rate is quite high, about twelve percent (2015). With help from parents and community leaders, the AAV project aimed to motivate those who had dropped out of school to return. A key part of this strategy were workshops for these children that were initiated by the local authority or the Department of Education and Training (DoET). These workshops were aimed to raise awareness on education in the community and among parents. There are several factors that are seen to contribute to low school-attendance. These include a lack of language skills, unaffordability, gender-based-discriminatory attitudes, and a lack of awareness of importance of education in development (Truong, AS et al. 1998).
As far as affordability is concerned, although the government has a policy to offer free education to children from families of ethnic minority parents are still required to contribute a certain amount of “voluntary” fees to the school for cleaning, drinking water, tables, and plastic chairs. This financial contribution parents have to make is not small, especially for families with many children attending school at the same time.
Truong is a project staff member in the district who told me that many families have great difficulties making such voluntary contributions to schools:

*Most local families in the commune are poor with many children. Therefore, not all of them can contribute to school (Truong).*

H’ Re, a fifty-six-year-old mother of six children agreed. She believed that no children should be denied the right to education just because of an inability to make a voluntary contribution and considered this an act of discrimination:

*The school often calls out the children’s names in class and in school when they gather for assembly on Monday every week. This makes them feel ashamed and embarrassed (H’ Re).*

It is not surprising that parents and children would want to avoid such embarrassment and humiliation and decided to leave the school. In an attempt to help improve the situation, the AAV project held and facilitated workshops at the school. These workshops were attended by the school leadership and representatives from the Commune People’s Committee (CPC) and District People’s Committee (DPC). In the workshops, leaders from the CPC and the DPC requested that the school stop calling for contributions from families because this is against the government’s policies on the education of ethnic minority children. In some cases, the DPC
requested the school to refund the amount to the children. However, in response the school leaders provided well-justified reasons for keeping the contributions; they have limited budget to operate the school and the current facilities are insufficient for them to provide quality education.

While these claims might be true, this raises questions about the accountability of the local government. The financial situation of the school should not be a barrier to local children enjoying their right to education, which is recognised and protected under the constitution of Vietnam and the Vietnamese government’s law on education.

In response to this problem AAV project has worked to begin a dialogue between schools and other relevant local government in the hope of finding support. The AAV project also worked with parents and local children to encourage children to return to school. However, no long-term strategy has been formulated to end this problem and what has been offered is only remedial.

Another factor affecting school attendance is a gender-based-discriminatory attitude within families. Girls are, more often than not, discriminated against as they are expected to perform housework at home. For example, girls are expected to collect water for family use, cook meals and keep the house clean, while boys are not assigned to perform any specific household tasks.
Educational priority is also frequently given to boys over girls because parents consider household tasks as a female domain. As my participant from the community, H’ Ly, told me in an interview:

Although we practice matriarchy, boys often receive better opportunity than girls. For example, many families here tend to prioritize education for boys than girls because girls are better in doing housework like collecting water and cooking (H’ Ly).

My field work suggests that the promotion of children’s rights in isolation of other rights (such as women’s rights and economic rights) does not result in improved human rights. In the case discussed above, the rights of the children need to be accompanied by material or financial assistance to be effective because of the complex interaction of economic, cultural and social conditions. Unable to address this boarder complexity, the efforts made by the AAV project to overcome to problem of ‘voluntary’ school contributions seemed to achieve little.

Another dimension of the AAV project on the rights of the children was to improve children's basic Vietnamese language skills. The AAV project aimed to do this by providing free language classes for preschool aged children so that they could begin their formal first school year with fewer challenges, especially in communicating with their teachers and peers who have a Vietnamese language background. The project also set up peer groups in the
local community, each consisting of two or three children, so that children
could help one another to learn and build greater capacity and skills. It was
hoped that this would turn into something more long term, such as a peer
network for local children to better deal with requirements of the school life
and ultimately be more empowered. This would be a sustainable long-term
outcome existing well after the AAV project has finished. Furthermore, the
AAV project also encouraged children to engage in outdoor activities, such
as a traditional game or football match, to learn team-building skills.

The AAV team also decided that schoolteachers should be assisted to
improve their skills in communicating in the local language. The hope was
that this would also empower teachers through the development of a deeper
understanding of their ethnic student’s socio- and cultural background.
However, the project recently terminated its language training.

All these examples of the AAV project clearly show that there are
institutional limitations to this work. These limitations prevent significantly
the AAV project from adhering to the HRBA key principles in the community.

A closer look at the Institutional limitations on AAV to follow
the HRBA to development in full

I think the HRBA is about building internal strength of local
people, making them more self-reliant, providing them with better
access to information and greater sense about the rights they are
entitled to (An).
I think that the HRBA is about women’s rights, right to education and child rights (Tien).

Tien is a project staff member at the district level and An, who comes from Nghe An province in the middle region of Vietnam, is an AAV staff member based at the regional office in Buon Ma Thuot city. Although they both worked on the project, their understanding of the HRBA was limited and somewhat different from each other, as illustrated by their comments above.

In my discussions with project staff members regarding their understanding of the HRBA, it became apparent that many staff members had not been sufficiently trained on the HRBA. Nor had they received instruction on how to promote its key principles, participation, accountability and empowerment, in practice. This explains why staff members had different and limited views on the HRBA.

Interviews with other project staff members Thuy and Truong support this observation. Although their perceptions of the HRBA seemed similar in terms of beliefs, their practical interpretation of the approach revealed differences:

...Well, I do not know much, but what I understand is that the HRBA is about women’s rights and domestic violence (Thuy).

My understanding of the HRBA is about building capacity of local community people so that they better know how to improve their
economic life. The HRBA is also about rights such as right to education and child rights (Truong).

As Scheinin and Suksi have shown in their work in 2002, a lack of understanding of the HRBA can result in the failure to promote the key principles of participation, empowerment and accountability. In the case of AAV, the project staff tended to focus on the implementation of activities as the ultimate objective rather than the implementation of the principles of the HRBA. This could lead to the project treating the activities as an end in themselves rather than as a means to an end (participation, empowerment and accountability). This became particularly clear in my discussions with participants about their day-to-day involvement in the project. For example, as I mentioned in chapter five, some staff members admitted that the reason why they did not promote the principles of HRBA was because of political sensitivity. It is generally felt by some people, such as institutional persons, that the HRBA is about human rights which, in some cases, is tended to be use by some Western powers as a political instrument to demand for political change in Vietnam that these powers want to see happen. This suggests a misunderstanding of the principles of HRBA.

*We do not mention the HRBA or its principles in practice. It is because we think it is politically sensitive and many of our staff members are not trained in the HRBA (Thuy).*
Since I participated in the project in 2007, I have been trained only once on the HRBA and I am the only trained staff from the community on the HRBA. My fellow colleagues have never been trained on the HRBA. The training was very short, two and a half days, and was conducted by a staff from Action Aid International Vietnam (AAV). I think that the training was very general (Tien).

Given the insufficient understanding and capacity among the AAV project staff members regarding the HRBA, it is not surprising that the local partners in the community such as Women’s Union (WU), Youth’s Union (YU), Farmers’ Association (FA) and local community villagers have not come to fully understand the approach or be empowered through their work in the project. Because of local ownership of the HRBA has been unsuccessful any future HRBA efforts in this area will have little foundation on which to begin. This is particularly worrying when my participants from NGOs and a university indicated that the HRBA remains “unknown” in the region:

_I have never heard about the HRBA before. This is the first time I heard about the HRBA (Duc).

Not until very recently that I have heard something about the HRBA to development (Hoang)._}

The comment made by Duc, a lecturer in economics at a local University and Hoang, who came from the DARD, is particularly damning because, although the AAV project has been implemented in the local community for many
years, the HRBA is still not widely known as an alternative approach to
development in the region.

Overtime, it would seem that the AAV’s focus on the HRBA has waned. As
Tien, a project staff member, told me in an interview:

... I have to say that there is a significant change in the way we do the planning in recent years. While in the first few years of the project, local stakeholders such as villagers and leaders had a chance to participate in the planning to discuss and decide on what to do in the following year. Now they no longer are given any chance. We have to follow the planning framework that AAV prepares and circulates with the activities already decided. Our job is to choose from the already planned activities ... (Tien).

My discussion with Tien and closer look at the AAV project in this chapter
suggests that in addition to examining how the project is delivered in the
community it is equally important to consider internal processes with the
AAV and the extent to which they align with the HRBA.
The lack of funding:

AAV has made a commitment to ensure that project activities are funded in the community. Yet, in recent times funding for the REFLECT classes and language classes for teachers have been cut and the classes discontinued. Scholarship suggests that revenue is one of the key challenges facing NGO work (Hudson 1987 and (Hudson & Day 1997). AAV demonstrates the complexity of this challenge; it is not a donor and therefore it has to raise funds to run development projects in communities. AAV is thus dependent on donors’ commitments, which are often tenuous and can be affected by economic circumstances. For example, the financial crisis in Asia in 1997 resulted in a significant decrease in AAV’s funding. This added more pressure on AAV’s operation. The recent change in the planning process is likely to be related to a dwindling budget. Yet, cutting back on processes and practices core to the HRBA has made it more difficult for AAV to follow the HRBA model, creating an endless vicious circle for itself.
Conclusion:

This chapter has examined how the AAV project is implemented in two communities in the Central Highlands of Vietnam. Although AAV claims to model itself on HRBA principles in its work on four key themes -- rights to education, rights to food, women's rights and children's rights -- the project has only achieved partial success.

Firstly, this chapter suggests that although capacity building is useful, it alone is not sufficient to end poverty. Capacity building needs to be accompanied by various forms of material assistance so that people have a bit of reserve to start building their capacity. Without material assistance, it would be particularly hard for local children and women, to realise and claim their rights.

But perhaps the greatest problem faced by AAV is that the HRBA principles are not understood properly by staff members. This is likely to have contributed to the recent changes in the planning process and engagement with local stakeholders.

In sum, then, from a HRBA perspective AAV seems to have some major institutional gaps that call for fundamental transformations rather than simple twigging. One way to begin such a process of transformation may be
for AAV to re-examine itself in light of whether it remains committed to the HRBA to development. In the next chapter I begin to do just this.
Chapter 7: Adapting the Human Rights Based Approach in Development.

In chapter six I examined the success and limitations of an AAV project in the Central Highlands of Vietnam. My analysis shows that there were times when the AAV project moved away from the HRBA key principles, either by accident or perhaps intentionally. This raises questions about the implementation of the HRBA in practice, and more generally about how appropriate or well developed this approach is to different settings. These questions introduce the topic of this chapter. More specifically, in this chapter I explore how the AAV project in the Central Highlands of Vietnam might be better adapted to reflect the HRBA in the local communities and how the HRBA itself could be modified to reflect and suit the local specificities of poverty reduction.

In my exploration of how the AAV project might be improved to better reflect HRBA principles I propose that the project should begin with a research phase that focuses on the local specificities of poverty. The role and importance of material assistance in parallel with capacity building in poverty reduction, highlighted in previous chapters, will also be investigated in this chapter.
This exploration of how the HRBA can be better adapted to local context leads me to consider different forms of community based development, such as community laundries and agricultural cooperatives. I am interested in exploring whether community based development initiatives could be developed into an effective tool of empowerment and collectivization in the AAV project under the current local social and political conditions. The main argument of this chapter is, in order to implement the HRBA to development effectively, the HRBA principles need to be delivered in a way that is compatible with the local specificities of poverty as examined in previous chapters.
Adapting the AAV project to better reflect the HRBA to Development

Role of research in poverty reduction:

A research phase is important in development practice for a number of reasons. Perhaps most importantly, a research phase can provide a deep understanding of the nature of poverty in the local context (Cornwall & Jewkes 1995; Rothman, Erlich & Tropman 2001). A research phase often involves relevant stakeholders, such as the community, project staff and local government, to meet and discuss openly and democratically the issues that the community faces. It is actually a participatory process in which all relevant parties are fully consulted for their input into the decision-making process (Catley & Aden 1996; Cornwall & Jewkes 1995). A research phase also provides a chance for project decision-makers, who are usually non-local residents with their own perceived notions of poverty, to explore and better understand the complexity of poverty in the community (Cornwall & Jewkes 1995; Rothman, Erlich & Tropman 2001). For Cornwall and Jewkes (1995), the focus of this research should not be limited to a quantitative evaluation but also on the qualitative picture of poverty. The aim of a research phase, then, is to provide a
comprehensive and holistic view of poverty that links social, historical and cultural dimensions (Mayo 2000).

A research phase would not only help to create more locally appropriate development work but could also enable this work to better the HRBA principles (Cornwall & Jewkes 1995; Scheinin & Suksi 2002b). More specifically, a research phase would be a way to enable local stakeholders, especially villagers, to participate fully in the conceptualization of poverty in their communities, to indicate their own needs and to have input into decision-making. In this way, as a number of scholars argue, the community can become the center of development where they are seen as strategic participants with indigenous knowledge, experience, resources and availability (Chambers 1994; Cornwall & Jewkes 1995; Hopper 2012; Nelson, N & Wright 1995).

A research phase also provides a useful interaction process in which the community can develop and strengthen their capacity and skills in planning, negotiating and decision-making, thereby gaining the confidence to participate in the project at a later stage (Cornwall & Jewkes 1995; Oakley 1991). It is through such an active participation process the local people can develop a sense of local ownership of the project, which is essential for the sustainability of the project.
outcomes, especially when the project eventually expires (Bain, Prokos & Liu 2012); (Holden 2011).

**The provision of material assistance in parallel with capacity building:**

As I have discussed in previous chapters, the role of material assistance in poverty reduction has been contentious. While it is seen as need and a local specificity of poverty, some, such as the AAV project staff and institutional participants, prefer to focus more on capacity building with the aim that, in the long run, local people are better equipped to tackle poverty when the project expires. Others, however, for example the community people, believe that capacity building needs to go hand-in-hand with material assistance. They argue that the HRBA simply cannot be working if local people are still struggling for everyday necessities, such as rice, seeds, and equipment, to ensure daily survival.

However, while the focus on provision of materials reflects the view of most of the participants in this study, they had different perspectives on the nature of material assistance required. For example, H’ Ly, a female villager from one of the two communities, who was not in the most economically desperate situation, suggested that development
work needed to look beyond only providing for physical survival through the delivery of food. As she commented:

I think that what is lacking is capital to invest in expanding our production. It is not simply materials like food to eat or variety seeds. So, the project should provide the access to capital for the community people to expand their production (H’ Ly).

A closer examination of the quote shows that, while acknowledging the importance of material provision, H’ Ly saw capital as the key component of lifting local people out of poverty because it allows them to expand their production. She believes it is a better way to tackle poverty in the community. Her comment highlights one important thing: not all villagers are suffering the same degree of poverty, and that local views of poverty are different. Dealing with poverty is thus complex and requires locally specific strategies.

Despite the different forms of material assistance that were discussed in my interviews, their appeared to be a consensus that there is a hierarchy of needs. In fact, my discussions with participants corresponded with the hierarchical needs proposed by Maslow, that is, basic needs and necessities, such as food, clothes, drinking water and shelter, must be in place for local people to use before they can move to broader domains of resource access (Wahba & Bridwell 1976). Maslow also acknowledged that the implementation of basic
rights as highlighted in universal instruments on human rights, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), must first ensure people to have access to basic necessities to live (Hannum 1998). This means that human rights and material assistance should not be seen as opposing approaches, but are compatible and complimentary in development (Kindornay, Ron & Carpenter 2012; Schmitz 2012b).

My previous work with the Danish Rural Water Supply and Sanitation (RWSS) project discussed in detail in chapter six shows that material assistance will be most effective when capacity building has commenced. I have also witnessed cases where government loans are provided for local people to expand production but, because the local people did not know how to make effective use of the loan or even what the loan was for, the money was kept in the kitchen cabinet and never used. These examples show that if material assistance arrives too early and prior to capacity building, local people may not know how to make effective use of the materials or even what they are for. This suggests that the AAV project should not view material assistance as the end of development but as a supplement to capacity building. This does not contradict the HRBA to development that the AAV
project aimed to implement but rather demonstrates one way in which
the AAV project can adapt better to the local context.

Yet in providing material assistance in parallel with capacity building
one also needs to consider the broader issues of how material
assistance should be provided, and whether it should be individual,
community or households-based. This is all to better ensure that
material assistance is effective, and that it adds to the possibility for
local people to step out of persistent poverty.

**Household-based-Assistance:**

As I discussed above and in the previous chapters, local needs for
materials assistance varies among villagers. To reflect this, and also
for the provision of materials alongside with capacity building to be
effective in local development, my research shows that one way to
achieve this is on household level rather than individual level. This,
however, does not imply or suggest that households’ need for material
assistance is identical. In fact, as discussed in the previous chapters,
even at this level the nature of material assistance required will differ
from family to family. For example, my examination of the AAV project
in the Central Highlands in chapter six showed that various forms of
material assistance were offered to help children attend school. For
children who do not attend school due to malnutrition, food assistance may help physically but on its own does not determine whether the child will return to school. The provision of cash would help families pay the “voluntary” fees required by schools. The government has also provided free education for ethnic minority children. Yet ultimately which type of intervention would best address the various factors that prevent a child from attending school has to be considered case by case. These examples show that, let’s take the right to education alone, the need for material assistance differs from family to family. This means different families have to deal with it differently. My research also shows that some villagers insisted that the only way they could ensure their children to have better, long-term access to education is to be able to expand their production and income. Hence for them, improved varieties of agricultural seeds, such as maize and rice, and breeding animals would mean more than food or money. Some other villages and institutional persons, insisted that only improved skills and knowledge and more time to practice change could do the trick. These examples suggest that material assistance alongside with capacity building needs to be on the household level in order for the provision of materials to be effective and contribute to lifting the community people out of poverty. These all suggest that in addressing
poverty in local communities, the AAV project should not ignore the needs for material assistance on the household level.

**Gender-based-Assistance:**

My field work suggests that gender requires special attention in the delivery of material assistance alongside capacity building. Women in the two communities I have studied have a double workload. Not only do they perform household duties, but they also engage in tedious and time-consuming agricultural work in the field, often in the absence of basic labor-saving devices. This deprives them of time and opportunity to become involved in community activities to form their own networks, build capacity and ultimately become empowered.

However, as Frenandez (2014) has shown, the provision of agricultural machines such as seeding equipment, a weeding machine or a micro rice mill, could actually exacerbate their drudgery. This is because it could further add to their existing workload, which is already overwhelming or the type of machine delivered is not suited for them. This risk of this happening in the two communities I have studied is perhaps something better left for local women to decide provided that they are aware of the danger. After all, if following the HRBA principles, women should be entitled to make their own
decisions based on their needs, and confront their consequences to build their confidence and capacity.

While women clearly see technological assistance as part of the solution, my research suggests that gender discrimination in the local context is also a cultural/attitudinal problem. Thus, an approach to gender in development cannot be confined to the provision of technology.

**Community-based Assistance:**

Household and gender-based material assistance is something that the AAV project could promote in the communities and is supported by my fieldwork. However, community-based-development initiatives, such as community laundries, agricultural cooperatives or community resolving credit schemes, should not be ignored as a way to empower local people, especially local women in development. This is key to the HRBA to development that the AAV project aimed to implement in the communities. Empowerment is a key principle of the HRBA to development (Alston 1988; Nyamu-Musembi & Cornwall 2004; Scheinin & Suksi 2005). This means that adopting these initiatives could better enable the AAV project to implement the principle of empowerment of the HRBA in the community.
There are two kinds of community based development initiatives that I think would be well suited to the communities. The first one is a revolving credit scheme and the other is a cooperatively run community laundry. Revolving credit schemes are nothing new in development and have been shown to provide better access to loans that can be used to expand production (Huppi & Feder 1990; Karmakar 2000; Weiss & Montgomery 2005). I believe a cooperatively run community laundry would work well in a community with a collectivist culture and could also add business diversity in community development. I will discuss each kind of community based development initiative in turn.

**Revolving credit scheme:**

Apart from the need for household-based-material assistance for food, improved varieties of seed, cash and breeding animals, local people also have an urgent need to access in order to expand their production. It has been well established that the restriction of capital to farmers results in poor utilization of arable land and therefore prevents them from stepping out of poverty (Chavan & Ramakumar 2002; Karmakar 2000).
My research shows (see chapter four) that farmers have limited access to bank loans because the procedures are cumbersome and hard for illiterate farmers to understand. This has led to most farmers turning to private traders for a loan, tying them to that trader and the trader’s price for their goods. In this context, farmers are not only disadvantaged by being denied the freedom to participate in the market but they also can become dependent on that trader. The AAV project could help farmers out of this trap by setting up a revolving credit scheme. As Loi, a commune leader, remarked:

*If the project could provide access to loans in the form of a resolving scheme, it would enable local people to participate in development as they don’t have to rely on private traders or the bank for capital to expand cultivation (Loi).*

Based on a community-based-assistance model, this scheme would work like a micro finance initiative that offers local people not only easy access to credit with very low interest, but importantly also a simple administrative procedure that is managed by and based in local community. Such a scheme could reach the poorest people in community who are completely ignored by the banks and who cannot afford to pay the relatively high lending costs of private traders (Weiss & Montgomery 2005).
In practice, the AAV project could assist in establishing a group that consisted of about twenty villagers. This number would be sufficiently large enough to create a critical mass of beneficiaries. The AAV project would also need to provide the initial capital for the scheme, allowing one or two members of the group to obtain a loan to expand their production. When these borrowers repay the loan and interest, ideally after a month or two, others in the scheme could borrow. Of course, how the scheme should be established and operated, and whether two months is a reasonable payback period, would need to be discussed and agreed upon by all group members. This community based development initiative puts local people in charge of operations, nicely corresponding to the principles of the HRBA.

However, the scheme would not function well without capacity building. Therefore, before the scheme is launched, the AAV project staff would need to be trained to provide technical assistance to the group members so that they know how to effectively run the scheme. Technical assistance should include finance management and accounting skills. Attention also needs to be given to building the commitment of group members to the scheme. This is important because the whole scheme would fall apart if only one member fails to make the loan repayment in time (Morduch 2002). By paying attention
to capacity building in this way, the AAV project could address the problem of poor rate of repayment (Chavan & Ramakumar 2002), which is one of the major reasons for a rural credit model to fail (Karmakar 2000).

**Cooperatives and implementing the HRBA in the local context:**

Cooperatives are another kind of community based development initiatives. A cooperative is an autonomous association of members voluntarily coming together and working together to satisfy their social, cultural and economic needs through a collectively-owned and democratically-managed enterprise (Ortmann & King 2007). Historically, cooperatives originated in Europe and date as far back as 1844 (Zeuli & Radel 2005). Today a well-known example of a successful cooperative is the Mondragon cooperative in the Basque region of Spain (Mathews 2017; Zeuli & Radel 2005). Over time, cooperatives have been regarded as an effective self-help model that places local people at the core of a development process (Mathews 2017). Ortmann & King (2007) suggest that cooperatives empower local people to challenge their current social and economic marginalization, as well as the political structure in the community and beyond. As Zeuli and Radel (2005:1) observed:
Cooperatives are viewed as important vehicles for community development because they mobilize local resources into a critical mass and their structure allows them to be more community-oriented.

Cooperatives are not new to Vietnam and have, in fact, been around for a long time (Desai 2005; Vo 1992; White 1985). However, it is a particular kind of cooperative, a centrally planned agricultural cooperative prominent during the 1960s-1980s, that is well known in Vietnam (White 1985). As Vo (1992) discusses, members of these planned cooperatives were not allowed to formulate a development plan for themselves or to make decisions on what to produce, what to sell, when to sell and how much to sell. Rather, members of these cooperatives had to follow the central government plan. This is not the type of cooperative I have in mind.

The kind of cooperative I propose the AAV project to consider is aligned with the principles of the HRBA to development that the project aims to promote in the community, and is centered on a set of principles: voluntary association, open membership, democratic member control, member economic participation, autonomy and independence, provision of education, training and information, cooperation among cooperatives and concern for the community. This means that if a local cooperative is established in the community, it should be organized, managed and controlled by members. Moreover,
this kind of cooperative would allow and encourage mutual learning among their members and their networks. Existing research on member controlled cooperatives in development suggest that cooperatives enable local villagers to work together towards achieving their collective socio-economic development goals and thereby satisfy their immediate needs and also the longer-term objectives in the communities (Eversole, Mcneish & Cimadamro 2005; White 1985; Zeuli & Radel 2005). Narayan (2002) argues, for example, that through working together in a cooperative, members would have a better chance to compete and participate in the market economy. My fieldwork shows that this model of development suits the collectivist culture in the communities under research. It provides a chance for them to practise some of their collectivist traditions, such as working together toward a collectivist goal. While working together, they can establish and develop the relationship between themselves that would foster the cooperation between them, enabling them to better achieve their development goals (Chen, Chen & Meindl 1998). Also, when they organize themselves into a form of cooperative, their individual effort can be joint and synthesized, which better enables them to work toward achieving their development goals (Chen, Chen & Meindl 1998). However, just as with the revolving
credit scheme, it is important to note that in order for cooperatives to succeed, members will need to have skills in legal, financial, planning and management.

**Community laundry: An example of models of cooperatives**

Community laundry is an example of models of cooperative that I suggest that the AAV project should consider applying for its relevance. While the AAV project helps to empower local women through training activities, such as gender equity workshops, my discussions with local women suggested that they remain tied down by their domestic duties, including cooking and washing. This leaves them with little time to engage in other activities.

One way to address this problem could be for the AAV project to establish a community laundry with local women. Quite simply a community laundry would enable local women to interact with each other while doing their washing. In so doing, they are empowered. This is central to the HRBA to development that the AAV project implemented in the communities. This means that by adopting the community laundry, it better enables the AAV project to implement the principles of the HRBA. This initiative would require
between fifteen and twenty local women organized into a group. In order to ensure that there is a budget for the ongoing maintenance of the initiative a charge on users for the services would be required. Members of the community laundry would need to be trained in the skills required to manage and maintain the laundry, including how to offset the basic costs like electricity and water and equipment required. This means that participants would need to discuss and agree on a contribution that each member has to make to the scheme, as well as how the budget is to be prepared, managed and used. For example, it would be up to members to decide whether it is better for users to pay every time they use the laundry or on a monthly basis. In other words, it is the local people who decide what and how they want to operate the community laundry. This is also key to the HRBA to development that the AAV project aimed to implement in the communities. So, adopting this model of development does not prevent the AAV project from implementing the principles of the HRBA. Rather, it could better enable the project to do it.

**Potential to be developed into a social enterprise:**

A community laundry initiative also has the potential to be developed into a community-based enterprise, especially for women who have an interest in generating a non-farm source of income. Such an
enterprise would introduce economic diversity into the local economy (Gibson, Cahill & McKay 2010). The aim would be for local women to improve their income, lift their standard of living (Gibson-Graham 2005) and become freer from the traditional gendered division of labour within the household (Hopper 2012).

Such an initiative could have a broader impact. For one thing, a community laundry could be a meeting place for like-minded women where they might form networks that promote mutual learning and empowerment. Rather than simply focusing on economic development as an agricultural cooperative aims to achieve, the social enterprise initiative places greater focus on promoting social development through building and expanding its membership network in the community and beyond. If these local women were to gain full recognition and acknowledgement from their families and communities as primary economic actors rather than secondary and dependent family members they would also strengthen their social position (Kabeer 2005; Nussbaum 2000; Powell 2005).

If successful, the project could be replicated elsewhere in order to empower other local women. Members from the initial scheme could share their experiences, thereby connecting and inspiring more women across the region. This would also enable the principles of
HRBA to be carried out in concrete and locally appropriate terms. And this is what the community laundry project could do to better enable the implementation of the HRBA principles in the communities.
**Conclusion:**

The HRBA could be more successfully adapted to the local context of the Central Highlands of Vietnam if more effort is directed to making it relevant to the needs of the local beneficiaries. In this chapter I have discussed some of these needs based on my field work in the communities. I have then gone on to imagine, with the help of previous research and my knowledge of the communities, what kinds of initiatives might better meet these needs.

I argue that any development project should begin with a research phase that works to assist the project staff and administration to gain a better picture of local specificities of poverty. I also argue that central to a research phase is local participation. The community people must be provided with opportunities to involve actively in the decision-making processes regarding the focus of the project. In doing so, the HRBA principles are simultaneously accomplished.

The chapter also explores how needs for material assistance can be met alongside capacity building for local development to be effective. I argue that the provision of material assistance should be seen as a complimentary measure because this would ensure that local people could maintain and preserve their livelihood base. I also argue that the
provision of material assistance requires consideration for the materials to be effective, and to ensure financial feasibility of the AAV project, and that material assistance can contribute to the local development process. To achieve this all, rather than providing material assistance on individual level, material assistance should be delivered on the household level, taking into consideration the gender issues. This aligns with the HRBA principles because it not only responds to the community people's needs, but allows them to participate actively in the development process. This means that the provision of material assistance alongside with capacity building enables local participation in development.

While drawing on previous studies of different communities around the world, my discussion of community based development initiatives in this chapter is somewhat speculative. However, in proposing the initiatives, I take into consideration the gender issue and the collectivist culture and traditions that are prevailing in the communities under research. My aim here is to offer the AAV project some actual initiatives through which the HRBA can be pursued in addition to a research phase and material assistance.

As discussed in the chapter, local women who have been overburdened and tied down by their overwhelming household duties
can come together to work on an alternative way of consolidating their social capital and skills to give themselves more time to engage in capacity building and empowerment through a community laundry. They can achieve this through models of cooperatives, for example community laundries. I think that a community laundry can be an appropriate development initiative for local women. It can reduce the drudgery of local women as a result of doing the washing manually. More importantly, it provides them with a chance to socially interact while doing their washing. This latter is crucial for them because by socially interacting with each other, they are empowered. This aligns with the key principle of empowerment of the HRBA to development that the AAV implemented in the communities.

I also speculate that models of cooperatives, of which community laundry is an example, are most compatible with the collectivist and political culture in the communities. This is because when working together, local people’s efforts are joint and synthesized into a more powerful force, which not only better enables them to achieve their collective development goals, but get their voice better heard in the local institutional structures.

And the community laundry, though beginning as a cooperative, could also have the potential of elevating into a social enterprise at a later
stage to generating better income, adding new non-farm dynamics into local economies and business opportunities for local women and beyond, addressing fully the gender issue that has been troubling development for a long time.
Chapter 8: Conclusion: Adapting the HRBA in local community development in the Central Highlands of Vietnam

The HRBA to Development: recapping of the thesis’ main argument

The introduction of the HRBA to development in the 1990s has radically reshaped thinking about development (Scheinin & Suksi 2002b; Schmitz 2012a). Many scholars, including Alston (2005-07) and Hickey & Mitlin (2009) agree that the arrival of the approach in the development world reflected the emergence of two different trends in development in the 1980s (Hickey & Mitlin 2009). One was associated with neoliberalism and in particular the shift in the provision of social public services from the government to private sector, and the other was linked to authoritarian governments in many countries (Hickey & Mitlin 2009). During this time governments failed to be efficient in public expenditure management and control, causing budget deficit and increased inflation, while the private sector, which is by nature revenue-driven, was challenged in its endeavors to respond effectively to the new mechanism and ways of operation as well as new opportunities (Hickey & Mitlin 2009). When adapting to the mechanism and new ways of operation, the private sector focuses on generating income as the most ultimate objective, while neglecting attention on human rights (Bakker 2008). These scholars (Alston and
Hickey & Mitlin) agree that in this context, rights have been violated and the issue of rights must be addressed to promote better development. It is also in this global context that the HRBA came into the development world as an approach to address development and poverty (Hickey & Mitlin 2009).

In light of the HRBA, poverty is no longer seen through the narrow lens of physical survival or economic growth alone (Sen 1999) but from a broader perspective that incorporates human rights, human freedom, gender equity, social equality, participation, accountability, empowerment and sustainability (Alston & Robinson 2005; Reichert 2007; Sen 1999). The approach subsequently has been endorsed by UN bodies and many development agencies as an approach to development that has the potential to better address poverty in communities (Aaronson et al. 2006; Scheinin & Suksi 2002a; Schmitz 2012b). Many scholars and development practitioners, including Alston (2005-7) and myself, believe that the HRBA has the ability to address poverty in the community because it promotes the key principles of participation, empowerment, accountability and non-discrimination.

The unique nature of the HRBA to development lies in its key principles that underpin it. These principles are participation, empowerment, accountability and non-discrimination (Filmer-Wilson 2005; Nyamu-Musembi & Cornwall 2004; Scheinin & Suksi 2002b). Many scholars argue that the uniqueness of the HRBA is its ability not only to address the broader dimensions of poverty that conventional
strategies, such as the “top-down” approach, have long failed to overcome but also to offer a new direction to deal with new challenges generated by unfair trade, governance and, now, climate change (McGoldrick 1996; Nyamu-Musembi & Cornwall 2004; Sen 1999b). This ability is the result of its main focus being not helping the poor in physical survival but transforming structural barriers that hinder people in local communities from accessing human rights, gender equity and participation. These barriers ultimately made development unachievable and sustainable (Braveman & Gruskin 2003; Callan & Nolan 1991; Pogge 2008; Sen 1999b; UNDP 2003). This unique nature of the HRBA makes the HRBA distinctive from other development approaches (Filmer-Wilson 2005; Nyamu-Musembi & Cornwall 2004).

The UN promotes the HRBA to development through its agencies and through international human rights law, that is, the human rights declarations and treaties (Sidoti 2012). It sees the HRBA as an effective instrument to align the human rights framework with its development framework (Uvin 2007b). These frameworks stress the active role and rights of community people in shaping and making their own decisions on development (Uvin 2007a). Many UN bodies, such as UNDP and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), and NGOs, such as Care International, Oxfam and Action Aid International, have adopted the
HRBA to development and poverty reduction as their basic working methodology (Kindornay, Ron & Carpenter 2012).

**The HRBA and the AAV project:**

Although the HRBA is recognized as an approach to development that has a better ability to address poverty in community, its implementation in development practice in Vietnam is not always easy or smooth (Dang, TN 2018; Reichert 2007). This thesis has reviewed the HRBA-framed AAV development project in two ethnic minority communities in the Central Highlands of Vietnam as a case study to illustrate the challenges in the HRBA. It has examined how the HRBA was perceived by local stakeholders, including local leaders, members of local mass organizations, persons from public institutions and local villagers from the two project communities, as well as the project staff and participants from NGOs, as to how suitable or appropriate the HRBA is in the local contexts. The in-depth interviews, considered in the light of my previous work experience, revealed many difficulties in the implementation of the project. Community people were not able to participate fully in decision-making on the priorities and activities. There was insufficient attention to empowering local people. Project staff members had limited capacity, especially in terms of their
understanding of the HRBA and their ability to implement its principles. The project failed to understand local contextual specificities of poverty and so failed to meet local needs, particularly in failing to provide material assistance in conjunction with capacity building.

Given these issues, the major finding of this research is that implementation of the HRBA in development must be flexible enough to suit the local needs and contexts. To do that the project design must be based on research that identifies the specific local contextual characteristics of poverty and its problems, with inputs from local stakeholders, considering that poverty is not universally the same.

This finding is consistent with the post-development perspective advanced by Arturo Escobar (1995 and 2007). Escobar insisted that the plurality of perceptions and discourses on development must be considered. Local people must understand and own the HRBA or Sen’s notion of development as freedom before these approaches can be delivered effectively in local communities. At the same time, however, the HRBA must deal with broader, complex global issues, such as climate change, growing hunger, depletion of natural resources, conflicts and so on.
Different perspectives on human rights:

Participants’ comments also indicated that another challenge for the HRBA is understanding of the concept of human rights itself. Although human rights has a long history in the West, especially in terms of its universality and indivisibility (Brems 2001), the concept is still seen as foreign to many people in developing countries - researchers, development practitioners, scholars and especially politicians. They maintain that the principles of human rights, like poverty, have their local contexts and deserve special consideration rather than blind acceptance (Cerna 1995; Panikkar 1982). So when poverty is considered, the primary concern is survival, not a broader, multi-dimensional phenomenon that goes way beyond survival to include participation, gender equity, human freedom or human rights (Callan & Nolan 1991).

Nonetheless development practitioners in developing societies, including in Vietnam, also argue that, in meeting needs dealing with education, health care and long-term poverty, it would be most helpful to consider local participation, human rights and gender equity because, in the long run, only capacity building on human rights, local participation and gender equity will resolve these problems effectively (Eversole, Mcneish & Cimadamroe 2005; Shepherd & Brunt
The simple provision of material assistance will not end poverty or under-development (Ife 2002; Nelson, N & Wright 1995). At the local community level, another issue arises. People there largely lack an understanding of human rights, such as what human rights mean and how they are linked to development, and so the HRBA would both be understood or owned unless human rights are first understood and owned. The educational task is an important part of the capacity building required, a part of the empowerment principle in the HRBA.

The findings of this thesis thus become apparent: in solving or ending poverty in the local communities, local contextual specificities are important but in the long run a HRBA framework is the most appropriate methodology to adopt and implement.

**Different perspectives on development:**

Stakeholders with different backgrounds held different views about approaches to development. Those from governmental or institutional backgrounds, that is, local leaders and public institutional employees, tended to favor the “top-down” approach to development that emphasizes the role of government and institutional leaders who, they say, have the knowledge and resources to meet immediate local needs.
For these participants, material assistance is essential for development or ending poverty in the community. Participants of non-governmental backgrounds, that is, villagers, the AAV project staff and persons from NGOs, on the other hand, preferred an approach that is not based on material assistance alone. They generally thought that the HRBA, a “bottom-up” or capacity-building approach, would be more suited for long-term development.

This division of views perhaps is reflective of the unique political culture of Vietnam and of the Central Highland communities. A participatory approach in development has not been a part of their political framework until recently. For this reason, leaders or decision-makers in development often see themselves as actors with the legitimate power and resources to make the “right” development decisions for local communities, and they see local people as mere passive recipients of development. Indeed this is a paternalistic characteristic of the local political apparatus (Trotsky 2001) and is the opposite to what the HRBA intends to promote (Banik 2010; Connell 2010; Kindornay, Ron & Carpenter 2012; Scheinin & Suksi 2002b).

Furthermore, although framed as mass organizations, local organizations in the Central Highland, such as the Women’s Union (WU), Youth Union (YU) and Farmers’ Association (FA), are not
representative of the views of the local community as they are actually part of the formal political apparatus, rather than the community structure (Dang 2018). My previous engagements with different projects in the communities also demonstrate this point. All these community-framed organizations are not community organizations at all. They are part of the local political system representing the government’s voice in the community rather than the community’s voices in the government. In fact, local people do not have an organization of their own that is totally independent of the government. This has made it more difficult to implement the HRBA, especially when local people do not have an organization of their own to participate and make their own voices well heard in the decision-making processes (Dang 2018). In addition, it is felt that it is the government’s intention to maintain and strengthen its control over the community through these community-framed mass organizations, while they (the government) might not want to give outsiders an impression that they try to control the community. This reflects a unique political feature of the contemporary political system in Vietnam (Dang 2018). However, while the government does not want to encourage local people to establish an independent organization of their own, it needs to establish organisations in the community that appear to be community-based but in reality, are under the government or Party control. One way that could help them achieve this objective was perhaps to establish the community organizations and label them mass organizations. However, these organizations are not open to public membership. Staff are employed and paid by the government as in any other governmental bodies in the region. This shows that, though labeled as mass organizations in the community,
these organizations are not truly community organizations. Local participation in local developmental processes is not promoted or strengthened. This really exposes as a major structural challenge to effective implementation of the HRBA to development in the local settings. My previous engagement experience also shows that, without effective participation of local people in the entire project, the project will be unlikely to be successful. However, to enable local people to participate in the process, there is need for establishing a truly community owned organization. “Community-based organizations typically command confidence because people feel a sense of ownership of them, and feel that these organizations are responsive to their priorities” (Narayan D et al 2000 p. 144).

Therefore, having a truly community organization for their own, local people can gather together to discuss a strategy that they can use to challenge public stakeholders regarding a decision that was made by these stakeholders (Narayan, Deep et al. 2000).

**Some conclusions:**

To promote the HRBA effectively in local development, capacity building is necessary and should not be considered as periphery. Development practitioners themselves must know thoroughly, understand and own the HRBA principles if the approach is to be delivered effectively. The REFLECT classes are good examples of empowerment and capacity building strategy. But, such activities
were ceased because of a lack of funding and a change in AAV’s planning approach, moving from a participatory to a “top-down” approach. Moreover, closer monitoring of project deadlines rather than outcomes has also been carried out, moving AAV and its project further away from an HRBA initiative.

In short, the thesis has found that the AAV project has not been able to implement the HRBA principles successfully. Based on my examination of the AAV project, I have formed a number of conclusions of what is required if the HRBA is to be continued in development in practice and in reducing poverty in local communities:

- A project begins with a research phase to explore fully the complexity of poverty in the community and local stakeholders, especially local people, be empowered to participate fully in shaping the project and deciding what the project should focus on in order to address poverty. These are central to the HRBA to development.

- The project staff must be equipped with sufficient capacity to understand the implications of the HRBA to development and
effectively implement its core universal principles of participation, empowerment, accountability and non-discrimination in the communities.

- The project must be able to address local contextual specificities, such as denied access to arable land, capital, climate change and political culture, in its attempt to address poverty in the communities.

- The project has to meet local needs for material assistance in conjunction with capacity building. Material assistance and capacity building can complement each other in poverty reduction in a specific context. Addressing the issue of material assistance is not opposed to the HRBA principles, but better enables the HRBA to adapt to the local context.

- The project must ensure sufficient budget to maintain strategic empowering activities, such as the REFLECT classes in the AAV project. This allows local participants, especially women, to claim their rights to education, which is a key theme of the project.
The project should apply models of community revolving credit schemes and cooperatives, for example, agricultural cooperatives and community laundry, as potential development models for the community. These models can be effective empowering strategies for the community and can better promote their rights to participation in development.
The need to be flexible in development:

It has been acknowledged that the concept of development remains a highly contested phenomenon (Hettne 1995). My experience with development project, such as the one on rural water supply and sanitation, also demonstrates this view. The concept of development is perceived differently by local people as compared to the project staff and public stakeholders. Whereas the project staff and public stakeholders defined safe drinking water as water that went through the chemical treating system, local people perceived it simply as running water, which means water in rivers or streams.

Therefore, a major lesson from this case study is that flexibility is critical to development work. Indeed, I have argued that, to deliver the HRBA principles effectively, flexibility is needed. This raises the question of whether flexibility could be added as another principle of the HRBA to development, in addition to participation, empowerment, accountability and non-discrimination. In relation to the AAV project, flexibility is central for effective implementation of the HRBA because the community itself varies contextually in terms of local specificities, such as needs and capacity. While, for example, the local government in Cu Hue commune is more responsive to local needs, that in Eadar commune is a problem. Another example is that the literacy level in Cu Hue is higher than that in Eadar commune, making it ‘easier’ for the AAV project staff to implement the principle of empowerment in Cu Hue commune than in the Eadar commune. In addition, while the
community groups in Cu Hue are active, those in the Eadar commune are inactive or even do not exist. This all means that an effective implementation of the HRBA in these two different communes requires flexibility. The AAV project staff could adjust their implementing strategies of the HRBA in order to better reflect local contextual specificities. While they could make use of the existing community groups in Cu Hue commune to promote the delivery of the HRBA principles, they might need to strengthen the groups or even establish them before they could use them to promote the principles in the Eadar commune. Going beyond these two examined communes, the implementation of the HRBA to development elsewhere, for example in Peru and India, also demonstrates that the effective implementation of the HRBA requires flexibility because of contextual differences (Hickey & Mitlin 2009). While the HRBA could assist rural households in Peru in securing their properties in order to maintain their livelihoods, the HRBA was used to assist the pavement dwellers to secure tenure in Mumbai in India: “the two contributions explore the extent to which the HRBA to development may help to protect the poor by offering rights or may undermine their long-term political interest by placing increasing emphasis on individualism within social norms and values” Mickey & Mitlin (2009, p.13).

As I have suggested in chapter two, three and elsewhere in this thesis, the HRBA to development can be individualistic but that it can also be collectivist and that this is an example of how it has to be flexible, choosing to focus on individuals or on collectivities depending on the position or context of the community.
However, being flexible in development and implementation does not require a radical change to or delay in the implementation of the key of the HRBA. Rather, it means that careful consideration must be given to how best the principles of the HRBA could be applied within the actual local contextual specificities. This is to better reflect local diverse views of poverty and approaches to poverty reduction.

The idea of flexibility in implementing the HRBA in the local context is consistent with Escobar's argument for a new form of development. Escobar (2007) suggests that development as a concept perceived by the West has not worked well in the so-called developing countries or Third World countries. This is mainly because the Western perceived concept of development was imposed on these countries, while completely ignoring local contextual specificities (Escobar 2007). Therefore, one can claim that the failure of Third World countries in achieving development is not their fault. Rather, it is a failure in how development has been imposed on them (Escobar 2007). In Escobar’s view, it is important to take into consideration vernacular cultures, relying more on existing knowledge, traditions, practices and the ordinary people’s attempts in development to achieve more culturally and ecologically sustainable development outcomes. He especially
suggests taking serious account of existing social movements and grassroots mobilizations as fundamental factors of development.

Escobar (2007) thus called for a post-development perspective that gives power to alternative discourses for local people to make their voices heard and have their rights recognized rather than blind acceptance of imposed external ideas of development. The findings of this study align well with Escobar’s view as well as the notion of rights-based development. When development approaches are employed, there must be careful consideration of timing and local specificities within the human rights framework so that local decision making and local empowerment could be enhanced. This perspective of Escobar’s could reinforce the argument that effective implementation of the HRBA requires flexibility. Flexibility gives local people space to participate in and to shape their own development, define rights in their own terms and decide what rights are to be addressed and how they should be addressed.

The findings of this study also align well with Sen’s (1995) theory of development as freedom. Although not explicitly stated, his notion of freedom in fact endorses the priority that development must give to individuals on a micro level and flexibility on a broader cultural and political level. This means that the implementation of the HRBA to
development should acknowledge the fact that local context varies between communities. Also, different people in different communes might have different needs, views and capacities. Therefore, the implementation of the HRBA requires flexibility for the HRBA to be able to adapt effectively in different contexts. While individual enjoyment is central to Sen’s theory of development, he also implied that, in enhancing and expanding human freedom, local conditions should be respected as they are also a source of enjoyment by local people (Sen & Jennifer 2000).

Sen (1999) is right in claiming that development is not merely the outcomes of a project delivered, but is more about the essentials of being respected, having the right to choose, making decisions to determine one’s future and dignity in living as a human being. The main lesson to be learned from the AAV project and the current development theories is that it is even more important when delivering development initiatives to ensure these elements are given due consideration and not to be confused with ‘good intentions’ or ‘paternalistic concerns’. Words are easy, but practice needs a lot more commitment and humbling reflections. And these include reflections by those who are in powerful leadership positions as well as those in less powerful situations to find out how and when they should work
together, putting what they know best, how they could collaborate well and what common goals and outcomes they should strive for, before all development decisions are made, either on behalf of others or for themselves.

If there is a central message to conclude this study, the following will be most appropriate:

The promises of the HRBA framework have been well debated, recognized and tried. What remains to be done is not only a continual refinement of its theoretical reflection, but also the development of a continuous cycle of on the ground research, feedback, reflection and grounded plans for action.

**An opportunity for follow-up studies:**

This research explores the implementation of the HRBA to development using a small case study of a poverty reduction project that promoted the HRBA to development in two ethnic minority communities in the Central Highlands of Vietnam. As such its findings might not necessarily reflect how the HRBA is implemented in non-western settings outside of Vietnam, or even across Vietnam itself. Future studies are needed to explore how the HRBA to development is
implemented in non-Western settings to draw more general conclusions.

To fill this gap, one might start by examining how the HRBA is implemented in another local context of Vietnam such as a community in a northern region where HRBA framed poverty reduction projects have been implemented by AAV. This would provide another empirical example that further demonstrates how the HRBA is implemented in Vietnam, and if the HRBA is differently implemented in different local contexts. Future studies might also examine a development project implemented by a different organization than AAV. This would provide insight into how the HRBA is implemented by different organizations, possibly also enabling more general conclusions or perhaps revealing unique factors within different organizations that shape development work with the HRBA.

Further research in this direction would be a significant contribution to the existing knowledge about how the HRBA to development can be adapted to a local context. It would also offer organizations that apply the HRBA to development, such as AAV, ideas about how to better implement the HRBA in the communities in which they work.
A central finding of this study is that to better enable the implementation of the HRBA to development it is essential to be flexible in development and in particular in the implementation of the HRBA principles of participation, empowerment, accountability and non-discrimination. In order to extend this research future studies should explore how flexibility, which I have framed as the fourth principle of the HRBA, can better enable the implementation of the HRBA in the community. Exploring this issue further is essential as it may offer a better way to implement the HRBA in practice for poverty reduction. This may further reinforce the argument that rather than framing development as a universally the same phenomenon, it is important to perceive it as a context specific issue that needs to be locally defined. To explore how flexibility works and contributes to better implementing the HRBA, future studies should collaborate with the AAV or other development organizations to implement a development project that employs the HRBA as the major strategy.
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