

# FACTORS IMPACTING ON THE LIVELIHOOD OF RAGLAI PEOPLE IN BAC AI DISTRICT, NINH THUAN PROVINCE

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## **Abstract**

*Nowadays, the livelihood of ethnic minority communities has become a central issue in many countries around the world. In our country, the living conditions of many ethnic minority communities have improved, but in general, it is still mainly agricultural production with low productivity, so the rate of poor and near-poor households is still high. Bắc Ái district, Ninh Thuận province is where more than 90% of Raglai people live and work. Although the government has many livelihood programs and policies on labor and employment, the life of Raglai people still faces many difficulties. This paper is an attempt to analyze objective and subjective factors that affect the livelihood activities of Raglai people, Bac Ai district, Ninh Thuan province. By a combination of quantitative research methods and qualitative research methods, the study shows that natural conditions, human resources, financial resources, social resources, etc. have an influence on livelihood activities leading to poverty of the Raglai community.*

**Keywords:** *Raglai ethnic group, poverty, poverty reduction.*

## **1. Introduction**

Bac Ai is one of 61 poor districts (now 64 districts) according to Resolution 30a of the Government. The district has 09 communes/38 villages (of which 31 are particularly difficult). Population 7,372 households/31,353 people (as of the end of 2018), mainly Raglai ethnic people (accounting for over 87%). The number of people of working age is 16,303 workers, accounting for 52% of the total population of the district, mainly engaged in agricultural production and animal husbandry.<sup>10</sup> Bắc Ái is an arid sub-climate, typically with a tropical monsoon climate, relatively high temperature, hot dry, and high winds, so droughts often occur every year. Although the government and local authorities have been implementing many livelihood programs, poverty reduction policies, and infrastructure construction, the rate of poor households and falling back into poverty is still high. Therefore, understanding factors impacting on the livelihood of Raglai people in Bắc Ái district will contribute to assessing the current status of labor and employment, identifying

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<sup>10</sup> UBND Huyện Bắc Ái, (2019), Sơ kết đánh giá kết quả 10 năm (giai đoạn 2008-2018) triển khai thực hiện Nghị quyết số 30a/2008/NQ-CP ngày 27/12/2008 của Chính phủ trên địa bàn huyện Bắc Ái.

the main causes that directly affect the livelihood their. Proper assessment and accurate identification of the causes will be an important basis for local authorities to find effective solutions to solve livelihood problems and help people escape poverty. Through a theoretical approach to the Department for International Development (DFID) sustainable livelihoods framework. The author analyzes the impact of human resources (skills, knowledge, work capacity and health); social resources (networking, membership of groups, relationships of trust, access to broader social institutions); natural resources; physical resources (basic infrastructure, equipment and means of production); financial resources (savings, credit or deposit to help choose different livelihood activities) to the livelihood activities of Raglai people in Bắc Ái district, Ninh Thuận province.

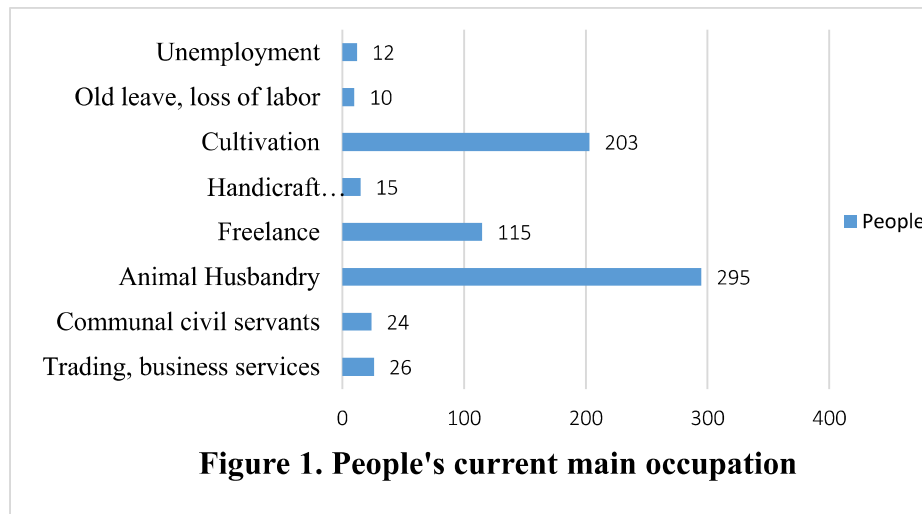
## **2. Method**

The study was carried out by survey method by questionnaire with more than 700 households in three communes: Phước Thành, Phước Thắng, Phước Tân of Bắc Ái district, Ninh Thuận province. On the other hand, to learn more about factors affecting livelihood activities; the level of participation and satisfaction of the Raglai with the programs and policies being implemented in the locality. The study conducted 30 more in-depth semi-structured interviews with subjects who were local people, officials, village elders, and village heads. The study also conducted 6 focus group discussions for people (according to the criteria of sex, age, occupation), officials. Survey data by questionnaire will be processed by SPSS 18.0 software to identify variables that have an impact on poverty of Raglai people in Bắc Ái district, Ninh Thuận province.

## **3. Results**

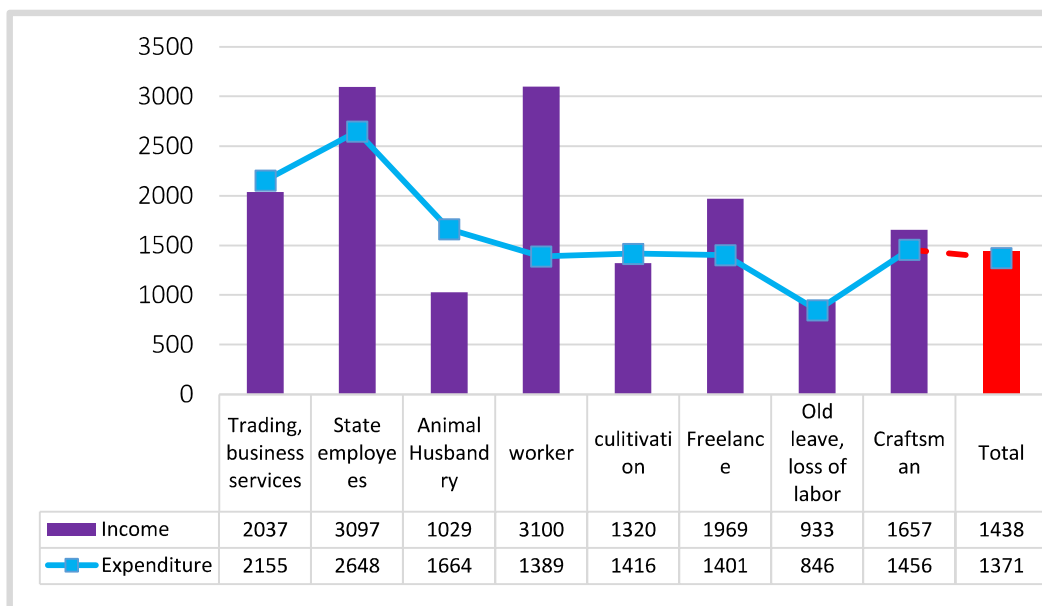
### ***3.1. Livelihood of Raglai People in Bac Ai District, Ninh Thuận Province***

Research on livelihood activities of Raglai people in three communes Phước Thành, Phước Tân and Phước Thắng in Bắc Ái district, the results show that the Raglai people mainly focus on working in occupational groups such as cultivation 203 people (29%); animal husbandry 295 people (49%); freelance 115 people (16.4%). Occupation groups such as trade profession, services, cottage industry, etc. have a very low percentage of Raglai people participating.



Source: Results of the study in 2017

Finding out about the incomes of occupational groups, the research results show that the average income of Raglai people is quite low (1,371,000/person/month), in which high-income occupation groups are mainly officials (3,097,000/person/month), workers 3,100,000/person/month) and traders (2,037,000/person/month). However, a paradox is that the number of people working in high-middle-income occupations accounts for a very low percentage. On the contrary, people working in the cultivation and animal husbandry groups have low income but many people participate. This is influenced by many different factors and will be analyzed in more detail later.



**Figure 2. Comparison between income and expenditure by occupation group (thousand VND/month)**

Source: Results of the study in 2017

On the other hand, looking at figure 2, we see that the income of the two groups of cultivation and animal husbandry is much lower than that of the other groups. In particular, considering the balance of income – expenditure of these two occupation groups, it is always negative (Animal husbandry: -635,000/month; cultivation: -96,000/month). This result tells us more that, when the main income generating profession is always in the state of spending more than receiving, the life of Raglai people is always in a state of deprivation, difficulties are inevitable. Currently, the exploitation and use of arable land has not been thoroughly used, so the agricultural production of people is also facing many difficulties. Raglai ethnic people still continue to exploit swidden land on the mountain slopes to grow corn, rice and vegetables. This land area is very difficult to estimate, it depends a lot on the human resource conditions of each household, because in order to use it for farming, it is necessary to give up quite openly.

### ***3.2. Factors impacting on the livelihood of Raglai people in Bắc Ái district, Ninh Thuận province***

#### *3.2.1. Natural resources*

*About climate, weather:* Bắc Ái is an arid sub-climate, typically with a tropical monsoon climate, relatively high temperature, hot, dry, windy, high evaporation, which are favorable conditions for intensive farming, increasing crops, especially especially for the group of plants that like light and to develop large-scale livestock raising such as buffaloes and cows; in the rainy season, crops can grow and develop normally, but need additional irrigation water to increase productivity and combat drought; in the dry season, if it is not irrigated, it is almost impossible to carry out production.

*About land resources:* Bắc Ái has a relatively large area of natural land, large forests and forest land, accounting for 79,71% of the natural area, with all three types of forests, namely special-use, watershed protection and production; agricultural production land area accounts for 11,94%. Land has 6 groups, 12 land units, including: semi-arid gray-brown soil group accounting for a large proportion with 72,2%; group of gray and gray soil 10,5%; alluvial soil 6,9%; valley land due to slope product accumulation 5,46%; red and yellow soil 4,72%; The rest is gravel.<sup>11</sup>

In general, the climate and weather conditions in Bắc Ái district are very harsh, often lacking water for agricultural production and in the dry season. In addition, the soil has low nutrient content, heavy mechanical composition, many acidic soils, degraded due to harsh climate, little annual replenishment and excessive use of pesticides; Therefore, the

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<sup>11</sup> UBND Huyện Bắc Ái, (2020), Báo cáo kết quả triển khai thực hiện Chương trình mục tiêu quốc gia giảm nghèo bền vững 9 tháng đầu năm 2020, và phương hướng thực hiện nhiệm vụ 3 tháng cuối năm 2020 trên địa bàn huyện Bắc Ái.

livelihoods of Raglai people based on cultivation and animal husbandry face many difficulties.

### 3.2.2. Human resources

The level of education has a close relationship with labor skills, adaptation in livelihood activities under the impact of natural conditions and risks from the market, epidemics, etc. Quantitative results shows that the education level of the Raglai is very low (more than 37,1% have never attended school; 59,9% have primary education and have dropped out), the dropout of children is still very common.

**Table 1. A detailed description of educational attainment of local children**

Description table		Frequency	%
Kindergarten	Male	123	10,0
	Female	117	9,5
Primary school level (from grade 1 to grade 5)	Male	293	23,9
	Female	223	18,2
Secondary school level (from grade 6 to grade 9)	Male	170	13,8
	Female	137	11,2
High school level (from grade 10 to grade 12)	Male	96	7,8
	Female	69	5,6
<b>Total</b>		<b>1,228</b>	<b>100,0</b>

*Source: Combining results of the study in 2017 and data posted by District Education Department on the website <http://bacai.edu.vn>.*

The results of Table 1 show that the percentage of students from primary to high school is gradually decreasing. The total number of primary school students was 516, but by high school only 165 students, a decrease of about 3,1 times. In which, the number of students decreased the most in the period from secondary school to high school, the number of boys decreased by 1,8 times (170 compared with 96) and the number of girls decreased by 2 times (137 compared with 69). The sharp decrease in the number of students across classes and levels is alarming. A teacher at Hung Vuong School – Phước Tân Commune shared: “*After a few days of Tet holidays, I had to go to each student's house to remind them to come to school tomorrow, sometimes I had to go to students' homes to drive them to school. It was very hard work, but I loved my job... Anger was anger at parents, they did not care about their children's education. Sometimes, students were absent from school for a whole week, when I went to students' houses to ask about their parents, they said that they did not pay attention because they went to work...*”.

Low level of education has a great influence on Raglai people's perception of livelihood activities. In farming, despite being granted land by the local government for

cultivation, many households still keep the old and outdated farming methods, so the productivity is very low. Even, many resettled households have refused the land in the plains granted by the government to return to their old places of residence (on the high mountains) to cultivate. An agricultural extension officer said: *“Although people in Phuoc Thang commune were resettled, provided with cultivated land, and had a house, but they were not familiar with it. Many households just left their homes and then went to the mountains to stay for a whole month before returning. In the mountains, they still grew corn, rice, and bananas just like they used to. Although they did not have high productivity, they were not used to growing wet rice. It was difficult to get water here, it took technology to be productive. Even though the people had been trained in farming techniques, they were still not used to it, so they did not do it”* (Male, 45 years old, district official). For livestock production, although the local authorities are very well trained in methods and techniques to take care of livestock and poultry, many households still do not understand and follow the old practices. An official from the district's Department of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs said: *“...The state provided each poor household with a cow under the program 135, but it was no longer available after that. There were cows that die due to disease, due to lack of food and drink, the cows became thin and boneless, or they were slaughtered. No one took care of cows like that. Every day, they took the cow out into the field and tied it to the tree until evening to bring it back. The important thing is that there was no water around, no grass, no cow could live”*.

From distant past to present day, The Raglai do not have the ability and habit of doing business, so making money through trading is not their forte and advantage. In particular, the local economic conditions are underdeveloped (in 2008 for the first time the district had a market supported by Oxfarm) plus very few households with low educational attainment, no math skills, no business knowledge. Raglai family participates in trading. Local trading activities are mainly carried out by Kinh people. Some Raglai households doing small business (selling groceries, selling chè, xôi) have much better income. However, buying and selling activities also face many difficulties when people of the same ethnic group buy without payment or owe but do not pay for many days, even they are afraid of being cursed (bỏ dậu) by neighbors when they see these families do better than them. One young woman, grocer said: *“...Trading made a little money, but sometimes neighbors bought it without paying, 'it' did not pay, sometimes 'it' said 'all are people from the same village, so they did not need to pay'. In fact, I was also afraid, because many people naturally had money, became rich, they were cursed by their neighbors and died from illness, so many families did not dare to be rich”* (Female, 25 years old, grocer). In spending management, due to not knowing how to calculate so the revenue - expenditure is ineffective, they do not have monthly spending plans or know how to accumulate, save to spend in difficult times, or risks from epidemics and natural disasters. A grocery store owner, Kinh people said: *A grocery*

store owner, Kinh people said: “Many households were suffering, but fortunately, the government planned the administrative area should be compensated a lot of money. But you knew what? they brought a whole bag of money to the grocery store to pay off the debt. They did not know how much they owe, but they just told the owner to take the money out of their own pocket for the amount they owe. Then they went to Ninh Son market to buy all kinds of things, ate a bowl of pho for 25,000 VND and gave 50,000 VND without taking any change. They were like that, very different, not like our Kinh people”. Or a woman officer said: “People who worked far away, father and son worked in Lam Dong had more than 20 million VND, wife bought 2 phones and laptops, then husband bought 2 then buys 2 TVs, daughter got married in the West. Father and son worked together to provide for his wife (mother). The state facilitated land allocation (program 135) but they refused to do so, how could they escape poverty? Compared to people in other places, people here were narrower”.

In the present time, the local government strengthens vocational training classes so that young people of Raglai have full skills to access jobs. The number of vocational classes is being opened more and more, such as cultivation, animal husbandry, veterinary medicine, construction, repairing engines and motorcycles, industrial sewing (*Phước Bình* 223 workers/10 classes; *Phước Hòa* 274 workers/10 classes; *Phước Trung* 322 employees/11 classes; *Phước Tân* 475 workers/14 classes; *Phước Tiến* 950 employees/27 classes; *Phước Thắng* 625 workers/18 classes; *Phước Chính* 414 employees/12 classes; *Phước Đại* 350 employees/10 classes; *Phước Thành* 550 workers/16 classes).<sup>12</sup> However, after they receive vocational training, they also face many difficulties because the Raglai do not want to work away from home, while in the locality, the industrial economy is not developed. This is a difficult problem for households and for local authorities.

### 3.2.3. Social resources

A social network is a social structure formed by individuals or organizations, bound by interdependence through the knots are relationships such as family, kinship, friends, etc. Social capital is established from social networks, in addition, social networks are increased and expanded by individuals and groups through the benefits that social capital brings. The Raglai people have a close relationship with their neighbours, only their relationship with local political organizations and product purchasing establishments are very limited. Therefore, they have little information about the fake market and are often pressured by traders for the agricultural products they earn. A particularly important issue is that relatives and neighbors only live around the village, very few people work far away so they do not have information about employment or are influenced by people with economic knowledge

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<sup>12</sup> UBND Huyện Bắc Ái, Báo cáo kết quả triển khai thực hiện Chương trình MTQG giảm nghèo bền vững năm 2019, phương hướng, nhiệm vụ, giải pháp thực hiện năm 2020 trên địa bàn huyện Bắc Ái.

to the Raglai. Through actual observations, the Raglai often trade with the Kinh (households who sell groceries and buy all the products earned by the Raglai) but learn nothing from these household businesses. In fact, Kinh business households in order to achieve high profits often force prices, buy products at very low prices compared to the market price, they encourage Raglai people to buy alcohol to exchange agricultural products. Raglai people are very limited in accessing information as well as expanding their relationships with local cultural and social organizations. That is also the reason why they lose many opportunities to access information about policies, programs and projects for them. In addition, Raglai people's access to information is mainly through information from village loudspeakers, word of mouth information, audio-visual media such as television, cassette, radio. However, during the actual observation in the locality, we found that there are some barriers in accessing information for the people such as: radio stations do not have wide coverage, only focus on a few densely populated places such as markets, schools, administrative areas. The form of broadcasting is not suitable for listeners, because Raglai people have low education level, do not understand the Kinh's voice, one interviewee shared: *"I listened to music but I did not understand, sometimes they spoke too fast so I could not hear it in time. I could only listen to it when I had free time, but when I went to work in the field, there was no loudspeaker in the field for me to listen to"* (Male, Raglai people).

In general, the social capital of the Raglai is very limited, mainly the relationship with family and neighbours. However, the people in the family, relatives, and neighbors also live around the village, and their understanding of doing business is the same, so they cannot learn from each other. Therefore, it can be seen that social networks play an important role in supporting people to access information in life.

#### *3.2.4. Physical resources*

Over the years, through the benefits of policies under Resolution 30a of the Government, the local physical conditions have been significantly improved. Housing support for poor households under Program 167 is 1,629/1,100 units, reaching 148,1% of the plan; housing under Decision No. 22 is 237 units; The remaining 1,257 houses are supported by other sources, such as: solidarity houses, support houses from organizations and businesses,...; 01 station has a fixed doctor, the remaining 08 stations have a rotating doctor according to the project 1816; schools at all levels are built spaciouly, there are schools for boarding students; asphalt and clear road delivery system to communes; 01 central market of the district, the fairs of Phước Bình, Phước Trung, Phước Thắng, Phước Tiến.

Compared with ethnic minority areas in the Northwest, the physical conditions in Bắc Ái district are much better, but due to harsh natural conditions, it is not favorable for agricultural development. On the other hand, Raglai people still keep the old habit of cultivation, so they often grow crops on high mountains, these places have no roads, so they



are often pressured by small traders. In addition, due to their low level of education and slow absorbing techniques and technologies, they have not effectively used the resources provided by the government. For example, Raglai people still have the habit of giving birth at home without going to local health facilities, they do not have the habit of regular antenatal check-ups to receive iron and calcium supplements as well as vaccinations. Therefore, the rate of malnourished children (short, stunted) is still high. The school is spacious, but most of them only study until the end of secondary school and then drop out of school to follow their families to the fields or to work as hired laborers.

### 3.2.5. Financial resources

Financial resources are very important for the livelihood activities of households. Bắc Ái district is a poor district, so the government is very interested in lending capital for the Raglai to do business and live. According to an official from the district's Department of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs, the state's current sources of loans to people are not lacking, even not fully lent. A paradox taking place in the Raglai community is that people are lacking in business capital, but the state loan fund is still available. The reason for the above contradiction is because Raglai people do not know what to borrow money for? They fear that if they borrow money and do nothing, they will spend it all and not have enough to pay back to the state. On the other hand, for some households that know how to do business, the loan amount is too small and it is not enough for them to expand their production. A person living here said: *"...If you did not dare to take money from the state, if you did not know what to do, where could you get the money to pay the debt? I saw my neighbors borrow money to buy TVs, bought an old motorbike, then ate and drank. After using all the money, how do I return the money to the state? I was so scared, I did not dare to borrow money"*. An official from the Women's Union also shared: *"In general, people were a bit afraid, shy, did not dare to contact, lack trust with strangers. The State facilitated low-interest loans. Previously, the interest rates of poor households were about 6% to 8%. Interest rates were low but they did not dare to borrow, 10 million, 15 million, I did not know how they determine it. They did not specify whether to borrow for economic purposes, to raise cows or for what?"*.

## 4. Discussion and Conclusion

In general, according to the theoretical approach to sustainable livelihoods framework of the Department for International Development (DFID). Results show that the Raglai people's livelihood activities are influenced by the following factors: (1) natural resources; (2) human resources; (3) social resources; (4) physical resources; (5) financial resources. In particular, the study shows that resources (1) and (2) have the strongest impact on livelihood activities of Raglai people. However, if viewed comprehensively, cultural resources are the key factor in the livelihood of Raglai people in Bắc Ái district, Ninh Thuận province. Cultural

resources are understood as the customs, habits, and traditional behaviors that have created inertia for the economic activities of the people here. About the regional culture, the Raglai follow the matrilineal system, with women being the main labor force in the family, performing many different roles. Therefore, male are less likely to participate in heavy work, they drink as much as they do, so some families have a hard time. In addition, Raglai people do not have the habit of working far away, they do not want their family members to go to big cities or go abroad to work in search of good job opportunities. On the contrary, they want their children to gather with their families even if they are hungry all year round. The Raglai also do not force their children to study or work to earn money when they reach adulthood. Or if the children go to work to earn money, they can completely decide with the money they earn without having to give it to the family. Some other families still keep outdated customs that cost the family a lot of money such as the custom of bỏ mã, cúng mùa, etc.

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