

## **Development comes at a price: a case of state-led, large-scale farmland expropriation for urban expansion in Vietnam**

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Since 2000, Vietnam experienced remarkable progresses both in terms of economic growth and poverty reduction. However, Vietnam's development strategy, centring around industrialization and urbanization supplied by large-scale, state-led expropriation of farmlands, resulted in the country's de-peasantization whereby at least 2.5 out of 12 million small farmers have been dispossessed and displaced from their farms. Farms in the periphery of urban places particularly face the highest risk of being expropriated. My research studied this process in the context of the Ecopark township, near Hanoi, and investigated how it affected the livelihood trajectory of a peasant community and households. Until present, the case still serves as a highly relevant example of how cropland in Vietnam can be expropriated using the state's coercive power supported by "economic development" and "public interest" arguments for private gains; how severe the land expropriation can destruct rural livelihoods; and how dispossessed farmers' struggles to protect their land against the state-capitalist alliance can end up unsuccessfully in the context that Vietnam is a single-ruling party state.

The research adopted a qualitative case study method, guided by the relational human capability framework that emphasizes multidimensional aspects of human wellbeing. This allowed individual small farmers to share the perceptions of the type of life they had reason to value and to understand the reasons that led to tension between affected farmers, the provincial state, and Ecopark's developer.

The key findings demonstrate the multifaceted, adverse effects of land expropriation on life and livelihoods of the dispossessed farmers including the risk of future impoverishment. It was found that the expropriation process has significantly triggered social and political discrimination among different social farmer groups by different socio-political mechanisms. Dispossessed farmers suffered the highest economic lost while the state lost its revenue due to land levies exemptions –these findings are often hidden in aggregated data and report. The only economic winners are the private capitalist and local state elites through their alliance. In the case of Ecopark, this alliance was possible thanks to several mechanisms like the Vietnam land government decentralization, the land for infrastructure programme, the two-tiered land price framework. All these mechanisms were mediated by the fact that Vietnamese government is the only lawful owner of the country's land. The legal struggle of the dispossessed farmers to claim their lands back went on until 2015, it, however, has ended up unsuccessfully when facing political consequences pressured by the local state.

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