

# Livelihood Transformation of The K'Ho Sre Ethnic Minority in Lam Dong Province

Vo Tan Tu<sup>1</sup> and Phan Van Bong<sup>2</sup>

## **Abstract**

*The K'Ho Sre people in Lam Dong province were the largest local group of the K'Ho ethnic group. Their traditional livelihood activities were farming, animal husbandry, making traditional handicrafts, and participating in predatory economic activities (hunting, gathering, fishing). Nowadays, the K'Ho Sre ethnic group has been adapting to converting their livelihoods from traditional agricultural production models to agricultural production models by applying science and technology. This economic transformation was manifested in many aspects, notably the strong introduction of new farm production methods completely different from traditional production methods regarding cultivation techniques, seedling structure, and forms of exploitation and product consumption. Besides, there were some relatively new activities such as services, buying and selling, hiring, etc. The research was conducted through the following methods: synthesis, observation, survey, and analysis of field data for 400 K'Ho Sre ethnic families in Lam Dong to point out changes in livelihood activities and propose recommendations to contribute to hunger eradication, poverty reduction, and sustainable development.*

**Keywords:** Ethnic Group, K'Ho Sre, Livelihood

## **INTRODUCTION**

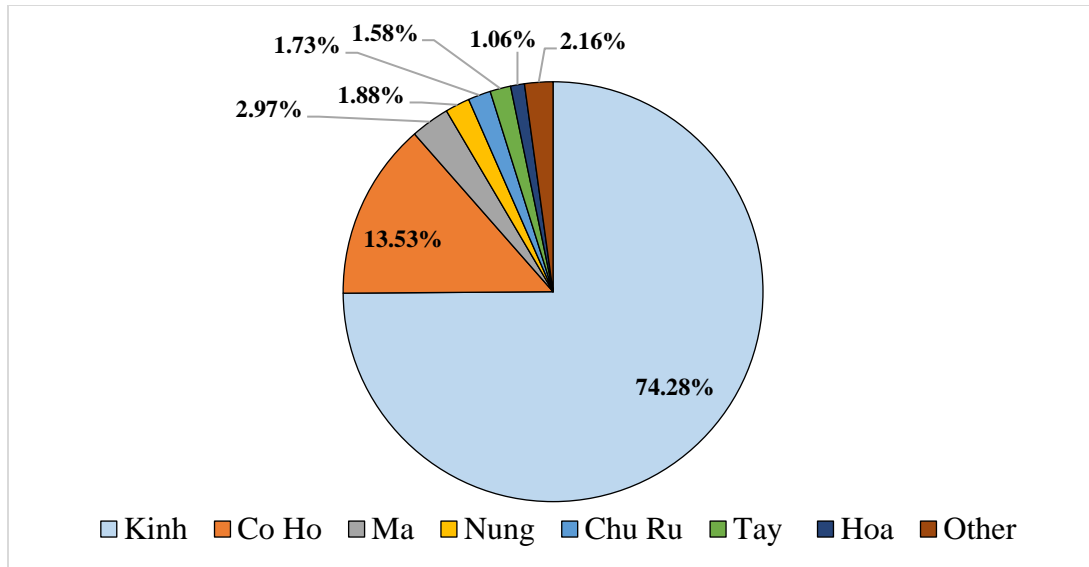
According to the results of the 2023 Vietnam Population and Housing Census by the Central Steering Committee for the Population and Housing Census, Vietnam is a country with 54 ethnic groups with an average population of 100.3 million people, in which the male and female population ratio is quite balanced (males account for 49.9%, females 50.1%). The average population of urban areas is 38.2 million people, accounting for 38.1%; rural areas are 62.1 million people, accounting for 61.9%. Kinh people are the majority ethnic group, with 82,100,000 people accounting for 85.3%, and the remaining 53 ethnic minorities account for 14.7%.

Lam Dong is a mountainous province located in the Central region of Vietnam and is also the 7th largest province in the country, adjacent to the Southern critical economic region. In 2022, Lam Dong is Vietnam's 23<sup>rd</sup> most populous administrative unit with 1,332,530 people. (General Statistics Office of Vietnam [GSOV], 2020). Lam Dong province has 47 ethnic groups living together, of which ethnic minorities have 70,655 households with 333,561 people, accounting for 24.91% of the province's population. From Figure 1, it can be seen that the ethnic group with the highest population proportion is the Kinh ethnic group, with 963,290 people (74.28%), ranked second is the K'Ho ethnic group, with 175,531 people (accounting for 13.53%) (General Statistics Office of Vietnam [GSOV], 2023)

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<sup>1</sup> Dalat University, 1 Phu Dong Thien Vuong Street, Da Lat City, Lam Dong, Vietnam E-mail: [tuvt@dlu.edu.vn](mailto:tuvt@dlu.edu.vn)

<sup>2</sup> Dalat College, 109 Yersin, Da Lat City, Lam Dong, Vietnam



**Figure 1.** Population ratio of ethnic groups in Lam Dong province

The K'Ho people, also known as Kaho, Ko Ho, or Koho, according to the K'Ho spelling, are one of the 54 ethnic groups in Vietnam, living in a long strip from the south of Khanh Hoa province to Lam Dong, the west of Binh Thuan province to the north of Dong Nai province. The K'Ho people speak the K'Ho language and belong to the Bahnar branch of the Austroasiatic language family. (Committee for Ethnic Affairs [CEMA], 2022). The main residential area of this ethnic group is Lam Dong province, including many local groups such as K'Ho Sre (Xre), K'Ho Chil (Cil), K'Ho Nop, K'Ho Lach (Lat), K'Ho T'ring (T'Rin) and K'Ho Co Don (K'Don), these local groups develop at different socio-economic levels (Thanh Van, 2017).

The K'Ho people, with a population of 200,800 people, rank 16th out of 54 ethnic groups, residing mainly in Lam Dong province with 175,531 people (accounting for 87.42%), followed by Binh Thuan province with 13,531 people, Khanh Hoa with 5,724 people, Ninh Thuan with 3,333 people (General Statistics Office of Vietnam [GSOV], 2020, 2023)

In Lam Dong province, K'Ho is one of three Indigenous ethnic groups, including K'Ho, Ma, and Chu Ru; they reside in all localities. The K'Ho ethnic group includes many local groups, of which the K'Ho Sre group has the most significant number, 103,682 people, accounting for 59.01% of the K'Ho population in Lam Dong province. (General Statistics Office of Vietnam [GSOV], 2020). Their living areas are concentrated in Di Linh, Duc Trong, Bao Lam, Lam Ha, and Don Duong, and Di Linh is the area with the largest population of K'Ho Sre ethnic people.

In recent years, the restructuring of agriculture has received significant attention from localities in Lam Dong province, and many new production models have been effectively planned and developed, including agricultural development models applying science, technology, and high technology. Accordingly, in ethnic minority areas in districts in the province, there has been a profound transformation in the development of the agricultural economy and livelihoods. The results of this transformation clearly show that the economy and life of the ethnic groups here have improved and developed significantly but are not yet sustainable, including the K'Ho Sre ethnic group. The objective of this study is to study the livelihood transformation of the K'Ho Sre people in Lam Dong, as well as the factors affecting that transformation process, in order to make recommendations to contribute to the sustainable development of livelihoods for the people.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the 1986 Renovation, the livelihoods of ethnic minorities in many regions across the country have gradually shifted from a self-sufficient agricultural production model to a large-scale and comprehensive production of farm commodities according to the market economy. Therefore, local authorities and people in

the regions invested material and spiritual resources to promote this transformation. The transformation enabled some areas and households to achieve new economic developments. However, some recent studies conducted in other minority regions, such as the minority areas in the Central Highlands, showed that the transition from a self-sufficient agricultural economy to a commercial agrarian production model also created many opposing economic, cultural, and social challenges for many communities. (Hoang, 2011). Beyond the scope of Vietnam, the unintended consequences of the transformation also occurred in many mountainous regions in other countries such as Indonesia (Li, 2000) or in the Alps of Europe (Perlik, 2019; Rudaz, 2019).

Livelihood, in its simplest sense, was “a way of making a living”; therefore, this term refers to the capabilities, assets, and activities needed to make a living (Chambers & Conway, 1992; Hoang Phe, 1997). The livelihoods of people around the world in pre-industrial times were very diverse, including hunting and gathering, extensive agriculture, intensive agriculture, and animal husbandry. These were the economic bases that formed the corresponding cultural and social characteristics of the ethnic groups. The forms of social organization based on these types of economies continued into modern times, and their interaction with the scientific advancements of the era became a popular research trend. Some studies on ethnic groups in Vietnam and the K’Ho ethnic group in particular provided a comprehensive picture of ethnic, racial, and ethnic origin issues in Vietnam. Baulch’s research team 2007 used data from the Vietnam Living Standards Survey and the 1999 Population Census to examine the disparities in living standards between and within different ethnic groups in Vietnam. The research showed that “Kinh and Hoa ‘majority’ households had significantly higher living standards than ‘minority’ households from 54 other ethnic groups in Vietnam. While the “Kinh, Hoa, Khmer, and Central Highland ethnic groups benefited from economic growth in the 1990s, the status of the Central Highland minority ethnic groups stagnated” (Baulch et al., 2007). Ethnic tourism was identified as a tool for poverty alleviation and the preservation of ethnic heritage in disadvantaged areas (Yang, 2016); when researching this issue, Nguyen et al (2024) provided insights into the challenges and opportunities for ethnic people in the Central region of Vietnam to transition their livelihoods. The socio-economic changes brought about by urbanization played an essential role in shaping cultural activities. As the community integrated more into the market economy, cultural practices adapted to reflect the new economic reality (Bouraiieu, 1984). For the peasant class in Vietnam, rural urbanization led to significant changes in the peasant class, including changes in economic life, cultural practices, and ideology (Anh et al., 2024). From 1986 to 2015, the farming activities of the K’Ho Sre people in Lam Dong province experienced positive changes compared to before, improving the living standards of households. However, the development in farming remained slow and unstable, with a high dependency on rice and coffee crops, and there was still a disparity in living standards compared to the Kinh people in the province (Phan, 2021)

Combining with the research works of several other authors, a comprehensive picture of the economic, cultural, and social conditions of the C’Ho people in Vietnam was revealed (Bui & Vu, 2003; Do & Quang, 2023; Ha & Thuy, 2019; Le, 2006; Quyet et al., 2023). From an ethnographic perspective, using in-depth research methods based on the analysis of field data and secondary documents, the authors above depicted a relatively comprehensive picture of the economic, social, and traditional cultural life of the K’Ho people, including aspects such as religious beliefs, art, childbirth, and weddings (Thuy, 2024; Thuy & Quyet, 2024). These valuable materials were analyzed and presented under the arguments of ethnographic researchers and scientists. However, studies addressing the livelihood changes of the K’Ho Sre people in Lam Dong were still quite limited. Therefore, this study was conducted to survey and investigate the current state of livelihood changes from traditional agricultural production models to agricultural production models applying scientific and high-tech methods and participating in other forms of livelihoods. From this, recommendations were proposed to contribute to poverty alleviation, economic development, and sustainable development for the indigenous people in general and the K’Ho Sre people in Lam Dong province.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Methods

**Research method:** The authors closely combined qualitative and quantitative research models. Specifically, they used grounded theory and survey methods to approach the research problem objectively and scientifically.

Additionally, the observation method was implemented to collect basic information and manifestations in the livelihood activities of the K'Ho Sre people. We conducted direct and indirect observations of the farming, livestock, and harvesting activities of the K'Ho Sre people in the Di Linh and Đức Trờng districts of Lam Dong province. Besides, the authors approached and examined the interdisciplinary research method from various theories and methods of many scientific fields, such as linguistics, folklore, geography, sociology, agriculture, and demographics.

***The theoretical research method:*** The authors synthesized and analyzed data from secondary sources, mainly collected from books, newspapers, scientific journals, etc., to inherit the necessary information for the article and thereby interpret and form a new theoretical basis (Barney and Anselm Strauss, 1967).

***Sampling method:*** Sampling was selected using two methods based on the research requirements: purposive sampling (judgment sampling) and convenience sampling. For purposive sampling, subjects suitable for the research scope of the study (households of the K'Ho Sre ethnic group in Lam Dong) had to be chosen. For convenience sampling, it was based on the convenience or, in other words, the accessibility of the research subjects. Convenience sampling was often used to explore and identify research issues without spending too much time and cost

***Sample size determination method:*** According to many researchers, the larger the sample size, the better (Nguyen, 2014). If the sample size was too small, it did not represent the population (Hoang & Chu, 2008). For this study, the author determined the sample size based on the table of Krejcie and Morgan's sample size distribution (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). Based on the collected data, 103,682 K'Ho Srê people lived in Lam Dong province. According to Krejcie and Morgan's sample size determination table, the required sample size was approximately 400.

***Survey method:*** After designing the questionnaire, it was piloted to check its suitability. Then, the authors conducted a focused survey on the livelihood transition of K'Ho Sre families in Lam Dong with 400 survey samples, including 200 samples in Bao Thuan commune, 150 samples in Di Linh town (Di Linh district), and 50 samples in Nthol Ha commune (Duc Trong district). Additionally, the authors conducted in-depth interviews to compare and contrast, presenting the livelihood transition of the K'Ho Sre people and the factors affecting the transition process.

## **Research Tools**

***Research tool:*** This study conducted a survey using questionnaires for K'Ho Sre households in Lam Dong to collect some objective information. The questionnaire was divided into general information and survey content to collect information using sociological research methods (Pham & Nguyen, 2011). The questions were designed to include multiple-choice questions, listing multiple-choice questions, and open-ended (qualitative) questions.

***The data analysis tools:*** Quantitative and qualitative data were coded and processed using Microsoft Excel 365 software.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

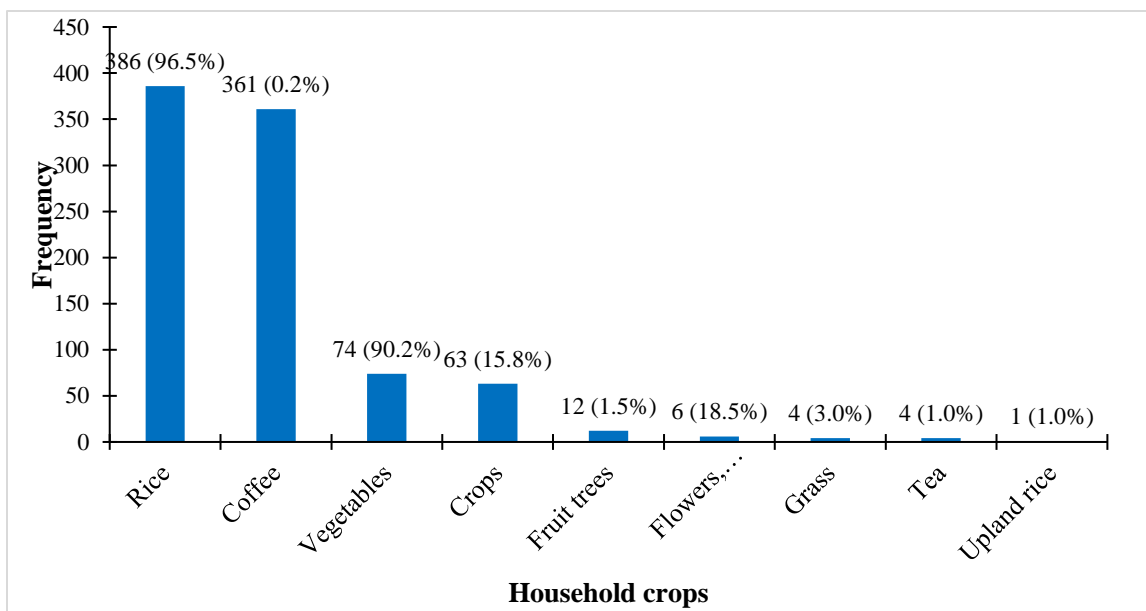
### **Livelihood Transformation of the K'Ho Sre Ethnic Group**

#### **Transformation in Agricultural Production**

##### *Crop Transformation*

Farming was a traditional production activity, holding a leading position in the economic life of the K'Ho Sre people. In farming, wet rice cultivation held an important position and was the primary food source. They also grew corn, pumpkins, potatoes, cassava, and various types of vegetables and beans. The survey results on livelihood changes in agricultural production (for crops) in Figure 2 showed that wet rice cultivation still held an important position among the crops. The K'Ho Sre people remained deeply dependent on rice (96.5%), and

the second most common crop in households was coffee (90.2%). From these results, it could be seen that the specialization in crop cultivation among the K'Ho Sre people was very high.



**Figure 2.** Main crops of the K'Ho Sre ethnic group

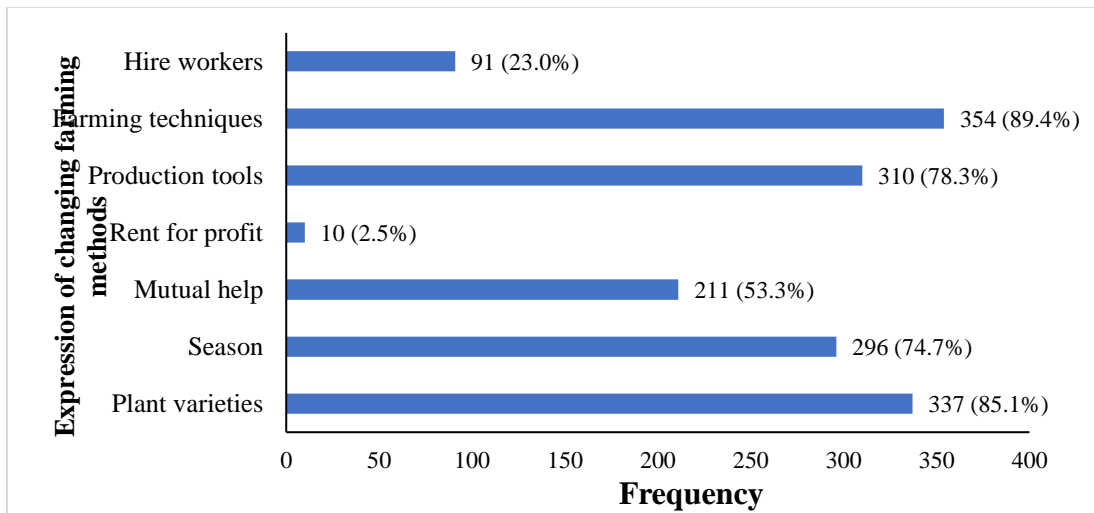
In the past, the K'Ho Sre people's fields were usually cultivated for only one season, typically from June to November, the rainy season in Lam Dong. The fields could be roughly divided into two types: wet fields and dry fields. Wet fields were areas along valleys with abundant water sources. Dry fields were areas on steep hillsides prone to drought. Due to the nature and geographical conditions of each type of field in each region, there were different characteristics, so the cultivation techniques also varied. For wet fields, if traditional rice varieties were sown in the past, yielding low productivity with one crop per year, they were replaced by new rice varieties suitable for the climate and soil, resistant to diseases, and yielding higher productivity with two crops per year. For dry fields, short-term crops such as corn, squash, sweet potatoes, cassava, vegetables, and beans were intercropped in the past. The traditional cultivation method was to poke holes and sow seeds. These have been replaced by long-term industrial crops such as pepper and coffee, with coffee being the main crop. In the 1990s, due to the high prices of coffee and pepper, the K'Ho Sre people in the fertile basalt land of Di Linh district, including the communes of Bao Thuan, Gung Re, Dinh Lac, and Di Linh town, expanded their cultivation areas and changed their crop structure, mainly focusing on coffee. Because of the suitable climate and soil, Duc Trong district became a specialized area for vegetables, flowers, and fruits in Lam Dong province, leading the K'Ho Sre people in the communes of N'Thol Ha, Hiep An, and Phu Hoi to switch to growing vegetables, fruits, and flowers on dry fields.

Income from growing crops such as coffee, vegetables, flowers, and fruits brought significant earnings, helping many K'Ho Sre households escape poverty and become well-off, and even some families became billionaires (Ndong Brùm, 2024; Ngoc Khanh, 2022; Thao Linh, 2023).

#### *Change in farming methods*

The traditional wet rice cultivation method for the K'Ho Sre people involved using buffaloes to plow the fields until the soil was finely tilled, then sowing the seeds. For dry fields, after harvesting for a period, they plowed the fields, harrowed them the first time, plowed again, harrowed a second time, leveled the land, and then sowed the seeds. The technical level was low in the traditional cultivation process, and the farming tools were rudimentary, such as wooden plows and harrows, using buffaloes for traction. According to the belief in worshipping the Rice God (*yang kòi*), the K'Ho Sre people did not use fertilizers or pesticides for fear of contaminating the rice god, relying mainly on the alluvial deposits brought by the rainy season. From sowing to harvesting, the care for the rice was minimal, resulting in low yields.

According to the survey results, nearly 99.0% of the respondents said that the cultivation methods had changed compared to traditional methods. The K'Ho Sre people in Lam Dong applied scientific and technical advances to production, resulting in higher yields (Phan, 2021). Various machines such as plows, harrows, combine harvesters, water pumps, pesticide sprayers, and coffee peelers were used, replacing manual labor (Figure 3). Families who could afford to buy these machines could rent them from dealers or families offering rental services in the area. The rental prices for these machines in 2024 were as follows: plowing machine rental at 100,000 VND per 1000m<sup>2</sup>, water pump rental at 300,000 VND per hour, and combined harvester rental at 200,000 VND per 1000m<sup>2</sup>.



**Figure 3.** Manifestations of changes in farming methods compared to tradition

Changes in production methods helped increase crop yields. According to surveys in the communes of Bao Thuan, Gung Re, Dinh Lac, and Di Linh town in Di Linh district; the communes of N'Thol Ha, Hiep An, and Phu Hoi in Duc Trong district, the average yield of 1 hectare of Robusta coffee, if invested according to standards: pruning, fertilizing, making basins, weeding, watering, spraying pesticides, etc., was about 3 to 3.5 tons/ha. Previously, when care techniques were not advanced, the yield was about 2 to 2.5 tons/ha. The yield of wet rice increased from about 2 tons/ha to 5-7 tons/ha.

In the Duc Trong district, some K'Ho Sre households switched to high-tech agricultural models for growing vegetables, flowers, and commercial tomatoes, such as greenhouses and mist irrigation. Growing clean vegetables according to VietGap (Vietnamese Good Agricultural Practices) standards brought high income (Minh, 2024).

#### *Transformation in livestock farming*

Supporting crop production activities was livestock and poultry farming. The K'Ho Sre people had been engaged in animal husbandry for a long time. In the past, when forests were abundant, and grasslands were readily available, life was relatively isolated between villages. Due to traditional culture, which used livestock for draught power, sacrificial offerings in rituals, and marriage dowries, animal husbandry was a regular and mandatory activity for each family.

Survey results on livelihood changes in animal husbandry in Figure 4 showed that the primary livestock of households was poultry (accounting for 81.8%), followed by livestock such as pigs and cattle, with nearly equal proportions (17.3% and 14.7%, respectively). Additionally, agricultural extension programs in Lam Dong province encouraged people to raise beef cattle (Sind) and dairy cows. However, the number of K'Ho Sre households raising beef and dairy cows was insignificant. In 400 surveyed samples, 11 households raised dairy cows, mainly concentrated in Sre Dang village (N'Thol Ha, Duc Trong), but on a small scale, with each household having about 2-3 cows.

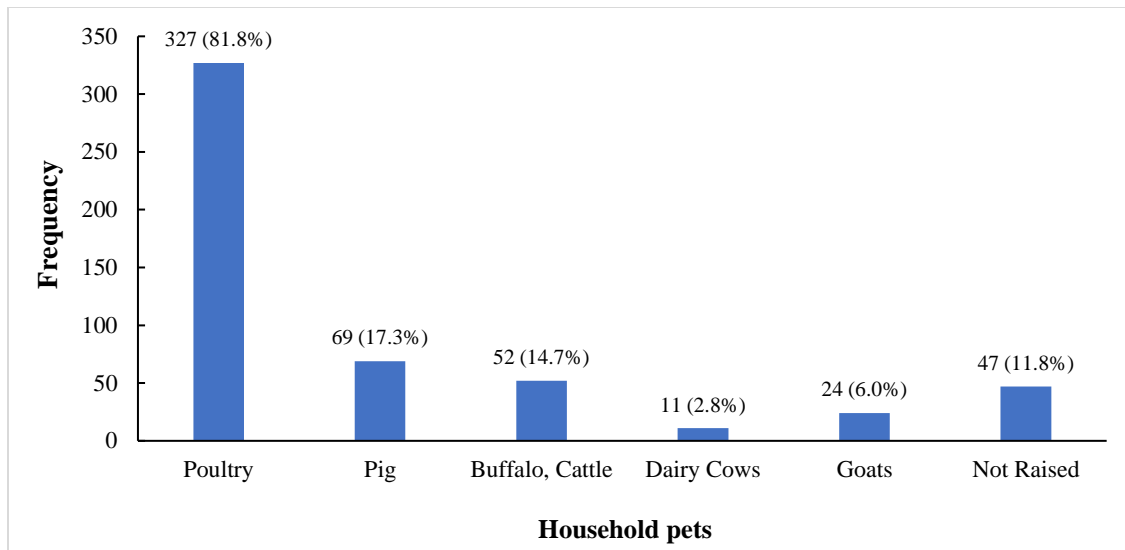


Figure 4. Types of pets in the family of the K’Ho Sre people in Lam Dong province

The buffalo was a characteristic livestock of the K’Ho Sre people, and most families raised buffaloes. The buffalo was considered one of the most valuable assets and had an essential role in economic life. Buffaloes were used as a medium of exchange for buying and trading. The number of buffaloes in each household and village reflected the family’s wealth and the village’s status. After buffaloes, the second most crucial livestock was pigs. Pigs were commonly raised in every family. Each household raised from three to ten pigs. Pigs were kept in pens, released in the morning to forage, and penned up again in the evening. Like buffaloes, pigs were mainly used for family or community sacrifices. Additionally, pigs were used for trading purposes. Besides buffaloes and pigs, the K’Ho Sre people raised goats, and a few wealthy families raised horses. Goats were also used for sacrifices and sale to the gods. Horses were used as a means of transport for long-distance trading trips with neighboring ethnic groups. Additionally, the K’Ho Sre people raised various types of poultry, such as chickens, ducks, geese, and turkeys. Chickens were raised for sacrifices, and their eggs were given as gifts, rarely sold or traded.

It can be said that animal husbandry among the K’Ho Sre people was emphasized very early. The primary method of raising livestock was free-range. The purpose of animal husbandry was to satisfy spiritual needs such as agricultural draught power, sacrifices, funerals, and weddings and to exchange for expensive items like gongs, jars, and jewelry rather than to improve meals or become commercial products (Figure 5).

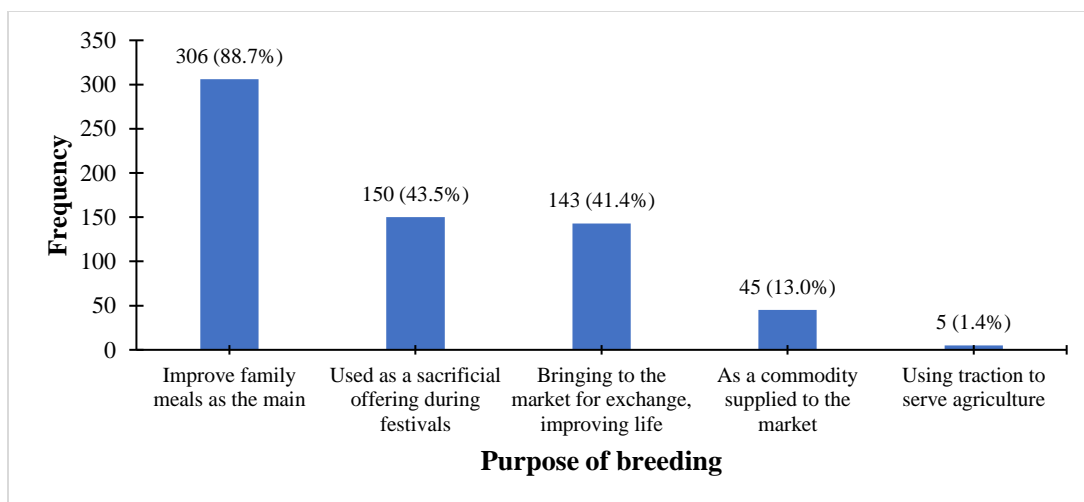


Figure 5. The main purpose of livestock farming of K’Ho ethnic households in Lam Dong



Nowadays, the K'Ho Sre people still maintain livestock farming, but it was small-scale and underdeveloped. However, it also contributed to household income, as every family raised livestock and poultry. The purpose of raising them was to sell and to improve meals. According to Mrs. Ka Dem, in the Di Linh Thuong 2 neighborhood, Di Linh town, Di Linh district, the selling price of a mature female buffalo was 26 million VND, and a male buffalo was 35 million VND. However, buffalo farming in the villages declined due to the lack of grazing fields and the reduced need for draught power or sacrifices. For instance, in Bao Thuan, in 2005, the K'Ho Sre people had 912 buffaloes; in 2010, only 517; in 2015, there were 505; and in 2020, there were 400.

### Changes in other Economic Activities

According to the survey results on the primary sources of income for K'Ho Sre households, 303 out of 400 households stated that 'industrial crop cultivation (coffee)' was the primary source of income, accounting for 75.8%. Next was 'rice cultivation,' accounting for 11.0%, and other forms such as workers, hired labor, public servants, and handicrafts accounted for less than 5.0% (Figure 6).

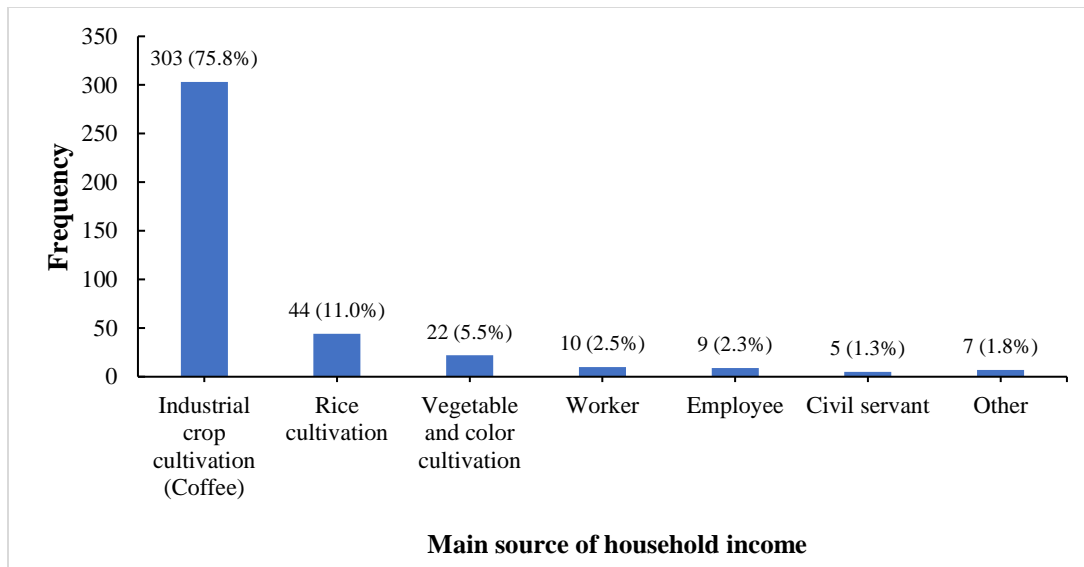


Figure 6. Main source of income of K'Ho Sre ethnic households in Lam Dong province

To explain this result, several conditions related to natural and social factors could be mentioned. The form of industrial crop cultivation (coffee) occupied a high proportion because the coffee industry in the Central Highlands attracted local labor and drew additional labor from other regions across the country, forming an abundant labor force. Moreover, the Central Highlands area soil had more than 80% red basalt soil with fertile and loose characteristics, which was very suitable for developing industrial crops, especially coffee. Also, due to the favorable soil characteristics, growers reduced costs for buying fertilizers or watering the coffee plants. This result was also found in the research of several authors on the changes in the economic activities of the K'Ho people in Lam Dong from 1986 to the present (Le & Mai, 2017; Phan, 2021)

*For the transition in hunting and gathering activities:* Combined with the production economy, hunting and gathering were regular activities in the life of the K'Ho Sre people. They were not only a source of profit and food supply but also a pastime for the male members of the village. However, forest products significantly decreased in the K'Ho Sre's residential area, so hunting and gathering activities were less frequent and widespread. Some K'Ho Sre households contracted to plant and protect forests according to the state's forest environmental protection service payment policy, which brought considerable income and improved people's lives. According to survey results in the research areas, many households took care of and protected forests with an area of 20 to 30 hectares, earning about 9,000,000 to 10,000,000 VND annually.

*For the transition in handicrafts:* The K'Ho Sre people were well-known for handicrafts such as weaving, blacksmithing, and brewing rice wine. These handicrafts contained many unique cultural features, enriching the



distinct cultural identity of the K'Ho Sre people. Until now, these handicrafts still existed, but over time, with the advancement of science and technology, when new material items with beautiful designs and convenience emerged, traditional handicraft products lost their competitiveness. This was also why the traditional handicrafts of the K'Ho Sre people gradually declined, and without preservation measures, some crafts risked disappearing (including blacksmithing and brewing rice wine).

*For the exchange and trade activities:* The economy in the traditional society of the K'Ho Sre people was self-sufficient, and the products they made were mainly for consumption. Besides using their products within the community, the K'Ho Sre people also exchanged them with neighboring ethnic groups, such as the Ma and Chu Ru, in various regions to obtain other products. Weaving and pottery did not exist in the K'Ho Sre community, so they traded goods with the Cham people in Ninh Thuan and Binh Thuan. The goods they brought for exchange included forest products and domesticated pigs, which they traded for skirts, shirts, blankets, pottery, salt, and dried fish. Each trip usually lasted about two weeks, and they made such trips once every one to two years. On each trip, they carried forest products and 30 to 40 pigs.

With rapid economic development, the conditions for purchasing services have become more convenient. Many K'Ho Sre families participated in selling plant/animal breeds agricultural services like pesticides and fertilizers and renting agrarian tools. Many households also opened grocery stores and formed markets selling agricultural products and goods from hunting and gathering.

### **Some Other Forms of Livelihood Besides the Traditional Form**

#### *Working for hire*

In the past, the K'Ho Sre people only engaged in mutual labor exchange, helping each other in production and house building. However, nowadays, working for hire has become an essential economic activity for a portion of the K'Ho Sre people, bringing in significant income. According to our survey in the research areas, everyday hired activities of the K'Ho Sre people included planting trees, fertilizing, weeding, digging beds, spraying pesticides, and harvesting coffee and other agricultural products for coffee plantations, vegetable farms, and fruit orchards owned by the Kinh people, different ethnic groups, and the K'Ho Sre people themselves in the area. Currently, 278 out of 400 households maintain an income from hired labor. The working hours were about 8 hours per day, with daily wages ranging from 300,000 VND to 400,000 VND, depending on the nature of the work. Additionally, some K'Ho Sre people worked as officials and employees, and some, mainly young people, went to work far away in Da Lat City and Ho Chi Minh City, taking on jobs as manual laborers and workers in companies, earning about 7,000,000 VND to 8,000,000 VND per month. From these results, it can be seen that hired labor brought significant income to families lacking production land, helping them secure stable employment and remarkably increasing income for individuals and households during the off-season

#### *Converting livelihood to tourism*

Lam Dong province, in general, and Da Lat City, in particular, was a famous tourist destination in the country, with various types of tourism, such as ecological, experiential, and cultural identity exploration (gongs, cuisine, handicrafts of ethnic groups, etc.). In Lam Dong, there were tourist areas that attracted many visitors, such as Dream Hill, Valley of Love (Da Lat city), Pongour waterfall tourist area (Duc Trong district), Langbian Mountain (Lac Duong district), etc. According to our research, many K'Ho Sre people also participated in the art teams of these tourist areas. Their job was to play gongs, dance, sing, etc., to serve tourists, and they had a stable income from 8,000,000 VND to 10,000,000 VND per month. Significantly, when Da Lat entered the peak tourist season (from December to July of the following year), their income increased because they served many tourist groups.

### **Factors affecting livelihood transformation of the K'Ho Sre people**

#### **Influencing factors**

Many factors, such as state policies, cohabitation among ethnic groups, and the increasing level of education, influenced the livelihood transformation of the K'Ho Sre people in Lam Dong province.

*State Policies*

After the country's reunification (April 30, 1975), the Vietnamese government introduced the migration program to build new economic zones and fixed cultivation and settlement programs. These were two crucial programs and were considered the main factors that comprehensively transformed the traditional socio-economic aspects of the people in the Central Highlands, especially in economic production. As a result of these programs, the population in the Central Highlands in general and Lam Dong in particular increased rapidly from two sources: planned migration and unrestricted migration from various regions in Vietnam. Many administrative units were established and became political, socio-economic, and cultural centers for the ethnic groups in the region. Since 1986, the Vietnamese government has transitioned from a planned economy to a market mechanism. The provincial government reorganized production in the minority ethnic areas, leveraging natural and social conditions, or in other words, promoting the strengths of each locality, which boosted economic development. The 6th National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam (December 1986) clearly stated, "Implement the Party's ethnic policy well. Increase investment and have specific policies on socio-economic aspects to promote the capabilities of the mountainous areas in building the economy, culture, and taking care of the lives of ethnic minorities." (Communist Party of Vietnam [CPV], 1987). This spirit was concretized by Resolution No. 22/NQ-TW in 1989 of the Politburo on some significant policies for socio-economic development in mountainous areas. It affirmed the importance of socio-economic development for the mountainous region (Vietnam Politburo, 1989)

It could be said that the migration and the transition of the economy from a planned economy to a market mechanism had significant impacts on the economic situation of Lam Dong province. The traditional wet and dry rice cultivation practices of the indigenous ethnic minorities in Lam Dong were gradually disrupted, and in their place, many specialized industrial crop areas were formed, such as Duc Trong and Di Linh, which specialized in coffee, flowers, vegetables, and fruits.

*Cohabitation among Ethnic Groups*

Due to the state's migration policy, there was cohabitation of many ethnic groups in one village, leading to diverse economic development methods. This interaction and mutual learning helped them develop together. This was also a natural process of bringing ethnic groups closer together. Specifically, the K'Ho Sre people learned to interact and exchange with the Kinh and other ethnic groups, using new crop varieties, applying scientific and technical knowledge to production, calculating in business, practicing intensive farming, and intercropping on a piece of land, growing industrial crops such as coffee, fruit trees, vegetables, and flowers.

*The level of education gradually increased*

The K'Ho Sre people previously had a low level of education, and children rarely went to school, but now, all villages had schools, and illiteracy was eliminated. Currently, in the K'Ho Sre people, many have graduated from postgraduate, university, college, and high school; some have been studying at colleges and universities. This was a high-quality labor force to absorb scientific and technical advances, apply them to production, and contribute to developing all aspects of this ethnic community.

**Some Urgent Issues**

Through research, we realized that the livelihood transformation of the K'Ho Sre people moved positively; their lives gradually stabilized and developed. However, to achieve sustainable development, it was necessary to address the following urgent issues:

*Lack of production land*

Currently, some K'Ho Sre households still lack production land. According to our understanding, the state previously resolved the issue of cultivating land for indigenous ethnic minorities, ensuring everyone had land to produce. However, due to difficult circumstances such as illness, disease, funeral costs, and weddings, according to the traditional culture of the ethnic group, many families had to sell land to the Kinh people

illegally. Due to the lack of production land, they faced difficulties in their livelihoods, leading to deforestation for farming.

*Unstable product output, fluctuating prices, and many risks*

Coffee, pepper, vegetables, flowers, and fruits have recently increased household income. However, in recent years, the output prices for coffee and pepper were meager, not even covering investment costs (the current price in 2024 in Lam Dong is 135,000 VND/kg for coffee and 160,000 VND/kg for pepper). The prices of vegetables, flowers, and fruits were unstable, entirely dependent on significant market prices such as in Ho Chi Minh City and the South Central Coast provinces. There were many instances of “bumper crops leading to low prices, poor crops leading to high prices,” and many households abandoned harvesting products like tomatoes, cabbage, mustard greens, and gladiolus flowers because the harvesting cost was higher than the selling price. For this issue, the state needed specific policies to support prices for ethnic minorities.

*The production technology level was still low, and high technology had not been widely applied in cultivation and livestock*

The general picture of cultivation and livestock among the K’Ho Sre people was that the workforce quality was still low. They only worked based on experience and mutual exchange rather than formal training, resulting in low productivity of livestock and crops. Therefore, it was necessary to improve the quality of human resources, focusing on enhancing educational levels and vocational training for K’Ho Sre youth.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The livelihoods of the K’Ho Sre people in Lam Dong province shifted from a subsistence economy to a market-oriented economy. Currently, agricultural production and other livelihood activities were the main economic activity. Besides rice being the primary food crop to ensure food security, the K’Ho Sre people also grew other crops such as coffee, pepper, vegetables, flowers, tubers, and fruits to supply the market. These were the primary sources of income to help households reinvest, develop production, and support family living. Livestock farming among the K’Ho Sre was still limited but also contributed to the family income. Other forms of livelihood also brought stable income, contributing to poverty reduction. Although there were changes in livelihood activities, these activities still faced many difficulties such as (1) lack of production land; (2) Unstable product outputs, fluctuating prices, and many risks; (3) Low production technology level and high technology had not been widely applied in cultivation and livestock. This required local authorities and people to objectively recognize these difficulties and propose applicable solutions to ensure the livelihood transition of the K’Ho Sre people in Lam Dong province.

From the above research results, the authors recommended conducting further in-depth studies on the purposes leading to difficulties in livelihood transition and expanding the research area beyond Lam Dong to have a more objective view of this issue.

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