

# 6

## Adopting the product contract system and the continuation of land reform and collectivisation, 1981–88

### Introduction

Starting in 1981, product contracts—officially called ‘The Product Contract to Groups of Workers and Individual Workers’ (*Khoán sản phẩm đến nhóm và người lao động*)—became the backbone of collective organisations in Vietnam.<sup>1</sup> According to Đặng Phong, the product contract directive was issued by the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) (Ban Bí Thư) rather than the Politburo (Bộ Chính Trị) because there were still some differences about this issue among members of the Politburo. The VCP Secretariat believed the product contract system was not a departure from collective farming, but rather an improvement to it. Under the VCP’s Directive No. 100 (issued on 13 January 1981), collective organisations were asked to continue perfecting the existing system by more strictly applying the rules for reward and punishment at the brigade level.<sup>2</sup>

---

1 BCHTU, Directive on improving the contracting of products.

2 Đặng Phong, *The Economics of Vietnam*, p. 224.

At the same time, VCP leaders acknowledged the failure of socialist transformation in the previous five years. Persistent in their task of building socialism in the south, party leaders emphasised the continuation of the push for socialist large-scale production and considered collectivisation and agricultural development top priorities for the next socioeconomic five-year plan, 1981–85.<sup>3</sup> The fifth party congress in 1982 also officially changed the target for completing collectivisation in the Southern Region (which includes the Mekong Delta and the South-East Region) from the end of the 1976–80 five-year plan to the end of the 1981–85 five-year plan.

From 1981, the Southern Region had intensified both collectivisation and land redistribution, which encountered weaker resistance from peasants under the product contract system. However, policy implementation fluctuated periodically and largely depended on the VCP's campaigns and directives. With continuous pressure from the VCP, local authorities in the Southern Region were able to complete basic collectivisation by the mid-1980s, although many collectives fell short of expectations. By February 1985, An Giang province was halfway towards completing collectivisation. To achieve full collectivisation in time to coincide with the tenth anniversary of Vietnam's reunification, provincial leaders pushed even harder and, by the end of May 1985, 80 per cent of agricultural land had been collectivised—a minimum index for basic collectivisation.<sup>4</sup>

This chapter will discuss how local authorities in QN-ĐN and An Giang adopted and extended the product contract system and how peasants and local cadres responded to it. It also examines how and why VCP leaders persistently pressed authorities in the Southern Region to achieve socialist agricultural transformation and how those local authorities, especially in An Giang, coped with obstacles to their efforts to complete the VCP's collectivisation goals.

3 Vo Nhan Tri, *Vietnam's Economic Policy Since 1975*, p. 126.

4 Đưa phong trào hợp tác hóa của tỉnh nhà lên vững chắc [Advancing collectivisation firmly], *An Giang*, 7 June 1985, p. 1.

## Adopting product contracts

### Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng (QN-ĐN), in the Central Coast region

Soon after Directive No. 100 was issued, QN-ĐN leaders held meetings to discuss product contracts and prepare their own directive to guide local authorities. The directive urged each district in QN-ĐN to select one collective in which to experiment with product contracts on paddy fields. To avoid any deviation, it warned that the product contract policy was not intended to redistribute collective land to be farmed individually nor to make a ‘blank or full contract’ (*khoán trắng*) allowing peasants to undertake all phases of farming. The directive also outlined five principles with which local authorities had to conform in implementing the policy. First, each collective was required to manage and control the collectivised means of production (land, farm tools, draught animals, fertilisers, and so on); no collective was allowed to return the collectivised means of production to members. Second, the collective was required to manage and monitor labour. Third, the collective had to make a production plan based on the district plan. Fourth, the collective had to control the end product and distribute it in an equitable and appropriate way. Finally, the collective had to facilitate members’ collective mastery of management and production.<sup>5</sup>

According to a *Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng* newspaper account, by May 1981, 15 collectives had experimented with product contracts. The performance of these collectives reportedly improved significantly. Collective members’ responsibility for tending paddy fields had been enhanced in an ‘unprecedented way’, and ‘everyone was daily and nightly concerned about how to exceed the quota.’<sup>6</sup> The report said peasants usually worked on their contracted rice fields—even on 30 (lunar) December, an important day of the *Tết* holiday (Vietnam’s New Year festival) and one day before the New Year. Collectives had cultivated their fields fully and on time, prepared the land properly, transplanted

5 Bàn về công tác khoán sản phẩm cuối cùng đến người lao động trong sản xuất nông nghiệp [Discussing the assignment of final products to labourers in agricultural production], *Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng*, 18 March 1981, p. 1.

6 Qua các hợp tác xã làm thử việc khoán sản phẩm cuối cùng đến người lao động [An evaluation of the performance of collectives adopting the product contract], *Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng*, 23 May 1981, p. 1.

paddy according to the right techniques, weeded assiduously and so on. The paper reported that members had improved agricultural intensification on contracted fields and had used manure of a higher quality than previously. Many bought extra chemical fertilisers to supplement their contracted paddy fields, and staple food production, labour productivity and yield had increased substantially.<sup>7</sup>

Excited with the good performance of collectives in adopting product contracts, in early July 1981, QN-ĐN chairman Phạm Đức Nam called for an intensification of the contract system. He said the product contract was correct policy that met collective members' aspirations and needs and helped enhance further collectives' economic performance. As well as contributing to a 40 per cent increase in paddy productivity, he argued, the product contract system had helped strengthen collective organisations, especially those that had been close to collapsing. In addition, product contracts helped improve collective management and the fight against negativism—rather than reviving peasants' consciousness of individual farming, as some critics had worried.<sup>8</sup>

On the back of these good results, in August 1981, QN-ĐN leaders called for an expansion of the use of contracts to secondary crops. They urged collectives to take back secondary-crop land, which had been temporarily lent to peasants.<sup>9</sup>

By the end of July 1981, 165 of the 241 collectives in QN-ĐN had adopted the product contract system; in Đại Lộc and Hòa Vang districts, all collectives implemented the policy. By the end of the winter–spring of 1981–82, all collectives in QN-ĐN had completed the adoption of product contracts.<sup>10</sup>

7 Ibid., p. 1.

8 Phạm Đức Nam: Tích cực thực hiện khoán sản phẩm cuối cùng đến người lao động trong nông nghiệp [Phạm Đức Nam: Be positive in implementing the product contract], *Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng*, 1 July 1981, p. 1.

9 Khoán sản phẩm trên đất màu để làm vụ Đông–Xuân tốt nhất [Making contracts on secondary-crop land for the best winter–spring crop], *Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng*, 15 August 1981, p. 1.

10 Tổng kết 3 năm thực hiện khoán sản phẩm đến người lao động trong nông nghiệp (1981–1984) [Summary of three years of implementing the product contract (1981–1984)], *Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng*, 6 July 1985, p. 1.

In Thăng Bình district, the implementation of product contracts was also rapid. By October 1981, all collectives in the district had adopted the system.<sup>11</sup> Villagers in Hiền Lộc recalled that Bình Lãnh collective adopted product contracts in 1981. Under these contracts, peasants were in charge of three phrases (*ba khâu*) of production—ploughing and harrowing, planting and tending, and harvesting—which differed somewhat from the national policy. The collective teams supplied seedlings, applied fertilisers, irrigated the fields, controlled and prevented diseases and monitored distribution after the harvest.<sup>12</sup>

The implementation of product contracts in many other provinces of the Central Coast and Central Highlands was also swift. In the winter–spring of 1980–81, 341 of 1,101 collectives in the Central Coast and 105 of 285 collectives in the Central Highlands began to experiment with the system.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, by July 1981, 53.8 per cent of collectives in these regions had adopted product contracts. At a conference on collectives in the Central Coast and Central Highlands in July 1981, party researchers claimed the product contract policy met the aspirations of people and local cadres and had significantly contributed to increased productivity in the collectives. Local ‘negative practices’ had also been significantly reduced. At the conference, Nguyễn Ngọc Trìu, a central government agriculture minister, also asserted that product contracts played an important role in strengthening collectives and facilitating agricultural production. He called for the completion of the adoption of product contracts in these two regions by the winter–spring of 1981–82.<sup>14</sup> Within one year, almost all collectives in the Central Coast had implemented product contracts.

Product contracts immediately enhanced the performance of collective farming and boosted agricultural output in QN-ĐN.<sup>15</sup> To illustrate these improvements, the *Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng* newspaper

11 Các hợp tác xã ở Tam Kỳ, Thăng Bình, Tiên Phước căn bản hoàn thành khoán sản phẩm vụ Đông–Xuân [Collectives in Tam Kỳ, Thăng Bình and Tiên Phước have completed the adoption of the product contract in the winter–spring crop], *Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng*, 28 October 1981, p. 1.

12 Author’s interview, 19 October 2005, Hiền Lộc.

13 Ban Quản Lý Hợp Tác Xã Nông Nghiệp Trung Ương [hereinafter Ban Quản Lý HTX NN TU] (1982), *Khoản sản phẩm trong hợp tác xã và tập đoàn sản xuất nông nghiệp* [The Product Contract in Collectives and Production Units], Hà Nội: NXB Sự Thật, p. 65.

14 Hội nghị khoán sản phẩm trong hợp tác xã nông nghiệp ven biển Trung Trung Bộ và các tỉnh Tây Nguyên [A conference on the product contract in the Central Coast and Central Highlands collectives], *Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng*, 8 July 1981, p. 1.

15 Phạm Đức Nam: Phát huy thắng lợi bước đầu mở rộng khoán sản phẩm cuối cùng ở tất cả hợp tác xã nông nghiệp cả tỉnh [Phạm Đức Nam: Extending the product contract to the rest of the collectives], *Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng*, 23 September 1981, p. 11.

in 1981 printed several articles praising the positive effects of product contracts. Among these was a letter from a peasant that criticised old farming arrangements and praised the new product contract system in his village. He wrote that, previously, under the work-points system, villagers merely pretended to work. When ploughing, people did one line and skipped another. When carrying manure to the fields, they dropped a lot along the road. They did not take care of collective production but concentrated on accumulating as many work-points as possible. But now, under the product contract system, everyone took care of their contracted fields. They ploughed their land properly. They transplanted and spread fertilisers and manure according to the right techniques, and many had increased their use of fertilisers and manure—all of which showed that villagers wanted to produce beyond their quota.<sup>16</sup>

*Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng* also reported several typical cases of collectives whose performance was significantly improved thanks to the adoption of product contracts, one of which was Tam Ngọc collective in Tam Kỳ district. Its performance during the work-points system had been very poor; in the spring–summer of 1980, the average productivity of paddy was 1.1 tonnes per hectare, meaning the collective was unable to fulfil its food obligation to the state, owing 8 tonnes of paddy. In the spring–summer of 1981, collective leaders adopted product contracts and set a quota of 1.2 tonnes per hectare. Thanks to the contracts, paddy productivity increased to 2 tonnes per hectare, exceeding the quota by 0.8 tonnes per hectare. As a result, the collective members' income increased, and the collective was able to repay its previous debt and also fulfil its state obligation of 42 tonnes of paddy. The main reason for the increase in paddy productivity, the article argued, was the product contract system, which encouraged members to care for their contracted fields more than ever before.<sup>17</sup>

In general, *Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng* accounts showed that, under the product contract system, the performance of collective farming in the province had significantly improved. In 1981, for the first time since reunification, the province had produced nearly 500,000 tonnes

16 Thư xã viên: Cách khoán mới ở quê tôi [Member's letter: New method of contracts in my village], *Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng*, 4 July 1981, p. 3.

17 Một vài cách vận dụng khoán sản phẩm cuối cùng về cây lúa ở hợp tác xã Tam Ngọc [Application of the product contract for rice fields in Tam Ngọc collectives], *Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng*, 12 September 1981, p. 2.

of staple food, which was close to the province's own consumption.<sup>18</sup> Staple food production in 1982 reached 525,000 tonnes of paddy equivalent, while staple food per capita increased from 303 kilograms in 1979 to 342 kilograms in 1982.<sup>19</sup> Kerkvliet's study of the northern collectives showed similar improvements; thanks to product contracts, staple food production in the north in 1981 and 1982 averaged a 24 per cent increase over 1980.<sup>20</sup>

Table 6.1 Rice production in QN-ĐN, 1979–82

Year	Area (hectares)	Yield (tonnes)	Annual growth of yield (%)
1979	124,739	319,917	
1980	123,329	310,742	-2.87
1981	122,734	332,211	6.91
1982	123,575	347,572	4.62

Source: Diễn biến sản lượng lúa cả tỉnh qua các năm [Paddy production over the past years], *Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng*, 14 September 1983, p. 1.

A few seasons after adopting product contracts, however, collective farming in QN-ĐN started to falter. Although the province's leaders made great efforts to strengthen them, collectives became weaker. Staple food production in QN-ĐN stagnated, especially during 1985–88, and the living conditions of collective members deteriorated. Villagers in Thanh Yên and Hiền Lộc recalled that the product contracts improved the performance of collective farming in the first few seasons, but their living conditions then deteriorated because they were unable to produce beyond the quota—a serious problem that is discussed in the next chapter.<sup>21</sup>

18 Mặt trận sản xuất nông nghiệp: Thành tựu của năm 1981 và nhiệm vụ vụ Đông–Xuân 1981–1982 [Agricultural production: The achievements of 1981 and the ongoing tasks for winter–spring 1981–1982], *Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng*, 28 October 1981, p. 1; Tổng kết sản xuất nông nghiệp năm 1981 và phát động thi đua giành vụ Đông–Xuân 1981–1982 thắng lợi toàn diện, vượt bậc [Summing up agricultural production in 1981 and calling for high achievements in the winter–spring of 1981–1982], *Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng*, 4 November 1981, p. 1.

19 Diễn biến sản lượng lúa cả tỉnh qua các năm [Paddy production over the past years], *Quảng Nam-Đà Nẵng*, 14 September 1983, p. 1.

20 Kerkvliet, *The Power of Everyday Politics*, p. 194.

21 Author's interviews, October 2004; October–December 2005, Hiền Lộc and Thanh Yên.

## An Giang, in the Mekong Delta

### Adopting the product contract system

The Southern Region began to experiment with product contracts in the summer–autumn of 1981—a season later than their counterparts in the Central Coast.<sup>22</sup> In mid-1981, An Giang's leaders called for trials of product contracts in the two production units in Bình Phú commune in Châu Thành district.<sup>23</sup> However, by the winter–spring of 1981–82, 180 of 394 production units and five of six collectives in the province had adopted the contracts.<sup>24</sup>

Like their counterparts in QN-ĐN, production units in An Giang found the adoption of product contracts improved their collective farming performance. Members of production units and collectives were 'enthusiastic' about the new contract system because of their increased income.<sup>25</sup> Some members who had previously doubted collective farming now had confidence in it and 'actively worked the contracted fields'. Many members 'spontaneously dug channels to ensure sufficient water for their paddy fields and overcame the fertiliser shortage by using manure or extra compost bought from the free market'.<sup>26</sup> Some collective members who had been fed up with the work-points system and had dropped out now returned to receive contracted fields. As one man in production unit no. 3 in Tây Khánh B hamlet (Long Xuyên) commented:

I had previously neglected collective farming and left because I saw people mistrusting each other on every task [*nghịch hợ nhau*]. I, a primary labourer, tried to work hard while other households sent their young children to work for form's sake. Now, under product contracts, I will not neglect farming any more.<sup>27</sup>

22 Ban Quản Lý HTX NN TU, *The Product Contract in Collectives and Production Units*, p. 65.

23 Collectivisation in An Giang has progressed, *An Giang*, 18 November 1981, p. 1; Xã luận: Ra sức phấn đấu đưa phong trào cải tạo xã hội chủ nghĩa đối với nông nghiệp ở tỉnh ta tiến lên một bước mới [The editorial: Do the best to take collectivisation in An Giang one step forwards], *An Giang*, 18 November 1981, p. 11.

24 Ban Nông Nghiệp Tỉnh Ủy An Giang: Thắng lợi của việc khoán sản phẩm trong nông nghiệp ở tỉnh nhà [An Giang Provincial Committee of Agriculture: The victory of the product contract in the province], *An Giang*, 4 July 1982, p. 3; Kết quả tốt đẹp của khoán sản phẩm trong nông nghiệp [The product contract brings about good results], *An Giang*, 23 May 1982, p. 1.

25 Phần khởi với cách khoán mới [Enthusiasm with the product contract], *An Giang*, 14 March 1982, p. 2.

26 Vụ lúa khoán đầu tiên ở thị xã Long Xuyên [The first contracted rice crop in Long Xuyên town], *An Giang*, 14 March 1982, p. 1.

27 Cited in The results of contracted rice crops, *An Giang*, 19 April 1982, p. 3.

According to *An Giang* newspaper accounts, product contracts achieved the following results: first, food production increased, mainly because the new contracts made peasants 'enthusiastic and eager to work' (*tự giác lao động*). Paddy productivity in collective farming increased, from 2–3 tonnes per hectare in the winter–spring of 1980–81 to 4–4.5 tonnes per hectare in the winter–spring of 1981–82. For example, in Chợ Mới district, paddy productivity increased from 2.5–3 tonnes per hectare to 6–8 tonnes in the winter–spring of 1981–82.

Second, the living conditions and income of collective members increased accordingly. The amount of paddy that each hectare of rice produced beyond the quota ranged from 300 kilograms to 1.5 tonnes. In Chợ Mới district, the amount exceeding the quota per hectare increased from 1 tonne to 2 tonnes, and the value of work-points increased from 1.2–5 kilograms of paddy to 10 kilograms of paddy in the winter–spring of 1981–82.

Finally, product contracts helped improve and strengthen collective farming in production units and collectives. Land, inputs and labour were better used and incidents of land being abandoned, laziness, foot-dragging, dropping out and embezzlement had been significantly reduced. Many production units and collectives had fulfilled two-way exchange contracts (*hợp đồng hai chiều*) with the state, paying irrigation fees and old debts, while food procurement (mobilisation) and sales (*huy động lương thực*) to the state increased to the amount of 1.2–2 tonnes per hectare.<sup>28</sup>

Satisfied with these achievements, provincial leaders urged the expansion of the product contract system. By the winter–spring of 1982–83, 896 production units (86 per cent of the total) and six collectives (100 per cent) in An Giang had adopted product contracts.<sup>29</sup> In Chợ Mới district, the adoption of product contracts was also rapid.

28 Khoản sản phẩm cuối cùng đến người lao động, một hình thức thích hợp mang lại nhiều kết quả to lớn [The product contract is suitable and brings about good results], *An Giang*, 30 May 1982, p. 1; The product contract brings about good results, *An Giang*, 23 May 1982, p. 1; An Giang Provincial Committee of Agriculture, *An Giang*, 4 July 1982, p. 3.

29 Các tập đoàn sản xuất, hợp tác xã tiến vào vụ Đông–Xuân 1982–1983 với nhiều khí thế mới [Production units and collectives entered into the winter–spring of 1982–1983 with new enthusiasm], *An Giang*, 2 January 1983, p. 1.

By the winter–spring of 1981–82, 39 of 40 production units were using the system. The four production units in Long Điền B took up product contracts in the winter–spring of 1981–82.<sup>30</sup>

Villagers there recalled that, in order to take up these contracts, collectivised land in the four production units had to be randomly (*bóc thăm*) divided among each household's primary worker. Each primary worker received 1 *công* (1,000 sq m) of contracted land and a subsidiary worker received 0.5 *công* (500 sq m).<sup>31</sup> In May 1982, *An Giang* newspaper reported that, in the winter–spring of 1981–82, the production units in Long Điền B in Chợ Mới district had all produced a bumper harvest; the average productivity of paddy was 6 tonnes per hectare. Explaining the increased performance, the article quoted one peasant, who said:

Frankly speaking, under product contracts, every member took care of the paddy fields, so every member had a bumper harvest. I had never seen abundant harvests like these since the beginning of production units!<sup>32</sup>

A former cadre of production unit no. 1 said product contracts had saved some units from collapse and facilitated collectivisation in the Southern Region. The main reason was peasants' resistance to collective farming under product contracts was weaker than it had been under the work-points system.<sup>33</sup> However, like their counterparts in QN-ĐN, in An Giang, a few seasons later, collective farming began to flounder and became a site of struggle between the state, cadres and peasants over land, labour and other resources.

### The second wave of collectivisation under product contracts

At the fifth party congress in March 1982, VCP leaders acknowledged the failure of socialist transformation in the previous five years and outlined a new socioeconomic five-year plan for 1981–85.<sup>34</sup> After this, the Southern Region intensified both collectivisation and land redistribution.<sup>35</sup>

30 Huyện Chợ Mới áp dụng khoán sản phẩm có kết quả [The product contract in Chợ Mới brings about good results], *An Giang*, 9 May 1982, p. 3.

31 Author's interviews, June–August 2005, Long Điền B.

32 Kết quả khoán ở Long Điền B [The results of the product contract in Long Điền B], *An Giang*, 2 May 1982, p. 3.

33 Author's interview, 17 August 2005, Long Điền B.

34 Vo Nhan Tri, *Vietnam's Economic Policy Since 1975*, p. 126.

35 Lâm Quang Huyền, *The Land Revolution in South Vietnam*, p. 193.

Like many provinces in the Southern Region, in An Giang, from 1982 to 1985, collectivisation was more extensive and more rapid than in previous periods. For example, from 1979 to 1981, Phú Tân district established only 30 production units. However, using product contracts, the district established 40 units during the first six months of 1982. The main reason for this acceleration was that peasants did not resist as strongly as before. In some areas, some peasants even mobilised one another to form production units.<sup>36</sup> A former cadre of An Giang's Committee for Agricultural Transformation asserted that product contracts made it easier to mobilise peasants into collective organisations because they were allowed to farm on their own land.<sup>37</sup>

*An Giang* newspaper accounts show that, from the issuance of product contracts, collectivisation in the province moved more quickly than before. At the end of 1981, An Giang had only 384 production units and six collectives, accounting for less than 10 per cent of peasant households and agricultural land. A year later, however, An Giang had 1,044 production units and six collectives, accounting for 34 per cent of peasant households and 19.2 per cent of agricultural land. The province had established 660 production units in 1982—double the number of units set up between 1978 and 1981.<sup>38</sup>

Collectivisation in An Giang and many other provinces in the Southern Region began to slow during the period 1982–83. During the first 10 months of 1983, An Giang established only 164 production units.<sup>39</sup> The reasons for this were unclear. It seems a shortage of cadres was one important factor. In addition, from 1982 to 1983, authorities put greater effort into strengthening the newly established collective organisations and training cadres than into expanding the number of new production units.<sup>40</sup> Explaining the slowing of collectivisation in

36 Phú Tân tiến nhanh trong phong trào hợp tác xã hóa nông nghiệp [Collectivisation in Phú Tân advances fast], *An Giang*, 8 August 1982, p. 2.

37 Author's interview, 6 June 2005, Long Xuyên.

38 Ban Tuyên Huấn tỉnh Ủy An Giang: Thành tích cải tạo nông nghiệp của tỉnh An Giang [An Giang Provincial Committee of Propaganda: The achievements of agricultural transformation in An Giang], *An Giang*, 2 January 1983, p. 1.

39 Đẩy mạnh cải tạo quan hệ sản xuất nông nghiệp [Speeding up agricultural transformation], *An Giang*, 25 September 1983, p. 2.

40 *An Giang* reports in 1983 often called for the strengthening of production units and collectives. See, for example: Toàn tỉnh đẩy mạnh củng cố và phát triển tập đoàn [The province intensifies the solidification and extension of production units], *An Giang*, 12 June 1983, p. 1; Các địa phương tập trung công tác củng cố, nâng chất và phát triển tập đoàn sản xuất [Local authorities must focus on solidifying, improving and extending production units], *An Giang*, 7 August 1983, p. 2.

the province in 1983, a former Chợ Mới district official argued that, after seeing collective farming's unpleasant outcomes, the provincial party leaders wanted to halt its progress. Moreover, in the early 1980s, many northern cadres who came to provide support for agricultural transformation returned home on expiry of their official duty or after conflict with local cadres.<sup>41</sup>

Unhappy with the slow progress of collectivisation and land redistribution in the Southern Region, the central party secretariat issued Directive No. 19/CT-TW on 3 May 1983, urging the Southern Region to accelerate the socialist transformation of agriculture and setting 1983 as the target for completion of land redistribution and 1985 for collectivisation.<sup>42</sup> However, neither land redistribution nor collectivisation accelerated.

In September 1983, *An Giang* newspaper reported that collectivisation in the province had been extended 'slowly and not widely in all districts. There were still 28 communes where no production unit had been established.' Provincial leaders therefore again called for an intensification of agricultural transformation and urged the completion of collectivisation by 1985 as a national target.<sup>43</sup> In October 1983, the provincial party committee released an urgent action plan (*chương trình hành động*), pushing each district to determine the main causes of slow collectivisation and to set about reversing them. Provincial leaders also insisted that some key districts, such as Long Xuyên, Chợ Mới and Châu Đốc, achieve complete collectivisation by 1984.<sup>44</sup>

According to one study, from 1984 to 1985, collectivisation in An Giang was 'extended hurriedly'.<sup>45</sup> The share of collectivised land in total agricultural land jumped from 20.6 per cent in October 1983 to 30 per cent in June 1984 and to 47.6 per cent in February 1985.

41 Author's interview, 18 June 2005, Chợ Mới.

42 ĐCSVN (2005), Chi thị của Ban Bí Thư số 19/CT-TW (ngày 3 tháng 5 năm 1983) [Directive of the Secretariat No. 19/CT-TW (3 May 1983)], in ĐCSVN, *Văn Kiện Đảng Toàn Tập: Tập 44, 1983* [Party Document: Volume 44, 1983], Hà Nội: NXB Chính Trị Quốc Gia, p. 190.

43 Speeding up agricultural transformation, *An Giang*, 25 September 1983, p. 2.

44 Hội nghị tỉnh ủy đề ra chương trình hành động từ nay đến năm 1984 [Provincial party committee meeting to make a plan of action from now to 1984], *An Giang*, 23 October 1983, p. 1.

45 Tô Thành Tâm (1990), Vấn đề ruộng đất và hợp tác hóa nông nghiệp ở An Giang [Land and collectivisation issues in An Giang], *Thông Tin Lý Luận*, 8 August, p. 8.

Table 6.2 Extending collectivisation in An Giang, 1982–85

Period	No. of production units	No. of interproduction units	Number of collectives	Percentage of agricultural land collectivised	Percentage of peasant households collectivised
December 1981	384	0	6	7.00	n.a.
December 1982	1,044	2	6	19.16	34.00
October 1983	1,216	57	6	20.61	42.08
June 1984	1,633	106	7	29.70	56.80
February 1985	1,957	116	7	47.60	n.a.
May 1985	2,326	121	7	80.00	77.13
November 1985	2,607	132	7	93.00	86.00

n.a. = not available

Sources: Ban Tuyên Huấn tỉnh Ủy An Giang: Thành tích cải tạo nông nghiệp của tỉnh An Giang [An Giang Provincial Committee of Propaganda: The achievements of agricultural transformation in An Giang], *An Giang*, 2 January 1983, p. 1; Toàn tỉnh hiện có 1216 tập đoàn sản xuất, 57 liên tập đoàn, 70 tập đoàn máy nông nghiệp [An Giang now has 1,216 production units, 57 interproduction units and 70 machinery units], *An Giang*, 23 October 1983, p. 2; Khắp nơi trong tỉnh [News around the province], *An Giang*, 12 July 1984, p. 4; Toàn tỉnh thành lập được 1957 tập đoàn sản xuất, tập thể hóa 106,798 ha [An Giang has 1,957 production units, collectivising 106,798 hectares], *An Giang*, 28 February 1985, p. 1; Đưa phong trào hợp tác hóa của tỉnh nhà lên vững chắc [Advancing collectivisation firmly], *An Giang*, 7 June 1985, p. 1; An Giang hoàn thành cơ bản công tác cải tạo nông nghiệp [An Giang has completed agricultural transformation], *An Giang*, 22 November 1985, p. 1.

By February 1985, the province was halfway towards completing collectivisation. To achieve full collectivisation in time to coincide with the tenth anniversary of Vietnam's reunification, provincial leaders pushed even harder towards completion. As a result, by the end of May 1985, collectivisation accounted for 80 per cent of agricultural land—a minimum index for basic collectivisation.<sup>46</sup> Unsatisfied with this achievement, however, the provincial Communist Party committee issued Directive No. 17-CT on 23 July 1985, urging an even more rapid take-up of collectivisation. By November 1985, An Giang

46 Advancing collectivisation firmly, *An Giang*, 7 June 1985, p. 1.

had established 2,607 production units, 132 interproduction units and seven collectives, accounting for 93 per cent of agricultural land and 86 per cent of peasant households.<sup>47</sup>

Collectivisation in many other provinces in the Mekong Delta was also extensive during the period 1984–85. For example, by early 1984, Tiền Giang province had established 2,515 production units and 27 collectives, which collectivised 85,953 hectares of land (77.7 per cent of the total agricultural land) and 143,158 peasant households (78.2 per cent of the total).<sup>48</sup> By May 1985, Cửu Long province had established 17 collectives and 4,721 production units, which accounted for 76 per cent of agricultural land and peasant households. At the same time, however, there were still many communes in which no production units, and even no production solidarity teams, had been established. Even so, by 20 October 1985, Cửu Long province announced the completion of collectivisation. The province had established 18 collectives and 5,337 production units, accounting for 97 per cent of peasant households and 94 per cent of its agricultural land.<sup>49</sup> Similarly, by June 1985, Hậu Giang province had established 6,983 production units and 36 collectives, accounting for 86 per cent of agricultural land and 85 per cent of peasant households. By 30 September 1985, Hậu Giang announced the completion of collectivisation in most of the province, with the establishment of 7,420 production units, 219 interproduction units and 36 collectives, accounting for 93 per cent of land and 94 per cent of peasant households.<sup>50</sup>

By early 1984, the whole Southern Region had established 20,341 production units and 296 collectives, which accounted for 38 per cent of agricultural land and 45 per cent of peasant households.<sup>51</sup> By late 1985, the Southern Region, including the Mekong Delta, had largely completed collectivisation. However, a former cadre of the Committee for Southern Agricultural Transformation recalled the hasty way in

47 An Giang has completed agricultural transformation, *An Giang*, 22 November 1985, p. 1; Tô Thành Tâm, Land and collectivisation issues in An Giang, p. 18.

48 Lâm Quang Huyền, *The Land Revolution in South Vietnam*, p. 197.

49 Nguyễn Thành Nam (2000), *Việc giải quyết vấn đề ruộng đất trong quá trình đi lên sản xuất lớn ở Đồng bằng Sông Cửu Long 1975–1993* [Resolving land issues in the process of large-scale production in the Mekong Delta, 1975–1993], PhD thesis, Đại Học Khoa Học Xã Hội & Nhân Văn, Hồ Chí Minh, p. 78.

50 Ibid.

51 Lâm Quang Huyền, *The Land Revolution in South Vietnam*, p. 196.

which provinces in the region collectivised by ‘just signing the names’ (*đánh trống ghi tên*) in order to complete collectivisation by 1985. Therefore, the quality of collective organisations was poor.<sup>52</sup>

A former production unit leader in Long Điền B recalled how, in 1983, authorities decided to build unit no. 10 in his hamlet. The authorities came to mark its boundaries (*đồng khung*) and then invited peasant households to join. Local cadres had to visit each household to persuade them to participate. The authorities declared those households who had land within the boundary had to join the unit or they would lose their land. About 70 per cent of the invited households decided to join.<sup>53</sup> In September 1984, *An Giang* newspaper revealed that some local cadres had commanded peasants to ‘join the production units or lose their land’. The article said coercion was an effective tool for extending collectivisation, but it failed to make the collectives strong.<sup>54</sup> A former cadre from Long Điền B commune recalled authorities announcing the completion of collectivisation in late 1984, while many collective organisations had not even started operating. For example, 28 production units and four interproduction units in Long Điền B had been formed, but their quality varied and was generally poor (*không đúng tính chất*). Likewise, many production units in Chợ Mới were not functioning well despite the district being hailed as the first to complete collectivisation.<sup>55</sup>

Asked why they decided to join production units, many villagers in Long Điền B claimed it was so they could keep their land or to receive contracted land under the product contract system. Even some upper-middle peasants joined production units.<sup>56</sup> Asked why he decided to join a production unit with product contracts, an upper-middle peasant who had lost some of his land to redistribution in 1983 said:

I was discontented with the policy but could not avoid joining the production unit. Because bureaucratic and subsidised policies were imposed on us, we citizens had to obey the state.<sup>57</sup>

52 Author’s interview, 6 July 2005, Hồ Chí Minh. *Đánh trống ghi tên* literally means ‘banging drums to get signatures’.

53 Author’s interview, 15 August 2005, Long Điền B.

54 Chuyện nhỏ: Khẩn trương nhưng vững chắc [Some issues: Hurry up and be firm in collectivisation], *An Giang*, 20 September 1984, p. 4.

55 Author’s interview, 20 June 2005, Long Điền B.

56 Author’s interviews, June–August 2005, Long Điền B.

57 Author’s interview, 2 August 2005, Long Điền B.

### A middle peasant explained:

We could not help joining the production unit because it managed agricultural materials such as fuel, diesel, fertilisers and pesticides. If we did not join, we could not buy these things and were disadvantaged [*chịu nhiều thiệt thòi*]. We could not even buy toothpaste [from the state].<sup>58</sup>

In short, from 1982 to 1985, collectivisation in An Giang spread more widely and more rapidly than in earlier periods. This was partly because of the pressure from national leaders to complete collectivisation by 1985. Local cadres in the province and the wider Mekong Delta exerted themselves to achieve this goal.<sup>59</sup> They even used coercive measures like their Central Coast counterparts to force peasants to join the production units, regardless of the peasants' aspirations or the quality of these organisations. Because of the product contracts and allowing peasants to farm on their own land, collectivisation did not face as much resistance as it had previously.

### The second wave of land redistribution

Accompanying collectivisation was a continuous process of land redistribution in the Southern Region from 1981 to 1985. On 30 April 1981, the VCP released Circular No. 14/TB-TW, which called for the resolute and rapid implementation of the policy of land redistribution in rural areas of the Southern Region. VCP leaders complained that the landless and land-poor still made up a large proportion of the rural population in the region despite land redistribution.<sup>60</sup> An investigation into 80 rural areas in the region in May 1981 showed that 25 per cent of peasant households were landless or land-poor, occupying only 10 per cent of available land. While rich peasants accounted for just 2.42 per cent of peasant households, they occupied 7.1 per cent of agricultural

58 Author's interview, 20 August 2005, Long Điền B.

59 By examining a series of VCP policies from 1981 to 1985, such as Directive No. 93 (June 1980), two circulars (no. 14, April 1981; and no. 138, November 1981), Directive No. 19 (May 1983) and so on, one can see that the party put great emphasis on completing collectivisation in the Southern Region.

60 ĐCSVN (2005), Thông báo 14/TB-TW, ngày 20 tháng 4 năm 1981: Kết luận của Ban bí thư tại Hội nghị bàn việc xúc tiến công tác cải tạo nông nghiệp ở các tỉnh Nam Bộ [Circular No. 14/TB-TW, 20 April 1981: On facilitating agricultural transformation in the Southern Region], in ĐCSVN, *Văn Kiện Đảng Toàn Tập: Tập 42, 1981* [Party Document: Volume 42, 1981], Hà Nội: NXB Chính Trị Quốc Gia, pp. 198–9.

land.<sup>61</sup> It was therefore essential, party leaders argued, to continue with the land redistribution policy, the main contents of which had already been provided in the previous directive, No. 57/CT-TW (November 1978).<sup>62</sup> Party leaders released Circular No. 138/TT-TW (11 November 1981) to guide the implementation of product contracts by strictly controlling land and redistributing it among households in order to make contracts with collective members.<sup>63</sup>

According to a report by the Committee for Southern Agricultural Transformation, many provinces in the Southern Region now intensified their land redistribution efforts, which had been all but neglected in 1980 and early 1981. This was in response to circular numbers 14 and 138 and Directive No. 100 (on product contracts). During 1982, 13 provinces in the Southern Region redistributed 54,934.5 hectares of land. Together with the 247,963 hectares reallocated during 1975–81, this brought the total area redistributed in the Southern Region during 1975–82 to 302,896 hectares.<sup>64</sup>

On 3 May 1983, the VCP issued Directive No. 19/CT-TW, which stressed the completion of land redistribution by 1983 and the intensification of collectivisation in the region. It reasserted the point that socialist agricultural transformation was designed to eliminate class warfare and deal with ‘who triumphed over whom in the clash between capitalism and socialism.’ Therefore, each province had to carry out land redistribution ‘positively and completely’ by appropriating land that was beyond the work capacity of each rural capitalist, landlord, rich peasant and upper–middle peasant household and sharing it with landless and land-poor households in the commune.<sup>65</sup> Despite the similarity of this directive to no. 57 (in November 1978), the language here was urgent and emphatic.

61 Nguyễn Thành Nam, *Resolving land issues*, p. 88; Đào Duy Huấn, *Solidifying and perfecting socialist production relations*, p. 36; Lâm Quang Huyền, *The Land Revolution in South Vietnam*, p. 181.

62 ĐCSVN, Circular No. 14/TB-TW, pp. 198–9.

63 ĐCSVN (2005), Thông tri của Ban bí thư số 138/TT-TW ngày 11 tháng 11 năm 1981 [Secretariat Circular No. 138/TT-TW of 11 November 1981], in ĐCSVN, *Văn Kiện Đảng Toàn Tập: Tập 42, 1981* [Party Document: Volume 42, 1981], Hà Nội: NXB Chính Trị Quốc Gia, p. 443.

64 BCTNNMN, *Report on Land Redistribution*, pp. 12, 18.

65 ĐCSVN, Directive of the Secretariat No. 19/CT-TW, p. 192.

According to the Committee for Southern Agricultural Transformation's report, after the release of Directive No. 19, every province in the Southern Region stepped up implementation of land redistribution:

[They] were resolute to complete land redistribution by 1983 to meet the target of the central leaders' policy. In 1983 the Southern Region had readjusted 72,779.8 hectares of land ... [which was] equal to the total amount of land redistribution from 1979–1981. So, by the end of 1983 the whole region had readjusted about 375,677.24 hectares.<sup>66</sup>

According to Đào Duy Huấn, from 1983 to 1985, the whole Southern Region had redistributed 186,286 hectares. By late 1985, it had largely completed the process. In total, in the period 1975–85, some 489,183 hectares of land had been reallocated.<sup>67</sup>

In assessing land redistribution, the Committee for Southern Agricultural Transformation's 1984 report admitted some mistakes had been made despite great achievements in eliminating rural exploitation, strengthening the revolutionary authorities and boosting collectivisation. First, land redistribution had been uneven across different parts of the Southern Region. For example, some local authorities had carried out land redistribution completely, while others had not. In many mountainous and single-crop areas, local authorities had not implemented land redistribution at all.

Second, many local authorities had implemented land redistribution hastily without distinguishing between different types of land recipients and land-givers. They often appropriated land and redistributed it equally (*cào bằng*) among each worker in the commune. Such distribution harmed 'the interests of a large number of middle peasants and caused disunity among peasants and conflicts in rural areas, manifest in peasants' complaints and petitions [*thưa kiện*]:

[Finally], due to the low level of socialist consciousness, some cadres and party members were not able to distinguish between labourers and exploiters. Some wanted to retain individual farming and exploitative economic activities. Some took advantage of their positions to capture public and readjusted land, good and fertile land, for themselves and to exploit peasants.<sup>68</sup>

66 BCTNNMN, *Report on Land Redistribution*, p.18.

67 Đào Duy Huấn, *Solidifying and perfecting socialist production relations*, p. 37.

68 BCTNNMN, *Report on Land Redistribution*, pp. 22–3.

The amount of land redistributed in the Southern Region in 1975–85 was less than the 564,547 hectares the Việt Minh had reallocated there between 1945 and 1954.<sup>69</sup> It was much more than the 245,851 hectares Ngô Đình Diệm’s government redistributed during the period 1955–63, but less than half of the approximately 1 million hectares the land reforms of Nguyễn Văn Thiệu’s government brought to tenants during 1968–74.<sup>70</sup>

These previous land reforms boosted commercial agricultural production, whereas the 1975–85 redistribution weakened it, by reducing the productive capacity of households classified as middle, upper-middle and rich peasants. In the late 1980s, when facing severe food shortages, production stagnation and emerging conflicts over land in the Southern Region, the VCP recognised there were shortcomings in existing land policies, especially Directive No. 19 (3 May 1983), which equalised (*cào bằng*) the distribution of landholdings among rural households without taking into account the capacity and occupation of each household. ‘Therefore, commercial agriculture in the Southern Region had been set back one step.’<sup>71</sup> In addition, the land redistributed in 1975–85 was then farmed collectively—a method that was usually less productive than individual household farming.

The following section discusses in more detail how the second phase of land redistribution took place in An Giang province.

### In An Giang

On 5 June 1982, An Giang’s leaders released Directive No. 44, calling for the acceleration of land redistribution, which had been largely neglected in 1981 and early 1982, and which they planned to complete by 1983.<sup>72</sup> As a result of this directive, according to newspaper accounts, many districts in the province intensified land redistribution. For example, by June 1982, Châu Thành and Châu Phú districts had redistributed

69 Lâm Quang Huyền, *The Land Revolution in South Vietnam*, p. 25.

70 The figures for the governments of Ngô Đình Diệm and Nguyễn Văn Thiệu include a small but unknown amount of redistributed land in the Central Coast (Prosterman and Riedinger, *Land Reform and Democratic Development*, p. 139).

71 Ban Tuyên Huấn Trung Ương (1988), *Đảng trả lời nông dân một số vấn đề cấp bách về ruộng đất* [*The Party’s Response to Urgent Land Problems*], Hồ Chí Minh: NXB Tuyên Huấn, pp. 6–7.

72 Land redistribution in rural areas, *An Giang*, 6 September 1982, p. 4.

2,557 hectares of land. Of these, only 500 hectares were granted to land-poor and landless households; the remainder was used by the state and district farms or was 'borrowed' by local cadres to produce food.<sup>73</sup>

From reunification until September 1982, An Giang had reallocated 39,157 hectares of land to 51,818 land-poor and landless households. Nevertheless, a large number of land-poor and landless households remained. In areas where land growing one rice crop per year had not been converted to double cropping, the percentage of land-poor and landless households was particularly high—about 21.6 per cent.<sup>74</sup>

In response to Directive No. 19 from the central government, authorities in An Giang again agitated for speedy land redistribution. In October 1983, realising that 18 per cent of households were still land-poor or landless, the provincial party committee repeated its call to meet the deadline set for the end of 1983.<sup>75</sup>

Despite many districts implementing land redistribution, the results fell short of expectations and, by late 1983, the province had not yet completed the task. On 12 December 1983, An Giang's provincial standing party committee released Resolution No. 05, calling for the equitable redistribution of land among members in each commune (*điều chỉnh theo định suất đất toàn xã*). That policy seemed to be at odds with the VCP's policy, which referred only to reallocating appropriated land equally among poor peasants.<sup>76</sup>

The reallocation of land equally among commune members was carried out not only in An Giang, but also in several Southern Region provinces, such as Tiền Giang, Cửu Long and Kiên Giang. Here, land redistribution was implemented at the same time as the establishment of production units; land within the boundaries of production units was distributed equally among members regardless of their work capacity. Authorities

73 Trong tháng 6 phát triển 39 tập đoàn sản xuất: Tỉnh hiện có 474 tập đoàn [In June, 39 production units were established: The province now has 474 units], *An Giang*, 11 July 1982, p. 1.

74 Land redistribution in rural areas, *An Giang*, 6 September 1982, p. 4.

75 Văn Phòng Tỉnh Ủy An Giang: Tiếp tục điều chỉnh ruộng đất cùng cố và phát triển tập đoàn sản xuất [An Giang Provincial Committee Office: Continuing land redistribution, and the solidification and extension of production units], *An Giang*, 9 October 1983, p. 1.

76 Ban Nông Nghiệp Tỉnh Ủy: Tình hình điều chỉnh và qui hoạch ruộng đất ở xã Vĩnh Phú [Provincial Agriculture Board: Land redistribution in Vĩnh Phú commune], *An Giang*, 9 August 1984, p. 3.

allowed landed households to retain part of their land according to the number of people in their households, but appropriated the excess for reallocation to land-poor and landless families.<sup>77</sup>

In 1984 authorities in An Giang executed land redistribution extensively, to the tune of about 10,000 hectares.<sup>78</sup> From 1975 to July 1984, the province had appropriated 57,594.8 hectares and redistributed 56,778.9 hectares to 71,756 landless and land-short households.<sup>79</sup> By 30 April 1985, the province had largely completed land redistribution, having redistributed 60,225 hectares to 75,558 landless and land-poor households since 1975. Therefore, redistribution in An Giang had affected about 27 per cent of the total agricultural land (224,357 hectares) and benefited 32 per cent of the province's 233,612 peasant households.<sup>80</sup> According to provincial documents, in 1975, 40 per cent of peasant households in An Giang were landless or land-poor. Land reform from 1975 to 1985 therefore brought land to 81.05 per cent of the targeted beneficiaries.

However, it was later discovered that a large amount of redistributed land did not go to poor peasants but fell into the hands of local cadres. This angered peasants, and several sent petitions to authorities at all levels. For example, in July 1987, a local newspaper reported that authorities in Thạnh Mỹ Tây commune had implemented the land policy incorrectly and redistributed land irrationally (*bất hợp lý*):

Most of the people in Thạnh Mỹ Tây were discontented with the results of land redistribution because they considered it [was] based on individual sentiment and injustice and because it favoured commune and district cadres' families.<sup>81</sup>

77 BCTNNMN, *Report on Land Redistribution*, p. 17.

78 Toàn tỉnh thành lập được 1957 tập đoàn sản xuất, tập thể hóa 106,798 ha [An Giang has 1,957 production units, collectivising 106,798 hectares], *An Giang*, 28 February 1985, p. 1.

79 Khắp nơi trong tỉnh [News around the province], *An Giang*, 12 July 1984, p. 4; Xã luận: Đẩy mạnh cải tạo quan hệ sản xuất nông nghiệp [The editorial: Intensifying agricultural transformation], *An Giang*, 9 August 1984, p. 1.

80 Toàn tỉnh đã xây dựng được 2570 tập đoàn sản xuất, 7 hợp tác xã và 21 liên tập đoàn sản xuất [The province has established 2,570 production units, 7 collectives, and 21 interproduction units], *An Giang*, 2 August 1985; An Giang has completed agricultural transformation *An Giang*, 22 November 1985, p. 1.

81 Còn thắc mắc về việc điều chỉnh ruộng đất ở xã Thạnh Mỹ Tây [Some concerns about land redistribution in Thạnh Mỹ Tây commune], *An Giang*, 31 July 1987, p. 6.

People claimed that cadres rather than average people were the beneficiaries, and that cadres accumulated large amounts of land for themselves and then lent it to others. Meanwhile, many poor households received low-quality or inadequate amounts of land, while some did not receive any at all.<sup>82</sup>

In retrospect, the *An Giang* newspaper concluded, in 1987:

In past years, the implementation of land redistribution has not been correct. Some cadres, especially local cadres, took advantage of their power [*lạm dụng chức vụ*] and gave themselves, their relatives and families good land. Some local cadres did not directly cultivate but tried to accumulate land. Many state agencies at provincial and district levels also made use of their collective names to misappropriate land. On the other hand, due to the constraints of administrative mechanisms [such as prohibiting non-resident cultivators], a large amount of land was abandoned ... This led to many peasant households not having land or enough land for their production.<sup>83</sup>

Villagers in Long Điền B commune recalled two types of land redistribution between 1975 and mid-1986. The first was done according to the 'sharing one's clothes and rice' policy, which took place from 1975 to 1981 (before the adoption of product contracts). The second was allocating an equal amount of land to each labourer in the commune (*chia theo định suất*), which began after the adoption of product contracts and continued until 1986.<sup>84</sup>

Under the product contract system, land in four collective farming production units in Long Điền B was initially divided equally among collective members. In addition to four production units, commune authorities often combined the implementation of directive numbers 100 and 19 with the establishment of new production units. For example, when establishing a production unit, land within its boundary was supposed to be distributed equally among its members. In practice, land-surplus households had the right to retain any part of their

82 Ibid., p. 6.

83 Ý kiến: Không nên ngộ nhận giữa việc phân bố chia cấp đất đai cho hợp lý với việc trả lại ruộng đất cho chủ cũ [The opinion piece: Don't mistake rational reallocation of land for returning land to previous landowners], *An Giang*, 29 May 1987, p. 1.

84 Author's interviews, June–August 2005, Long Điền B.

land equal to the amount allocated to everyone else. The surplus was distributed to land-poor and landless households. One middle peasant recalled:

I had 15 *công* of land. After readjusting according to land rations, I only had a few *công* left. My household had five workers, so I only retained 5 *công*. We selected some of our land according to our land ration and surrendered the remaining land for others.<sup>85</sup>

An elderly couple who retained only 1 *công* of land recalled:

We had 12 *công* but almost all of our holdings were destroyed [*phá tan hết*]. At that time [about 1983–84], the state made all decisions without listening to us. Anyone was granted land; the poor and the rich had the same amount of land. A woman aged above 55 years old and a man above 60 each received only 0.5 *công* of land. The children received the same.<sup>86</sup>

To please landowners, local cadres in Long Điền B often allowed land-surplus households to redistribute some of their land to their relatives and acquaintances. A former cadre of interproduction unit no. 3 (*liên tập đoàn 3*) remembered that, by allowing landowners to redistribute their land to relatives, there was less resistance to the redistribution. He only readjusted whatever land remained beyond what each household had been able to disperse.<sup>87</sup> A former leader of production unit no. 16 said he was able to complete land redistribution in his unit in just two days (in 1984). He organised a meeting and told landowners with substantial holdings to distribute their land to relatives but not to anyone else. They all agreed and the redistribution was rapid.<sup>88</sup> Similarly, a former leader of production unit no. 13 said:

At the time of production solidarity teams [1978–84], the amount of land owned still varied among households. But at the peak time of production units [1984 and 1985], land was divided equally among members according to land per capita in the commune. My method was to let the land-surplus households redistribute their land to their family members and relatives. They had the right to retain the best

85 Author's interview, 2 August 2005, Long Điền B.

86 Ibid.

87 Author's interview, 20 June 2005, Long Điền B.

88 Author's interview, 11 August 2005, Long Điền B.

land. Then the production unit readjusted the remaining surplus land. We conducted redistribution in this way in order to avoid hurting [people's] feelings [*tránh khỏi mất lòng*].<sup>89</sup>

In general, from 1982 to 1985, land redistribution in Long Điền B achieved better results and faced less resistance than during previous periods—for several reasons. First, many years after reunification, local authorities were strengthened significantly because the number of local cadres had increased and they had been better trained. Moreover, under strong pressure from higher-level authorities to complete agricultural transformation by 1985, local cadres resorted both to using harsh measures to coerce peasants and to modifying state policies to ease their resistance. For example, peasants in Long Điền B remembered that, when implementing land redistribution, authorities often sent to the fields armed cadres who were ready to arrest anyone who dared to openly resist the policy.<sup>90</sup> A local newspaper in 1985 printed a peasant's letter complaining that authorities in Long Kiến commune in Chợ Mới district had taken advantage of their power to redistribute peasants' rice fields, which were under cultivation, and had handcuffed people who tried to prevent cadres from redistributing land.<sup>91</sup>

Second, after several campaigns of socialist transformation in rural areas—including agricultural, trade and industrial transformation—in the mid-1980s, the economic power of large landowners had been weakened significantly. In addition, the state forced the adoption of high-yielding rice, the production of which depended heavily on state inputs. Realising they were not able to farm all their land on their own, many land-surplus households gave some of their land to others.<sup>92</sup>

Finally, despite some poor households refusing to receive others' land, local authorities faced fewer problems redistributing the appropriated land thanks to a large number of land recipients. Land recipients were not only landless or land-poor peasant households, but also included non-farming people who had previously made their living as small

89 Author's interview, 20 August 2005, Long Điền B.

90 Author's interview, 27 June 2005, Long Điền B.

91 Trả lời bạn đọc: Về việc điều chỉnh ruộng đất ở xã Long Kiến [Reply to reader's letter: On land redistribution in Long Kiến Commune], *An Giang*, 27 September 1985, p. 3.

92 Author's interview, 7 August 2005, Long Điền B.

merchants, in transport, as handicraft-makers and so on. Due to the socialist transformation of trade and industry, these people returned to their hamlets to receive land. One woman land recipient recalled:

At the time of land redistribution, many people wanted to receive land because they feared that, if they did not have land, they would be sent to the new economic zones. So, we accepted the land although we knew that a few *công* was not enough for us to make a living. We thought we could combine farming with working for wages [*làm mướn*].<sup>93</sup>

Another woman in the same commune also asserted that some non-farming households had accepted land because they feared being taken to the new economic zones.<sup>94</sup> An official of Chợ Mới district's Department of Agriculture and Rural Development who was familiar with post-1975 land redistribution commented:

An Giang was one of the provinces in the Mekong Delta which implemented forceful socialist agricultural transformation. Under the Directive No. 100, An Giang had peasantised all the rural population [*nông dân hóa mma ngutum*]. Bike-taxi riders [*xe thô*], pedicab riders [*xe xích lô*] and small merchants in Chợ Mới town were put into production units to receive land. So, landholdings became fragmented. This led to the poor performance of agriculture.<sup>95</sup>

However, some peasants—especially those who had lost large amounts of land due to the prohibition on non-resident cultivators—refused to accept other people's land. A well-off man in Long Điền B recalled that he had 60 *công* in Thoại Sơn district but lost it due to the state prohibiting non-resident cultivators. The production unit there asked him to accept a few *công*, but he refused, considering it inappropriate to take others' land when the owners were unhappy and crying. He decided to work for wages instead.<sup>96</sup> Similarly, a woman who had lost 130 *công* in the late 1970s due to the non-resident prohibition also refused to accept redistributed land. She said:

93 Author's interview, 3 August 2005, Long Điền B.

94 Author's interview, 5 August 2005, Long Điền B.

95 Author's interview, 23 June 2005, Chợ Mới.

96 Author's interview, 7 August 2005, Long Điền B.

I did not receive readjusted land because I was afraid of making the landowners unhappy. Like us, they had suffered a lot to accumulate land. It was not right to take others' land. Rather, we worked for wages. Later I borrowed 10 *công* of my sister's land to make a living.<sup>97</sup>

Despite the theory that land redistribution in Long Điền B meant equal distribution among households, this was not how it occurred in practice. One peasant commented that local authorities did not appropriate surplus land from their relatives or from powerful cadres (*người có chức có quyền*), but they redistributed every bit of land of those who were powerless.<sup>98</sup> Land recipients were forced to accept poor and unproductive land, while local cadres took good-quality, productive land for themselves and their relatives (a practice detailed in the next chapter).<sup>99</sup>

In short, the second round of land reform in Long Điền B and An Giang fulfilled the targets of weakening large landowners and 'peasantising' rural people; however, due to misuse of their position, local-level cadres redistributed land in unexpected ways, meaning their relatives were the beneficiaries rather than landless and land-poor households.

## Conclusion

In the first few years after the adoption of the product contract system, the performance of collective farming improved significantly, not only in QN-ĐN in the Central Coast, but also in An Giang in the Mekong Delta. As a result, the contract system was welcomed by the members of collective organisations and adopted extensively in both provinces.

In An Giang, the use of product contracts and allowing households to retain some of their land meant authorities were able to accelerate collectivisation and land redistribution. However, with strong pressure from central party leaders to complete collectivisation by 1985, authorities in An Giang and elsewhere extended collectivisation and land redistribution too hastily, while modifying the content of the national policy to speed up the process, especially during 1984–85.

97 Author's interview, 10 August 2005, Long Điền B.

98 Author's interview, 2 August 2005, Long Điền B.

99 Author's interview, 12 August 2005, Long Điền B.

By late 1985, those provinces had largely ‘completed’ collectivisation, but many collective organisations were unstable or existed only on paper.

The completion of collectivisation, egalitarian land redistribution and other policies from 1981 to 1985 changed major features of An Giang’s agriculture, from commercial farming to subsistence-oriented farming, as they did in the Central Coast. They eventually destroyed the diverse rural economy of An Giang and many other areas of the Southern Region. From that time—especially from mid-1985 to the late 1980s—agricultural production in the Southern Region stagnated and then declined, peasants’ living standards dropped alarmingly and a new class of exploiters started to emerge—in contrast with the VCP’s original vision. In other words, from 1985 to the late 1980s, collective farming in both An Giang and QN-ĐN was in crisis, with similar serious problems and local politics in both places, which led not only local authorities, but also the VCP leadership to rethink the direction and purpose of collective farming and, finally, to decide to return to household-based farming.

This text is taken from *Vietnam's Post-1975 Agrarian Reforms: How local politics derailed socialist agriculture in southern Vietnam*, by Trung Dang, published 2018 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.