

# Identifying conflicts of interest in peri-urban communities in the context of urbanization and industrialization

*(The Case Studies of Chau Khe Ward, Tu Son Town, Bac Ninh Province and Yen Thuong Commune, Gia Lam District, Hanoi City)*

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**Abstract:** *Social conflict is a long-standing issue in the history of human society. In Vietnam, social conflict is always parallel to the development of the country. Studies on social conflict in general and conflicts of interest in particular, notably those in peri-urban communities, nevertheless remain limited. As practice shows, conflicts of interest in the Vietnamese peri-urban communities are on the rise and put forward a number of questions. This paper identifies the types of conflicts of interest in peri-urban communities and involved stakeholders in the context of urbanization and industrialization.*

**Keywords:** Social Conflict, Conflict of Interest, Peri-urban Communities

## 1. Introduction

Social conflict is a long-standing issue in the history of human society. There have been different views so far on the origin of social conflict. Heraclitus, an ancient Greek philosopher, asserted that social conflict was an important and essential attribute of social life. Whereas, from the view of Epicurus, social conflicts brought about negative consequences that forced people to live in a state of peace and stability. The English economist Thomas Malthus,

nevertheless, regarded the struggles of people for existence as an inevitability and social conflicts as an eternal factor of the social development. Contributing to the discussion, Ludwig Gumplowicz differentiated social conflicts by nature and concluded their key role in the advancement of human history. The social division between the ruler and the ruled was an eternal phenomenon that caused social conflicts. These conflicts in turn helped to promote social unity and facilitate the formation of more

inclusive links (Chu Van Tuan and Vo Khanh Vinh, 2013: 11-14).

Conflict is also considered a classic topic in the Western sociology. Karl Marx saw a close link between conflict and the development of human society: the final stage of conflict is strongly polarized among capitalists and proletarians, which leads to socialist revolution and then to communism – the final state of happiness with no limit to the goods and no class nor class struggle (Endruweit and Trommsdorff, 1996: 891). In the context of social changes from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century until early 20<sup>th</sup> century, social conflict received particular attention from sociologists and was seen in different viewpoints. It is defined in sociology as disputes between two or more individuals or groups and divided into two basic forms - conflict of interest and conflict of values (Endruweit and Trommsdorff, 1996: 890).

In Vietnam, social conflict is always parallel to the development of the country. Rapid urbanization and industrialization in the peri-urban areas have resulted in changes of the social structure, social division, as well as an increase in conflicts of values and interests. Historically, these communities were typically characterized by the agricultural activities together with handicrafts and services. The production relations here used to be strongly attached to community spirit and mutual assistance in daily life. Today's peri-urban areas have been changing a lot: reduction of agricultural land, diversification of non-farming occupations, and improvement of income and quality of life towards

modernization and civilization. Nevertheless, social relations and community cohesion are weakening. This has been one of the causes for an increase of community conflicts in recent years, threatening social stability and security in these areas.

The paper focuses on identifying the current types of conflicts of interest in peri-urban communities and involved stakeholders (households, households and enterprises or local authorities) in the specific cases of Chau Khe ward, Tu Son town, Bac Ninh province and Yen Thuong commune, Gia Lam district, Hanoi city. After that, a discussion on how to mitigate the community conflicts in the peri-urban areas under the context of urbanization, industrialization, and integration would be also provided.

## **2. Forms of conflict of interest in peri-urban communities**

Chau Khe ward and Yen Thuong commune are both peri-urban locations within the Kinh Bac region<sup>(\*)</sup> in the Red River delta, benefiting from the development of Hanoi-Hai Phong-Quang Ninh economic triangle. Each of them, however, is distinguished by its own socio-economic and cultural features as well as the level of industrialization and urbanization. While Yen Thuong commune is regarded as a case study of more agriculture-and-trade combined community, Chau Khe ward represents an example of non-agricultural economic development.

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(\*) Formerly comprised of Bac Giang, Bac Ninh, and parts of Hanoi city, Hung Yen, and Lang Son provinces.

The dual trends of urbanization and industrialization in the peri-urban areas have led to rapid changes of community space and social structure. Relationships here are broken and frictions among community members arise. In-depth interviews revealed the conflicts between households in these two localities. "There have been many frictions recently about different things, but mostly related to disputes of residential land, arable land, or houses since land has been increasingly valuable. Conflicts also happen due to unpaid loans or business competition between households. Other attributions are the pollution of waste from production activities and the unequal financial contributions of households to common works as well," said a male official (aged 38) in Chau Khe ward. The same situation was also observed in Yen Thuong commune. "Discord between siblings because of land dispute or argument over taking care of old parents, as well as conflicts in production and doing business have happened a lot," a male civil servant (aged 56) in Yen Thuong reported. It is noticeable that conflicts of interest among family members and within family lineage tend to increase in these two surveyed localities. The conflicts vary from old-style issues in agricultural production to more modern-day problems, such as competition in business, pollution from production, land or housing disputes, unfinished loans, and unequal contribution of money and labor to community works or to caring for old parents and relatives. The

situation reflects changes in interests and social cohesion due to changing social contexts. Major types of community conflicts in the two localities are as followed:

### ***2.1. Social conflicts due to pollution from waste discharge***

The pollution of living environment from the discharge of domestic and production waste has been a new community tension recently. This is the most common and serious type of conflict in the two surveyed areas. Waste discharge not only has negative impacts on the environment, but the contradictions related to this issue have also affected directly the quality of community life. A woman (aged 52) in Yen Thuong commune said: "These two ponds are already polluted. People raise ducks, encroach the area, and throw litter or animal carcasses in there. Every day after the market closes, meat and vegetables vendors discharge all their wastes into the ponds. Dirty mixture of trash and soil when it rains, and discomfort smell stinks under the sun. Some households have heatedly complained." Residents of Chau Khe ward also reported the same problem. "There is currently too much domestic and production waste. It is unreasonable when they collect and gather garbage here in our neighborhood. The residents all are very upset and have petitioned the local authorities against this at many meetings. Nothing has changed so far, however. They said the city government was considering investing in local waste treatment machines" (Male, aged 71, Chau Khe ward).

The survey results show that the conflict over the problem of domestic and production waste happens with three groups of actors: the conflicts between households, between households and businesses or local authorities, and between different communities.

#### *Conflicts between households*

The conflicts usually happen between trading households and households living in the trading areas. There are in the surveyed locations official markets and temporary markets, which operate spontaneously along the main streets and village roads. Although these temporary markets facilitate the daily purchase and sale of foodstuffs and essential consumer goods, they cause a lot of garbage pollution that leads to contradiction between households living in the areas and small traders. Ponds and lakes nearby are also flooded with trash and the contaminated water kills fish. The households, therefore, express their frustration with undisciplined littering of small traders. This contradiction, according to local authorities, has been present for many years. Notification to small traders does not really help while there are not yet local regulations to manage the situation.

Conflict due to environmental issues, such as production and living activities that damage public hygiene and contaminate water sources, also happens between neighboring households. In any forms this type of conflict arises, it breaks the community cohesion and affects the mental and psychological health in the community.

#### *Conflicts between households and businesses.*

In the two surveyed areas, conflicts occur between households and iron and steel producers who also cause a lot of pollution. According to the survey results, the production activities of such households and small firms spread noise and dust all over the neighborhood. This problem has attributed to many arguments and discords among different social groups in community.

#### *Conflicts between communities.*

Contradictions and disagreements among households in neighboring hamlets and quarters also arise because of waste pollution. Households in Yen Thuong commune discharge domestic waste to abandoned plots of land or release domestic waste water to canals shared between hamlets. These behaviors affect the environment and living conditions of the households nearby or downstream, leading to tensions between people in the two hamlets. The same conflict between communities exists in Chau Khe ward. Conflicts due to water and air pollution from production activities also happens often between people in the two surveyed locations. Many mechanical and steel-rolling households and businesses in Chau Khe ward operate day and night, causing a lot of noise and dust that affect residential communities of Yen Thuong commune nearby. According to heads of hamlets, a number of households reported about the situation years ago but no solutions up to now.

Conflicts due to pollution from production activities occur at different levels and

both within and outside the community. The above mentioned contradictions exist mainly between people in the same village. It is hardly to find the conflicts as such between kinship families.

## **2.2. Conflicts due to property disputes**

Chau Khe ward and Yen Thuong commune both are going through a rapid process of urbanization and industrialization. Many changes have been made to the land use plan and planning. According to local leaders, conflicts in the community are frequently related to land and housing disputes. "There was a case years ago of a 70-year-old woman and her five children, three daughters and two sons who are all married. The piece of land where she used to live with her husband alone is certified for the land use right. After her husband died, she legally inherited half of this property so she wanted to sell it partially. One of her two sons disagreed, however, and the family brought the issue to the commune authority. According to the Inheritance Law, the old woman was eligible for inheritance and had the right to dispose her inherited property. The commune authority had to call together all the family members for a clarification. While the other children of the woman were unanimous in her decision, the son persisted in disagreement with the explanation and resolution of the commune. He then filed a petition to the district court," reported the Vice Chairman of Yen Thuong People's Committee.

Chau Khe ward is also experiencing the same problems. A resident here shared her story. "My family also had a land

dispute some years ago with a neighbor. Their father and ours were brothers, so he cut off some land for our father to build up a separate wall. Now their father passed away, they showed their land map to us [to ask for giving the land back]. I just told them our fathers previously shared the land with each other like that" (Female, aged 59, Chau Khe ward).

The survey results show that residential land, housing, and farm land disputes are the second most common types of conflict of interest. In facts, in the two locations of the survey, the real estate market has been very busy in recent years. As "an inch of land is worth an ounce of gold", land disputes arise between households, even among households of the same family or kinship.

Land and housing disputes between family siblings stem from the division of family inheritance. Unequal shares among family members trigger the feeling of lost interests, leading to disagreements and conflicts. In fact, in the two surveyed locations, often the proportions of land to family members depend on their hierarchical positions or on personal preferences of the decision makers, which become part of the cause of disagreements and disputes.

Moreover, in these two localities, land disputes between neighboring households are even more common. There is a case where the two families shared a fence in peace for years. Until a family wanted to rebuild it, the conflict arose since the other family considered the fence an inviolable property of their own.

The contradictions due to unequal contribution, both in terms of finance and labor, to looking after old parents or to public works do not frequently happen. These problems are just discord in the thought and not transformed into action.

Land disputes between households and local authorities, nevertheless, tend to occur more. A lot of public areas (such as ponds, lakes, and canals) in the two surveyed locations have been encroached by a number of households living nearby. Local authorities have to enforce them to return the public space after their notifications to them did not work.

### **2.3. Conflicts due to business competition**

It is noticed through the survey that conflicts related to production and business activities occur in different groups of occupations. Contradictions between trading households are often originated from competition in large market places and in spontaneous village markets. Selling the same items and services leads to disputes over sales locations and customers. This type of conflict mainly occurs between people in the same industry, and more often between people trading in the same locations. "Business households in spontaneous village markets usually have conflicts over goods, customers, and sales locations. Because of trading the same products, they quarrel with each other when one offers lower price to draw customers from the other. That's it, but it's ok then, and they still continue trading together year after year," said a resident (female, aged 59, Chau Khe ward).

For agricultural families, people work in fields or farms most of their time so frictions between them are often in association with cultivation and animal raising activities. Some causes for the situation such as draining the water from the others' fields to one's own field, burgling fish and vegetable from other farmers, or plant protection spray caught in the wind affecting the next-door crops, etc.

Local economic development has led to a diversification of industries and commodities. There are a lot of production and trading households in the two surveyed locations, thus high competition is unavoidable due to limited demand. Many families do not communicate with their neighbors despite living close to each other just because of business competition and trading the same commodities. The conflicts between these households come in different forms, such as talking bad about others, lowering the quality of the competitors' goods while raising the prestige of their own goods, offering lower prices, dumping, or fighting over customers. The survey results reveal also conflicts of interest due to business relationship without contract between households providing services and households using the services.

Besides, contradictions due to unpaid loans happen in both locations. Since more business activities in Chau Khe ward, the black-market banking here gains a stronger foothold than in Yen Thuong commune. It is popular that people borrow money or gold from loan sharks for doing business, or from their relatives without

documents for purchases, house repairs, or wedding organization for their children, etc. However, frictions and conflicts arise when both borrowers and lenders might misremember undocumented or unwitnessed long-time borrowings, or due to late payment and even no payment at all. It thus results in stressful and disruptive relationships between households. More importantly, the trust between individuals is impaired and social relations are diminished or looser. It is noteworthy that contradictions stemmed from unpaid or unfinished loans also happen between family siblings in both locations.

Other types of conflicts of interest exist in both locations are associated with the loss of local funds or nontransparent expenditures by the local authorities.

#### ***2.4. Conflicts due to unequal contributions***

“There is no funding for annual local festivals, so the local authority has to call for financial contributions from local people and businesses. The amounts set for households and the willingness to contribute of households are sources for some frictions. Normally, households with better economic conditions would like to make greater contribution for the festival organization. Poorer households, on the contrary, do not want the festivals and are only able to contribute small amounts. However, there are some arguments but not too strong tensions,” said a resident (Male, aged 53, Yen Thuong commune). Moreover, calling for donations and financial supports also generates contradictions in the community. “Fund raising by the local authority for the poor, for the people in flooded areas,

for education promotion, and so on, also leads to disagreements among the people. According to the notice, the fund raising is based on voluntariness so some households make their contribution, some others do not. And it becomes the subject of gossips about each other at every chance,” said a Chau Khe resident (female, aged 53, Chau Khe ward).

In short, the urbanization and transformation of occupational forms have resulted in the strong social division in the two survey communities. It is noticeable that this process leads to different levels of participation and contribution of household groups in terms of money and labor. This is the source of discords and contradictions between household groups, directing the increase tendency of conflicts and frictions both in form and nature.

### **3. Conclusion**

The analysis has sketched a current picture of conflict of interest in the peri-urban community. Different forms of conflicts of interest occur at different levels and of different ranges - between households, between households and businesses or local authorities, and between communities. The popular types of conflicts include conflicts caused by daily activities and pollution from production activities, conflicts due to land disputes; conflicts in production and business; and conflicts due to unequal contribution of money and labor.

Conflicts of interest resulting from daily activities and environmental pollution of waste discharge is the most common type of conflict in the two surveyed areas. This form of conflict is still ongoing and tends to increase in both localities. Next is

conflicts of interest due to land disputes, which occur at different scales, between households and between households and local authorities. This form of conflict has been increasingly observed in the primary group of blood relations and family lines in the two localities.

Conflicts of interest due to business competition and conflicts due to unequal contribution also exist in the two surveyed areas. These types of conflicts are not as common as others, but they show the competitiveness and capability to make contribution among community groups are very different. It is to say that the peri-urban community is no longer a homogenous social community among social groups.

The process of urbanization and industrialization has been changing not

only the natural landscape but the social structure and created a strong division in the peri-urban areas. This is the basis for changes in social relations, emergence of conflicts and contradictions among social groups in the community. This paper only aims at identifying the types of conflicts of interest and the stakeholders. Further studies are necessary to understand better the causes and solutions to conflicts of interest in the community □

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