



BASIS FOR ORIENTING AND FORMULATING POLICIES FOR AN EFFECTIVE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF ETHNIC MINORITY AREAS IN VIETNAM

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Abstract:

Ethnic minorities in Vietnam live primarily in mountainous areas, which border a large area and account for three-quarters of the country's land area and play a very important strategic role in terms of politics, economy, national defense, and ecological environment. Vietnam's ethnic minorities have amassed a distinct and diverse national cultural treasure over thousands of years of creating and protecting the country. Long-held beliefs, practices, and traditions have given each ethnic group its own particular cultural identity, contributing significantly to the diversity and richness of Vietnamese culture. The formulation and implementation of appropriate policies and laws for ethnic minority areas is nothing more than the exploitation and promotion of all the country's potential to improve and raise the quality of people's lives; create the best conditions for ethnic minorities to escape poverty and backwardness; implement equality, respect, solidarity, and harmoniously settle relations between ethnic groups, helping each other to develop sustainably. The article provides some basis for effective and sustainable ethnic minority development policies.

Keywords: policy on ethnic minorities, ethnic minorities, social economy, development

1. Introduction

Vietnam is a multi-ethnic country with 54 ethnic groups, including 53 ethnic minorities (which account for approximately 3 million households and 14.7 percent of the country's population). Ethnic minorities in Vietnam live in 64 provinces, cities, 548 districts, 5,266 commune-level administrative units, mainly in the Northwest, Central Highlands, South West and Central Central Coast (General Statistics Office of Vietnam, 2020: 37-38). People in Vietnam's ethnic minority areas still rely primarily on agricultural and forestry products for a living. The ratio of ethnic minority groups employed in industry,

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construction, and services is quite low, indicating that the region's tourism and service potential has yet to be realized. The average monthly income of ethnic minorities is currently at 1.1 million, which is less than half of the national average (General Statistics Office of Vietnam, 2020: 14). Although agro-forestry is the most prevalent source of income for individuals in ethnic minorities and mountainous areas in general, the absence or lack of productive land is common. According to survey data on the socioeconomic position of 53 ethnic minorities, up to 68.5 percent of ethnic minority households require more production land. In which, there are many ethnic groups in the Central Highlands, where over 80% of households lack productive land. According to statistics, only roughly 6.2 percent of ethnic minority workers (from primary vocational level and up) are trained, which is one-third of the national average (General Statistics Office of Vietnam, 2020: 15-16). Today, underemployment among ethnic minority youth is a major concern. More than 1.3 million of the 9.38 million ethnic minority youth aged 15 and up do not have stable jobs. A portion of ethnic minority employees have left their hometowns to seek employment in industrial zones or as hired laborers in neighboring countries such as Cambodia and China. According to research on the population pyramid of 53 ethnic minorities and the population pyramid of Vietnam, the proportion of age groups of 53 ethnic minorities is lower than the national average. The proportion of the population under 15 years old is 29.7%; population from 15 to 64 years old is 65%; from 65 years of age or older is 5.3%; the corresponding figure for the whole country is 24.3%; 68%; 7.7% (General Statistics Office of Vietnam, 2020: 55-56). This proves that the population of 53 ethnic minorities is a young population, the population aging rate is slower than the population aging rate of the whole country. In short, it can be seen that the community of ethnic minorities in Vietnam consists of many different ethnic groups; Each ethnic component is not an isolated and separate group in terms of politics - society, but a part of the Vietnamese nation that is united in diversity; Ethnic groups have an uneven history of socio-economic development; Ethnic populations are intertwined, dispersed in all regions of the country, there is no separate territory for each ethnic group; The population of different ethnic groups is not equal, the majority ethnic group is the Kinh with the largest population, the remaining 53 ethnic groups are ethnic minorities; Most of the ethnic minorities live in highland, mountainous and remote areas where infrastructure and people's intellectual level are still very low compared to other regions. Therefore, the policy for the development of ethnic minority areas needs to be researched and implemented seriously.

2. Implementation of policies on ethnic minority areas in Vietnam since 1986 and some issues raised

2.1. Implementation of policies on ethnic minority areas in Vietnam from 1986 up to now

Since the 6th Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam (1986), ethnic work has gradually integrated into the national renewal process. The Party and State of Vietnam

pay special attention to leading and closely directing ethnic affairs. The Politburo issued Resolution No. 24-NQ/TW, dated November 27, 1989 on a number of major undertakings and policies for socio-economic development in mountainous areas; The Council of Ministers (now it is the Government) has institutionalized the Resolution of the Party into Decision No. 72-HDBT, dated March 13, 1990 on a number of specific guidelines and policies for socio-economic development in the mountainous region. These two documents paved the way for the renewal of national work. The content-oriented view of ethnic affairs in the new period is scientifically and objectively evaluated and recognized by the Party: *"The issue of ethnicity and national unity is a fundamental and long-term strategic issue, and is also the current urgent issue of the Vietnamese revolution. Ethnicities in the great Vietnamese family are equal, united, helping each other to develop together, striving together to successfully implement the cause of industrialization and modernization of the country, building and protecting the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, resolutely fighting against all plots to divide the nation"* (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2003: 34-35). At the Document of the 12th National Congress of the Party, it is stated: *"Improve the quality of education and training, the quality of human resources, and take care of building a contingent of ethnic minority cadres, reputable representatives in the community of ethnic minorities, etc., fight against ethnic discrimination; strictly punish plots and acts of division and destruction of the great unity bloc of the nation"* (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2016:36-37). In general, the ethnic policy of the State of Vietnam has been mentioned and developed in each period, reflected in the Constitutions in 1946, 1959, 1980, 1992, 2013. In the 2013 Constitution, in Articles stated as: Article 5, Clause 2 *"Ethnicities are equal, unite, respect and help each other develop; strictly prohibit all acts of discrimination and division of the nation"*; Clause 4 *"The State implements the policy of comprehensive development and creates conditions for all ethnic minorities to promote their internal resources and develop together with the country"*; Article 61, Clause 3 *"The State gives priority to the development of education in mountainous areas, islands, ethnic minority areas and areas with extremely difficult socio-economic conditions..."*; Article 70, Clause 5 *"The National Assembly decides the State's ethnic and religious policies",...* In particular, the 14th National Assembly approved Resolution No. 88/2019/QH14 dated November 18, 2019 approving the master plan for socio-economic development in ethnic minority and mountainous areas in the period of 2021-2030; Resolution No. 120/2020/QH14 dated June 19, 2020 of the National Assembly approving the investment policy of the National Target Program for Socio-Economic Development in the ethnic minority and mountainous areas for the period of 2021- 2030; The Prime Minister issued Decision No. 1014/QD-TTg dated July 14, 2020 on the establishment of the Central Steering Committee of the National Target Program for Socio-Economic Development in the ethnic minority and mountainous areas for the period of 2021- 2030.

When evaluating the economic effectiveness of policies for the development of Vietnam's ethnic minority areas, in a news update on April 7, 2021, the World Bank commented: *"From 2002 to 2018, GDP per capita of Vietnam increased by 2.7 times, reaching more than 2,700 USD in 2019, the poverty rate fell sharply from more than 70% to less than 6% (3.2 USD/day at purchasing power parity). However, the majority of the remaining poor in*

Vietnam are ethnic minorities, accounting for 86%” (World Bank, 2021). According to the Report of the Steering Committee of the National Target Program on Sustainable Poverty Reduction in the period of 2016-2020, “*by the end of 2019, the poverty rate in the whole country will be 3.75%*” (Department of Economic Cooperation and Rural Development, 2020). However, the results of the survey to collect information on the socioeconomic status of 53 ethnic minorities in 2019 showed that “*poverty and near poverty rates of ethnic minority households are still 3.5 times higher than the poverty and near poverty rates of the whole country. The rate of poor people in ethnic minority households near the border is 1.5 times higher than in other regions (48.4% compared to 34.4%); the rate of rural areas are 4 times higher than that of urban areas (39.4% compared to 11.0%). The North Central and Central Coast regions have the highest poverty rates and the largest number of near poor ethnic households (48.2%) of ethnic minority households in poor and near poor communes. The next two regions with the highest percentages of poor and near poor households are the North Midlands and Mountains (39.1%) and the Central Highlands (35.5%). The lowest proportion of the poor and near poor households of ethnic minorities is in the Southeast (4.6%). Many ethnic groups such as Xinh Mun, La Hu, Chut, Mang and Pa Then have poor and near poor households accounting for more than 70%. In particular, the Chut ethnic group has the proportion of poor and near poor households up to 89.3%, that is, 9/10 of the Chut ethnic minority households are poor or near-poor*” (GSO, 2020: 27-34).

2.2. Some issues raised in the implementation of policies on ethnic minority areas today

The causes of limitations and weaknesses in the implementation of ethnic policies in recent years are:

- (1) The issue of ethnicity and ethnic policies in some places has not been thoroughly grasped, the awareness is not yet complete and comprehensive, meeting the requirements on par with the tasks of ethnic policy set forth in the current context.
- (2) The policy of ethnic minorities is slowly being concretized, suitable for the specific characteristics of each region and each object. Investment is still spread, not focused on the central point. Investment resources for ethnic minorities and mountainous areas are still low, not strong enough, and coordination and integration in the implementation of ethnic policies are not tight and synchronous.
- (3) The propaganda on ethnic policy is not timely; the sense of self-reliance of a part of the ethnic minorities has not been well promoted, and there is still heavy expectation and dependence.
- (3) The work of inspecting, supervising and urging the implementation of ethnic minority policies is not regular; the summarization and evaluation of the results of the implementation of programs and projects have not been paid due attention.
- (4) The organizational structure of the agency for ethnic minority affairs has been gradually supplemented and consolidated, but it is still inadequate, not very stable, and has low professionalism.

The difficulties and challenges facing ethnic minorities today are:

- (1) Infrastructure (including technical and social infrastructure) in ethnic minority areas is generally still poor, first of all, roads, irrigation systems; intellectual level and conditions for accessing information, commodity production market, scientific and technological progress of the 4.0 technology revolution.
- (2) The gap between rich and poor and social stratification is widening.
- (3) Cultural values and identities of ethnic groups in the development process are being lost.
- (4) Habitat (forest, sea, river) and living environment (health, medical service, hygiene...) are degraded and polluted seriously; Climate change is becoming more and more obvious with unpredictable consequences.
- (5) Enemy forces often take advantage of the guise of ethnicity, religion, human rights, radical nationalism and secessionist tendencies to incite and divide the great unity bloc of the nation.

3. Policy implications for effective and sustainable development of Vietnam's ethnic minority areas

3.1. Towards equitable economic development

The underdevelopment in many aspects and the high poverty rate of ethnic minorities compared to the average development level in general and the Kinh people, in particular, show the need for reasonable economic and social policies to quickly shorten the gap between ethnic minorities. When making policy, besides paying attention to the slow development of ethnic minorities in general, it is also necessary to pay attention to the uneven development among ethnic groups. Therefore, there should be priority regulations for ethnic minorities in general and specific priorities that are suitable to the development level of different ethnic minority groups. In addition to the provisions of the law, it is necessary to develop special programs and projects aimed at creating conditions for the development of ethnic minority groups. Projects and programs should be based on specific survey results to develop a long-term socio-economic development plan for ethnic minority areas, and identify specific goals and a roadmap to achieve those goals. Developing policies for ethnic minorities need to deal with the relationship between policies for regions, communities, and households in general and ethnic policies, avoiding overlapping and inappropriate interventions. Currently, many policies on ethnicity are often designed in the form of "one-size-fits-all", while the characteristics of each region, locality and ethnicity are very different. This not only reduces the relevance of the policy but also limits the creativity and effectiveness of policy implementation at the local level. Therefore, it is necessary to pay attention to using the anthropological approach for development to promote the cultural values and intrinsic resources of ethnic minority groups for development. In order for the policy to really come to life, it must be built in a bottom-up approach, avoiding the introduction of unrealistic goals, contents, tasks, and norms. On the other hand, it is necessary to avoid specifying too detailed and specific contents, norms, and methods, .. such as reducing the "responsibility" of local

authorities in organizing the implementation, thereby reducing the effectiveness of policies in general and mechanisms and policies on ethnic minorities in particular. On the other hand, each ethnic group has its own endogenous resources and strengths to survive. Therefore, policies should aim to promote those endogenous capacities. Policies that only support "free" as currently, should be in the "conditional" direction, which means that the poor individuals, poor households, and poor communes must be responsible when enjoying the State's policies. This is an issue that poverty reduction policies have not approached properly in recent years. Failing to prescribe conditions for beneficiaries will lead to a state of expectation and dependence on policies, thus not creating motivation for development.

3.2. Pay attention to social factors

In order for the promulgated policy to be effective, it is necessary to carefully and thoroughly analyze the underlying causes leading to the slow development and high poverty rate. On the other hand, it is necessary to aim to create mechanisms and conditions to overcome the underlying causes of the slow development and high poverty rate. The main causes of underdevelopment and poverty are limited access to public services. First of all, infrastructure such as roads, electricity and water, training facilities, medical institutions, information services... have different limitations. Therefore, the first priority policy is to focus on building and renovating roads, training and medical institutions in the areas of residence of ethnic minority communities. For example, the problem of child marriage and consanguineous marriage is believed to be caused by many factors, including low educational attainment, isolated living areas, and few opportunities for exchange, and integration with the outside society; along with that are marriage customs, prejudices between developed and underdeveloped ethnic groups; Inadequate understanding of the consequences of child marriage and consanguineous marriage,... leading to this situation in ethnic groups living in difficult areas has not shown signs of ending. Due to the complexity of the situation, the solution to address child marriage and consanguineous marriage among ethnic minorities need to be approached in a persistent, long-term and comprehensive manner, in which, creates conditions and motivation for ethnic minorities to integrate and develop the social economy is the basic solution that should be paid attention to. Medical facilities located far from residential areas are one of the reasons why access to medical examination and treatment services is still difficult. To solve the above situation, in addition to measures to accelerate socio-economic development, propagandize and disseminate to people about the benefits of using health insurance cards, etc., it is necessary to have appropriate policies to achieve the goal of increasing the rate of use and effective use of health insurance cards among ethnic minorities, specifically: having a reasonable model of investment in health development in terms of physical foundations, equipment and human resources for disadvantaged and extremely disadvantaged ethnic minority areas through specific mechanisms, prioritizing strong development of village health stations - commune health stations - regional polyclinics and district hospitals that are different

from the medical investment model in the delta area. The cause of the high poverty situation is also due to the low level of human resources and labor skills of ethnic minorities. Adult illiteracy is a major challenge for ethnic minorities. There is a very low proportion of the trained labor force and a high diversity among different ethnic minorities. On average, only 6.2% of the workforce has received training, equal to one-third of the national average. The lowest quintile has an average rate of less than 2%, while the index in the highest quintile is above 7%. There is a great disparity between men and women in terms of education and employment due to many reasons, of which mainly the male chauvinism, old-fashioned and outdated notions about women having to do housework and take care of the family should not be studied much. In addition, many ethnic minority women have to undertake agricultural and forestry activities and cannot afford to go to school. The education level of ethnic minorities is generally low compared to the national average, which has had a significant impact on the process of formulating policies and legal documents for the development of ethnic minorities. In order for policies and laws to come to life, in addition to general policies, it is necessary to have policies to serve the propagation and dissemination of legal documents suitable to the intellectual level of the communities of ethnic minorities. In particular, it is necessary to pay attention to promoting the role of village elders, village leaders and reputable people in the community. The work of propagating and disseminating the State's policies and regimes toward ethnic minority communities requires a separate approach to each ethnic community group because they have different educational levels. Recent survey data shows that all social development indicators of ethnic minorities are at a low level, therefore, formulating policies and legal documents for the development of ethnic minorities needs to be systematic and synchronous. First of all, the synchronization between the set goals and solutions and implementation resources. At present, policies often fall into the state that the set goals are too large, while the tasks, solutions and resources, even if they are met as specified in the policy, cannot achieve the set goals. The design of ethnic policies by sectors and fields is still independent, there is a lack of coherence of policies within a sector (education, health care, culture, etc.) and between different sectors, creating dispersion. This leads to overlapping of policies, making it impossible to carry out joint coordination to achieve a comprehensive and holistic effect. The uniformity of policies must be built in the general, based on the practical basis of each region, locality and each ethnic group to coordinate goals. For example, the common cause of low social indicators such as education, training, economy, information, etc. is due to poor technical infrastructure, therefore, if separate policy-making and implementation of separate policies such as education, health, cultural development policies, etc., both have the goal of infrastructure construction. Separate coordination will lead to overlap, fragmentation and waste.

3.3. Focus on preserving cultural values

The characteristics of society, culture, customs and practices as well as factors of natural, historical and economic characteristics of each region and each ethnic group have a great

impact in the formulation of ethnic policies. In order for policies to be put into practice, the formulation of ethnic policies and development programs and projects in ethnic minority areas needs to be considered, taking into account cultural factors and characteristics as a condition to ensure policy adequacy. Customs and practices are an important part of the cultural system, reflecting the "vision" of an ethnic community about the cosmic world including natural matter, the surrounding environment and the corresponding codes of conduct of the community. In the history of survival, in order to be able to survive and develop, peoples and communities have to overcome the obstacles of natural and social forces to adapt, transform and integrate. These behaviors are repeated many times, forming a way of life, a way of thinking, clearly expressed in customs and practices. It is these long-standing customs and practices that have created cultural traditions, characteristics, and differences, forming the identity of the community and nation. Customs, practices and culture are formed on the basis of the socio-psychological background of a community, the religion or the ideology of the nation. Culture creates cohesion between individuals and social communities in unity and universality. From the general perception of the worldview and being bound by the provisions of the customary law, customs and practices have profoundly influenced the thoughts and behavior of each person, and re-defined their thoughts and behaviors. From there, creating the community's social psychology and higher transformation into the ideology of the nation, into the superstructure of the nation, that is the ideology. In a social community with a narrow level and scale like in the mountainous ethnic minority areas of Vietnam, with many isolated factors, the internal connection and difference with the general society are very greater. Therefore, each intervention policy must be suitable to real life and emotions, psychology of the people and community, orient and transform those cultural elements step by step in each specific context. Relevancy is reflected in the promotion of traditional cultural quintessence, overcoming barriers of customs, towards a new civilized, modern and developed life, however, they still preserve their cultural identity. In fact, each ethnic group has its own customs, habits, way of thinking and customary law, the making of policies and laws for the development of ethnic minorities needs to issue a separate law with an appropriate name to regulate relationships related to ethnic minorities, create a legal corridor for the development of ethnic minorities and ethnic minority areas. Paying attention to the peculiarities of customs, practices, ways of thinking and thoughts of ethnic minorities in order to develop appropriate laws; Not promulgating a separate law, but reviewing all relevant current laws to supplement and correct missing or unsuitable contents for the development of ethnic minorities and ethnic minority areas. This method requires careful study of customs, practices and customary laws related to each specialized law in order to make appropriate additions and amendments. Currently, the Industrial Revolution 4.0 is taking place strongly, with changes in the environment and epidemics that have created very important changes in the lives of countries, including ethnic minorities. The process of globalization changes people's perceptions and consciousness. There is a danger of losing important cultural values in cultural identity and cultural heritage. At the same time, the process of

population shifting and intermingling has become more and more popular, forming mixed communities with many ethnic groups. Environmental changes and epidemics also lead to new ways of life and social relationships. This fact leads to the process of mixing and interweaving between the trends in intercultural interference, acculturation, cultural adjustment and preservation among ethnic groups. Because, a community with a larger population and a more developed economy will dominate, affecting the culture of the remaining communities. That combination creates a colorful picture. The ethnic policy must be handled in such a way as not to lose the key factor that is "university in diversity", which is determined by the relationship between ethnic groups based on the principle of equality. In addition, the ethnic policy must strengthen the sense of national confidence and self-respect, the desire to preserve, promote and spread the cultural values of their own nation. Therefore, the policy for the development of ethnic minorities needs to create conditions for the development of socio-economic life, while conserving cultural values in general and the cultural heritages that make up the identity of the ethnic minorities in particular.

4. Conclusion

In the coming period, Vietnam's ethnic policy should be built on the basis of the characteristics of the ethnic communities and must be suitable to the current situation. If in the 60s of the last century, the prominent ethnic policy was the sedentary settlement campaign, implemented from the first 5-year plan with the roadmap *"Where it is convenient to do first, gradually move to the more difficult areas"* according to the planning mechanism, then change the implementation method by specific projects. In the last years of the twentieth century, the implementation of the renovation of ethnic work was carried out with many new contents and methods, typically Program 135 (the name of Program 135 is derived from Decision No. 135/1998/QĐ-TTg dated July 31, 1998 of the Prime Minister of Vietnam. The name of the program according to this decision is "Program for socio-economic development of extremely difficult communes in the ethnic minority areas and in the mountainous areas." Later, although the program moved to the next stages and the legal basis was the Decision No. 07/2006/QĐ-TTg, the program was still called Program 135. Since 2012, the Program 135 continues to be used to refer to the National Target Program for Sustainable Poverty Reduction). The breakthrough is to focus on the most difficult and poor places, the Program 135 has limited the widening gap between rich and poor, .. affirming the necessity of implementing ethnic policies by the Target Program. In the context of the current situation, with new advantages and difficulties and challenges, the ethnic policy should continue to be implemented by the National Target Program (greater than or at least equal to the Program 135, as the saying goes in migration and resettlement: The new place of residence must be greater than or equal to the old one). The ethnic policy is essentially a system of specific policies in all areas of social life with multi-sectoral nature. This is an indispensable and objective requirement: It is not possible to set a general policy that applies to all regions, all

different subjects in a multi-ethnic country. This is also the dialectical unity of two sides of an issue: (1) Ethnic policy is part of the national development policy system in terms of politics, economy, culture, society, environment, national defense and security and international integration. (2) Ethnic policy is to concretize the national development policy in all aspects, into specific policies for effective implementation in the ethnic minority and mountainous areas. Implement ethnic policies with the National Target Program in order to focus investment and support resources with central points and a reasonable roadmap; overcome the situation of spreading, leveling, and average investment; overcome the limitations of "coordination and integration of different programs and projects in the same area" which is quite common so far. When implementing ethnic policies, it is necessary to create motivation to overcome the mentality of inferiority, dependence, and lack of will to strive for improvement. Change the way of support for free, to the form of preferential credit loans along with guidance on the use of capital in production by agricultural extension, forestry extension, etc. The method of implementing ethnic policies must stimulate the promotion of local strengths so that ethnic minorities can surpass themselves and bring a happy and prosperous life to themselves, their families and their villages. Ethnic policies in the coming period need to define goals and contents not only to focus on infrastructure investment, but also to strengthen training, vocational training and career guidance for people about new and more effective ways of doing business to get out of poverty and get rich.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

About the Author

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