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Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PROCEEDINGS OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

“SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND

ETHNIC MINORITY POVERTY REDUCTION

IN MOUNTAINOUS REGIONS”

Thai Nguyen- Vietnam 2014

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

AAA	Advocacy, Anti-Stigma, Awareness
CBT	Community-Based Tourism
CDD	Community Driven Development
EMWG	Ethnic Minorities Working Group
MOLISA	Ministry of Labor-Invalids and Social Affairs
NOMAFSI	Northern Mountainous Agriculture and Forestry Science Institute
PRPP	Poverty Reduction Programs and Policies
TNU	Thai Nguyen University
WB	World Bank

Preface

This international conference on “Sustainable Development and Ethnic Minority Poverty Reduction in the Mountainous Regions” was conducted for a dialogue among government, country stakeholders (including civil society), and development partners on both the experiences in the Northern Mountains of Vietnam and that in other countries in order to determine how the development approach on sustainable development and ethnic minority poverty reduction could be improved.

Specifically, the objectives of this conference were: to introduce the international experience of poverty reduction targeting ethnic minorities in mountainous and remote areas, especially in the region having similar economic and geographical conditions; to review and discuss (i) current programs/projects targeting ethnic minorities in the Northern Mountainous region; and (ii) alternative options for Northern Mountainous region in order to achieve more effective interventions; and to formulate a list of policy and project options about potential poverty reduction initiatives that could be replicated in the region and presented to the local authorities for further consideration.

The conference was a multi-sectoral forum that featured plenary papers by experts and government leaders with focal points on policies in Vietnam from government and donor perspectives, and parallel sessions and open forum presented by academics/researchers and development practitioners who have exceptional exposure in the field of research together with practitioners, graduate students, researchers, government officers focusing on livelihood and market linkages, natural resource management, cultural diversity, education and health care, climate change and environment, and poverty analysis and evaluation. Poster and video presentations were also showcased in the event.

A final count of more than 200 participants from the northern, central and southern Vietnam and from more than 15 countries and international organizations attended the conference. With the discussions and active participation of each of the delegates over the past three days, the conference was well on the way to achieving its the prime objectives.

All essential information about sustainable development and poverty reduction issues among ethnic minorities were adequately discussed. Clear illustrations were provided for clarification purposes through poster and video presentations.

Hence, this international conference proceedings was prepared as future reference on issues related to sustainable development and ethnic minority poverty reduction in the mountainous regions.

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Acknowledgements

The international conference on “Sustainable Development and Ethnic Minority Poverty Reduction in the Mountainous Regions” which was jointly hosted by the World Bank and Thai Nguyen University, Vietnam on June 11 -13, 2014 was successfully realized due to the effort of a number of wonderful people who have always given their valuable support. In regard to this, sincere appreciation is due to the inspiration and assistance of all those people who have been instrumental in making the conference a success.

Sincere thanks to the World Bank in Vietnam as TNU’s co-host in conducting the conference most especially to Ms. Victoria Kwakwa (World Bank Country Director), Ms. Jennifer Sara (Sector Manager, Sustainable Development Department, World Bank in Vietnam), and to the President of Thai Nguyen University Dr. Dang Kim Vui in providing valuable insights leading to the successful completion of the conference;

Special thanks are extended to Mr. Dang Viet Thuan (Vice Chairman of the Thai Nguyen People’s Committee), and Mr. Son Phuoc Hoan (Vice Minister of the Committee for Ethnic Minorities Affairs) for taking time off from their busy schedule to participate in this event;

Gratitude is equally extended to Ngo Truong Thi (Director-General, National Office for Poverty, Ministry of Labor and Invalids and Social Services), Mr. Vo Van Bay (Director, Chief of Program 135, Committee for Ethnic Minorities Affairs), Mr. Do Thanh Trung (Acting Director, Department of Local and Territorial Economy, Ministry of Planning and Investment), Mr. Ta Huu Nghia (Head, Poverty Reduction and Social Security Division, Department Cooperatives and Rural Development, Ministry of Agricultural Research and Development), Mr. Gavan McCann (Chair of the Ethnic Minority Poverty Working Group, Deputy Head of Mission, Head of Development, Irish Aid), Mr. Nguyen Hoang Linh (National Technical Coordinator, PRPP/MOLISA), for sharing their abundance of knowledge on development policies, review and guiding principle in poverty reduction for minorities in the coming years, livelihood development for poverty reduction and made it clear that the business of sustainable development is one we must do and do well for the advantage of the ethnic minorities and our future generations who are disproportionately affected by poverty;

Deep sense of gratitude is due to all paper and poster presenters, both international and local, for the excellent and scholarly contributions in this event. They have addressed a range of sustainable development and ethnic minority poverty reduction issues and challenges, focused on the impact of livelihood and market linkages, natural resource management, climate change, health and education, cultural diversity, and poverty analysis and evaluation; and

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composed of TNU Staff and students for the full support and assistance in organizing the conference agenda and logistics, whose contributions are highly valued, without which the international conference would not have been possible.

Executive Summary

Ethnic minority and mountainous areas in Vietnam account for nearly three quarters of the natural area of the country. These areas are inhabited by 54 ethnic groups, of which there are 53 ethnic minority groups with over 13 million people, accounted for 14.28% of the country's population. Ethnic minority and mountainous areas where centralized resources, mineral resources and great potential for hydroelectric power, are the sources of many rivers, streams, freshwater supply, maintaining ecological balance, climatic conditions and more sub-region to facilitate the development of agriculture, forestry and animal husbandry. In addition, ethnic minority and mountainous areas are very rich in tourism potential.

On the other hand, the ethnic minority and mountainous areas face many difficulties and challenges. These challenges are complex, dangerous, and often influenced by the impact of large natural disasters such as flooding which results to great limitation in opening wide exchanges, especially the highlands, remote, border areas. The socio-economic development in the ethnic minority and mountainous areas are still underdeveloped. The infrastructures in some high areas, remote areas and revolutionary bases are still low. The customs of some places remain backward with much superstitious phenomenon. The status of nomadic, free migration, deforestation, land claim disputes, illegal religious activity, trafficking, transporting, drug trafficking remain unlawful ordinances. The ecological environment is seriously degraded. The impact of climate change leads to disasters mode, causing flash floods annual heavy losses of life and property in ethnic and mountainous areas. Hence, the poverty rate remains poor which is higher than the average in Vietnam.

In regard to this, policies in reducing poverty and socio-economic development of ethnic minorities were developed. It was suggested that policies on ethnic affairs of the ministries and branches needed to be merged into a common document, a number of national target programs should be reduced, and new policies should serve multi-purpose aims and suitable for long-term socio-economic development and characteristics of each region.

Introduction

As Vietnam rapidly develops, remote ethnic minorities and rural households have often been left behind. Poverty continues to be predominately rural; more than 90 percent of the poor live in rural areas with ethnic minorities and rural households concentrated in mountainous regions. Ethnic minorities are nearly half of the remaining poor population. The World Bank has been supporting Vietnam's rural development with programs such as the P135-2 and the Northern Mountains and Central Highlands CDD projects, as well as operations focused on water and sanitation, transport, and energy in rural areas. The Bank has been (and continues to be) involved in extensive analysis of poverty in Vietnam, including (*inter alia*) a Country Social Analysis on ethnicity and development in 2009, a Poverty Assessment in 2012, and a Programmatic Poverty & Gender AAA to be carried out through 2014. The Bank also has extensive experience in addressing poverty among disadvantaged groups in remote areas in other countries (e.g., India, Brazil, and China) around the world.

The World Bank has been requested by Vietnam's Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development to provide technical assistance and advice regarding the challenge of remote rural populations, typically ethnic minorities, in the Northern Mountains of the country, who are being left behind as the country develops. To address this request the Bank organized an analytical and advisory activity centered on understanding the development challenges of these populations. In regard to this, an international conference was organized on June 11-13, 2014 in Thai Nguyen University, Thai Nguyen City with the participation of 200 participants of which over 50 were international. The conference was participated in by representatives from government, academia, civil society, and the development partners to reflect on and discuss issues, focusing on both the Vietnamese experience and international experience in promoting rural development among remote and dispersed rural mountainous communities. The conference was structured in such a way as to motivate discussion and development of policy and project level recommendations.

Objectives of the Conference

General objectives

1. To launch a dialogue among government, country stakeholders (including civil society), and development partners on both the experience in the Northern Mountains of Vietnam and that in other countries; and
2. To determine how the development approach to this area could be improved.

Specific objectives

1. To introduce the international experience of poverty reduction targeting ethnic minorities in mountainous and remote area, especially in the region having similar economic and geographical conditions;

2. To review and discuss (i) current programs/projects targeting ethnic minorities in the Northern Mountains region; and (ii) alternative options for Northern Mountain region in order to achieve more effective interventions; and
3. To formulate a menu of policy and project options about potential poverty reduction initiatives that could be replicated in the region and presented to the local authorities for further consideration.

Conference Methodology

The conference featured plenary papers by experts and leaders in sustainable development and poverty reduction, and paper presentations, parallel sessions and workshops to identify gaps in sustainable development and poverty reduction in the country and develop mechanisms for collaborative projects. The papers for discussion were focused on the following topics: livelihood and market linkages, natural resource management, cultural diversity, education and health care, climate change and environment, and poverty analysis and evaluation. Poster and video presentations were also showcased in the event.

Participants from other countries who are renowned academics/researchers and development practitioners with exceptional exposure in the field of research related to this conference were invited together with practitioners, graduate students, researchers, government officers, policy makers and donors from Vietnam.

Main Findings

Policies in Vietnam from Government and Donor Perspectives

Policies in Reducing Poverty and Socio-Economic Development of Ethnic Minorities

Vietnam has achieved remarkable success in socio-economic development, especially in poverty alleviation. Those achievements are due mainly to special attention of the Vietnam's Government through issuance of a number of policies [Ngo Truong Thi, 2014 and Vo Van Bay, 2014], in which ethnic minorities have been identified as a priority target.

However, the promulgation of too many policies led to overlap and fragmentation. Policies which were built for short term, became a major burden for the implementation, while Vietnam does not have mechanisms to ensure effective coordination among relevant ministries in



A typical poor household in Vietnam's Northern Mountainous region, Source: Do Anh Tai

implementing poverty reduction [Vo Van Bay, 2014]. Most of the policies are emphasized on the infrastructure development, which were not much different than investments in rural infrastructure development [Gavan McCann, 2014].

Lessons Learned on Policies in Vietnam

In order to avoid the dispersed and overlapped investment, current state of poverty, primary objectives, and the core poor and disadvantaged regions must be determined. Policies must fit on each region, while democracy and transparency in the implementation of policies should be ensured [Vo Van Bay and Gavan McCann, 2014].

Implications for the poverty reduction policies

The policies on ethnic affairs of the ministries and branches needed to be merged into a common document, a number of national target programs should be reduced, new policies should serve multi-purpose aims, and suitable for long-term socio-economic development and characteristics of each region [Ngo Truong Thi, 2014, Vo Van Bay, 2014 and Gavan McCann, 2014] based on the participation of ethnic minority group [EMWG, 2014].

Policies and Approaches for Poverty Alleviation in the Mountain Areas of Nepal and Central Andean Region of South America

International experience shows that in order to achieve success in developing policies for isolated areas, specific factors and socio-economic circumstances of the localities should be taken into account. In Nepal [Prabhu Budhathoki, 2014], the government has succeeded in issuing policies with dual objectives to preserve natural resources and contribute to improving livelihoods for local people. Nepal has moved from a system of strict protection policy using the method "to prevent and sanction" into the participatory approach of the local people in the conservation of natural resources. Although the management mechanisms can vary depending on the characteristics of each area (relying on non-governmental organizations, local communities, government agencies), the participation of the local people in the community local has always played an important role. Revenues generated from the sale of products in the region will be redistributed to benefit communities and the rotation of investment and to carry out development conservation activities. The Andes region countries also showed other experiences in adapting difficult weather conditions and take advantage of in situ biodiversity [Alejandro Camino, 2014].

Lessons Learned on International Experiences on Ethnic Minority Poverty Reduction

The experience shows that the development policies (especially for isolated areas) should pay attention to the following points: (i) the empowerment and promotion of democracy in local communities [Alejandro Camino, and Prabhu Budhathoki 2014, 2014]; (ii) the management model which harmoniously combines benefits of harmonizing the local community [Brian J. Peniston, 2014] and the need to preserve biodiversity; and (iii) the management models should be linked to specific characteristics of localities to emphasize their possession [Prabhu Budhathoki, 2014].

Implications for the poverty reduction policies

In developing countries, multi-objective approach is better suited to bring about better results [Prabhu Budhathoki, 2014], and the formation and development of alliances between manufacturers and customers are models to ensure the effective implementation of sustainable development policies [Jhonny Delgadillo, 2014].

International and domestic experience

1. Livelihood and Market Linkages

Livelihood development model for ethnic minorities: The absence of synchronization [Vo Van Thiep, Tran The Hung, Phan Thanh Quyet, 2014] led to success in technical perspective for most of the models, but in view of the market, those models were not successful due to lack of market outlets for the products. Thus, the sustainability of the models was greatly affected.

On the other hand, the link between producers and consumers, the transparency and mutual trust showed important implications to ensure a



Wild boar breeding help poor farmers sell for high profits and ensuring the species' survival. *Source: Nguyen Huu Tho*

successful implementation of livelihood development models as piloted by NOMAFSI. Groups of farmers were organized to produce safe products with certification issued by DARD which enabled these groups of farmers to market their products direct to supermarkets and other safe retailers. This livelihood development model has helped farmers make linkages with potential buyers. [Nguyen Phi Hung, Gordon Rogers, Jeroen Pasman, Pham Thi My Dung, Pham Thi Sen, 2014].

Lessons Learned in Reducing Poverty among Ethnic Minorities through Livelihood and Market Linkages

Strengthening of farm marketing is an important finding to improve the livelihoods of the poor. Market linkage strengthening through the value chain approach is a common feature of rural development projects in Vietnam [Nguyen Thanh Duong and Pham Thi Minh Nghia, 2014]. Livelihood approach needs to take into account the specific needs of different regions and different ethnic groups, which helped develop the strength of each regions as well as the knowledge, understanding, practice and habits of the local people.

Implications for the poverty reduction policies

The project does not invest directly on the poor, but only create a favourable environment or a good opportunity for the poor to seize in order to escape from poverty, avoid dependence on the State. The project is customized for compatibility with different characteristics of natural conditions, socio-economic, poverty rate, etc. of each region based on local knowledge of the people under the motto "Each village has an outstanding product" [Vo Van Tiep, Tran The Hung, Phan Thanh Quyet - 2014].

2. Natural resource management

Agriculture is considered as the main source of income of upland ethnic minorities, the traditional farming methods has created difficulties for people living in those areas and is a challenge for natural resources. Particularly, land and forests are being overexploited and overused, affecting to the sustainability [Sushil Pandey and Huaiyu Wang, 2014]. Improvement of productivity is one of the breakthrough solutions to help people eliminate the vicious circle between production inefficiency and poverty, since it will help people get more bare areas to cultivate other crops and bring in more income.

Lessons Learned in Reducing Poverty through Natural Resource Management

Native trees should be conserved while introducing new varieties in cultivation system of the highland people is also needed to consider due to different characteristics of each region. Assessment of local people during the deployment process will ensure the success of model replication.

Implications for the poverty reduction policies

New technologies and techniques contribute to improving productivity in agriculture and are golden key to help farmers escape the life of poverty and have better life. Those innovations also have a positive impact on the environment [Sushil Pandey, 2014]. However, a unified program can not be applied for all regions due to certain differences.



Barren hills due to over-logging and farming,
Source: Do Anh Tai

3. Cultural Diversity

Linguistic diversity is a typical characteristic in mountainous areas, but it is also a barrier to the implementation of socio-economic development programs, especially areas using only the native language [Nguyen Thuan Quy, 2014]. In many ethnic minority areas, men have their right to access and participate in the economic development activities, while women are the direct labors participating in production [Ta Thi Thao, 2014].



A woman (direct labor in her family) carries heavy wood in her shoulder,
Source: Do Anh Tai

Community-based tourism (CBT) harnesses the strength of mountainous areas with cultural diversity, abundance of terrain, landscape ecology, helps people to be able to improve the economy and reduce poverty, maintains and preserves the traditional identity of ethnic minorities in production and daily life activities

[Tran Huu Son, 2014].

Lessons Learned in Reducing Poverty through Understanding Cultural Diversity

When implementing the socio-economic development activities in the ethnic minority areas, the approaches to different cultures and customs should be varied, and direct participations of productive activities should be paid more attention.

Model of CBT is regarded as a standard to optimize the benefits and strengthen the role and responsibilities of local communities in the protection of the traditional core values of the areas.

Implications for the poverty reduction policies

National cultural identities are resources for economic development, and vice versa, the process of economic development needs to preserve the traditional cultural heritage of ethnic minorities.

4. Education and healthcare

Education for ethnic minorities: The economic development programs have brought worthy results in the field of education for ethnic minorities [Anh Dang Hai, Gabriel Demombynes, 2014]. However, since most of ethnic minority children have limited access to Vietnamese language before attending to school, and most of the learning materials are in Vietnamese, so results of their latter study are affected [EMWG, 2014].

Health Care for Mothers and Children: The studies indicate that the ethnic minorities apply traditional methods of health care, in which measures of traditional health care for children has brought good results [Dam Khai Hoan and Hac Van Vinh, 2014], showing the need for promotion and combination of useful, adaptable measures of traditional health care with the modern health care services, to improve the health of ethnic minority people, especially women and children.

Lessons Learned in Reducing Poverty among Ethnic Minorities through Education and Health Care

Sufficient supply of books and other learning materials are necessary to have a positive impact on the learning outcomes of the people especially of the children. Besides, improvement of health also brings positive impact to the learning process of students [Kamrul Ahsan, 2014]. In attempting to improve the health, safety and economic sustainability of poorly educated and socially isolated groups, there is a need for patience, for coordination of effort, and for variety of techniques to be employed. Hence, building community capacity for groups of ethnic minorities with low literacy level is the first step towards the success of the poverty alleviation programs [John Collins, 2014].

In addition, the practices of ethnic minorities, especially some outdated practices, will severely affect the health care program. Some traditions affecting children and mother health care, such as: women still perform heavy work when pregnant, birth at home by midwives and family support, sitting to lay, lay next to the kitchen door, among others, are some of the backward customs

which are not good for mothers and children's health. [Dam Khai Hoan and Hac Van Vinh, 2014].

Implications for the poverty reduction policies

Education should be given special attention. The learning materials in native languages of the ethnic minorities will help children reach school earlier. Teaching and learning method need to be reformed to actively promote the participation of learners in each lecture.

Enhancing communication must be initiated to help ethnic minority people abandon backward customs which are not good for mothers and children's health, and organization of health care programs especially maternal and child malnutrition prevention programs should be enhanced.

5. Climate change and environment

Problems on Environmental Protection in the mountainous region

Soil, water and air in mountainous areas tend to deteriorate; natural resources and biodiversity are degraded. The infrastructure and equipment for environmental protection are backward, environmental pollution increases, while funding for environmental investments, as well as state enterprises have not been paid adequate attention. The staff capacity for environmental management is also limited. Climate change impact increases and affect directly on economic life of the ethnic minorities, and the poor are main subject to influence.

The population growth, migration and poverty cause intense pressure on natural resources and environment. The environmental protection measures have not been incorporated in harmony with socio-economic development, leading to difficulties to prevent pollution and ensure sustainable development.

Perception of local people in the environment and sustainable development are insufficient, while awareness on environmental protection is low [Vu Thi Thanh Minh, 2014].

Lessons Learned in Reducing Poverty among Ethnic Minorities through Understanding Climate change and Environment

The interest in achieving economic development goals was to increase the risk of environmental damage and depletion of natural resources [Vu Thi Thanh Minh, 2014].

Expansion and development of organic agriculture need to consider all technical and market development, system testing and inspection, and prices subsidy. Intercropped plants should be identified and grown in appropriate regions. Strict ban on burning fields to cultivate food or nomadism in the region should be imposed. Provision of alternative livelihoods for the poor families can help protect the environment [Manuel S. Tan Jr., 2014].

Implications for the poverty reduction policies

Promotion of awareness about the environment and sustainable development in order to improve people's movement for environmental protection is considered to solve root of the problem.

Environmental protection policies should be institutionalized and put into action plans of socio-economic development of each locality, as well as to build specific sanctions for implementation. Environmental zoning map should be planned and set as a basis for planning socio-economic development aligned with protecting the environment in ethnic minority and mountainous regions.

6. Poverty Analysis and Evaluation

Welfare for ethnic groups in Vietnam: Although the number of poverty households has dropped, their economic growth is much slower than the other groups [Phung Duc Tung et al., 2014]. The indicators measured by educational level, literacy, economic sectors, the rate of migration and wealth index indicate that the economic development programs bring greater benefits to groups of ethnic minorities in mountainous areas. However, the poor groups still rely on agriculture as the main activity for livelihood [Anh Dang Hai and Gabriel Demombynes, 2014].

Lessons Learned on Poverty Analysis and Evaluation of Experiences among Ethnic Minorities

Through the evaluation of poverty reduction projects, interventions in agriculture have brought more positive results for income of the poor ethnic minorities than interference in other infrastructure [Phung Duc Tung et al., 2014].

For a comprehensive look, ethnic minority groups are poorer than the Kinh, but the ethnic minority groups have gained significant experience and achievements from the programs on hunger eradication, poverty reduction and economic development of Vietnam [Hai Anh Dang and Gabriel Demombynes, 2014].

Implications for the poverty reduction policies

Education plays a meaningful and important role towards families and communities. In order to sustainably reduce poverty, non-agricultural activities (besides agricultural activities) needed to be focused and supported.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

After a series of discussion of government, country stakeholders (including civil society), and development partners on both the experience in the Northern Mountains of Vietnam and that in other countries, it is therefore concluded that Vietnam has achieved remarkable success in socio-economic development, especially in poverty alleviation. The Government of Vietnam has issued many policies, but there are existences of overlap and dispersion. The international experience shows that to achieve success, policy development for isolated areas needs to take into account specific factors and socio-economic circumstances of the localities.

However, the northern mountainous region in Vietnam which are inhabited mostly by ethnic minority communities are facing challenges on livelihood and market linkages, natural resources and environmental degradation, and climate change. Thus, those challenges severely affect the poverty alleviation programs and economic development.

It should be noted that the key component of economic development in the mountainous areas is education, but the differences in language and approach must be taken into account to help improve the living conditions of the ethnic minority people.

Recommendations

The following recommendations provide possible solutions to the issues and concerns related to sustainable development of ethnic minority poverty reduction in the northern mountainous regions:

- To merge the policies on ethnic affairs of the ministries and branches into a common document, a number of national target programs should be reduced, new policies should serve multi-purpose aims, and suitable for long-term socio-economic development and characteristics of each region based on the participation of ethnic minorities group.
- To formulate and develop alliances between manufacturers and customers to ensure the effective implementation of sustainable development policies, to encourage the private sector to participate in socio-economic development for the poor ethnic people regions.
- To encourage programs that put technology, new techniques to improve productivity in agriculture and create positive impact on the environment and in accordance with specific regions.
- To pay special attention to education, especially the learning materials in native languages of ethnic minorities, since those materials will help children approach school earlier
- To reform teaching and learning methods to actively promote the participation of learners in each lecture.
- To provide projects that create favorable environment for the poor to be able to capture opportunity in order to escape from poverty, and match to the different characteristics of natural, economic and social conditions.
- To enhance communication and organization of health care programs, especially maternal care and malnutrition prevention program.
- To raise awareness about the environment and sustainable development in order to improve movement for local people's environmental protection, to institutionalize and put environmental policy into action programs of each locality's socio-economic development, and to build specific sanctions for implementation.
- To plan and set environmental zoning map as a basis for socio-economic development plans aligned with protecting the environment in ethnic minority and mountainous regions.

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