ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ETHNIC POLICIES IN OUR COUNTRY TODAY*  

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In the renovation years, the Party and State have paid attention to the lives of ethnic minorities. Many policies have been promulgated and implemented effectively, contributing to the progressive transformation in all areas of social life in ethnic minority and mountainous areas. However, besides the immense and undeniable results achieved, the process of implementation of ethnic policies also revealed a number of weaknesses, limitations, raised issues that need to continue to solve. It is necessary to evaluate objectively and comprehensively on this issue, which will serve as a basis for enhancing the effectiveness of the implementation of ethnic policies in the coming time.

Key words: Ethnic policy; ethnic minority affairs; ethnic minorities; renovation.

1. Introduction

Policy on ethnic minority is a constituent part of general policies of a political party, a state in which to map the principles, treatment and resolution of national problems in a country. Ethnic policy in Party and State of Vietnam is all policies and solutions that affect all aspects of lives of ethnic minorities, ethnic minority areas, and individual ethnic group in order to change backwardness, isolation, discrimination and inequalities between different ethnic groups; to exercise equality, solidarity, mutual respect and mutual assistance among ethnic groups to develop together. Over the past years, the Party and State have been effectively studying, issuing and implementing ethnic policies which impact all aspects in ethnic minorities. However, the process of implementing ethnic policies in our country also has many limitations, weaknesses and problems that need to be resolved.

2. Major achievements in the implementation of ethnic policies in our country since 1986

The comprehensive reform process initiated by the Communist Party of Vietnam (since 1986) has led to a dramatic shift in the perception and direction of the implementation of the national policy. In a comprehensive way, the process of implementing the national policy has achieved important achievements in all fields of economy, culture, society, security and national defense.

The essential infrastructure in ethnic minority and mountainous areas has achieved important results, creating a new socio-economic appearance.1 Infrastructure development is fast, initially to meet the development of production and service life of ethnic minority people, the economic structure of positive change. The program of socio-economic development of the State, especially Program 135 (phase II, III), program 134... have been actively implemented, bringing important results to the ethnic minority areas, contributing to hunger eradication and poverty alleviation, improving lives; To step by step change the economic structure of the ethnic minority areas, from a basic self-sufficient economy to commodity economy, coupled with the development of trade and services. According to Survey of 53 ethnic minority groups in 2015 data, Tay, Thai, Muong,  

1 According to the Report on implementation of National Target Programs 2011-2015 and orientation for development of national target programs for 2016-2020, the programs have invested 4,459 baselines, supported the development of production and served people’s needs in poor districts; built and put into operation over 1,600 essential infrastructure works in service of production and people’s life in the communes meeting with exceptional difficulties in coastal and island communes. In 2 years (2012-2013), Program 135 has invested in the construction of 8,959 works including transportation, irrigation, electricity, schools, health, and water supply. In 2014, 6,221 works have been invested and 2,069 works are planned in 2015, mainly focusing on roads, irrigation works, cultural houses, schools, water supply. By 2015, there are 80 extremely difficult communes in 23 provinces and 366 villages in 30 provinces that have completed the program’s objectives.
Nung, Mong, Dao, Khmer, Ba Na, Ede and Co Tu are among the ethnic groups which have fastest poverty reduction rate phase 2012 - 2015.

Chart 1: Typical poverty reduction rate in some ethnic groups phase 2012 - 2015

According to the Government’s Report on Assessing the implementation of NTPs for the period 2011-2015 and orientation for building national target programs in 2016-2020, by the end of 2014, rate of poor households in ethnic minority areas significantly decreased, an average of 34.8%, each year decreased over 3.5%. In addition, policy on supporting production land, residential land, housing and clean water in accordance with the Decision No. 134/2004/QD-TTg, also achieved certain results. Since 2004, 4,473.9 billion VND has been allocated to support the housing, supported 373,400 houses for ethnic minority people; supported 1,552 hectares of residential land for 71,713 households; supported 27,763 hectares of productive land for 85,563 households. Water has been distributed to 198,702 households and 4,663 concentrated water projects.

Along with the positive changes in the economy, the cultural life of ethnic minority people has also been raised remarkably, cultural institutions at grassroots level was built. Nearly 100% of communes have grassroots party organizations, nearly 90% of villages and hamlets have gradually upgraded the Fatherland Front and mass organizations at all levels to gradually improve their contents, mode of operation; focused on mobilizing its members and the people to participate in the implementation of local socio-economic development programs, striving for the target of poverty reduction and policy implementation.

Social order and security are basically ensured. During the 13 years of implementation of Resolution No. 24 on ethnic affairs, these are specific and sensitive issues in the context of the early years of the 21st century. However, politics, economy, security and national defense in ethnic minority and mountainous areas are still stable (except in Muong Nhe 2011). The anti-democratic activities of the hostile forces were timely prevented, the development of illegal religion was controlled, the political security and social order and safety in the area was maintained.

The state management on ethnic affairs model has gradually stabilized and improved the organizational structure, functions and tasks. With regard to the organizational structure, each term is supplemented and perfected in order to enhance the expertise in the field of ethnic minority work. Functions and tasks are also more completed and comprehensive, based on the party’s resolutions on ethnic affairs, the Government issued decree No. 05/2011/ND-CP and directives, decisions on strategic ethnic minority affairs... Local model is
strengthened. Up to now, agencies that exercise the functions of state management on ethnic minority affairs have been the most complete ever: at ministry-level there is Committee for Ethnic Minority Affairs with 19 departments and offices (including 3 local affairs departments in charge of North West, Central Highlands, Delta Mekong River). There are 52 agencies at province-level and offices at district-level. The system of agencies in charge of ethnic affairs is synchronous from the central to local levels, step by step affirming and promoting a very important role in socio-economic development in ethnic minority areas.

3. Challenges for the implementation of the policy ethnic groups in our country today

Apart from important results in all fields of social life of ethnic minorities, creating a favorable premise for the implementation of ethnic affairs, the current process of implementing the ethnic minority policy reveal some shortcomings, weaknesses, set many issues that need to be resolved.

Firstly, infrastructure is backward, incomprehensive; economy development is slow; poverty rate in the ethnic minority areas is still high and poverty reduction is not sustainable.

The economy in the ethnic minority areas is still underdeveloped compared to the potential and unstable. The economic structure, the labor structure shifted slowly, many places are confused, apply limited scientific knowledge, old production tools, backward, productivity is very low. The majority of provinces in the Northwest, Central, Central Highlands and Southern Vietnam (except for the Hoa and Cham ethnic minority groups) have a high rate of poor and near-poor households (often double or higher than the average local). The poverty rate in ethnic minority areas, remote and isolated areas is high, accounting for more than 50% of poor households in the country. According to the survey on socio-economic development of 53 ethnic minority groups in 2015, the poverty rate is 23.1%, near poor 13.6%, which is four times higher than the national average; The rate of child marriage: 26.6%, 19 ethnic groups over 40%, highest 73%.

Table 1: Percentage of ethnic minority households being poor, near-poor determined to live in ethnic minority areas by rural and regional areas as of 1 July 2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Order</th>
<th>Region name</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Poor households</th>
<th>Near-poor households</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Northern Midlands and Mountains</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>58.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Red river delta</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>78.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>North Central and Central Coast</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>32.4</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>51.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Highlands</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>66.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>South East</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>90.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Mekong Delta</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>75.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: According to the results of socio-economic survey of 53 ethnic minority groups in 2015)

Poverty reduction in the ethnic minority areas has achieved important achievements, but the gap between the rich and the poor are very high. Analysis by ethnic group and by region also shows the variety in poverty rates among different ethnic minority groups. The highest poverty rates were 83.4% for the Mong and 75.2% for the Central Highlands, but significantly lower were 23.1% for the Khmer and 32.1% for the Tay. If ethnic groups were divided into six main groups, the Kinh-Hoa group or the majority group had the lowest poverty rates; the Khmer-Cham and Tay-Thai-Muong-Nung groups had substantially lower poverty rates compared to the rest of the ethnic minorities (VASS, 2011).  

The rate of poverty reduction in ethnic minority and mountainous areas is uneven and unsustainable. Although the poverty rate felt sharply, the gap between regions was large until 2015, especially in some areas with poor development such as midland and mountainous areas in the North, the rate was 16.0%, in the Central Highlands was 11.3% (In 2010, the rate of poor households in Central Highlands was...
1.53 times higher than the national average and 1.6 times in 2012). In the northern mountainous region, in 2010, the rate of poor households was 2.34 times higher than the national average.

Secondly, the quality of education, healthcare, and childcare is low.

Educational development has not met the requirements. There have been many policies and guidelines for strengthening the development of education through the programs of the Party and the State, however, from policy to reality there are still gaps to be overcome. In particular, the promulgation of a number of documents guiding the implementation of education and training policies is not timely; policies for ethnic minority pupils and areas with extreme difficulties have not met the requirements; level of support for children, pupils and students of ethnic minorities is lower than the actual demand; policy on appointed enrolment of educational establishments is inadequate: the structure of selected training and career fields is not close to the socio-economic development requirements of many localities, thus graduated students can not be arranged jobs according to regulations; some communes in mountainous and ethnic minority areas do not have kindergartens.

Infrastructure and medical equipment in some highland and remote areas are lacking and incomplete. In some places, the percentage of communes having health stations varies considerably. The number of highly qualified staff is insufficient, especially for local staff. The number of doctors in commune health stations in the ethnic minority and mountainous areas is low, especially in the North West. 32.4% of the communes do not have qualified doctors, reproductive health care facilities, infrastructure and medical equipment. Meanwhile, up to 70% of the poor live in mountainous areas using the commune level, about 30-40% of the poor in the northern mountainous provinces and 20% in the Central Highlands self-treat when sick. As a result, people in these regions have not benefited from high quality health services; People with health insurance in mountainous and ethnic minority areas face difficulties when access to health services because of the distance and indirect costs (Committee for Ethnic Minorities Affairs, 2017).

Thirdly, cultural life is poor, many cultural values of ethnic minorities are lost, and culture of groups with sparse population are at risk of assimilation.

In many rural areas, especially remote and isolated areas, ethnic minority areas, former revolutionary bases, resistance wars, border areas, islands, cultural activities are still poor, the gap in cultural enjoyment compared to urban is large; State investment in cultural preservation is low and fragmented, especially investment in conservation and cultural development of ethnic minority areas.

Many cultural values of ethnic minorities, especially those of ethnic minorities, are strongly influenced by international integration. In particular, the traditional cultural identity of very few people such as voices, festivals, costumes, singing, indigenous knowledge, etc. are lost, crossed, eroded by culture. Other ethnic groups have larger populations in the area and are at risk of losing their traditional cultural identity. Especially the acquisition of culture, new knowledge of young people due to lack of orientation, lack of conditions, opportunities to preserve cultural identity should tend to forget the original culture or dozen traditional culture. The use, borrowing of other ethnic languages is taking place in most communities; a large part of the population, especially young people, is less likely to use their mother tongue instead of using the language of the Kinh or other ethnic groups (Hmong, Tay, Nung, Thai ...).

Fourthly, the quality of ethnic minority staff, the performance of the grassroots political system is low.

The number of officials and employees of ethnic minorities in state agencies and non-productive agencies is very low compared to the percentage of ethnic minority people in the area, even less than half of the province’s population is ethnic minority. The structure of ethnic minority cadres and civil servants is unequal at all levels, between Party agencies, state agencies, branches ... (the proportion of ethnic minority officials and employees at the central level is only 5%),
officials only make up 1.6%). Some localities have not paid due attention to the planning, training, upgrading, deployment and utilization of ethnic minority staff; ethnic students are admitted to universities, colleges and students are sent to study the selection process is not received and assigned to work in accordance with the graduation training.

Ethnic minority staff mainly work in the education and health sector. In the same locality where there are many ethnic minority people, there is an imbalance among ethnic minorities, except the Tay, Nung, Muong and Thai ethnic groups. The number of cadres, civil servants is very low compared to the proportion of population. Ethnic minority staff are not trained and retrained.

The grassroots political system has many weaknesses and inadequacies in leadership, management, organization. Lack of representation for ethnic groups in the area. The percentage of key staff, civil servants is not equal to the proportion of population. The number of ethnic minority cadres involved in the Party and State agencies is still low compared to the population.

Fifthly, security and defense in ethnic minority areas still have potential problems.

After the Resolution No. 24 on ethnic minority affairs, there was a second political violence in the Central Highlands and political security in the Central Highlands provinces, especially in Gia Lai and Dak Lak, up to now (8/2008) is still very complicated, there are hot spots like in Gia Lai. Up to the beginning of August 2008, there were 70 villages in 35 communes, 9 districts receiving direct or propaganda demonstrations, riots. As a result, the economic and ethnic minorities' lives, especially in strategic areas, strategic regions, defense areas are facing many difficulties, the rate of poor and near poor households is high; The gap between the rich and the poor among the peoples, the regions that have increased.

Sixthly, environmental degradation is becoming serious.

Population growth is a great pressure on the environment and living space of many ethnic minorities in many parts of the country. Rapid population growth and economic pressures have made ethnic minority communities exploited natural resources for livelihoods and deforestation for agriculture. Many of the precious resources of the ethnic minority areas are overexploited, which caused incalculable consequences on the environment, production and life for the region... This is one of the problems that requires synchronous solutions to prevent the degradation of land resources in ethnic minority areas.

4. Causes of shortcomings
- Objective causes:
  Due to the natural conditions, the geography of the ecological environment of the ethnic minority areas is very diversified and complex, which hinders the transformation of the production mode and exchange between regions. The way of economic and social activities of ethnic minorities and backward features are inappropriate for present life. The hostile forces take advantage of the national problem against the revolution of our country. The conspiracy of hostile forces is to take advantage of the national problem of spearheading the implementation of the “peaceful evolution” strategy to create a disunity and conflict between ethnic minorities and people; stimulate thought against the disgruntled, negative elements, making them look out, waiting for the opportunity to work; reducing the belief of the people towards the Party and the Government, decreasing the effectiveness of the state management, creating dissatisfaction among the people, causing political and social instability and abolishing the socialist regime in Vietnam.
- Subjective reasons:
  Overlapping policy. Too many policies on poverty reduction have been issued, leading to the scattering and overlapping difficulties in the implementation process. Up to now, there are about 70 valid documents, including 2 Government Resolutions, 10 Decrees, 30 Decisions of the Prime Minister, 30 circulars and inter-ministerial circulars. Provinces also have guidelines to implement local poverty reduction policies. This leads to difficult and unstable settlement in the implementation of poverty reduction. This problem creates the unwanted
consequences of the policy: people do not want to escape poverty, lack the will to rise to benefit from poverty reduction policies, and grassroots officials do not want the local to get out of poverty in order to get support.

Poverty reduction in ethnic minority areas and mountainous areas has achieved some positive results but still slow, investment and supporting are low. There are passive, loose management in solving problems related to ethnicity, religion.

5. Conclusion

The national policy in our country has shown great human values, humanity and bring legal and political values that have a full impact on all aspects of ethnic minority life, therefore, it must be properly appreciated; since then, try to maintain, protect and make it more and more assertive in life. With opportunities and new challenges, it is important and urgent to improve the effectiveness in implementation of ethnic policy. Thus, many solutions with the efforts of the entire political system, people, the help of the international community, especially the striving for community from ethnic minority people should be worked out to realize the undertakings and policies of the Party and the State in life, and meet the requirements of the new situation.

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* Bài viết là sản phẩm nghiên cứu của đề tài khoa học cấp Bộ: “Nghiên cứu, đánh giá kết quả thực hiện Nghị quyết Trung ương 7 (Khóa IX) về công tác dân tộc”, Ủy ban Dân tộc, năm 2017.

THÀNH TỤC VÀ MỘT SỐ VẤN ĐỀ ĐẶT RA TRONG THỰC HIỆN CHÍNH SÁCH DÂN TỘC Ở NƯỚC TA HIỆN NAY


Từ khóa: Chính sách dân tộc; công tác dân tộc; dân tộc thiểu số; đổi mới.