

Implementation of Poverty Reduction Policies in Ethnic Minority Region in Vietnam: Evidence from CBMS

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Abstract

Vietnam is a multi-ethnic country. In addition to Kinh (Viet) people occupying 85 percent of the whole country, there are other 53 ethnic groups with 15 percent of the whole population. Most of the ethnic minority population is living in mountainous areas and has low living standards. Their poverty incidence is considerably higher than that of the national average level and the gap is increasing.

In poverty reduction policies and programs, the Vietnamese government noted an emphasis on the extremely poor regions and ethnic minority groups.

The paper focuses on the following:

- Reviewing the government's poverty reduction policies toward ethnic minorities.
- Analyzing and evaluating impacts of poverty reduction policies on ethnic minority groups.
- On that basis, elaborating recommendations for improving poverty reduction policies and measures in ethnic minority regions in Vietnam.

The analysis is based on the data collected from CBMS in 17 communes in the whole Vietnam. Poverty status and impacts of the government policies and program are presented for 15 representative ethnic groups.

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The research results show that CBMS is an appropriate tool not only for poverty monitoring but for policy assessment as well.

Introduction

Vietnam is a multi-ethnic country. In addition to the Kinh (Viet) people who occupy 85 percent of the whole country, there are about 53 other ethnic groups occupying the country. Most of these ethnic minority population (15% of the entire population) live in mountainous areas and far away from main highways. Production activities are extremely difficult due to harsh climate, bad soil and terrain. Thus, the levels of socio-economic development and education in these areas are low. Language is viewed as a barrier. People's income is low, accompanied by poor entitlements to social services such as education and healthcare. Poverty incidence is considerably higher in these mountainous, remote and far-flung areas than that of the national average level.

Poverty reduction is a priority in the socioeconomic development strategy of Vietnam. And high on the list of the poverty reduction policies and programs of the government are these extremely poor regions and ethnic minority groups.

This paper aims to:

- Review the government's poverty reduction policies toward ethnic minorities;
- Analyze and evaluate the impacts of poverty reduction policies on ethnic minority groups; and
- Make recommendations for improving poverty reduction policies and measures in ethnic minority regions.

The first part of the paper presents the research methodology, followed by an overview of ethnic minorities in Vietnam and an analysis of their poverty status. The final section reviews governmental policies that aim to promote poverty reduction among ethnic groups and evaluates the implementation of concerned policies as well as its actual impacts on ethnic people over the last five years.

Research methodologies

The different methods applied in the research include:

Review of existing materials and analysis of secondary data concerned

There are several studies on poverty reduction in ethnic minority regions available in some last years (see References). Issues on poverty reduction in regions of ethnic minorities have been launched in a number of conferences and workshops. A number of surveys in the national scale conducted by General Statistic Office (GSO), namely Vietnam Population and Housing Census (1999), Survey on infrastructures in rural communes (2000), and Household Living Standard Surveys (1993, 1998, and 2002) have also figured out the context of poverty reduction in ethnic minority regions.

Quantitative research

The assessment of poverty status and evaluation of the implementation of poverty reduction policies requires quantitative data. While the surveys conducted by the GSO are rich in information, they lack a sufficient overview of the different aspects of life of ethnic minority groups. The previous studies were deprived of basic data of ethnic groups. For instance, several studies relied on the Living Standard Surveys in 1993 and 1998 to make comparisons between the Kinh-Hoa group and the rest of the other ethnic minority groups. The number of samples of ethnic minority households unfortunately was inconsiderable. Therefore, in the very real sense, the comparison failed to benefit policies¹. The data set of the Vietnam Household Living Standard Survey in 2002 (VLSS 2002), in which 75,000 households

¹Actually, the comparison did not reflect the reality and thus no appropriate conclusion or recommendations were drawn. This is attributed to different social development, education level and living standards. The combination of Kinh and Hoa was not persuasive, particularly in terms of socioeconomic difference between the two groups. Besides, such ethnic groups as Thai, Tay, and Nung that have the same conditions to Kinh's people in various faucets were combined with other ethnic groups.

were probed, should have been sufficient to provide a survey of several ethnic minority groups by province and region. Unfortunately, it remains unfinished and has been included in the pipeline.

Meanwhile, under the International Development Research Centre (IDRC)-sponsored research project "Poverty Monitoring in Vietnam" (MIMAP-Vietnam project), a community-based poverty monitoring survey (CBMS) approach in several pilot sites have been implemented. In 2002, the MIMAP-Vietnam project collaborated with the Managing Office of the National Programme for Hunger Eradication and Poverty Reduction to implement CBMS in 20 villages which will be considered as regular poverty observatories. Results of annual community-based poverty surveys will serve as effective tools for policy adjustment and implementation of the poverty reduction strategy and plans. In addition, CBMS has been piloted in two provinces with 40 surveyed communes.²

In this study, the CBMS data collected in observatory communes in 2003 in the whole country was used. Among the surveyed communes, with the number of 100-200 households selected at random each commune; several communes with a high population of different ethnic minority groups were selected, with the effort to the fulfillment of the study. The major ethnic groups such as Tay, Thai, Muong, Khmer, Mong, Dao, Gia rai, Ede, Coho, and Xodang were all probed in the CBMS samples. Some smaller ones, namely, Giay, Sandiu, and Bru-Vankieu ethnic groups, were also included. Surveyed communes are distributed at any place where these ethnic groups are living: Northwest, Northeast, North Central, South Central, the Central Highlands, and the Mekong Delta. Survey data were available at two levels: communes and households. The Kinh people living in the same communes were also surveyed and taken for

² In Hatay Province (in the Red River Delta), 30 communes were selected as representative samples for more than 300 communes in the province. In Yenbai province (in the Northern Mountainous Region), 10 communes were selected among 120 communes in the province.

comparison with ethnic minorities. The total is 17 communes with 1,985 households, 10,932 people of 15 ethnic groups.

Communes listed to be surveyed in the quantitative study are shown in Table 1.

The total number of surveyed households, meanwhile, classified by nationalities is shown in Table 2.

Table 1. Communes to be surveyed in the quantitative study

Communes	Districts	Provinces	Nationalities
1 Chieng Bom	Thuan Chau	Son La	Thai
2 Chieng Kheo	Mai Son	Son La	Thai
3 Cam Giang	Bach Thong	Bac Can	Tay, Kinh
4 Yen Cu	Cho Moi	Bac Can	Tay, Dao, Kinh
5 Hai Yen	Cao Loc	Lang Son	Nung
6 Sa Pa	Sa Pa	Lao Cai	Mong, Kinh
7 Ban Xeo	Bat Xat	Lao Cai	Dao, Giay, Kinh
8 Nam Loong	Tam Duong	Lai Chau	Mong, Giay, Kinh, Thai
9 Tan Vinh	Luong Son	Hoa Binh	Muong, Kinh
10 Thach Dong	Thach Thanh	Thanh Hoa	Muong, Kinh
11 Ban Dat	Phu Binh	Thai Nguyen	San Diu, Kinh
12 Tham Don	My Xuyen	Soc Trang	Kho me, Kinh
13 Ia dok	Duc Co	Gia Lai	Gia Rai, Kinh
14 Ea drong	Cu Mga	Dac Lac	Ede, Kinh
15 Ngoc Wang	Dac Ha	Kon Tum	Xo dang
16 Loc Nam	Bao Lam	Lam Dong	Co ho, Kinh
17 Huong Hiep	Dac Krong	Quang Tri	Bru-Vankieu, Kinh

Table 2. Total number of households by ethnicity

1. Kinh	462	9. San diu	52
2. Tay	154	10. Giay	88
3. Thai	235	11. Gia rai	82
4. Muong	160	12. Ede	100
5. Nung	102	13. Xodang	99
6. Mong	138	14. Bru-Vankieu	96
7. Khmer	77	15. Co ho	67
8. Dao	73		

Qualitative research

Besides the quantitative study, field trips were taken in several localities. During these field trips, interviews and group discussions with representatives of provincial, district and commune agencies and mass organizations were held as well as in-depth interviews of some poor households of ethnic minorities.

Poverty of ethnic minorities in Vietnam**Overview of the ethnic minorities in Vietnam***Population*

Vietnam is a multi-ethnic country. According to the list of ethnicity announced by the Vietnamese Government, there are 54 different ethnic groups inhabiting Vietnam, in which the Kinh people are the majority at 85 percent of the population and the 53 ethnic minorities accounting only about 5 percent of Vietnam's total population. The Vietnam Population and Housing Census in 1999 released that there were 10.53 million ethnic minorities in Vietnam. As estimated, the present population of ethnic minorities is about 12 million.

Table 3 shows the various ethnic groups in the order of their number.

Based on the Table, the following information may be discerned:

- There are only 4 ethnic minorities which have more than 1 million people (Tay, Muong, Thai, and Khmer).
- There are 13 ethnic minorities which have population ranging from 100 thousand to 1 million.
- There are 19 ethnic minorities which have population ranging from 10 thousand to 100 thousand.
- There are 12 ethnic minorities which have population ranging from 1.5 to 10 thousand.
- There are 5 ethnic minorities which have less than 1000 people, in particular, Odu, Brau and Romam which only have about 300 people each.

Table 3. Population and residential areas of 54 ethnics, 1999

Ethnic	Population (people)	% in total country's population	Residential areas
1 Kinh	65,795,718	86.2070	All provinces
2 Tay	1,477,514	1.9360	Mountainous provinces in Northeast, and Central Highlands.
3 Thai	1,328,725	1.7410	Mountainous provinces in North-West, Thanh Hoa, Nghe An, Central Highlands
4 Muong	1,137,515	1.4900	Phu Tho, Hoa Binh, Thanh Hoa
5 Khmer	1,055,174	1.3830	Tra Vinh, Soc Trang, Can Tho, Hau Giang, Vinh Long.
6 Hoa	862,371	1.1300	Big cities, mountainous provinces in Northeast.
7 Nung	856,412	1.1220	Mountainous provinces in Northeast, and Central Highlands.
8 Mong	787,604	1.0320	Mountainous provinces in North Eastern, North-West, Central Highlands, Nghe An
9 Dao	620,538	0.8130	Mountainous provinces in Northeast, North-West, Central Highlands.
10 Gia rai	317,557	0.4160	Gia Lai, Kon Tum, Dac Lac, Dac Nong
11 E de	270,348	0.3540	Gia Lai, Dac Lac, Dac Nong, Phu Y ^a n
12 Ba na	174,456	0.2290	Gia Lai, Kon Tum, Binh Dinh
13 San chay	147,315	0.1930	Mountainous provinces in Northeast
14 Cham	132,873	0.1740	Ninh Thuan, Binh Thuan, An Giang
15 Co ho	128,723	0.1690	Lam Dong, Binh Thuan
16 Xodang	127,148	0.1670	Quang Ngai, Quang Nam, Kon Tum
17 San diu	126,237	0.1650	Quang Ninh, Bac Giang, Vinh Phuc, Phu Tho, Thai Nguyen, Tuyen Quang
18 Hre	113,111	0.1480	Quang Ngai
19 Rag lai	96,931	0.1270	Lam Dong, Binh Thuan
20 Mngong	92,951	0.1220	Dac Lac, Dac Nong, Lam Dong
21 Tho	68,394	0.0900	Nghe An, Thanh Hoa
22 Xtieng	66,788	0.0880	Binh Phuoc, Dong Nai
23 Kho mu	56,542	0.0741	Son La, Lai Chau, Nghe An
24 Bru Vankieu	55,559	0.0728	Quang Tri, Thua Thien – Hue
25 Co tu	50,458	0.0661	Quang Nam, Thua Thien – Hue
26 Giay	49,098	0.0643	Lao Cai, Yen Bai, Ha Giang
27 Ta oi	34,960	0.0458	Quang Tri
28 Ma	33,338	0.0437	Lam Dong, Binh Phuoc
29 Gie trieng	30,243	0.0396	Quang Ngai, Quang Nam, Kon Tum
30 Co	27,766	0.0364	Quang Ngai, Quang Nam
31 Cho ro	22,567	0.0296	VND Nai

Table 3. Cont'd.

Ethnic	Population (people)	% in total country's population	Residential areas
32 Xinh mun	18,018	0.0236	Lai Chau, Son La
33 Ha nhi	17,535	0.0230	Lai Chau, Lao Cai
34 Chu ru	14,978	0.0196	Lam Dong, Binh Thuan
35 Lao	11,611	0.0152	Moutainous provinces in Northwest, Thanh Hoa
36 La chi	10,765	0.0141	Ha Giang
37 Khang	10,272	0.0135	Lai Chau, Son La
38 Phu la	9,046	0.0119	Moutainous provinces in Northeast.
39 La hu	6,874	0.0090	Lai Chau
40 La ha	5,686	0.0074	Lai Chau, Son La
41 Pa then	5,569	0.0073	Tuyen Quang
42 Lu	4,964	0.0065	Lai Chau
43 Ngai	4,841	0.0063	Lang Son, VND Nai
44 Chut	3,829	0.0050	Quang Binh
45 Lo lo	3,307	0.0043	Cao Bang, Ha Giang, Lao Cai
46 Mang	2,663	0.0035	Lai Chau
47 Co lao	1,865	0.0024	Ha Giang
48 Bo y	1,864	0.0024	Ha Giang, Lao Cai
49 Cong	1,676	0.0022	Lai Chau
50 Si la	840	0.0011	Lai Chau
51 Pu peo	705	0.0009	Ha Giang
52 Ro mam	352	0.0005	Kon Tum
53 Brau	313	0.0004	Kon Tum
54 O du	301	0.0004	Nghe An

Settlement

Most ethnic minorities live in mountainous areas and highlands. There are only 3 ethnic minorities living in plain areas. These are Hoa, Cham, and Khmer.

Because of the obstacles and difficulties in accessing the residential areas, ethnic minorities are isolated resulting in social and economic problems.

Ethnic minorities live in almost all provinces in Vietnam; however, they populate densely in only some areas, such as the Northwest, Northeast, and mountainous areas in North Central part, South Central part, and Central Highlands. Cham people live in South

Central part (Ninh Thuan and Binh Thuan), and Khmer people live in the Mekong River Delta.

The proportion of ethnic minorities varies from province to province. Per the 1999 Population Census in 1999, the following are the proportions:

- 11 provinces with the highest rate of ethnic minorities - more than 50 percent of total population;
- 7 provinces with rate of ethnic minorities ranging from 20-50 percent;
- 9 provinces: 10-20 percent;
- 7 provinces: 5-10 percent;
- 13 provinces: 1-5 percent;
- 14 provinces: under 1 percent.

Socioeconomic characteristics of ethnic minorities

Among the notable characteristics of Vietnam's ethnic minorities are:

- The population scale of each ethnic group is different from one another.
- The idea of many ethnic minorities living together in the same villages and communes has become quite popular. In recent years, there have been emigrations in provinces, districts, and communes, thereby encouraging cultural interference, and economic integration among ethnic minorities.
- In view of the solid and equal ethnic policy that has been in place since 1945, there has not been any ethnical discrimination or conflict among ethnic minorities and between ethnic minorities and majorities. Moreover, they always help each other to live and earn money.
- Some small-scale ethnic minorities live in remote areas and high mountains so they have a higher isolation level than some large-scale ethnics who live in lowlands such as the Kinh, Tay, Nung, Thai, and Muong.

Table 4. Proportion of ethnic minorities in provinces (in 1/4/1999)

Province	Ethnic minorities	% of population	Province	Ethnic minorities	% of population
Cao Bang	467,379	95.32	Binh Thuan	72,457	6.92
Ha Giang	529,551	87.89	Quang Nam	93,100	6.78
Bac Can	238,578	86.7	Phu Yen	40,271	5.12
Lang Son	587,718	83.5	An Giang	103,380	5.06
Lai Chau	488,488	83.14	Khanh Hoa	47,805	4.63
Son La	728,431	82.58	Thua Thien Hue	38,704	3.70
Hoa Binh	546,861	72.27	Vinh Phuc	36,650	3.36
Lao Cai	397,475	66.87	Can Tho	58,901	3.26
Kon Tum	168,535	53.64	Ba Ria Vung Tau	23,880	3.00
Tuyen Quang	350,141	51.78	Binh Duong	20,951	2.92
Yen Bai	341,993	50.36	Ca Mau	31,802	2.84
Gia Lai	421,902	43.63	Vinh Long	27,190	2.69
Soc Trang	407,007	34.72	Ninh Binh	18,831	2.13
Tra Vinh	301,802	31.21	Binh Dinh	28,985	1.98
Dac Lac	530,241	29.78	Quang Binh	14,761	1.86
Thai Nguyen	259,003	24.76	Tay Ninh	16,316	1.69
Lam Dong	228,629	22.91	Ha Tay	29,369	1.23
Ninh Thuan	110,979	21.98	Ha Noi	16,623	0.62
Binh Phuoc	125,958	19.26	Da Nang	3,927	0.57
Thanh Hoa	568,996	16.41	Ben Tre	5,761	0.44
Phu Tho	183,700	14.56	Tien Giang	5,733	0.36
Kien Giang	216,047	14.43	Long An	3,868	0.30
Nghe An	381,416	13.34	Hai Duong	4,198	0.25
Bac Giang	177,801	11.91	Dong Thap	3,690	0.24
Quang Ngai	137,960	11.59	Hai Phong	2,294	0.14
Quang Ninh	111,609	11.11	Bac Ninh	1,182	0.13
Bac Lieu	80,979	11.02	Ha Nam	973	0.12
HCM City	460,189	9.14	Thai Binh	1,197	0.07
Quang Tri	51,893	9.06	Ha Tinh	847	0.07
Dong Nai	171,075	8.59	Hung Yen	679	0.06
			Nam Dinh	794	0.04

- There has been an unequal economic development among certain ethnic minorities such as their cultivation conditions and infrastructure.
 - Some ethnic minorities have market-oriented economies. They plant coffee, rubber, pepper, sugar, and fruit trees with intensive cultivation. These are the Ede, Gia rai, Co ho, and Ma in Central Highlands, and

the Tay, Nung, and Muong in North. For some ethnic minorities living in high mountains where there are few farm areas, they are forced to cultivate along the mountainside. In terms of access to basic services, expectedly, they are not satisfied with the level of services that they get.³

Each ethnic minority has its own unique culture. Traditional culture and customs have a decisively important role in economic and community development. Thus, all policies in general, and poverty reduction policy, in particular, should pay much attention on the characteristics of ethnics' culture in order for them to be run effectively and accepted by others.

Poverty of ethnic minorities

Overview

In the last 10 years, Vietnam's economy has achieved a high growth rate, about 7-8 percent a year, which contribute in the reduction of poverty ratio.

According to the result of the Vietnam Household Living Standard Survey (VHLSS), which is based on the poverty line including all expenditures, i.e., food ration with 2100 kilo cal a day and about 40 percent of non-food expense⁴, the poverty rate has declined from 58.1 percent in 1993 to 37.4 percent in 1998, to 28.9

³Basing on geographical positions and other general characteristics of socio-economic development, State Committee for Ethnic Minorities and Mountainous Areas defined 3 development areas: I, II, and III. Area level III is very difficult, so they need favorable policies to eliminate poverty. Now, there are 2325 communes in this area. Area level II is in better condition than Area level III, however there is still high risk of poverty. Area level I includes plains and urban areas.

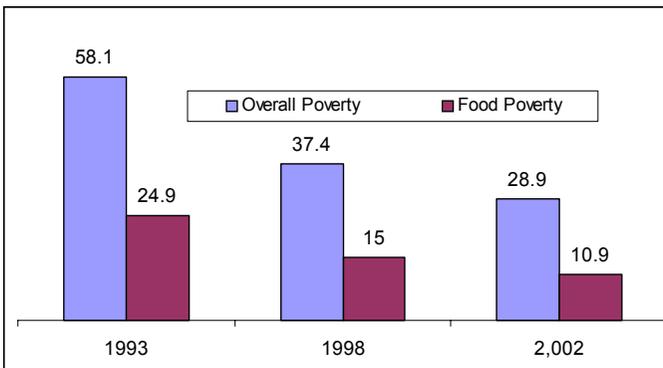
This way of diversify was proposed in 1996; some criteria are now no longer suitable but State Committee for Ethnic Minorities and Mountainous Areas still base on this diversification to implement policies. However, they are trying to reform it at this moment.

⁴Expenditure per capita was 1.2 million VND in 1993, 1.8 million VND in 1998, and nearly 2 million VND in 2003.

percent in 2002, and to about 25 percent in 2003 (Figure 1). Food poverty rate, that includes only food expenditures, has also reduced from 24.9 percent in 1993 to 15.0 percent in 1998 and to 10.9 percent in 2003.

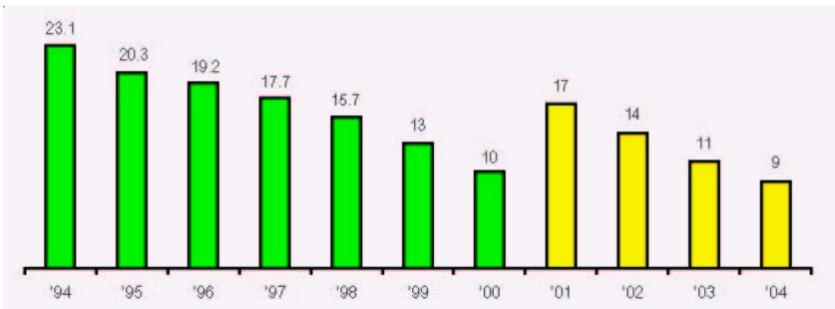
According to the poverty line, that is based on monthly per capita income, announced by MOLISA (Figure 2), the poverty rate has declined from 30 percent in 1992 to 17.7 percent in 1997, and to 10 percent in 2000. In 2001, this poverty line was raised; thereby the poverty rate in 2001 was 17.2 percent and 11 percent in 2003.

Figure 1. VHLSS poverty rate (%)



Source: GSO-VHLSS 1992, 1998, 2002

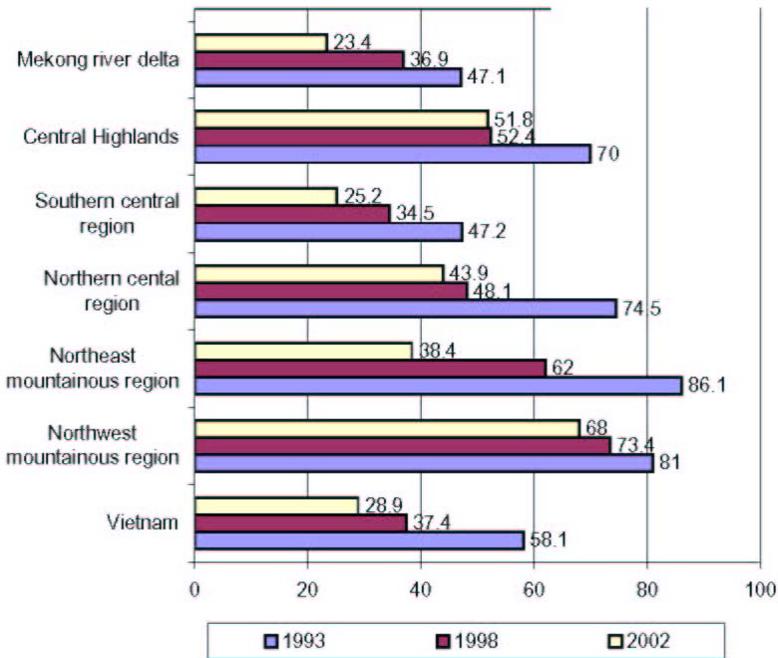
Figure 2. MOLISA poverty rate



However, the rate of poverty reduction is not equal among regions in the country (Figure 3). According to VLSS, in a period of 10 years from 1993-2002, in the Northeast Region, the poverty rate went down to 55 percent while in Central Highlands, it was reduce to 26 percent. In the Northwest Region, the ration was only 16 percent.⁵

The data on poverty reduction rate in two years (2001 vis-à-vis 2003), which were announced by MOLISA, stated that the poverty ratio in the Northwest Region reduced more slowly than other regions

Figure 3. VLSS overall poverty rate in areas



Source: GSO-VLSS 1992, 1998, 2002

⁵ Because the size of the survey sample was too small at only 4000 households in the country, the data on poverty rate of the VLSS 1993 is not reliable. The Northwest Region is always known as the poorest area in the country. However, it seems that the poverty rate of the Northeast Region in 1993 survey was even higher.

although the speed of reduction was rather equal between regions and the Northwest Region. Meanwhile, the poverty rates in the Northeast Region and Central Highlands are also shown in Figure 4. However, the data do not seem reliable since in only two years, the poverty rate of these regions was reduced by nearly a half.

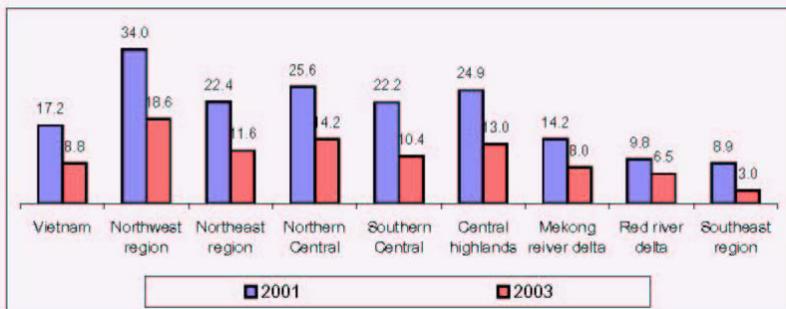
Poverty rate and poverty tendency in ethnic minorities

In recent years, MOLISA and other groups have pointed out that the rate of poverty reduction for almost all the ethnic minorities—the small-scale ethnics living in difficult geographical and climatic conditions—is slower than that of the Kinh and other ethnic groups like the Tay, Nung, Muong, and Thai. Thus, the process of reducing poverty for ethnic minorities needs a comprehensive system of policies and measurements that can speed up the reduction or elimination of poverty. If the process proceeds slowly, the number of ethnic minorities—and the poor as a whole—will increase the more.

In terms of expenditure data of 30,000 households in the VLSS of 2002, a World Bank team had described the poverty of ethnic minorities as follows:

- The level of expense per capita of ethnic minority households is 13 percent lower than the Kinh or Hoa (community and household characteristics are the same).

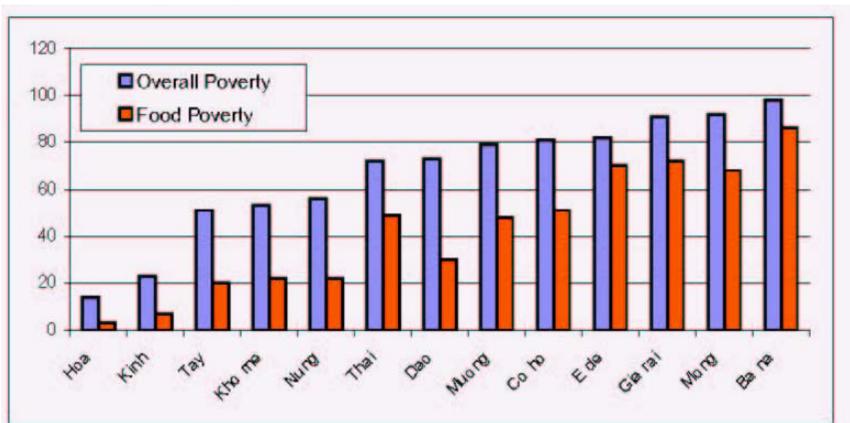
Figure 4. Poverty rate by MOLISA



Source: National Office of NTP on HPER and Employment, MOLISA, 2004

- In general, ethnic minorities are very poor but the poverty rate among them varies greatly as seen in Figure 5.
- In general, more than 50 percent of the ethnic minorities are now living under the poverty line.
- The proportion of ethnic minorities to the total number of the poor increased from 20 percent in 1993 to over 30 percent in 2002. Based on the food poverty line, the proportion of ethnic minorities to the total poor rose from under 30 percent in 1993 to 53 percent in 2002. The experts of World Bank also estimated that by 2010, about 37 percent of the poor will be ethnic minorities and 49 percent of population whose expense is below the food poverty level, will be ethnic minorities.
- Some welfare indicators of ethnic groups, such as education, health care, and public health services are dramatically lower than the Kinh.

Figure 5: The poverty rate of ethnic minorities in 2002



Source: " Vietnam development report 2004: Poverty". General reports of sponsors in Consultant Meeting of Vietnamese sponsors, Hanoi, 2-3/12/2003.

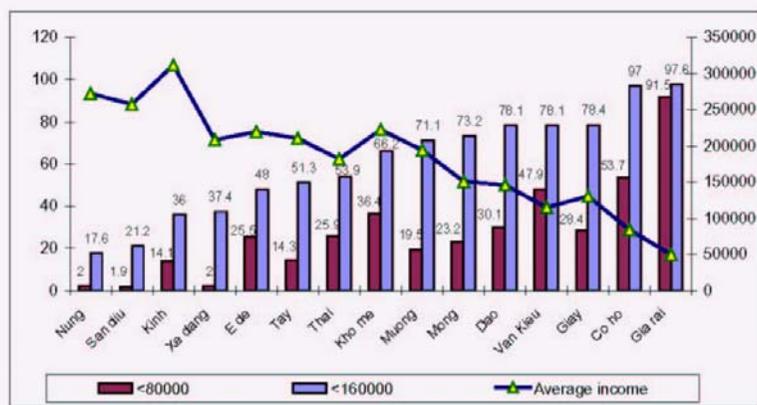
Note: The poverty rate is only counted for ethnic minorities which has at least 100 observations in VHLSS 2002.

From the above considerations, experts of the World Bank concluded that in this decade, the poverty in Vietnam will relate closely with ethnic minorities.

The CBMS survey result of 17 communes also showed the big difference in the poverty rate among ethnic minorities (Figure 6) while the results of the 2002 VLSS showed that the poverty ratio among ethnic minorities is ten times different. While the poverty rate for the total sample is 31 percent; the lowest poverty rate is only 2 percent (Nung and San diu), and the highest poverty rate is 90 percent (Gia rai). The Kinh ethnics have the highest average income, however, since the difference among households is large, the household poverty rate is still higher than the Nung ethnic and San Diu ethnic groups.

Taking into consideration the disparity in the poverty rate among ethnic minorities, it should be noted that in areas where many ethnic minorities live together, the Kinhs' poverty ratio is not higher than other ethnic minorities like the Tay, Nung, Muong, and Thai. This means that the reason for poverty is not the ethnic identity. Rather, it is brought about by the fact that most of the minorities live in isolated areas, lack production resources and information, and uphold old community institutions. As such, their isolation keep them away from development and therefore makes their economy weak. Moreover, if

Figure 6. Average income and poverty rates of 15 ethnic minorities in 17 surveyed communes in 2003



an ethnic minority is taught how to work effectively, then poverty can be eliminated more quickly. The group will then have a better standard of living than others

The general concept “ethnic minorities” (contrary to “ethnic majorities”) cannot be seen as the basis for proposals of poverty reduction policies for all ethnic minorities. Ethnic groups may be classified on the basis of economic development as follows: (a) Ethnic groups with big population, living in lowlands, having advantage economic conditions, and high level of education and economic developments: Kinh, Hoa, Tay, Nung, Muong, and Thai.; (b) Ethnic groups who live in low and mid-mountainous areas, have difficult conditions, and middle level of education and economic developments: Dao, Khmer and San diu, among others; and (c) Ethnic groups who live in remote areas and in high mountains, have the lowest level of education and economic developments.

Causes of poverty

At the macro level, the causes of the poverty of ethnic minorities are usually due to:

- Living in high mountains, causing transportation difficulty and geographical isolation.
- Language barrier that prevents them from acquiring information and gaining knowledge.
- Having few farming area and good land.
- Lack of capital, technical and business knowledge, and to apply scientific improvements into cultivating and breeding.
- Having low level of education standards, the people still uphold backward living and cultivate customs.
- Governmental organization’s development assistance and policies are not really effective.

Beside these general causes, each community has its own causes of its poverty. The results of the CBMS research in 17 communes indicate that there is a significant difference in defining the causes of poverty of households in ethnic groups.

There may be 4 groups of direct causes of poverty: (1) lacking production inputs (farming area, capital, working knowledge and experience); (2) factors that affect production outputs - market, and price; (3) force majeure (risk and natural calamities); and (4) population and society (lacking people in working age, having many children, getting sick, and contracting social evils, among others).

The group of production inputs

Most poor households are in the first group of causes (Table 5). Lacking working experience and capital are the popular causes. For Kinh, Tay, Khmer, and Gia rai, the cause of lacking experience is not as serious as other ethnics.

The lack of farming land is one of the leading causes of poverty for most ethnic groups. Kinh people who live together with ethnic

Table 5. The causes of poverty assessments (% households)

	Lacking working experience	Lacking capital	Lacking farming land	Lacking market	Disadvantage price	Affecting by natural calamities	Lacking people in working age	Having accidents	Having many children	Getting sick, old	Affecting by social evils
Kinh	43.6	78.2	64.1	2.6	5.1	7.7	6.4	23.1	16.7	39.7	3.8
Tay	40.0	66.7	46.7	6.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	46.7	20.0	6.7	0.0
Thai	65.1	69.8	57.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.6	19.0	1.6	1.6	0.0
Muong	93.3	20.0	2.2	0.0	0.0	42.2	35.6	31.1	26.7	17.8	0.0
Nung	75.0	75.0	25.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	25.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Dao	86.2	82.8	48.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	31.0	17.2	17.2	3.4
Mong	75.0	73.6	56.9	1.4	1.4	1.4	11.1	43.1	0.0	1.4	2.8
Khmer	37.2	83.7	60.5	0.0	7.0	7.0	4.7	32.6	18.6	20.9	0.0
E de	70.7	87.8	39.0	2.4	4.9	0.0	2.4	29.3	29.3	7.3	0.0
Gia rai	24.7	58.9	0.0	1.4	1.4	0.0	0.0	11.0	35.1	6.8	0.0
Co ho	69.6	100.0	82.1	0.0	5.4	5.4	1.8	7.1	14.3	21.4	0.0
Xo dang	100.0	86.7	26.7	6.7	13.3	0.0	0.0	33.3	33.3	0.0	0.0
Gay	74.2	58.1	48.4	0.0	0.0	3.2	0.0	54.8	12.9	12.9	0.0
San diu	100.0	80.0	20.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	20.0	70.0	10.0	10.0	0.0
Van kieu	74.5	48.9	8.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.3	38.3	36.2	19.1	0.0

minorities in the same resident always have smaller farming land area because Kinh people are emigrants. There is a clear relationship between the rate of household with little farming land (per capita) and the poverty rate (income per capita).

Table 6 shows that in many communities, the rate of households with less than 500 square meters farming land ranged from 20 percent to 30 percent. A cause of this tendency, that should be of concern, is the transfer of farming land from people to people resulting to bigger gap among households in the area of working land.

The group of production outputs

About production output, many ethnic minorities produce to satisfy their own family's need. Market-oriented economy still plays a small part in their trade activities. The rate of the value of the sold products

Table 6. Households' farming land

	Average area of land per household (m ²)	Rate of household with small area of land (less than 1000 m ²)	Farming land area per household (m ²)	Farming land area per capita (m ²)	Rate of household with small area of farming land (less than 500m ²)	MOLISA's rate of poor household (%)
Kinh	7,444	10.4	4,872	958	33.0	14.1
Tay	27,079	0.6	3,556	770	28.6	14.3
Thai	11,026	3	7,336	1,244	50.0	25.9
Muong	9,559	3.8	6,528	1,064	23.9	19.5
Nung	37,842	0	5,986	1,316	2.9	2.0
Dao	12,812	1.4	5,378	941	23.3	30.1
Mong	18,610	1.4	9,259	1,409	16.7	23.2
Khmer	9,420	16.9	9,109	1,686	26.0	36.4
E de	21,941	3.1	19,504	2,932	26.5	25.5
Gia rai	19,490	0	16,228	3,278	0	91.5
Co ho	6,757	1.5	6,537	1,404	4.5	53.7
Xo dang	27,913	0	26,608	4,565	3.0	2.0
Giay	6,469	3.4	4,707	891	19.3	28.4
San diu	10,147	0	7,619	1,230	7.7	1.9
Van kieu	9,217	5.2	4,564	780	53.1	47.9

in their total harvest volume shows the development level of market-oriented economy. This is also the measurement for the development of household economy. Kinh, Tay, Thai, Muong, Khmer, E de, Gia rai, Co ho, and Xo dang develop commodity economy at high level. According to research, for food production, there is only Khmer ethnic who can sell over 90 percent of their production to the markets; while other ethnics such as Kinh, Tay, Muong, and Giay can only sell 15-20 percent of their production to the markets. High commodity rate mainly lies in cultivating industrial crops and fruit-trees. (Figure 7)

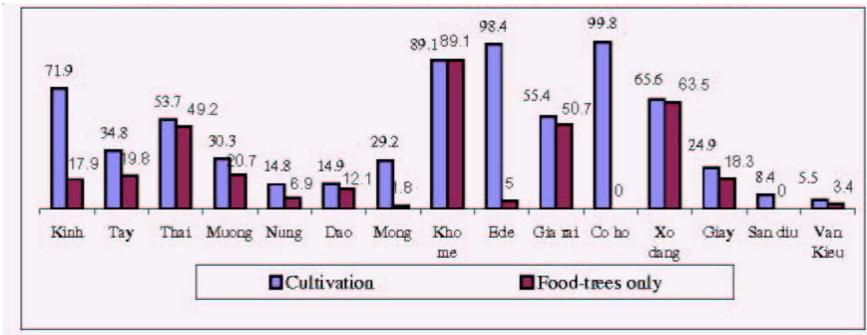
The group of force majeure

Force majeure such as natural calamities and pestilent insects, is very dangerous risk for the poor. Because of severe geographical and climatic conditions, ethnic minorities are the direct victims of this kind of danger. The section on relief policy will discuss this problem in more detail.

The group of human causes

The family size of ethnic minorities is usually big. On average in Vietnam, one family has 4.8 people. One Mong or Ede family has 6.6–6.7 people on average; San diu, Muong, Thai, Van Kieu, Xo dang, Dao: 5.7–6.2 people; Khmer, and Giay: 5.3–5.4 people. Kinh

Figure 7. The rate of products for selling (% productivity value)



people who live together with compatriots of ethnic minorities, have a family-scale of 5.1 people, higher than national average. Tay and Nung have the smallest family-scale, only 4.6 people (Figure 8).

Poor households usually have big family size. Having many children and dependents is the popular cause of poverty. However, many poor people have not yet understood this fact. They still think that having many children is happiness.

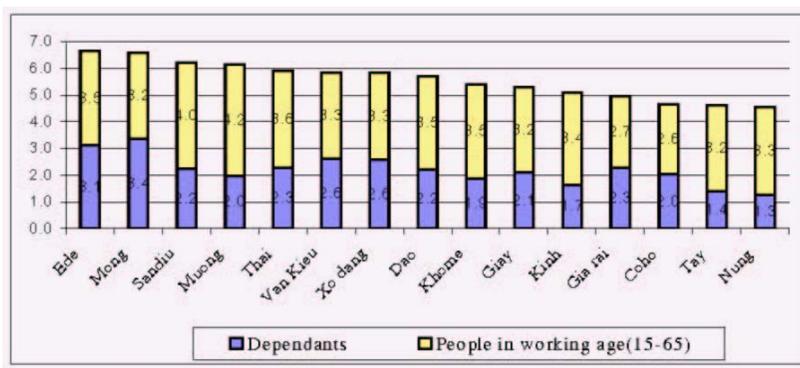
State policies on poverty reduction for ethnic minorities

Overview of policies on ethnic minorities

The following basic concepts are contained in the Vietnamese State policies on ethnic minorities:

- *Politics*: Equality and solidarity among ethnic groups is being ensured in the Vietnamese Constitution.
- *Culture*: Languages, scripts, cultural traditions, ethnic customs and habits of their identity are encouraged for conservation.
- *Economy and society*: The State provides special priorities/policies on the economy, education, and communication for ethnic minorities, with the understanding that economic and cultural developments of most ethnic minorities remain low and their living conditions remain difficult.

Figure 8. Size and structure of household (persons)



In addition to policies, programs and national projects, special priorities have been focused on investment in extremely difficult areas. Some major development programs and international cooperation projects have been implemented in various localities having remote ethnic minorities to reduce poverty, develop rural infrastructures, and provide credits for the poor.

These policies have achieved some success, i.e., to ensure national unity, promote development in difficult areas and create more favorable conditions for ethnic minority development. However, it is difficult to gain both positive impacts and harmony among all policies. The gains of one aspect of a project may affect that of others. For example, in ensuring national unity and solidarity between peoples, some policies might have missed giving special attention to ethnic colors or features.

Rapid socio-economic development in poor areas may bring about undesirable loss of long-standing tangible and intangible cultural identity and heritage.

Contents and implementation of poverty reduction policies on ethnic minorities

Poverty reduction is a vital part of the ethnic and of the socio-economic policy domain. These policies provide special priorities for ethnic minorities. Policies on poverty reduction for ethnic minorities have gained initial successes albeit having some outstanding issues yet to be settled.

In past years, together with economic growth development, the Vietnamese State had always considered poverty reduction and hunger eradication as objectives in its plans and strategies, in which mountainous and ethnic minorities areas are given special priority. Therefore, along with the nationwide program, the Government set forth a socioeconomic development program for the extremely difficult remote and mountainous areas (called Program 135) to improve living conditions, eradicate hunger and reduce poverty of ethnic minorities in these areas. At the same time, the government

continued the implementation of permanent farming and settlement, and provision of support price and freight subsidization, health care and education to extremely difficult ethnic minorities. Most recently, the Government has issued the Decision 134/2004/QĐ-TTg on some policies to support production/housing land and to supply drinking water for poor ethnic people with hard living conditions.

The policies cover four targets:

1. Relief;
2. Improvement of infrastructure in poor areas and communities;
3. Improvement of quality of social services (health, education and culture); and
4. Assistance to households in economic development.

The support policies usually focus on some fields, objects and time periods and are performed by relevant agencies. Each national program and project often addresses many targets. For example, the National Target Program on Hunger Eradication and Poverty Reduction, and Program 135 cover all four above targets.

Below is a summary of the contents and impacts of these policies.

Relief policies

Although the number of starving households remains to be few, still hunger during some months of the year and in between cropping seasons takes place in many localities. As reported by the Committee of Ethnic Minorities, hunger between crops rose dramatically in the last months of 2004. Some provinces required food relief for about 10 percent of their total population such as in Cao Bang province, in KonTum province and Hoa Binh province.

The CBMS survey data in 17 communes show that the number of starving households differs substantially among various ethnic minorities. Each household evaluated itself in terms of the capacity of making ends meet (so-called “food sufficient” and “food shortage”).

Severe starvation occurs in Gia-rai when all interviewed households reported that they all had food shortage, 50 percent of which suffer more than 4 months a year (Table 7). This ratio is over 50 percent for the Coho, Xodang, Mong, and Khmer, and 35 percent for the Ede, Thai, Giay and Van Kieu. Food sufficient households account for over 90 percent of the Tay, Nung, and San Diu and 85 percent of the Kinh people living in ethnic minority areas.

For many years, the government had to provide subsidy for extremely poor minority groups (within the national project framework); and relief (in rice, salt, clothes, blankets, mosquitoes nets, cooking utensils, chinaware, seeds and strains or in money) for in-need households due to sudden harvest losses or natural calamities. Although, the poor/hunger ratio substantially decreased, this fund had nevertheless increased.

Infrastructure improvement policy for poor areas and communities

Investment in infrastructure is of particular concern to the State and is considered as a threshold to develop socio-economy in difficult

Table 7. Food shortage ratio as self-evaluated by households (%)

	Food Sufficient	Food Shortage 1-3 months	Food Shortage 4-6 months	Food Shortage over 6 months
Kinh	85.5	8.0	2.8	1.5
Tay	91.6	3.2	1.9	1.9
Thai	60.8	32.8	3.4	0
Muong	59.7	17.0	5.7	6.3
Nung	95.1	4.9	0	0
Dao	72.6	17.8	9.6	0
Mong	37.0	43.5	11.6	5.8
Khmer	48.1	29.9	9.1	11.7
E de	66.3	31.6	1.0	1
Gia rai	13.4	84.1	2.4	0
Co ho	0	50.7	41.8	7.5
Xo dang	52.5	39.4	6.1	2
Giay	62.5	26.1	6.8	3.4
San diu	90.4	9.6	0	0
Van kieu	63.5	26.0	6.3	2.1

areas. National programs on hunger eradication and poverty reduction reserve the majority of their budget for this purpose. Program 135 is the main contribution source in this.

Program 135 was approved by the government under Decision 135 dated 31 July 1998. Localities covered under the initial program included 1,200 extremely difficult communes with around 1.1 million households totaling over 6 million people. So far, the program has been extended to 2,374 communes. The program's objectives are: (i) to reduce poor household ratio in extremely difficult communes down to 25 percent by 2005; (ii) to supply sufficient drinking water; (iii) attract more than 70 percent of children of schooling ages to classes; (iv) supplement production skills and knowledge to majority of the poor; (v) control social severe diseases, and (vi) provide roads to communes cluster centers and promote rural markets.

Within 5 years (1999-2004), 6493.1 billion VND (equiv. to 95.5% of the program's total budget) has been spent on the construction of communes and inter-communes infrastructure. With support of Program 135, localities have built 17,235 infrastructure projects.

Since 1996, construction of mountainous communes cluster centers were experimented in Ha Giang, Cao Bang, and Lang Son and then expanded to become a part of Program 135. Within 7 years, 1388.8 billion VND has been invested to build 143 communes cluster centers in 49 provinces.

On average, each of the CT135-targeted communes invested VND 2,735 million in infrastructure (including investment in communes cluster centers). Every commune was provided with 7.26 communes-level projects at 300 million VND each.

The National Target Program on Hunger Eradication and Poverty Reduction also had one infrastructure project for 700 poor communes (non-CT135), with a plan to build one infrastructure work for each commune a year. Although the budget has not been allocated for this project due to its delay in classification and selection of poor

communes, within 2001-2003, these localities have mobilized 776 billion VND for construction of about 1,000 infrastructure projects.

With priorities being given to infrastructure, new public projects have changed the outlook of extremely difficult communes. There have been some overall reports on the positive impacts of the infrastructure support policies in these communes.

While acknowledging the positive impacts of infrastructure construction in ethnic minority areas, the following points have to be noted:

- The achievement remains minor compared to the requirement. Only half of the mountainous communes have access and benefits from CT135 projects. In fact, only central areas of those communes received new common welfare projects such as schools, clinics, offices, roads, electricity and markets. People from very remote villages have not benefited significantly from these projects.
- Recent investment focused only on common welfare projects such as schools and roads. On average, each commune only had one small irrigation project which could directly impact on local people's economic development, productivity enhancement and their incomes.
- There are still weaknesses in the selection of project type, design, contractor and construction management. Only a few localities followed democratic principle and were open for local people's participation, discussion, decision-making and supervision, or decentralized its management. A couple of projects were incorrectly designed or located, were completed with poor quality, received low impacts or were rarely used by local people. They have negatively affected the overall evaluation of the public and international donors.

Policies improving quality of social services and living standards

A pillar in HEPR policies is to improve the quality of education,

healthcare, and information with the aim to extend the outreach to public services of ethnic people.

Education

Various supports in education in form of written documents have been made as follows:

- Tuition waivers and free charge in school hostels (Decision No. 70/1998/TTg, No. 1121/1997/TTg).
- Preferential policies for teachers and education managers in extremely difficult areas (Degree No. 35/2001/ND-CP).
- Provision of writing papers for pupils (Document No. 2727/VPCP-KTTH).
- Provision of textbooks and magazines.

Thanks to the abovementioned priorities, a good performance in education has been maintained in these areas. Nonetheless, the following are still to be taken into account:

- A low rate of enrolment in several groups, namely Gia rai, Xo dang, Khmer and Co ho.
- Inequality in terms of schooling opportunities among girls and boys in groups such as in Mong, Khmer, Gia rai, and Xudang (Figure 9).
- The number of households having children of schooling age (6-15 years old) without enrolment is considerably high in some groups⁶: 70 percent of households in Mong group, 50 percent in Co ho, and 40 percent in Dao and Gia rai (Table 8). Meanwhile, the rate is rather low in the groups of Kinh, Tay, Nung, Thai, San diu and Van kieu (1.4–3.6%).
- The higher the education levels are, the lower the rate of enrolment (notably that of schoolgirls) is.

⁶ Due to several constraints, the indicator of “the rate of unenrolled children out of the total of school-aged children” was replaced by that of “the rate of households having school-aged but unenrolled children”.

Figure 9. Number of school children out of 1,000 residents

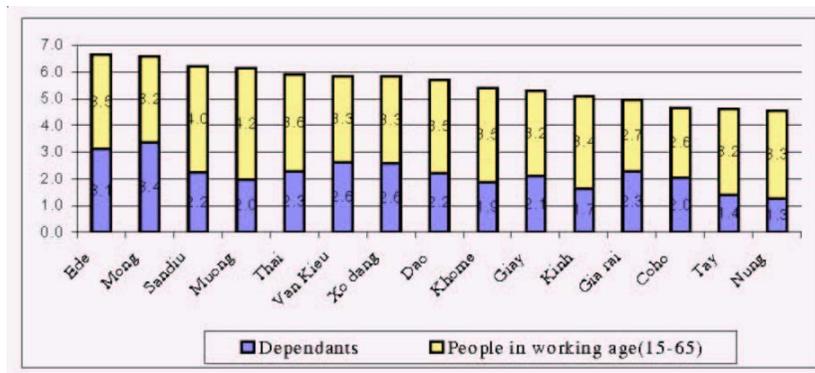


Table 8. Households having school-aged but unenrolled children

	Boys	Girls	Total
Kinh	1.7	2.6	4.3
Tay	1.4	1.4	2.8
Thai	3.7	9.5	13.2
Muong	14.3	4.1	18.4
Nung	0	0	0
Dao	26.4	14.4	40.8
Mong	27.6	41.9	69.5
Khmer	16.8	9.6	26.4
E de	15.3	13.8	29.1
Gia rai	17.2	19.7	36.9
Co ho	32.1	19.2	51.3
Xo dang	10.4	15.6	26.0
Giay	10.8	6.5	17.2
San diu	3.1	0	3.1
Van kieu	3.6	0	3.6

Despite available tuition waivers and exemption of contribution into schooling facilities, the enrolment is still low, due to insufficiency derived from the real condition of poor households that fails to meet all needs in studying. The CBMS survey showed that lowland groups such as Tay, Thai, Muong, Nung, Khmer and Van kieu have to bear

higher schooling expenses (over VND 200,000 for school fees, facilitators and other contributions) than that of highland groups, including Dao, Mong, Gia rai, and Xo dang (under VND 100,000).⁷

- In terms of awareness, a prevalence of low enrolment in highland areas is due to the fact that the children's families find it unnecessary for the children to study much.
- In terms of studying programs, it is hard for ethnic children to grasp all official Vietnamese lectures.
- The shortage of teachers in highlands is prevalent. Notably, ethnic teachers are in special needs.
- The shortage of teachers in highlands is prevalent. Notably, ethnic teachers are in special needs.

The work of education promotion in ethnic minorities should be further researched and improved with a need to a special action plan. Some recommendations are given as follows:

- A system of various norms in terms of teaching-studying programs and methodologies should be in place, in conformity with the level of socio-economic development in the areas. This conclusion is backed up by distinctions in terms of living conditions and languages in ethnic groups that differentiate with that of other groups in the country.
- A great concern for primary students should be focused by the State. Thus, authorities in education and training could set up a system of boarding schools for primary students under the caring of residents right in the localities. Students in secondary schools or high schools are currently studying in district-based boarding schools. In case the system fails to be set up, several supports should be provided to help them study in day-boarding campus (meals and breaks are served).

⁷Yearbook of Statistics on Health 2001.

Fundamental needs should be met with an aim to a better system, on the basis of: (i) a rise of the number of teaching staff; and (ii) financial support in terms of expenditures on schooling facilities and functional rooms.

- Vocational training centers and undertakings should be improved, especially in terms of various jobs with an aim to the development of agriculture production, manufacturing of agriculture products and on-the-job training promotion.

Healthcare

In the light of State policies on health support to poor people, various healthcare forms have been applied:

- Medical care fees are exempted for holders of certificates of poor households or certificates of healthcare fee exemption.
- Issuance of medical care cards, the value of which is equivalent to that of Health insurance cards, helps hospitals recovered the actual expenses that are exempted for the poor in the form of part of the budget.
- Health insurance cards are for sale, under the guidelines of the Joint Circle No. 05/1999.
- A periodical added amount should be provided for hospitals by provincial authorities to make up for their expenditures on medical care exemption entitled by the poor.
- Medical care and distribution of free medicines for the poor are conducted periodically.
- Several fictional diseases should be focused with the support of healthcare charities.

In 2002, the Government issued Decision No. 139/2002/QĐ-TTg providing guidelines on Medical Care and Treatment for the poor with a focus on ethnic people living in 4 provinces in Central Highlands and 6 provinces under extreme difficulties in mountainous areas in the North.

Special healthcare programs were implemented in some ethnic groups in the forms of preparedness of strum and malaria; set-up of healthcare stations at all communes (elimination of communes with “blank” healthcare stations). Medicines and iodine, which cost dozen of billions VND, were provided. Annually, State support, in terms of medicines delivery costs, were given to poor people. A network of healthcare (including integration of soldiers-farmers-doctors) was open, with a focus on healthcare at the very first stage; healthcare for mothers and newborn children, preparedness for malnutrition and community healthcare. Medical facilities were provided and improved in hospitals for the poor and part of them were given to healthcare stations.

However, some shortcomings remain:

- The health status of ethnic people improved at a lower pace in comparison with the general level of the whole country. Such basic health indicators such as fatalities in children, malnutrition, and sum of maternity and death ratio are still high. Some regional diseases, namely, malaria, plague, leprosy, and struma still exist. Others such as petechial fever and diarrhea are in danger of outbreaks.
- The quality of healthcare services is quite low and below the expectation of people.
- Salary for healthcare staff is a barrier for their willingness to work in mountainous and remote areas.
- Provision of free medicines is ineffectively managed. Subsidies on medicine prices and delivery costs are under difficulties due to improper distribution mechanisms.
- Hospitals lack budget to ensure the quality of medical care services. Compensation covered by the State is too low, with VND 10,000 in maximum for a commune station and VND 147,000 for a district undertaking in terms of the course of time serving medical care.

- Medical care at home with the belief in magicians is prevalent.
- Regardless of the availability of programs for clean water and sanitation for the poor, their efficiency is low due to irregular implementation and dependence attitude of residents (Table 9).

A series of constructions (sanitary latrines, livestock cages far from living clusters and water sources) with the aim to protect the environment have been ineffective in ethnic minority areas. For example, there is still a high proportion without latrines (Table 10).

Housing

Housing policies are new, including the policy on loans with deferred payment for housing in Mekong Delta and Central Highlands; the policy on supporting roofs for ethnic people in 6 provinces with extreme difficulties in the North. These policies met basic needs of ethnic residents, in the compliments of all levels.

Table 9. Sources of drinking water (% households)

	Tap water	Rain water	Water from drilled wells	Water from digged wells	Treated river water	Untreated river water
Kinh	3.9	6.1	9.3	74.2	1.3	5.2
Tay	5.8	0	3.9	79.9	0	15.6
Thai	0	42.7	0	0.4	0.9	69.4
Muong	0	11.3	1.3	86.2	1.3	0.6
Nung	0	0	0	0	13.7	85.3
Dao	21.9	19.2	0	0	0	46.6
Mong	7.2	1.4	0	32.6	40.6	17.4
Khmer	14.3	24.7	57.1	0	1.3	0
E de	7.1	0	2	87.8	11.2	12.2
Gia rai	0	0	0	56.1	0	40.2
Co ho	0	0	0	64.2	1.5	34.3
Xo dang	0	0	0	100	0	0
Gia y	31.8	0	0	15.9	13.6	35.2
San diu	0	0	0	100	0	0
Van kieu	0	0	0	46.9	22.9	27.1

Table 10. Proportion of households using latrines

	Sanitary latrines	Manual latrines (Unsanitary)	Toilet in rivers, lakes	No latrines
Kinh	44.0	41.0	3.1	11.9
Tay	70.1	27.3	0	2.6
Thai	14.2	85.8	0	0
Muong	10.7	81.1	3.8	4.4
Nung	9.8	58.8	5.9	25.5
Dao	31.5	16.4	16.5	35.6
Mong	1.4	3.6	8.8	86.2
Khmer	29.9	16.9	9	44.2
E de	1.0	90.8	6.2	2.0
Gia rai	0	0	0	100
Co ho	0	3.0	0	97.0
Xo dang	0	100	0	0
Gay	2.3	48.9	1.1	47.7
San diu	11.5	88.5	0	0
Van kieu	4.2	30.2	0	65.6

In a variety of approaches, the common objective of localities is to eliminate dilapidated, leaking, temporary houses. A few set up an objective to support living standards for people, i.e., Ha Giang with the model of “a roof, a cistern, a cow”, with replication in Lao Cai, Son La and some other mountainous areas in the North.

Mass organizations and community as a whole considerably contribute to the housing campaign, notably with “Fund for the poor” conducted by National Fatherland Front with the aim of building houses for poor households. Over the last 3 years (2001-2003), the Fund spent VND 200 billion on constructing and repairing 43,000 houses.

The policies on housing have a direct impact on living standards of the poor. Yet, insufficient resources of localities fail to meet with the board outreach of beneficiaries.

Culture and Information

Over the past few years, improvements in terms of information and

culture in ethnic minorities have been considered. Radio and television news are on the air everywhere with diversity in contents and the longer length of time broadcasting. Artistic activities are still maintained in several provinces.

Constructions, in terms of centers of information and culture, exhibitions and libraries, and State head offices, among others, have been popular. Regardless of the fact that they occur in parts of community, these constructions make a deep impression on the work of reservation and development of such fields in ethnic minorities.

The number of households having audio facilities is an indicator of policies' impact. As surveyed, it is the majority in ethnic groups with a difference among various groups. The proportion of households possessing TV sets is nearly 50 percent in the groups of Tay, Thai, Muong, Nung, Khmer, Giay, and San diu and very few in the group of Mong (8.7%), Coho (10.4%), and Gia rai (15.8%).

Radio sets are also rare in the group of Gia rai (2.4%) and Mong (18.8%).

In terms of audio facilities, the rate is very high in Gia rai (81.7%), Mong (74.6%), Co ho (53.7%), Khmer (45.5%), Xo dang (42.4%), E de (38.8%), Van kieu (36.5%), and Dao (35.6%).

Other facilities such as newspapers and magazines are rare in many ethnic groups. There are some State policies on delivery of newspapers to localities but they are ineffective due to limited quantity and difficult transportation. Thus the efforts to eliminate illiteracy are hopeless due to the consequence of forgetability in handwriting when seldom reading is considerate.

In general, the extent to access information and entertainment is low, with the poor outreach of beneficiaries in the context that ethnic people are living separately and isolated in highlands, which is viewed as source of social evils such as drug addition.

Policies on supporting households in economic development

Four main contents are split as follows: (i) solving the shortage of production land; (ii) settlement and cultivation stabilization; (iii)

preferential loan rate; and (iv) technology transfer, agriculture extension, and forestry extension.

Shortage of production land

As earlier explained, the lack of production land is one of the main causes of poverty in a group of ethnic minority community. There are different reasons for different ethnic minority communities.

Due to lack of production land, limited job opportunities and service business, and weak development of non-agriculture, people in these areas are facing more difficulties.

The Government issued Decision No. 186/2001/QD-TTg and Decision 132/2002/QD-TTg on supporting production land to the ethnic minorities. As calculated, in the whole country, by the end of 2003, 10,455 households were supported with a total of 5,139 hectares of land. However, the situation of land shortage is increasingly more serious.

It is completely difficult to solve the shortage of production land for the ethnic minorities. Policies should be comprehensive and appropriate to socio-economic context, to practices of different areas, and to the capacity, and Government resources.

In the Northern mountainous area, where there is limited farming land resources, the solution is high-farming, changing types of plants, exploring more fields instead of assigning land or splitting more land.

In the Central Highlands, the longer-term solution should be to combine support for promoting effective business on their land. Otherwise, it will result in a vicious cycle: due to poverty, they will sell their land and become those in need of land.

Settlement and sedentarisation

Settlement and sedentarisation is an important policy once there are still a number of ethnic minorities keeping shifting cultivation of wandering hilltribes, or settling but wandering hilltribes. The program on settlement and sedentarisation started in 1968 in the North and

applied in the whole country from 1975. This program has a history of both achievements and failures.

Some projects on resettlement and sedentarisation have actually improved lives of the ethnic minorities who formerly wandered hilltribes or shifted cultivation of wandering hilltribes. Projects implemented by bordering servicemen along the borders of Son La, Thanh Hoa, Nghe An, Quang Tri, and Central Highlands provinces mobilized a volume of important resources, including the most important one - more than 2,000 officers and combatants. They went to villages and became teachers, doctors, agriculture and forestry extension officers, to support capacity building on local authority management. With this resource strength, these projects with complete activities have brought comprehensive impacts on the socio-economic lives of people.

In addition to successful projects, according to some households who were involved in programs on settlement and cultivation sustainability in some areas, there also exist many ineffective projects due to:

- The low quality of farming land in the resettlement areas;
- Lack of effective infrastructure works such as irrigation and roads;
- Lack of essential social services including health care and education;
- Inappropriate design of villages and houses compared to ways of life of the ethnic minorities; and
- Arising social problems and conflicts among resettled people and the local people due to lack of wide consultation with communities.

One important traditional lesson learned from past decades is to ensure the principle of democracy, willingness, wariness, and paying attention to culture of each ethnic group.

Credit support

Giving credit support to the poor ethnic minority people to develop their production and business activities is a key tool in the process of carrying out poverty reduction policies. Since 1993, the Government has promulgated policies to help family producers get credit through the credit programs for mountainous, island areas, the concentration areas of the Khmer people.

In recent years, credit programs for ethnic minority people have been continuously conducted in larger scale with higher average loan and lower soft interest.

Results of the survey conducted in 17 communes illustrate that the number of households that can get loan depends on the activeness of the bank at each locality (Table 11).

Table 11. Situation of getting credits

	Total credits		Social Policies Bank		Mass organizations		Agriculture Bank	
	% of borrowing families	Million VND/ family	% of borrowing families	Million VND/ family	% of borrowing families	Million VND/ family	% of borrowing families	Million VND/ family
Kinh	36.7	7.86	8.00	3.98	1.1	2.20	15.4	9.46
Tay	48.7	2.65	33.1	2.48	4.5	1.30	5.2	5.44
Thai	25.9	3.10	21.1	2.78	0		1.7	5
Muong	57.2	4.55	28.9	6.83	0		31.8	15.78
Nung	19.6	4.98	12.7	5.04	0		6.9	4.86
Dao	58.9	3.38	56.2	3.45	0		2.7	2
Mong	56.5	4.77	42.8	4.19	0.7	8.00	13.8	6.16
Khmer	35.1	7.27	3.90	2.33	0		31.2	7.89
E de	67.3	9.27	16.3	2.00	1	2.00	40.8	12.33
Gia rai	31.7	2.28	29.3	1.93	0		1.2	10
Co ho	14.9	1.39	7.50	1.20	0		0	
Xo dang	11.1	2.86	11.1	2.86	0		0	
Giay	77.3	3.79	71.6	3.40	0		8	5.57
San diu	80.8	2.05	53.8	2.07	1.1	4.00	26.9	2
Van kieu	86.5	5.0	74.0	4.76	0		10.4	7.05

Communities that have the highest number of households getting credits from the Social Policies Bank (with the soft interest rate of from 0.5% to 0.6%) are Van Kieu (74% of the households with the average amount of VND4.8 million), Giay (71% with VND3.4 millions), Dao (56% with VND3.5 million), and San Diu (53.8% with VND2.1 million). Communities that have smaller number of households receiving credits from the Social Policy Bank are Khmer (3.9% with VND2.2 million per loan), and Co Ho (7.5% with million 1.2 million per loan). The Kinh people, who live in ethnic minority areas, have little access to such credit channel (only 8% with VND4 million per loan).

Credit activities of mass organizations in the investigated communes are not strong. The second important lending channel is the Bank for Agriculture. Credits from this bank are mostly for families who know how to do business and have business purpose with the interest rate of 0.8-1 percent per month.

Apart from official lending channels, private channels operate strongly in areas where the commodity economy develops (e.g., the Mekong Delta where there is Khmer people, or coffee plantation areas in the Central Highlands)

It can be noted that local people can access credit but do not know how to use it effectively. This thus requires synchronized solutions. Support in credit will become a burden to local people and destroy the system of credit policies for poverty reduction if it is not combined with transferring knowledge, and enhancing technical and business capacity for local people.

Transferring techniques and agro-forestry extension

This activity has been consolidated and has had operated effectively with certain achievements. Models of trial breeding and farming some types of animals and trees that are suitable to the natural conditions; cultivating water rice, crossbred maize, productivity cassava; intensive cultivating coffee, fruit trees; improving mixed gardens; mixing agriculture and forestry, raising new types of chicken, productively

pigs, goats, etc., have been created. At the same time, on-the-job trainings are organized to transfer technology advancements on cultivation and husbandry. With basic knowledge, the farmer families started applying it in the agriculture production to increase the outputs.

In general, there has been a great progress in agro-forestry activities with an increase in acreage, output and capacity of water rice. Technology advancements have been applied in the production and the production seems to direct toward producing trees as products. Local people have gradually been aware of applying science and technology advancements in the production. So far, the production of trees as products has moved toward the objective of enriching.

There are, however, certain constraints in agriculture extension activity:

- Large areas and scattered population, different communities with different traditions and customs living in the same place are very difficult for monitoring the production.
- Low background limits the ability of local people in getting knowledge and applying science and technology advancements.
- Poor economic condition and out-of-date infrastructure for production remain a constraint.
- The extension cadres often play different functions. They do not have good understanding about the local traditions, customs and cannot speak local languages.
- Unstable market for agriculture products is seen as a difficulty to the propagation on science and technology transfer.

Because of the above-indicated problems, the results gained from agriculture extension activities have been limited.

Conclusion

First, the proportion of ethnic minorities to the total population of the poor is on the rise. As a result, the poverty tendency in ethnic minorities may become a key issue in hunger eradication and poverty

reduction activities in Vietnam. To prevent such tendency, it is necessary to set out and achieve the target on increasing the pace of poverty reduction in ethnic communities.

As analyzed above, in spite of the continuous reduction in absolute number, with a slower reduction speed, the poor ethnic minority people will tend to account for a higher portion in the total poor people nationwide. Such trend means that the living standard gaps among different peoples will rise in the direction that the smaller and mountainous people will become backward and be left behind by the ones in the lowland. This result is contrary to the policies and programs of Vietnam's Party and Government and the desires of people. Therefore, it is necessary to set out the important objective for hunger eradication and poverty reduction in 5 to 10 years by raising poverty reduction speed in the ethnic minority areas. Only by doing this can one escape from the above-mentioned unexpected tendency.

Second, to reach the above-mentioned objective, hunger eradication and poverty reduction policies for ethnic minorities should not just be a general framework for every poor groups in every areas or localities but a specific one with respect to the characteristics of ethnic minorities.

The system of poverty reduction policies and recommendations should be classified into two groups: (i) general policies and recommendations for every poor target groups; and (ii) solutions and specific implementation ways for each group of ethnic minorities. Taking into account the special characteristic of the population in ways of doing business, their background, ways of thinking and living should be considered as a framework for the formulation of a group of special poverty reduction solutions and special ways of carrying out the policies and recommendations for different groups of ethnic minorities.

Third, the National Targeted Program on Hunger Eradication and Poverty Alleviation for ethnic minorities should consider the content of direct poverty reduction as the focus. Activities that have

indirect impact on poverty reduction or create general conditions for socio-economic development should be moved to other targeted programs. Activities of extending agriculture – forestry – fishery, developing marketing and market, transferring technology, creating and introducing demonstration models, developing new sectors for jobs creation and income generation, providing new seedlings and breeds, developing processing industries, giving loans to the poor, etc., should be given large proportion of budget in the program and the contents should be broadened. In the framework of the program, only small infrastructure should be built to serve the production of poor communities (e.g., small irrigational systems, dykes, breeding farms, and processing workshops).

Fourth, poverty reduction policies and recommendations should give attention to and be combined with location and time to create a general impact that is strong and long enough to achieve the target of sustainable poverty reduction.

In comparison with areas with high socio-economic growth, poverty reduction in ethnic minorities is more complex and takes longer time to work. The main task of poverty reduction is not just supporting the development of production and the target groups of poor households but also enhancing the capacity of individuals, families and communities on economic, education, public health, environmental and natural resources protection, gender equality, social management, etc. All of these aspects must be developed in time, harmoniously and interactively in a long process.

The distribution of resources and capital for hunger alleviation and poverty reduction activities in ethnic minority areas should be re-considered. It is suggested that the budgets of different projects be combined in one project at the commune level to conduct hunger alleviation and poverty reduction activities comprehensively.

Fifth, indigenous knowledge and national culture must be integrated in designing and organizing the implementation of poverty reduction activities.

Indigenous knowledge is a precious asset of each nation, which is accumulated through many generations. Such asset contains lessons on how people should react to the surrounding environment to sustain and develop. There are also principles on how individuals should behave in the community and among communities. The custom of each locality and nation exists for a long time and has a higher effect than the modern legislation. Indigenous knowledge is one of the basics of national character and culture.

In the present modern society, the rapid changes in natural and social conditions have led to the backwardness of part of indigenous knowledge. Nevertheless, much of such knowledge still remains with its value and communities still maintain their customs. Poverty reduction is a process that brings two-side effects on the knowledge as well as on culture of people. On one side, it brings new knowledge, new tools to create new production methods and new ways of living; and enriches, re-improves and even erases part of the backward knowledge, tradition and custom that hinders the progress. On the other side, poverty reduction program has to inherit the knowledge on nature and people, and appropriate cultivation techniques of the communities. It has to respect the local cultural tradition and take part in reserving the valuable ones. To deal with such two aspects, it is necessary to formulate ways, contents, and process of implementing suitable solutions for each community.

Results of previous years show that the first aspect of the influencing process has covered policies and supporting activities for ethnic minority people while the second aspects has been accepted in arguments, directions and plans but has not been attentively carried out. There have been a number of practical lessons that if poverty reduction projects do not pay enough attention to national knowledge and culture, they will not achieve the expected result.

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Comments

- Vietnam is very serious about looking at the situation of its ethnic minority. It is commendable that the paper looks at the benefit incidence of government initiatives for the ethnic groups. However, in strengthening the benefit incidence component of CBMS for these kinds of households, it is very important to know whether households have benefited from such initiatives in the end or not.
- It is also important to know why these ethnic people are poor—due to cultural factors or environmental differences (quality of the environment). It was suggested that it is important to explore the question of social status by ethnicity also in other countries where the political situation is not too sensitive.
- In Vietnam, there is a community-based verification of poorest households every 5 years that is revised annually. In this regard, it is important to provide information on who makes those judgments and how these judgments are made and if this is a consistent process around the country.
- Moving from this kind of description to an analysis is a very complex arena. There are at least 4 major factors coming together to produce outcomes such as structural, cultural, spatial and political. In this regard, extreme care should be observed since this study shows that ethnic groups tend to be confined in certain areas of the country.
- Provide information on what issues the author came across in terms of representation of the data, whether data disaggregated by ethnicity is representative, for example, in a certain village where there can be 2-3 households of a particular ethnic group.

- The author has used primary outcome indicators such as food security, health and education to get a sense of how these programs have done. These outcome indicators are affected by many other factors other than such programs so it is important to know how to deal with attribution problem when evaluating poverty reduction programs.