

## CHARTING A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE: THAI NGUYEN'S ETHNIC MINORITY COMMUNITIES

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### Article Info

**Keywords:** Socio-economic development, Ethnic minority policy, Thai Nguyen province, Poverty reduction, Ethnic minority, communities

### Abstract

Socio-economic development plays a pivotal role in driving progress within a nation. In Vietnam, the government's ethnic minority policy is instrumental in enhancing the quality of life for minority communities. Thai Nguyen province, situated in the Northern midland and mountainous region, houses a diverse population of over 1.2 million individuals, encompassing 51 distinct ethnic groups. Notably, more than 384,000 residents belong to ethnic minority groups, constituting nearly 30% of the provincial population.

These ethnic minority communities are dispersed across 123 communes and towns, predominantly within 5 mountainous and highland districts. These regions are categorized into 3 development areas, consisting of 25 communes in Region I, 63 in Region II, and 36 in Region III. Over time, the inhabitants of these communities have displayed remarkable resilience, fostering patriotism, unity, industriousness, and steadfastly preserving their cultural heritage.

In recent years, the government's commitment to advancing socio-economic development in Thai Nguyen province has yielded substantial results. Extreme poverty has witnessed significant reductions, with 33 out of 48 communes successfully escaping extreme poverty status by the close of 2020. Furthermore, the province is making remarkable strides in accomplishing the objectives of Program 135, a governmental initiative aimed at alleviating poverty in ethnic minority and mountainous regions. In 2019, an impressive 75 out of 94 hamlets in Thai Nguyen province benefiting from Program 135 succeeded in attaining the program's goals, positioning the province as a national leader. The poverty rate in ethnic minority and mountainous areas has experienced a swift and consistent decline, averaging 3-4% annually. This, in

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turn, has contributed significantly to Thai Nguyen's ascent in the ranks of low-poverty provinces within the Northeast region.

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## Introduction

Socio-economic development is a key driver of progress in any country. In Vietnam, it is also an important component of the government's ethnic minority policy, aimed at improving the quality of life for the country's minority communities. The province of Thai Nguyen, located in the Northern midland and mountainous region of the country, is home to over 1.2 million people, with 51 ethnic groups living together. Of these, over 384,000 people are members of ethnic minority groups, accounting for almost 30% of the population.

The ethnic minority communities in Thai Nguyen province are spread across 123 communes and towns, mainly in 5 mountainous and highland districts. These areas are divided into 3 development regions, with 25 communes in Region I, 63 in Region II, and 36 in Region III. Over the years, the people of these communities have shown resilience, promoting patriotism, solidarity, and industriousness, while preserving their national cultural identity. In recent years, the government's efforts to promote socio-economic development in Thai Nguyen province have paid off. Extreme poverty has been significantly reduced, with 33 communes out of 48 having been lifted out of extreme poverty status by the end of 2020. The province is also making strides in fulfilling the goals of Program 135, a government initiative aimed at reducing poverty in ethnic minority and mountainous areas. In 2019, 75 out of 94 hamlets in Thai Nguyen province benefiting from Program 135 were able to achieve the program's goals, making the province a leader in the country. The rate of poverty in ethnic minority and mountainous areas has been declining rapidly, averaging 3-4% per year, contributing to Thai Nguyen's rise in the rankings of low-poverty provinces in the Northeast.

In addition to poverty reduction, Thai Nguyen is also making progress in other areas of socio-economic development. The province has made significant strides in meeting the new rural standards, with 77 out of 112 communes meeting the standards by the end of 2020. Thai Nguyen is also making strides in the education sector, with the construction of new classrooms and an increase in the enrollment of ethnic minority students in boarding schools.

Despite these achievements, there are still challenges to be addressed. In May 2021, the Chairman of the Provincial People's Committee issued Plan No. 99/KH-UBND, outlining a project aimed at strengthening international cooperation to support socio-economic development in ethnic minority areas of the province. The project aims to increase resources for socio-economic development, narrow the development gap between regions and ethnic groups, and preserve and promote the cultural identity of the ethnic groups.

This article aims to evaluate the quality of life of ethnic minority communities in Thai Nguyen province over the past 35 years, highlighting the achievements, limitations, and problems that have been encountered. The article will also propose solutions to improve the quality of life of ethnic minority populations in the current period of promoting industrialization, modernization, and international integration. The keywords of this article are livelihood and sustainable development, which reflect the importance of ensuring the well-being of ethnic minority communities while ensuring the long-term sustainability of development efforts.

### **1. Accordingly, the Plan identifies 10 priority areas to attract resources and mobilize aid:**

- Solve the shortage of residential land, houses, production land, domestic water of ethnic minorities households. Attracting and mobilizing financial resources to support the poor ethnic minorities who have no land to live in to stabilize their lives

- Arrange, plan, arrange and stabilize population in necessary places; support for households to resettle or settle in place.
- Develop agricultural and forestry production, bring into play the potentials and strengths of localities to produce goods along the value chain. Support forest protection; supporting the application of science and technology, techniques of plants and seeds...; support Sustainable development of livelihood for poor households; Support to build a business model...
- Invest in essential infrastructure, serving production and life in the area ethnic minorities, boarding schools for ethnic minorities, boarding schools, houses for semi-boarding students, rural transport works serving production, business and people's livelihood; Power supply works for daily life, production and business...
- Invest in developing education and training for ethnic minorities people, improving the quality of human resources who are ethnic minorities; Supporting ethnic minorities workers to easily access labor market information, job search and connection support services; Support ethnic minorities youth to find jobs that match their training levels, abilities and aspirations.
- Preserve and promote the fine traditional cultural values of ethnic minorities in association with tourism development. Invest in building typical tourist destinations in ethnic minorities and mountainous regions; promote propaganda and widely promote typical traditional cultural values of ethnic minorities...
- Taking care of people's health, improving their physical condition and stature ethnic minorities; child malnutrition prevention.
- Implement gender equality and solve urgent problems for women and children. Focus on preventing and combating domestic violence, human trafficking, unsafe labor migration, cultural practices harmful to women and children; increase the participation of women in self-governance and community development.
- Development investment for ethnic groups still faces many difficulties and has specific difficulties. Support to improve the population of ethnic minorities, reduce the rate of malnutrition among children under 6 years of age, contribute to improving the quality of the population, and ensure equal and equal development among ethnic groups.
- Propaganda and mobilization in the area of ethnic minorities people; support ethnic minorities people in applying information technology to support socio-economic development and ensure security and order in ethnic minorities and mountainous areas.

### 1. Actual situation of economic life of Hmong ethnic group in Thai Nguyen province

After several centuries of living from China to Vietnam, the Hmong ethnic group is distributed in most of the northern border provinces and some Central Highlands provinces, including Thai Nguyen.

The Hmong people in Thai Nguyen province mainly belong to the White Hmong and Black Hmong groups from Cao Bang, Lang Son emigrated from 1979, until 2019, the number of Hmong people in Thai Nguyen province increased rapidly (see Table 1)

Table 1. *Statistics on the number of Hmong people in Thai Nguyen province*

Five 1979	1989	1999	2009	2019	
Quantity (person)	644	2.264	4,831	7.230	10,822

Source: Author compiled on the basis of data provided by the Department of Statistics of Thai Nguyen province. In Thai Nguyen, Hmong people reside in 26 hamlets/hamlets in districts: Dong Hy, Vo Nhai, Phu Luong and Dinh Hoa, of which there are 5,623 men and 5,199 women (Thai Nguyen Provincial Statistics Office, 2019).

Hmong people live mainly in high mountains, complicated terrain, sloping land is easily washed away and degraded. The main economic activity of the people is the cultivation of maize and rice with low productivity. In addition, there are households raising more chickens, ducks, pigs, buffalos.... in small quantities by letting loose. Due to living in divided terrain, difficult traffic, scattered population, low level of education, the life of Hmong people is still difficult.

In order to develop the life and economy for the people, over the years, many programs, projects and supports of the Central Government and Thai Nguyen province have been implemented. In which, the most prominent are programs and projects such as: Program 135, Program 102... In addition to the programs, projects and general policies of the State, on September 16, 2014, the Human Resources Committee People of Thai Nguyen province promulgated Decision No. 2077/QD-UBND approving the Project " *Socio-economic development, production stabilization and life in extremely difficult villages and hamlets where many Hmong ethnic groups were born. live in Thai Nguyen province until 2020* " (referred to as Project 2037) to support 26 extremely difficult villages/hamlets inhabited by many Hmong ethnic groups. Effective investment from programs, projects and projects has made the life and economy of Hmong people have markedly developed. People are supported to borrow capital to develop production and business; supporting scientific and technical knowledge applied to production in order to create jobs, increase income, and contribute to changing outdated farming practices, suitable to the actual conditions of each hamlet. Hmong people were provided by agricultural extension officers with seeds and instructions on planting hybrid maize and other valuable economic crops such as tea, dong quai, pomelo and orange trees; provide financial support for local people to raise buffaloes and cows for reproduction. A few households open a small grocery store.

Thai Nguyen province is also interested in infrastructure investment in the hamlets/hamlets of Hmong people. The province has invested in building 15 roads into extremely difficult hamlets/villages; to build 15 preschools and primary schools; 3 community cultural houses; 11 national grid power projects and 2 concentrated domestic water works. By 2019, 26/26 hamlets/hamlets had access to the national grid, 96% of households had electricity for daily life, and 87% of households had access to hygienic water (Thai Nguyen Provincial Party Committee, 2019).

Along with economic policies, Thai Nguyen province also fully implements policies and regimes on education, society and culture with the Hmong ethnic group. In hamlets/villages far from the commune center, the province builds preschools and primary schools; implementing the priority regime for enrollment of children living in 26 hamlets/villages who can attend ethnic boarding and semi-boarding schools of the province. The hamlets/hamlets have health workers. Every year, Thai Nguyen Department of Health organizes volunteer groups to visit hamlets/hamlets to examine and distribute free medicines to people. Activities aimed at preserving the cultural identity of the Hmong ethnic group and promoting the role of reputable people in the Hmong ethnic group are also focused on by Thai Nguyen province.

It can be said that the policies, programs and projects of the Party, State and Thai Nguyen province have brought practical effects, creating conditions for Hmong people to develop their economy, culture and society, gradually reducing them. poor. However, compared to other ethnic groups, the life of Hmong people still faces many difficulties (see Table 2).

Table 2. *Statistics of economic life of Hmong ethnic group (as of December 2018)*

STT	Explain	Unit	Number of households
1.	Total number of households	Household	2.189
2.	Number of poor households	Household	1.202
3.	Number of near-poor households	Household	227
4.	Number of households lacking productive land	Household	714
5.	Number of households that have not yet used electricity from the national grid	Household	eighty seven
6.	Number of households that do not have access to hygienic water	Household	285

Source: (Thai Nguyen Provincial Party Committee, 2019).

The educational level of the Hmong people has been raised but is still low compared to the common level of Thai Nguyen province and other ethnic groups. As of December 2018, the number of Hmong people who cannot speak or write Mandarin is 268, the number of people with intermediate education is 2, and the number of people with college and university degrees is 10. (Thai Nguyen Provincial Party Committee, 2019).

## 2. Sustainable development of livelihood by Hmong people

Livelihood is understood as the indispensable activities of people in life to make food, clothes, houses, etc. to maintain their daily lives. Solving the problem of livelihood for the people means eradicating hunger and reducing poverty sustainably.

Up to now, the economic life of Hmong people has made remarkable progress. However, looking at it as a whole The number of 1,429/2,189 poor and near-poor households (accounting for 65%) poses many challenges in the Sustainable development of livelihood of the people. Therefore, it is necessary to implement the following key tasks and solutions to Sustainable development of the livelihood of the people:

- + Continue to have specific policies, support investment in infrastructure, economy, society, culture, train human resources and recruit officials who are from the Hmong ethnic group.
- + Solve the shortage of productive land (714/2,189 households, accounting for 32.6%), lack of residential land due to population growth, lack of domestic water (285/2,189 households) and production water .
- + Continue to support plant varieties and livestock breeds suitable to the soil with efficiency and high economic value so that agricultural products can not only meet daily consumption for the people but also become goods that bring in income. stable, long-term income for the people.
- + Continue to organize training for households on production knowledge, study tours to exchange experiences so that people can improve their knowledge and production capacity.
- + Invest in building markets in communes without rural markets: Tan Long, Van Lang (Dong Hy), Sang Moc, Than Sa, Phuong Giao (Vo Nhai) to promote business and trade for people; Support building cooperation and association along the chain of production and consumption of products.

## 3. Health care solutions, improving the population quality of Hmong ethnic groups in Thai Nguyen

Thoroughly grasp and effectively implement the viewpoint on population policy set forth by the 13th National Party Congress: "Effective formulation and implementation of population and development policy,. ..., improving the quality of the population, linking the improvement of population quality with the improvement of the quality of human resources, ensuring a reasonable population growth rate and equal sex at birth" (Communist Party of

Vietnam, 2021, p. 151). Therefore, in order to improve the quality of the population, ethnic minorities must perform the following tasks well:

- Perform general tasks on socio-economic development in ethnic minority and mountainous areas.

In the current socio-economic and social development conditions of the country as well as the ethnic minorities and mountainous regions, in order to improve the quality of ethnic minorities, a solution that is both immediate and fundamental is to promote development. socio-economic development, improving the living environment, constantly improving the material and spiritual life of ethnic minorities. Socio-economic development in mountainous ethnic minority areas in the 2021-2030 period requires "Mobilizing, allocating, using and effectively managing resources for development investment, creating fundamental changes in the economy and society. economy, culture and society in the area with a large number of ethnic minorities people. Paying attention to the specificity of each region ethnic minorities in planning and organizing the implementation of ethnic policies. There is a mechanism to promote the positivity, self-reliance and self-reliance of ethnic minorities, socio-economic development, sustainable multi-dimensional poverty reduction, etc." (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2021, p. .170). Only on the basis of socio-economic development can the living standards be improved, living conditions improved, education, transportation, health care, and the quality of the ethnic minority population improved.

- Protect and improve the living environment for the people

First of all, it is necessary to protect the natural environment, which is the living space of ethnic minorities people, in which, forest protection and development is the number one task in mountainous areas. Develop a program to develop sustainable forests and stabilize residents. Ethnic minorities resettle in hydropower and irrigation projects and overcome the situation of free migration, creating livelihoods, jobs and stable settlements for the ethnic minorities people.

Second, focus on investing in building socio-economic infrastructure such as transportation systems, electricity, clean water, physical facilities for health and education, gradually improving living conditions, environment. live for the ethnic minorities and mountainous regions.

- Effectively implement social security policies in ethnic minority and mountainous areas

+ Continuing the work of poverty reduction, this is the most important task of the social security policy, one of the leading tasks in the socio-economic development policy in ethnic minorities and mountainous regions. In order to continue effectively implementing poverty reduction in ethnic minority and mountainous areas, it is necessary to thoroughly implement a number of basic solutions as follows:

- \* Implement social insurance policies for ethnic minorities. The issue of ensuring social security for the ethnic minorities people is a fundamental solution to sustainable poverty reduction, improving people's living standards and contributing to socio-political stability.

- \* To expand the participants, in terms of mechanisms and policies, it is necessary to raise the support level for the voluntary social insurance participants, to expand the non-poor and near-poor households; To be more flexible in terms of support levels, it is necessary to specify a minimum level of support so that localities with favorable economic conditions can have a mechanism to support part of the voluntary social insurance premium payment.

- \* Strengthening responsibility in leadership and direction of Party committees and local authorities in implementing legal policies on social insurance and health insurance at grassroots level, drastically implementing development solutions for insurance participants; interested in directing industries and employers in the area to complete the work of completing personal information to complete the profile, meeting the goal of issuing social

insurance books and electronic health insurance cards. for participants; strengthen propaganda and dissemination of social insurance and health insurance policies and laws to raise awareness of all levels of Party committees, authorities, units and all people to understand the humanistic meanings, the importance of social insurance and health insurance policies.

+ Pay attention to the development of ethnic minorities with a small population. Support for ethnic minorities is needed in each phase, in the period from 2020 to 2030, from 2030 onward. The State must have specific and breakthrough policies to create conditions and development opportunities for ethnic groups with a small population. Investment in essential socio-economic infrastructure , investment support for production development, investment in education development, support for health and cultural development activities, appropriate human resource training. suitable for each nation.

Reducing child marriage and consanguineous marriage in the ethnic minorities region aims to prevent and fundamentally reverse this situation, contributing to improving the quality of population and human resources in ethnic and mountainous areas. .

Disseminate and raise awareness for officials and people. Organize training on knowledge, communication skills, advocacy, and legal advice on marriage and family among ethnic minorities. It is necessary to have a legal support policy for ethnic minorities people, especially difficult when it comes to getting married at the right age and carrying out the marriage registration procedure.

Strengthen propaganda in many forms and in many languages to grassroots levels, especially villages; replicate pilot models that are effective in preventing consanguineous and child marriage. Propaganda and campaigns need to be associated with border guards stationed in the area and enlist reputable people in the community to gradually change people's perception. Promoting the role of the government and mass organizations in propagating and mobilizing the implementation of the law on marriage and family.

- Regarding the implementation of policies on health, health care, and improvement of the quality of ethnic minorities

First of all, it is necessary to review the issued health care and health care policies for ethnic minorities in order to amend, supplement and develop health and health care policies suitable to the conditions of ethnic minorities. and mountainous areas for each period and long-term policy until 2030, creating conditions for people to fully access technical services in basic health care in order to improve the quality of the population in the regions. Ethnic groups with a small population (under 10,000 people).

Having a policy to support food and food for pregnant mothers and children of Ethnic minorities who are severely malnourished in disadvantaged families residing in remote areas; implementing models to improve the quality of the population of very few ethnic groups.

Financial investment; staff training, human resource development in the health sector in ethnic minority and mountainous areas; specific policies for health care, population and family planning in ethnic minority, mountainous and extremely difficult areas from now to 2030 and the next period, with the following contents: focus on public finance for health; amending and supplementing the Law on Health Insurance in the direction of the State budget paying health insurance for people who are ethnic minorities, near-poor households and Kinh people living in extremely difficult areas; abolish the regulation of co-payment for the poor, ethnic minorities, near-poor households and Kinh people living in extremely difficult areas. Implement health insurance policies, incorporate health plan goals and targets, health insurance coverage rates into local socio-economic development programs and plans; reforming and simplifying administrative procedures in medical examination and treatment, creating favorable conditions for patients to participate in health insurance. To increase investment in medical

facilities and equipment for all levels, especially health stations in remote and remote communes; invest in the construction of health stations in communes in disadvantaged areas, first of all giving priority to communes and townships in poor districts 30a; Ministries and branches develop criteria for localities to have a basis for allocating investment budgets from programs and projects for the health sector; prioritize investment in and upgrade the medical waste treatment system and treatment costs; develop a mobile medical team model to carry out medical examination and treatment activities in remote and isolated areas; formulating regimes and policies for training and developing human resources for the health sector in ethnic minorities and mountainous areas. To adopt policies on recruitment, training, employment and special treatment for health workers in disadvantaged and mountainous areas of the Northern provinces, the North Central and South Central Coast regions, the Central Highlands and the Central Highlands. The Mekong Delta under the election system contributes to basically solving the quantity and quality of health human resources for the ethnic minorities region and mountainous and extremely difficult areas.

It is necessary to include the targets of reducing HIV/AIDS morbidity and mortality in the system of socioeconomic development indicators in the Northwest, Central Highlands, and Southwest regions; include health policy, health care and population and family planning into the content of social security.

Second, implement health insurance policies, contribute to supporting medical examination and treatment for ethnic minorities in remote, isolated and extremely disadvantaged areas; for the elderly, poor households and ethnic minorities with a small population.

Improve the quality of medical examination and treatment by investing in equipment, training and improving professional qualifications for medical staff and doctors to perform a variety of technical services, creating trust for patients. people.

Third, build a health care model suitable to the conditions of ethnic minorities and mountainous regions. It is necessary to develop a method of taking care of people's health suitable to mountainous, remote and remote areas. Replicating the model of combining military and civilian medicine to take care of people's health has been jointly implemented by the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of National Defense in recent years, making a practical contribution to filling up the medical gaps in the highlands. The unit's military medical force has worked closely with medical units in effectively implementing national health programs in the area, as well as regularly taking care of people's health.

The achievements in raising the number of ethnic minorities through the indicators of human development in terms of physical and capacity, average life expectancy, reflect the humane nature of the ethnic policy of the Party and State.

In order to continue to improve the quality of the population ethnic minorities to meet development requirements in the current period of accelerating industrialization, modernization and integration, it is necessary to develop specific policies suitable to the needs of the population. development of ethnic minorities; integrate policies on population development and people's health care in socio-economic development strategies, master plans, plans and projects. This is a long-term career, the responsibility of the whole political system at all levels, branches and ethnic minorities themselves.

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