



**Australian Government**  
**Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade**

# **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**PROCEEDINGS OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE**

**“SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND**

**ETHNIC MINORITY POVERTY REDUCTION**

**IN MOUNTAINOUS REGIONS”**

**Thai Nguyen- Vietnam 2014**

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# Acronyms and Abbreviations

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

# Preface

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

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

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

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

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

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

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**President, Thai Nguyen University**

# Acknowledgements

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

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

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

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

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

Correspondingly, equal credit is given to Roxanne Hakim, Son Thanh Vo, Nghi Nguyen, Phuong Thu Nguyen (World Bank), Dr. Dang Van Minh, Dr. Tran Viet Khanh, Dr. Nguyen Huu Cong, Dr. Do Anh Tai, Dr. Mai Anh Khoa, Dr. Tran Van Dien, Dr. Lai Khac Lai, Dr. Nguyen Hong Lien, Dr. Nguyen Thanh Ha, Dr. Nguyen Anh Nguyet, Dr. Ha Xuan Linh, Dr. Nguyen The Hung, Dr. Nguyen Thi Gam (all from Thai Nguyen University), and to the Conference Program Committee



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

## Executive Summary

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

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

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

# Introduction

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

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

## Objectives of the Conference

### *General objectives*

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

### *Specific objectives*

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



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

## Conference Methodology

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

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

# Main Findings

## Policies in Vietnam from Government and Donor Perspectives

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

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

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



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

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

### **Lessons Learned on Policies in Vietnam**

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

### **Implications for the poverty reduction policies**

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

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

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

### **Lessons Learned on International Experiences on Ethnic Minority Poverty Reduction**

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

### **Implications for the poverty reduction policies**