

# IMPLEMENTATION OF POVERTY REDUCTION POLICIES FOR THE KHMER PEOPLE IN AN GIANG PROVINCE, VIETNAM

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## ABSTRACT

Poverty is a global socio-economic issue, thus addressing poverty becomes an important task of An Giang province. On the other hand, hunger eradication and poverty reduction are also some of the basic social policies that are concerned by the State of Vietnam. Therefore, the good implementation and implementation of poverty reduction policies, especially poverty reduction policies for ethnic minorities not only contributes to promoting the socio-economic development of the locality but also contributes to better implement the ethnic policy, ensure stable security and politics of the locality. The identification of poverty reduction in the Khmer ethnic minority is one of the top priority policies in the socio-economic development strategy of An Giang province. In recent years, the implementation of the State policies on poverty alleviation in An Giang province has concentrated resources, implemented many policies on poverty reduction and social security; it brings many important results, contributing to sustainable socio-economic development, especially in areas with a large number of Khmer ethnic minorities with many positive changes, the rural development is more and more prosperous development, the rate of poor households decreased, the life of a quite large part of the Khmer ethnic group has been increasingly improved.

**Keywords:** An Giang, poverty reduction, the Khmer ethnic, policies.

## INTRODUCTION

An Giang is a province in the Mekong Delta region. The province has 11 administrative units at the district level, 156 communal administrative units; There are 18 border communes, 35 communes with difficulties. The population of the whole province is 2,142,709 people, the total number of households is 524,759. Currently, An Giang has 30 ethnic groups living, of which the Ethnic Minority population is quite large Khmer with 90,271 people, accounting for 4.2%.

The Khmer are working in the agricultural sector, and the Khmer have experience and long-standing practice of intensive wet rice cultivation. In addition, they also work in the fields, animal husbandry, a few people work in traditional handicrafts such as weaving, pottery, making palm sugar, with more than 90% of the Khmer population specializing in living by rice production, most Khmer land is used to grow rice and crops. The economy of Khmer is still heavily self-sufficient, self-sufficient, they depend a lot on nature, backward farming practices, economic difficulties still exist, and the rate of poor households (over 20%). Agricultural products and handicrafts are mainly for the family's consumption, in the village, they rarely exchange goods in the market. Therefore, the commodity economy has not taken a satisfactory position in rural Khmer.

The majority of the Khmer are attached to the upland villages, around the foothills, or the Theravada Buddhist temples, the Khmer live relatively separate from the Kinh, who Kinh prefers to live in urban or peri-urban areas, or waterway and road traffic axis. Therefore, there are some communes with a large number of Khmer ethnic people (in which there are communes accounting for 90% of the Khmer) such as Chau Lang, Nui To, An Tuc, O Lam, Luong Phi, Ba Chuc, Co To in Tri Ton district, and Van Giao, Vinh Trung, An Cu, An Hao, Tan Loi in Tinh Bien district.

The educational level of Khmer is low, they are not only influenced by religion, cultural activities, and beliefs, but they are also influenced by the Kinh and other ethnic groups in the region, influenced by the Kingdom of Cambodia. The Khmer people live concentrated in the two mountainous districts of Tri Ton and Tinh Bien, where there is a border with Cambodia, so crossing the border is quite easy, with cultural relationships and economic exchange with a part of the Cambodians, it created a unique between the two countries Vietnam and Cambodia.

## RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### *Some poverty reduction policies for the Khmer people have been implemented in An Giang province*

In the process of poverty reduction, An Giang province has focused on areas with high rates of poor households, including remote areas, areas with Khmer ethnic minorities with the motto of strictly implementing the policy mind, right to the point; direct implementation should be drastic, force distribution, reasonable work volume, completion time; should be exemplary, democratic, and creative in accordance with the laws of the State.

To solve the problem of poverty alleviation, stable long-term base, An Giang province has focused on investment in the development of areas in the life of the Khmer people, the People's Committee of An Giang province has built Its plan is also known as Ethnic Program, with many contents including reorganizing production, implementing agricultural extension programs, economic restructuring, investment in infrastructure development, housing support living for the poor, training Khmer human resources, teaching the Khmer language for ethnic minority areas and border areas. The local government has implemented the ethnic policy under the motto “Well implement the policy of equality of all ethnic groups, solidarity, and mutual assistance, mutual development, preservation and promotion of cultural identity, good traditions of each ethnic group” (Department of Ethnic Affairs of An Giang province, 2013).

Regarding the organization of production, the local government has mobilized the establishment of production cooperation and association groups; seed support, loans, and guidance for the implementation of the agricultural extension program. The localities plan to change the production structure in regions that have conditions and are suitable for each type of crop, not imposed; Focusing strongly on growing vegetables, industrial crops, growing grass to raise cows, in the long term, going to build a vegetable, fruit, and food processing factory based on local raw materials.

Water pumping stations for irrigation have been invested in upgrading, serving mainly for crop production and rice cultivation. Each cooperative group, an association of production has an average cultivated area of about 100 hectares, with officials from the agricultural sector joining the groups, to act as the core of production instructions. Cooperative groups, production associations directly sign contracts with farmers and state-owned enterprises assigned by the province to provide seeds, materials, and product sales.

Planning, population redeployment, the People's Committee of An Giang province has asked subordinates to build a plan for residential areas paired with main traffic routes to relocate Khmer ethnic households in many places to settle in to facilitate the supply of electricity and water, ensure environmental sanitation, fulfil other requirements for investment and development.

Infrastructure investment projects. The People's Committee of An Giang province has a plan to implement infrastructure projects under ethnic programs, including irrigation projects to supply drinking water and irrigation, the rural transport project helps the Khmer to circulate and transport goods, the project has electricity for daily life, to complete the school works. Organizing Khmer language teaching, implementing Khmer language classes for cadres in ethnic minority and border areas; focus on learning the language, then learning to write; stipulating that commune and hamlet cadres who are Kinh people must speak the Khmer language.

Promote economic development, reduce poor households, improve living standards of Khmer people, well implement policies on socio-economic development in ethnic minority areas, focus on investment, and exploit the advantages of each place to create favorable conditions for ethnic minorities to improve their production, improve their lives, continue to effectively implement the ethnic minority program, continue to implement the policy of supporting capital, breeds, conversion of plants and animals to develop production, guide the application of science and technology for the Khmer to improve production efficiency, encourage the Khmer to restore the development of handicraft industries, traditional trades of the Khmer ethnic people.

Improve people's intellectual level, take care of health for the people, improve cultural enjoyment of Khmer ethnic minorities, continue to implement the program of literacy eradication and extensive primary education universalization for Khmer people, especially the young people who are proficient in common languages and scripts, promoting general education and vocational training for ethnic minority children. The local government has increased the quota for the recruitment to training ethnic minority children at professional vocational schools and universities.

The Department of Health of An Giang province builds and implements quality improvement and expansion of the medical network to take good care of health, prevent and control epidemics in ethnic minority areas. Continue to mobilize ethnic minorities to participate in the

movement “All people unite to build cultural life in residential areas”. Increase the amount of radio and television broadcasting and publish many documents and books in the Khmer language; create conditions to support the ethnic minorities in purchasing audio and visual media. Maintain and improve the quality of traditional festivals, preserve good cultural values of ethnic minorities, to promote positive factors. Enhance the assurance of political security, social order, and safety, the local government has well implemented the movement to protect the national security, build a strong enough militia force and the people's security the sense of vigilance, well solving the crime, gambling, superstition problems, consolidating the people great solidarity. Educate Khmer ethnic minorities to well implement the border regulations, register temporary residence, temporary absence in accordance with regulations, strengthen border control, proactively coordinate with the Kingdom of Cambodia to maintain border security and order gender.

In addition, the Government has invested in building a number of communes centers; projects to stabilize, develop production in association with processing and selling products; a project to plan, rearrange the population in necessary places and a project to train commune officials to serve the community. Among the border communes and disadvantaged communes, there are many communes in Tri Ton and Tinh Bien districts that have been integrated investment with many other capital sources, including the capital from the provincial ethnic program supported by the central government. Many programs and policies to directly support the poor have been implemented, including credit loan programs, housing programs, social protection policies, preferential policies on health and education. In general, most of the projects invested in construction are practical, in line with people's aspirations, and supported by the people.

## **RESULTS OF IMPLEMENTING POVERTY REDUCTION POLICIES FOR THE KHMER PEOPLE IN AN GIANG PROVINCE**

### ***Economic, Cultural, and Social Achievements***

For the area of Tinh Bien and Tri Ton districts, it is the key area to be prioritized for investment development as well as infrastructure construction, socio-economic development. Because this is a border area - a mountainous area - many poor Khmer live. In the orientation of the socio-economic development strategy for the period 2011 - 2020, Vietnam has identified “Improving people's income and quality of life. Provide equal access to development resources and enjoy

basic services and social benefits. Implement more effectively the appropriate poverty reduction policies for each period; diversify resources and methods to ensure sustainable poverty reduction, especially in the poorest districts and extremely difficult areas. To encourage getting rich according to the law, quickly increase the number of households with average income or more. To adopt appropriate policies and solutions to limit the rich and poor differentiation, and reduce the difference in living standards between rural and urban areas” (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2011).

Ethnic policies have been implemented and are being implemented in An Giang province, including policies to support the settlement of residential land and job creation for poor ethnic minorities, productive land, domestic water for poor ethnic minority households, and poor households in extremely difficult communes; implementing law propaganda and dissemination for rural people and ethnic minorities (Hop, 2019). In addition, An Giang province has also issued many policies calling for investment in extremely difficult communes, border communes, Communes with a large number of ethnic minorities live, at the same time, building open mechanisms and policies, creating favorable conditions for the promotion of border economic development in association with promoting advantages in services tourism, creating leverage for development in a region inhabited by many Khmer ethnic minorities.

For job training and job creation, An Giang province mobilizes a lot of resources from the State and society to take care of poor people with a higher budget next year than last year. Most localities, especially the commune level, actively organize the implementation of social security policies in the area to promptly bring the policy to the people; The majority of members of the social security team at the commune level have access to policies and proposed many effective implementation solutions, suitable to the actual situation in each locality (Minh, & Cop, 2018). The localities focused on implementing policies to create jobs for employees. In addition, to support vocational training, capital to create jobs on the spot, many localities have linked with businesses in An Giang province and outside to bring workers to work. The results of job creation reach the target.

For poverty reduction, An Giang province has paid attention to socio-economic development, implementation of poverty reduction policies, and job creation; launched many movements to help each other reduce poverty effectively, thanks to that, the rate of poor households has decreased, ethnic minority areas also have many positive changes, their lives have been gradually improved through programs, and central and local investment projects. According to

the statistics of the Department of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs of An Giang province, the rate of poor households in the Khmer ethnic minority area in a period of five years has decreased by 16.74% (the average annual decrease of over 3.35%).

Table 1. Statistics on the percentage of poor Khmer households in An Giang province

Year period	Early 2011	End of 2011	End of 2012	End of 2013	End of 2014	End of 2015
Number of poor households	7.171	5.587	5.575	4.616	3.882	3.487
Percentage (%)	31,73	24,72	24,67	19,14	16,1	14,99

According to the multidimensional poverty standard in the 2016-2020 period (Decision No.59/2015/QD-TTg of the Prime Minister), the rate of poor households in the Khmer ethnic minority area decreased from 32.29% (equivalent to 6,949 households) at the beginning of 2016 to 27.76% (equivalent to 6,268 households) at the end of 2016, by the end of 2017, it decreased to 24.85% (equivalent to 5,432 households).

Over the years, An Giang province has invested in the development of education for the Khmer people, the number of schools, classes, and the number of students at all general education levels have increased, the work of illiteracy eradication, primary education universalization has increased. An Giang had two boarding schools for junior high school and high school for children of Khmer people. In terms of Khmer ethnic culture, the local authorities and social unions are interested in creating conditions to help people organize holidays and Tet holidays in accordance with traditional customs with joyful and healthy content. Backward customs and superstitions have been gradually removed, new cultural life in residential areas is being formed and developed (People's Committee of An Giang province, 2016).

The cultural and sports institutions in the ethnic minority areas have been concentrated on developing rapidly. In communes where ethnic minorities are concentrated, combining capital sources of many branches of the province and district to form cultural centers, cultural venues, soccer fields, and volleyball courts. A pagoda is a community place of Khmer people, so the local authorities support the repair of facilities to contribute to educating Khmer youth, preserving the cultural identity of the nation.

The cultural and cultural activities performed in the ethnic festivals organized by the local government and the temples attracted many people, including the PhiThi Choi Chnam Thmay,

PhiThi Dolta festival (Hai, 2019). On this occasion, the local government has created conditions for various types of cultural and cultural activities, sports and sports activities, entertainment activities according to the Khmer ethnic traditions, especially the festival Racing Cows in the Bay Nui region received a warm response. Through cultural and artistic activities, step by step educating and mobilizing the civilized lifestyle movement, implementing the movement “the whole people unite to build cultural life in residential areas”, there are 7,664 families recognized as a cultural family, reaching the rate of 43.3% In with the total number of Khmer households, there were 16 hamlets with all Khmer ethnic people recognized as cultural hamlets.

Health care for Khmer ethnic minorities has been invested and implemented with good results, disease prevention, malaria control, expanded immunization and vitamins for children, and malnutrition prevention care for children. In particular, the implementation of the population and family planning policy has been more and more responded to by the Khmer people. Every year, the province and district coordinate to organize many examinations and deliver medicine to treat gynecologically diseases for Khmer ethnic women.

Theravada Buddhism plays an important role in the daily life of the Khmer, it is considered central, and a monk is a reputable person in the Khmer community. Khmer pagoda takes care of the lives of people in the village in many ways such as organizing literacy classes for fellow Buddhists, helping Khmer people get the most necessary conditions to access life and society, and even science, to have a qualification to recognize science and technology for production. The need of repairing and rebuilding pagodas of the Khmer and monks has been concerned and helped by the authorities at all levels, in accordance with the State regulations. Currently, An Giang has 63 Khmer pagodas, there are about 800 monks (often fluctuating due to renunciation of a monk, just starting to become a monk), all activities of the temple are in compliance with policies and laws (Hai, 2019). On the occasion of festivals and traditional Tet holidays of the Khmer ethnic people, the local government has organized visits and gifts to pagodas and poor Khmer households to create a good relationship with the Khmer ethnic people. The local government has always created relationships with monks, it is considered an important part of local advocacy work.

## **DIFFICULTIES IN IMPLEMENTING POVERTY REDUCTION POLICIES FOR KHMER PEOPLE**

In Vietnam, there are too many policies on poverty reduction, causing confusion and difficulties for localities in implementing and implementing. Too many policies on poverty reduction have been issued, leading to fragmentation and duplication, making it difficult for the locality in the implementation of policies in practice (Giang, Wang, & Yan, (2014). Direct implementation staff spends a lot of time understanding policies.

Many poverty reduction policies have not aimed at improving the capacity of the poor to escape poverty. A number of poverty reduction policies are subsidized and directly supported, thus forming a feeling of dependence, passivity, and relying on the State support in a part of the poor. This creates an undesirable consequence of the policy, that is, people do not want to escape poverty to benefit from the poverty reduction policy.

The low level of support in many policies leads to spreading and difficulty to improve the lives of the poor. Many policies have been issued based on the current situation and needs, but the resources have not yet been balanced for implementation. Poverty reduction policies have many direct support policies, but with very small levels of support, the support becomes dispersed, less effective in poverty reduction, but only encourages and overcomes a few immediate difficulties (Thuy, 2012). Poverty reduction policies often set high targets, project approval is often based on needs but not on the balance of resources, making many schemes and policies always in a state of inadequate funding. This leads to difficulty in resolving completely and unsustainably in the implementation of poverty reduction policies.

The budget for poverty reduction is disproportionately distributed between investment in infrastructure construction and supporting the development of production and business to generate income for the poor. Budget support for poor households to develop their livelihoods has not been focused properly, while the construction of infrastructure is expensive but effective for the whole region, or the opportunity to benefit from the works brought to all people in the area are limited. In fact, the poor have less chance to benefit from infrastructure than the non-poor, because they have fewer conditions to diversify their livelihoods, thereby increasing their income to escape poverty.

Many households are constantly poor, but there is no suitable policy for them. Many Khmer ethnic minorities are constantly poor, life is very low, there are very few conditions to escape poverty. Most of these households are ethnic minorities in remote and isolated areas with

extremely difficult socio-economic conditions. In these places due to slow economic restructuring, mainly dependent on agricultural production, while agricultural production conditions are difficult and the opportunity to change to other jobs is very low. So, most young people grow up again do agriculture like their parents, and poverty hangs on them from generation to generation. They fall into a vicious cycle of inaccessible poverty.

Many households escaped from poverty, but it is very easy to return to poverty. Households that have just escaped from poverty and near-poor households are very easy to return to poverty when faced with external risks or shocks. Risks of natural disasters, weather, epidemics, and market risks are the main causes of unsustainable escaping from poverty. This shows that the need for poverty reduction policies and insurance policies as well as policies to help people reduce and adapt to risks (Thang, 2018).

Current poverty reduction policies mainly focus on increasing income for the poor, not paying due attention to increasing welfare for the poor. Although income is an important indicator, income is only a necessary condition to improve the welfare of the people in general and the poor in particular. Support for the poor to access basic social services is just as important as providing favorable conditions to increase income.

## **SOME SOLUTIONS TO IMPROVE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF POVERTY REDUCTION POLICIES FOR THE KHMER PEOPLE IN AN GIANG**

In order to remove reliance, the State needs to drastically reduce direct and free support and gradually move to conditional support, recoverable support, and raise awareness of beneficiaries; to attach importance to focusing budget on supporting poor households to develop production and business to escape poverty, improve the poor's access to markets to help them escape poverty sustainably; create conditions for the poor to participate in value chains of agricultural products; replacing the current scattered and small livelihood support into sub-projects to support livelihoods for the society and having a long enough operation time to develop livelihood plans to reduce poverty according to the conditions and abilities of the people (Nguyen, 2020).

We should classify poor households according to their cause of poverty, especially for those who are constantly poor in order to have appropriate policies. For groups of households unable to escape poverty, it is necessary to have specific social security policies such as building capacity for poor households, helping to improve their livelihoods out of poverty sustainably; expanding livelihood support policies for households who have just escaped from poverty, near-poor households; gradually shift the policy of poverty reduction from focusing only on increasing income for the poor to increasing welfare and creating opportunities for the poor to help them escape poverty sustainably (Minh, & Cop, 2018).

The State should strengthen poverty reduction policies integrated with insurance, risk reduction, and climate change adaptation policies. In fact, poor households are vulnerable to external shocks (natural disasters, weather, epidemics, erratic prices), and also react differently to shocks to avoid falling into a vicious circle (Nguyen, Phung, & Daniel, 2015).

Localities should continue to steer the promotion of propaganda and raise awareness of poverty reduction, promptly praise and mobilize effective examples of poverty reduction, and criticize cases of abusing policies, has no will to rise, does not want to escape poverty (Su, 2019). Synchronous implementation of the above solutions will be one of the conditions contributing to improving the efficiency of the implementation of poverty reduction policies in the Khmer ethnic minority area in An Giang now and in the near future.

## **CONCLUSION**

Implementation of ethnic policy, poverty reduction in the Khmer ethnic minority in An Giang has achieved many achievements. However, it still has many difficulties, not really sustainable, especially some mountainous and border districts Tri Ton, Tinh Bien with a large number of Khmer ethnic minorities still make up a fair proportion of poor households high; The initiative of the poor Khmer is still limited, part of them still waiting for and relying on the state subsidies do not seize opportunities to escape poverty. Especially, many households cannot afford to escape poverty; the lives of a part of the poor Khmer ethnic minority are not ensured and there is a disparity between mountainous areas, ethnic minority areas, and the national average; The phenomenon of falling back into poverty is still common.

Because An Giang's economic characteristics are mainly agricultural production, economic restructuring is still slow, market price factors always adversely affect producers, along with

natural disasters and floods year, always making changes in the increase and decrease of poor households. Research on poverty reduction policies and their impact will help us understand more about the reality of poverty and poverty in the Khmer ethnic minority; Thereby, proposing a number of solutions to improve the effectiveness of the implementation of poverty reduction policies in the Khmer ethnic minority area in An Giang today.

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