
Some Solutions to Promote Sustainable Poverty Reduction in the Southern Mountainous Districts

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Abstract

This paper proposes several solutions for sustainable poverty reduction in the southern mountainous districts of Vietnam. These solutions aim not only to reduce the poverty rate but also to improve the quality of life and create conditions for the mountain residents to escape poverty sustainably. The implementation of these solutions requires close coordination between government agencies, social organizations, and local communities. Particularly, the active participation of the residents is essential for the solutions to be truly effective and to meet their essential needs. In the context of climate change and globalization, sustainable poverty reduction in the mountainous districts contributes not only to the local socio-economic development but also to the national sustainable development goals.

Keywords: mountainous areas; sustainable poverty reduction; solutions; economy

1. Introduction

The comprehensive economic and social development reforms in the country have brought about significant changes in the socio-economic life. Among these comprehensive changes, the most notable is the rapid and sustainable reduction in the poverty rate, which has always received attention and investment from the Party and the State. Localities have been decisively directed to effectively implement poverty reduction initiatives, resulting in many positive outcomes in recent times.

Poverty is one of the major challenges for socio-economic development, especially in mountainous districts, where living conditions and infrastructure remain limited. In Vietnam, mountainous districts account for a large proportion of the poor population, posing urgent issues that need to be addressed effectively and sustainably.

Poverty is not just an issue of low income but also a lack of education, healthcare, housing, and other basic services. Sustainable poverty reduction requires comprehensive and synchronized solutions, including economic development, improving education quality, enhancing healthcare services, and building infrastructure. Additionally, it is essential to focus on environmental protection and promoting gender equality.

Sustainable poverty reduction is a concept that not only involves improving people's income but also enhancing their quality of life and access to basic services such as education, healthcare,

clean water, and sanitation. This is an important goal in the socio-economic development strategies of many countries worldwide, including Vietnam.

Concept and criteria of sustainable poverty reduction: Sustainable poverty reduction is understood as a long-term process to ensure that people can permanently escape poverty and not fall back into it, through improvements in economic, social, and environmental factors. The main criteria to assess the sustainability of poverty reduction include: ensuring stable income sources for people from sustainable economic activities; improving educational attainment and vocational skills for better job opportunities; enhancing healthcare services to ensure people can live healthily and work efficiently; investing in infrastructure such as roads, electricity, clean water, and drainage systems to improve living conditions; and promoting environmental protection activities to ensure sustainable development without harming future generations.

Models and experiences of sustainable poverty reduction:

Local economic development models: Some countries have successfully promoted local economic development by supporting small and medium-sized enterprises, encouraging entrepreneurship, and developing sustainable agriculture.

Education and training programs: Free or subsidized education programs have improved people's educational levels, thereby enhancing their ability to access job opportunities.

Universal healthcare policies: Improving healthcare services and expanding health insurance coverage have made it easier for people to access healthcare, reducing the burden of disease and medical costs.

Nguyen, T. L., & Bui, V. H. (2022) explores the role of Community-Driven Development (CDD) in enhancing the living standards of communities in southern mountainous districts. It provides an in-depth analysis of how CDD initiatives have contributed to sustainable development through the implementation of infrastructure projects, agricultural development, and educational programs. The study developed the following solutions:

Strengthening capacity building: Invest in continuous training and capacity-building programs for community members to enhance their skills in project management and maintenance.

Enhancing resource allocation: Improve resource allocation mechanisms to ensure that communities have access to sufficient funds and technical support for implementing and sustaining projects.

Promoting inclusive participation: Encourage the inclusion of marginalized groups, such as women and ethnic minorities, in CDD processes to ensure that benefits are equitably distributed.

Improving coordination mechanisms: Develop better coordination frameworks among stakeholders to facilitate information sharing and collaborative decision-making.

This study provides valuable insights for policymakers, development practitioners, and community leaders. By highlighting the successes and challenges of CDD, it offers practical recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness of community-driven approaches in sustainable development. The emphasis on community ownership, capacity building, and inclusive participation can serve as a model for similar initiatives in other regions.

The World Bank's 2020 report focuses on global poverty and shared prosperity. The report highlights the progress made in reducing global poverty but also warns of new and severe challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the report, the global poverty rate has significantly declined over the past decade, but millions still live in extreme poverty. However, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has reversed much of the progress, pushing millions more into poverty. Additionally, the pandemic has exacerbated inequalities, severely affecting vulnerable groups such as informal workers, women, and children. The report emphasizes that to promote shared prosperity, policies must focus on improving the income of the lowest 40% of the population. This requires countries to enhance social security systems, expand and improve the effectiveness of social welfare programs to protect the vulnerable; increase investment in education and healthcare to enhance human resource quality and public health; promote policies supporting small and medium-sized enterprises, creating favorable conditions for entrepreneurship and economic development; and adopt environmental protection and sustainable development measures to ensure resources for future generations.

"Poverty and Shared Prosperity 2020: Reversals of Fortune" provides an insightful and comprehensive view of global poverty and shared prosperity in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. It underscores the need for strong and effective interventions to reverse the pandemic's negative impacts and promote sustainable development and prosperity for all.

The United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) "human development report 2019" titled "Beyond income, beyond averages, beyond today: Inequalities in human development in the 21st century" focuses on inequality in human development. This report analyzes various aspects of inequality and their impact on human development. It proposes policies to address inequality and promote sustainable human development: It emphasizes the existence of inequalities in opportunities, such as access to education, healthcare, and employment. These inequalities often start early in life and can persist across generations; Although average incomes have increased in many countries, income inequality remains a serious issue, particularly between different social groups. Additionally, the report analyzes the impact of new factors such as advanced technology and climate change on inequality, noting that these factors can widen the gap between the rich and the poor. The report also highlights gender inequality, analyzing disparities in income, opportunities, and rights between men and women. According to this report, proposed policies for sustainable development include: enhancing investment in public services such as education and healthcare to ensure everyone has the opportunity to develop their potential; building strong social security systems to protect the vulnerable and minimize economic risks; implementing specific measures to reduce gender inequality, such as policies protecting labor rights and promoting women's roles in society; and adopting policies to protect the environment and mitigate the effects of climate change, especially for vulnerable communities.

The Asian Development Bank (ADB, 2019) emphasizes the crucial role of the manufacturing sector in driving economic growth, creating jobs, and increasing national income. The report provides a range of policy recommendations to enhance the competitiveness of the manufacturing sector, including: investing in transportation, energy, and information technology

infrastructure; enhancing vocational training and technical education to improve workforce skills; supporting businesses in adopting new technologies and innovation; and simplifying administrative procedures, improving regulatory frameworks, and promoting transparency.

Dang, N. T., & Tran, T. M. (2022) conclude that promoting economic diversification in rural mountainous areas is key to improving livelihoods and achieving sustainable development. Tourism, handicrafts, and small-scale industries offer significant potential for creating new economic opportunities and enhancing the living standards of local residents. However, addressing challenges related to market access, skills, and financial resources is necessary to ensure the long-term success of these initiatives.

Nguyen, T. D., et al. (2023) Support the development of tourism and eco-tourism initiatives that leverage natural and cultural assets; Promote small-scale manufacturing and handicraft production through training and market development; Encourage entrepreneurship by providing access to finance and business development services. According to the authors, economic diversification plays a crucial role in poverty reduction in rural areas. By developing tourism, handicraft production, and small-scale industries, communities not only increase income but also enhance economic resilience. However, to achieve long-term success, it is necessary to address challenges related to financial resources, management skills, and market barriers.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2018) suggests investing in education and vocational training to improve the skills and capabilities of young people, enabling them to participate in local economic activities. It also recommends providing financial, advisory, and technical support to small and medium-sized enterprises; improving rural infrastructure such as transportation, electricity, water, and telecommunications; and facilitating cooperation between farmers, businesses, and non-governmental organizations to develop sustainable value chains.

Sachs, J. D. (2015) proposes a series of solutions and strategies to achieve sustainable development, including: transitioning from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources such as solar and wind; adopting sustainable farming practices to ensure food security and protect natural resources; investing in education and healthcare to improve quality of life and promote human development; and strengthening international cooperation to address global issues and promote sustainable development.

Nguyễn Thị Hoa (2009) outlined several concepts of poverty and the role of the government in poverty alleviation, policies for poverty reduction, theoretical foundations for improving poverty reduction policies, and international experiences in addressing poverty. Based on this foundation, the dissertation evaluated the main poverty reduction policies in Vietnam (an overview of Vietnam's poverty reduction policy system; the actual implementation of the main poverty reduction policies; an evaluation of the main poverty reduction policies) and proposed directions for improving these policies in Vietnam.

Trần Quốc Chung (2010) summarized several theoretical issues related to poverty reduction work, the characteristics of highland mountainous districts in implementing socio-economic

development tasks, and closely linked with the task of rapid and sustainable poverty reduction in the current context. The study clarified the objective necessity of strengthening the state's role in poverty reduction in general and in implementing rapid and sustainable poverty reduction in highland mountainous districts. Based on theoretical and practical foundations of the state's role in rapid and sustainable poverty reduction in highland mountainous districts, it summarized and evaluated practical experiences and identified urgent issues that need to be addressed: how to enhance the state's role in effectively impacting rapid and sustainable poverty reduction in highland mountainous districts. It proposed several orientations and specific solutions to address pressing issues in state management and enhance the state's role in rapid and sustainable poverty reduction in highland mountainous districts in the coming period.

In summary, these studies and reports emphasize the importance of adopting sustainable development policies and strategies to address economic, social, and environmental challenges. They provide specific and practical recommendations to support countries in promoting economic development, reducing poverty, and protecting the environment.

3. Research methodology

The research methodology of this paper includes a comprehensive review of studies conducted by scientists and reports from banks on sustainable poverty reduction. Additionally, the author conducted field surveys, analyzed statistical data from localities, and interviewed experts. The collected information and data will be processed and analyzed to derive specific conclusions and propose solutions suitable to the actual conditions of mountainous districts.

The results and proposals from this research are hoped to contribute to the fight against poverty in Vietnam and provide valuable experiences and lessons for similar regions.

In-depth Interviews: Semi-structured interview guides. Collect detailed information from local entrepreneurs, community leaders, and economic experts about opportunities and challenges in economic development.

Focus group discussions (FGDs): Focus group discussion scripts. Provide a space for community members to discuss their experiences and perspectives on economic development initiatives.

Participant observation: Observation notebooks. Collect direct data on economic activities, business practices, and community interactions.

Document analysis: Document analysis templates. Review reports, policies, and relevant documents to better understand the economic context and development policies.

Impact measurement: Evaluate the impact of economic development initiatives on local economic indicators. Use quantitative data to identify trends, patterns, and relationships between variables.

Surveys: Structured questionnaires. Collect quantitative data from households, businesses, and workers on income, living standards, and other economic factors.

4. Result

Solution 1: Enhancing awareness, vocational skills, and determination of the poor

District leaders need to implement policies to reach out to the poor and impoverished households, understand their aspirations, and devise appropriate policies to improve literacy, awareness, and understanding among the poor. Motivating and encouraging the poor to shed their inferiority complex and shame about their impoverished state, abandoning outdated and low-productivity traditional production practices to participate in community activities, and engaging in new production models can improve their communication and provide opportunities to access political, cultural, and social information at national, provincial, and local levels. Gradually applying scientific and technical advancements in production and business to create jobs and increase income is crucial.

For those among the poor who are lazy, fall into social vices, and do not engage in productive labor, it is essential to educate, motivate, and set examples through regular neighborhood meetings and activities of grassroots organizations to remind, encourage, and persuade them. Making them aware that laziness will not help them escape poverty and that it is shameful, as it jeopardizes their children's future and fails to improve their family's living conditions, will give them the motivation to engage in productive labor, secure stable employment, and generate income for the family to improve their lives.

The role of those who have risen out of poverty should be emphasized, as they are living proof and have experience in overcoming poverty and understanding the aspirations of the poor. They should be seen as important propagandists and guides to help other impoverished households in the community escape poverty. Political and social organizations at all levels need to enhance their role in supporting and assisting their members who are impoverished in economic activities by providing technical support, developing demonstration models, and organizing on-site learning exchanges to tap into the capital from investment programs for economic development in the district.

Furthermore, there should be a focus on orienting production and creating jobs for families towards sustainable poverty reduction. Policies should be developed to supplement and develop new human resources to attract skilled experts and high-level workers; diversify training forms, channel training from high school levels, and train students from vocational schools to prioritize the training of teachers, medical staff, and grassroots officials in villages. Increasing the number of agricultural, forestry, and fishery extension officers through staff rotation, new recruitment, and investment in agricultural, forestry, and fishery extension work is necessary. Policies should also be in place to train and foster management cadres, experts, and employees in enterprises and production and business establishments, thus ensuring sufficient human resources to assist and guide impoverished households in business operations, boost production, create jobs, and increase income.

To effectively manage and implement solutions aimed at enhancing awareness, vocational skills, and the determination of the poor, a comprehensive set of tools is required. These tools will facilitate training, engagement, and empowerment, ensuring sustainable and impactful outcomes.

Community education campaigns: Vehicles equipped with educational materials and staff to visit remote areas. Broadcasting information and success stories about poverty alleviation and opportunities. Utilizing Facebook, Zalo, and YouTube to disseminate information and share educational content. Organizing events to educate the community about available resources and opportunities. Information Dissemination Materials. Printed materials distributed in community centers and markets.

Educational Videos: Short videos on relevant topics such as financial literacy, health, and vocational training. Centralized locations for posting announcements and information about programs and services.

Local leaders and peer educators: Courses designed to equip local leaders with the skills to educate and motivate their communities. Utilizing respected community members to lead awareness campaigns and share information.

Vocational skills development tools: Facilities offering practical training in various trades such as carpentry, tailoring, agriculture, and IT. Portable classrooms that deliver vocational training to remote areas. Websites and apps providing access to vocational courses and certification programs.

Curriculum and training materials: Comprehensive guides for instructors and trainees in various vocational skills. Interactive online courses covering both basic and advanced vocational skills. Virtual and physical tools that simulate real-world job scenarios for hands-on practice.

Apprenticeship and mentorship programs: Structured agreements between trainees and local businesses for on-the-job training. Connections between experienced professionals and trainees to provide guidance and support. Custom plans outlining the skills to be acquired during the apprenticeship period.

Tools for enhancing determination and motivation: Documents for setting personal and professional goals, tracking progress, and adjusting plans. Sessions focused on building confidence, setting realistic goals, and overcoming obstacles. Programs teaching time management, problem-solving, and decision-making skills.

Success stories and role models: Sharing stories of individuals who have successfully improved their lives through training and education. Identifying and promoting local figures who serve as examples of success and perseverance. Awarding and celebrating achievements within the community to inspire others.

Solution 2: Promote the development of socio-economic infrastructure

To gradually improve the material and cultural living standards of people, especially the poor, it is essential to enhance rural infrastructure, particularly the transportation system, which is considered the lifeline of the economy. This will also improve land use efficiency and production development. Therefore, it is necessary to invest in the construction and expansion of inter-

communal and inter-district roads, creating a transportation network to facilitate the exchange of goods and products and alleviate difficulties for the poor and farmers.

Alongside the construction of transportation infrastructure, adequate attention should be given to existing irrigation works and the construction of additional key irrigation projects to ensure water supply for reclamation, crop intensification, and converting single-crop land to double-crop land. Investments should be made to gradually complete the water delivery system from the main canals to the communes and down to each field. The installation of drainage systems, especially small on-field drains, should be perfected. Drainage systems for areas prone to water logging during the summer should be managed. Rural markets should be expanded, and a system of technical material services should be developed to meet the needs of the people in goods exchange and production development. Additionally, a complete power grid system should be constructed, and the information system, particularly the broadcasting system, should be upgraded and strengthened to enable residents to access scientific and technical information and promote production development.

Priority should be given to investing in infrastructure in key areas, border areas, raw material areas for processing industries, and areas with tourist attractions to attract investment. All resources should be mobilized to build infrastructure projects under the principle of “the state and the people work together.” Residents should be encouraged to invest and collaborate in developing production with business organizations. Furthermore, the efficiency of investment capital use should be improved, and the responsibility of investors for the quality of construction projects should be emphasized. A reasonable investment structure should be established to create rapid economic restructuring. Additionally, calls for projects on environmental resource protection and biodiversity, land resource protection, and water resource development should be intensified, combined with the development of tourism and other services.

Regarding social infrastructure, conditions should be created for the poor to access basic health services and use quality healthcare services at prices appropriate to the economy's development and the income levels of various population segments. The effective use of government bond funds should be utilized to invest in upgrading district general hospitals, regional polyclinics, increasing healthcare staff and basic medical supplies for villages, improving the quality of medical services at communal health stations, increasing the number of doctors in impoverished communes, and building a team of village healthcare workers. The province should have policies to recruit and train ethnic minority medical staff locally. Community contributions should be mobilized to build healthcare funds for the poor, charity medical funds, and humanitarian healthcare funds, emphasizing the poor's responsibility in disease prevention, self-protection, and self-care. Awareness campaigns should be conducted to change the mindset of the poor, especially ethnic minorities, regarding the importance of family planning. Various forms of free or reduced-cost medical services and family planning services should be provided for the poor. To effectively implement this solution, the following are needed. Support from the government, financial and human resources, public-private partnerships. Project management software, planning and design tools, monitoring and evaluation tools, stakeholder engagement tools.

Solution 3: Implementing education development policies

Investing in education not only enhances the intellectual level of the populace but also serves as the key to sustainable poverty reduction. By expanding access to education, improving teaching quality, developing vocational and technical education, enhancing adult education, applying technology in education, and encouraging the participation of women and girls, nations can create a highly skilled workforce contributing to sustainable socio-economic development.

To increase the poor's access to education, two issues need to be addressed: reducing the cost of education for the poor and enhancing the benefits of education, which means creating tangible outcomes from the education of the poor. To achieve this, resources should be focused, and support from the central government should be sought to eliminate communes and villages without educational infrastructure, eradicate illiteracy, and implement universal primary education for children from poor households and vocational education for rural and ethnic youth. Government bond funds should be leveraged to invest in and solidify schools and teachers' housing in especially difficult communes, linked with rearranging the school network to ensure convenience for learners. Existing boarding schools should be upgraded, and additional boarding schools in the form of "semi-boarding with community support" should be considered in difficult areas for ethnic children to create a source of officials.

Policies supporting education in mountainous areas should be effectively implemented, such as providing free textbooks, waiving or reducing tuition fees and other related costs for children from poor households, offering allowances and scholarships to enable ethnic minority children to attend all three educational levels, and providing credit loans for vocational and professional training for children from poor and ethnic households to ensure they have opportunities to study in the national education system. Specifically:

Expanding access to education: Invest in building schools, particularly in rural, mountainous, and difficult areas, to ensure all children can access education; Government and non-governmental organizations should provide tuition waivers and scholarships for disadvantaged students to encourage school attendance.

Improving education quality: Provide training and professional development programs for teachers to enhance teaching quality; Equip teachers with the latest skills and knowledge in education; Update and improve curricula to meet labor market demands and socio-economic development trends, focusing on practical skills and creative thinking.

Developing vocational and technical education: Establish vocational and technical training centers in rural and mountainous areas, enabling people to learn trades and improve labor skills; Collaborate with businesses to develop vocational training programs that align with labor market needs, ensuring graduates have job opportunities.

Enhancing adult education: Implement literacy programs for older adults, especially in rural and mountainous areas, to help them access information and improve their quality of life; Provide continuous education courses for adults to enhance their knowledge and skills, thereby improving income and living conditions.

Applying technology in education: Encourage and support the use of information technology in teaching, particularly e-learning and distance education programs, to expand learning opportunities regardless of geography and circumstances; Invest in technological infrastructure in schools, providing modern teaching equipment and software to improve education quality.

Encouraging participation of women and girls: Develop special policies to encourage women and girls to participate in educational programs, minimizing social and cultural barriers; Ensure a safe and non-discriminatory learning environment, creating equal opportunities for all students to develop.

To effectively implement this solution, the following are needed: Support from educational authorities, financial resources, human resources, public-private partnerships. Educational management software, curriculum development and delivery tools, monitoring and evaluation tools, stakeholder engagement tools.

Solution 4: Developing the local economy

Enhancing agricultural production capacity: Apply advanced science and technology to agricultural production to increase productivity and product quality; Encourage the development of organic agriculture and region-specific agricultural products.

Promoting community-based tourism: Utilize cultural and ecological tourism potential to create community-linked tours that increase local residents' income.

Supporting the development of small and medium enterprises: Provide training programs, consultancy, and financial support to local small and medium enterprises to help them grow their businesses and create more jobs.

To effectively implement this solution, the following are needed: Favorable policies and regulations to support local economic development. Tax breaks, subsidies, or grants to encourage local business growth and investment. Establishment of local funds to support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Availability of microloans and credit facilities for local entrepreneurs and businesses. Training and development programs to enhance local skills and entrepreneurship. Engagement of local experts and business mentors to provide guidance and support. Partnerships between local businesses, government agencies, and NGOs to leverage resources and expertise.

Conclusion

Sustainable poverty reduction in the southern mountainous districts requires a comprehensive and coordinated approach that combines economic development, infrastructure improvement, enhanced education and healthcare quality, and environmental protection. Achieving sustainable poverty reduction in these areas necessitates close coordination among all levels of government, local communities, and development partners. Solutions must be synchronized, flexible, and adaptable to real-world conditions, ensuring that all residents have access to and benefit from development programs. Only through the efforts and commitment of all stakeholders can the

goal of sustainable poverty reduction be achieved, contributing to building a just, developed, and sustainable society.

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