

Promoting the Role of Farmers as Subject and Settling the Relations between Law and Self-governed Mechanisms for Development of New Rural Society

Nguyen Xuan Thang *

Abstract: The Resolution 26-NQ/TW (Congress 10) on agriculture, farmers and rural areas has clearly pointed out that agriculture, farmers and rural areas play a strategic role in the cause of industrialization and modernization. The problems in agriculture, farmers and rural areas must be solved in connection with the process of industrialization and modernization... In the relations between/among agriculture, farmers and rural areas, farmers are the subject of the development process. The paper analyses the role of farmers as the subject and settle the relations between law and the self-governed institutions/mechanisms in new rural development.

Key words: Agriculture; farmers; rural; areas; new rural development; subject role, law, self-governed institutions.

1. The official Documents of the 7th, 8th and 9th Congresses of the Communist Party of Vietnam and other Instructions and Resolutions of the Party Central Committee have all expressed a consistent strategy on agriculture, farmers and rural areas; and step by step identified the significance and importance of inclusive development of rural economy and new rural areas. The 10th National Party Congress stressed that at present and in the years to come, the issues of agriculture, farmers and rural areas are of strategic importance. The documents of the 10th National Party Congress reflected the Party's determination to strengthen industrialization and modernization in agriculture and rural areas.

On reviewing the lessons and experience of agriculture and rural development, the Resolution 26/ NQ/TW (Congress 10) pointed out the limitations and weaknesses of the past period and the major causes to

these problems: The perception on the role and position of agriculture, farmers and rural areas has not yet been responsive to the requirements of the reality; a system of theories and viewpoints on agriculture, farmers and rural development has not yet been fully established. Based on this analysis, the Resolution said that "in the close relations between agriculture, farmers and rural areas, the farmers must be considered the subject of the development process" and set the tasks for the leaders and managers "to revitalize the spirit of patriotism, self-reliance and self-improvement of the farmers" (The Party Central Committee, 2008).

2. Vietnam's agriculture in the 1980s

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was marked by important reform policies. The first was *Contract 100* (Instruction 100 of the Party Central Committee in 1981); then followed by *Contract 10* on “reform in agriculture management” (Resolution 10 of the Political Bureau issued in April 1988). According to these policies, agricultural land was step by step allocated to farmers. The policies did retrieve the nature of economic activity in general and agricultural economy and rural areas in particular. Since then, several other institutional / legal reforms came into being to support the development of agriculture and rural areas. The 1993 Land Law, the amended Land Law in 1998 and 2001; and the new Land Law in 2003 continued to reform and improve the land-related policies by giving land-use rights to individuals and households. These important changes contributed to removing the bottlenecks, creating new driving motives for development, and bringing Vietnam from a country that had to import rice for domestic demands to become one of the largest rice exporters in the world after two decades.

The policies of the Party and Government have revitalized and stimulated the socio-economic potentialities of the farmers, the results of which were the achievements in agriculture and rural development for over the past decades. Viewed from the history of policies, these were the results of the change in the Party’s theory on “the role of farmers as the subject” in the revolution and in the cause of socio-economic development of Vietnam.

3. The Resolution 26-NQ/TW was truly the foundation for the National Target Program on New Rural Development to be designed, which was executed through

Decisions 491/QĐ-TTg and Decision 800/QĐ-TTg. On the basis of the above-said policies and practice of development, the question is how to make the spirit of “the role of farmers as the subject” to be thoroughly comprehended by the entire society, creating unanimity in mindset and effectiveness of agricultural development and new rural development in Vietnam today. This important document of the Party, when addressing the issues of agriculture, has pointed out the weakness that “the process of economic structuring and reform of agriculture production was slow-going; agricultural production remained small-scaled and dispersed... The development of industry and service sectors to support agriculture remained under-developed, unable to strengthen economic restructuring and labour in the rural area. Also, the ways of production organization were slowly innovated, unable to meet the requirements of commodity production development” (The Party Central Committee, 2008).

By stressing the weaknesses of forms of agricultural production organization, the Party has set the requirement for development of “new subjects or new actors” in agriculture and rural development. This is not only the requirement in terms of theory and policy but also the requirement from the practice of development. Truly, the development of industrialization and modernization has created important changes in the rural society, new “appearance” of the farmers. Together with small farmers, there appeared an increasing number of new notable persons in the rural society, including farm owners, businessmen in agriculture, and the force of rural labour in agriculture and

agricultural services etc. These are the products, the characteristics of market economy, industrialization and modernization in agriculture.

In this rural society, there formed different groups and classes with different demands and capacities. Therefore, it is necessary to understand correctly the subject role of farmers and rural residents in agriculture and rural development. Till present, the policies toward farmers have treated farmers as a special group with special supportive mechanisms rather than the subject of the development process. It is necessary to create appropriate development mechanisms to stimulate farmers' creativity and dynamics. The history of Vietnam's agriculture, from a system of cooperatives to contract-based regime and land-related laws... has been, basically, the history of the non-stop efforts made by the Party to seek for, to experience new development mechanisms in which, farmers and rural residents have played the role as the subject. In the current context of development, besides the form of rural households, the subject role of farmers should be further extended to be the subject role of other economic forms that are the future of a modern agriculture and new rural society, such as agricultural enterprises, factories, companies etc. While providing continued efforts to support the role of rural households, it is necessary to promote the role of new organizations and new forms of economic cooperation in agriculture and rural development.

Still, the point is the making of policies. As industrialization and modernization is an inevitable trend, it is important for us to explore appropriate development institutions

or mechanisms in order to stimulate and encourage creativity and innovation, creating social dynamics and strengthening the subject role of farmers and rural residents in agriculture and rural development. To this end, the policies on land, on encouraging investors and enterprises to invest in agriculture, and on credit... are the key.

4. For development of new rural society, it is necessary to settle the relations between traditions with modernity in many dimensions. As regards to social management, the point is to solve the inter-related relations between laws and customs, between administration and self-governance, and between the central and local governments etc.

The Resolutions of the Party have emphasized the efforts made by the entire political system, that is, "improving the quality of the movement *"People are united to build a cultural life"*, forming village conventions, promoting the fine traditions of friendship, fraternity and good neighborhood, while eliminating old bad traditions, and developing a new lifestyle in the rural area" (The Party Central Committee, 2008).

The rural areas of Vietnam, which are characterized by diverse socio-economic and cultural life among the regions has raised the question of building different forms of social management. In the Northern regions and Central Highlands of Vietnam, for example, the roles of village patriarch, customary laws and other traditional social structures and religious dignitaries are still strong, while in the Southern region of long traditions of commodity agriculture, an open and dynamic village structure has been created. This diversity has set up distinctive social and

cultural characteristics which need appropriate policies. In essence, the ways the farmers participate in the society, the ways they react to the policies from the government will depend partially on how the relations between / among these factors/ components.

A farmer in the Mekong river delta, or in the Red river delta, or in the Central Highland and/or in the Northwestern region is the “villager”, the member of a specific/ individual village, hamlet, or a community where remain many characteristics of his/her traditional culture, social relations and self-governed mechanisms and/or institutions. The important goal in rural society management is to how to make the “village farmer” become a “citizen” of a society which is based on the principles of a “rule-of-law” state. To this end, this is the nature of the process of modernization of Vietnam society in general and rural society in particular.

The point is to develop the mechanisms and steps that must be appropriate to every individual region and area, with thoughtful considerations to socio-cultural distinctions. In a specific village or community, the point is how to effectively apply a new management mechanism in parallel with traditions in development and management of the rural society.

5. One of the key points in the new vision of the Party is to put the issues of agriculture, farmers and rural area in Vietnam’s socio-economic development. The Resolution No.26-NQ/TW has affirmed that “the issues of agriculture, farmers and rural area must be solved in conformity with the process of industrialization and modernization of the country. Industrialization

and modernization in agriculture and rural area is the mission of primary importance of the national industrialization and modernization...; the fundamental is development of new rural areas in connection with development of industry, services and urban areas while the core is comprehensive development and modernization of agriculture” (The Party Central Committee, 2008).

It is a must to include the content of new rural development in the general development strategy of the economy, and in particular, in close connection between industry and agriculture, between urban development and rural development. Once there is nearly 70% of total population living in the countryside and on agriculture, we cannot say of how to enrich them or make them rich. One of the keys to change the rural area lies in the connection between urban and rural areas, between industry and agriculture. How to make the urban areas to become the hubs, the centers of economic development, social dynamics; how to make the urban areas become strong enough to change the economy and the rural area, improve the structure of the rural society and solve the “problems of farmers” are some of the key questions to be addressed.

References

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