

Ensuring Social Protection in Vietnam

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Abstract: To ensure the viability of social protection has always been a consistent and systematic guideline of the Party, that is leading Vietnam to development. Despite a number of major achievements attained during the past period, the policy system to guarantee social protection in Vietnam is still faced with several shortcomings and weaknesses which should be improved and overcome properly to maintain effective policy enforcement. The research and development of feasible policies and practicable measures to enhance and secure the sustainability of Vietnam's social protection system in the coming years, hence, are highlighted as an urgent need at present.

Keywords: social protection, sustainable development, social assistance.

Subject classification: Sociology

1. Introduction

After 30 years of economic reforms since the launch of *đổi mới*, or renovation, process in 1986, Vietnam has “officially joined the category of lower middle-income developing countries” while continuously promoting further the national industrialisation and modernisation process in accordance with the development of a knowledge-based economy”. Recent statements stating the viewpoints of the Communist Party of Vietnam and the State have always emphasised the importance of rapid and sustainable economic development, along with “effective efforts to achieve social improvement and equality, as well as to

guarantee the coverage of social protection in every stage and policy enforced during the course of development”. Ensuring social protection for the people has become a core pillar of the national development strategy and Vietnam is currently striving to establish a widespread social protection system which covers the entire population. This paper seeks to analyse and clarify a number of outcomes from the implementation of social protection policies; while proposing some solutions to finalise the system of social protection policies in line with the pursuit of sustainable economic development and the guarantee of social protection rights for the people in the upcoming future.

2. The perception and contents of social protection in Vietnam

Currently, there exist a variety of different perceptions of social protection. However, in Vietnam, the conceptual framework of social protection is initially based on the World Bank's definition, saying: "Social protection² normally refers to a collection of public measures that help individuals, households and communities confront and restrain any influential risks to their incomes in order to reduce the vulnerability and income insecurity". On that basis, it is advisable to perform various public arrangements so that vulnerable households and communities might be able to control and mitigate negative impacts. In particular, this implies crucial State policies designed for the provision of public utilities and development assistance services such as: health insurance, social insurance, social assistance and other similar schemes.

The system of social protection also represents a major role in socio-economic stability and development as follows: (1) to help stabilise the living standards of the labour force; (2) to ensure the security and stability of the socioeconomic domain; (3) the social protection system, including social insurance, inevitably tightens the relationships between the employee, the employer and the State; (4) to foster economic growth and social equality. Besides, the distribution embedded in social protection actually follows a wealth redistribution process in which low-income individuals will be better beneficial. Particularly, the income will be shifted from the healthy and fortunate people with more stable

livelihoods to weak and vulnerable individuals who are frequently exposed to sudden shocks and risks in their daily life. Therefore, social protection helps narrow the gap between rich and poor while essentially maintaining social equality.

To ensure the viability of the social protection system has always been a consistent and systematic perception of the Party, which leads the country. It is regarded as a fundamental policy to alleviate poverty, ensure the living standards of the people, achieve equality, generate consensus in the society, and help to secure political stability and social protection as well as to protect the national defence.

As such, social protection policies are required to focus on the four main following pillars:

Firstly, to create more job opportunities, guarantee a certain minimum income and sustainably alleviate poverty for disadvantaged groups in the labour force through personal and household assistance in order to foster production, provide credit supports and financial help, offer steady employment and connect information within the labour market.

Secondly, to increase the chances for the labour force to participate in the policy system of social insurance and unemployment insurance, so as to actively cope with any loss or reduction in income due to potential risks, sickness, work-related accidents or old age.

Thirdly, to regularly provide social assistance transfers for individuals with specific situations and emergency assistance for the victims of unanticipated or uncontrollable risks (harvest losses, natural disasters, earthquakes, wars, poverty...)

through various arrangements, either in cash or in kind, guaranteed by the State budget.

Fourthly, to improve access of the people to a number of basic social services such as

education, health care, accommodation, clean water and environmental sanitation and information.

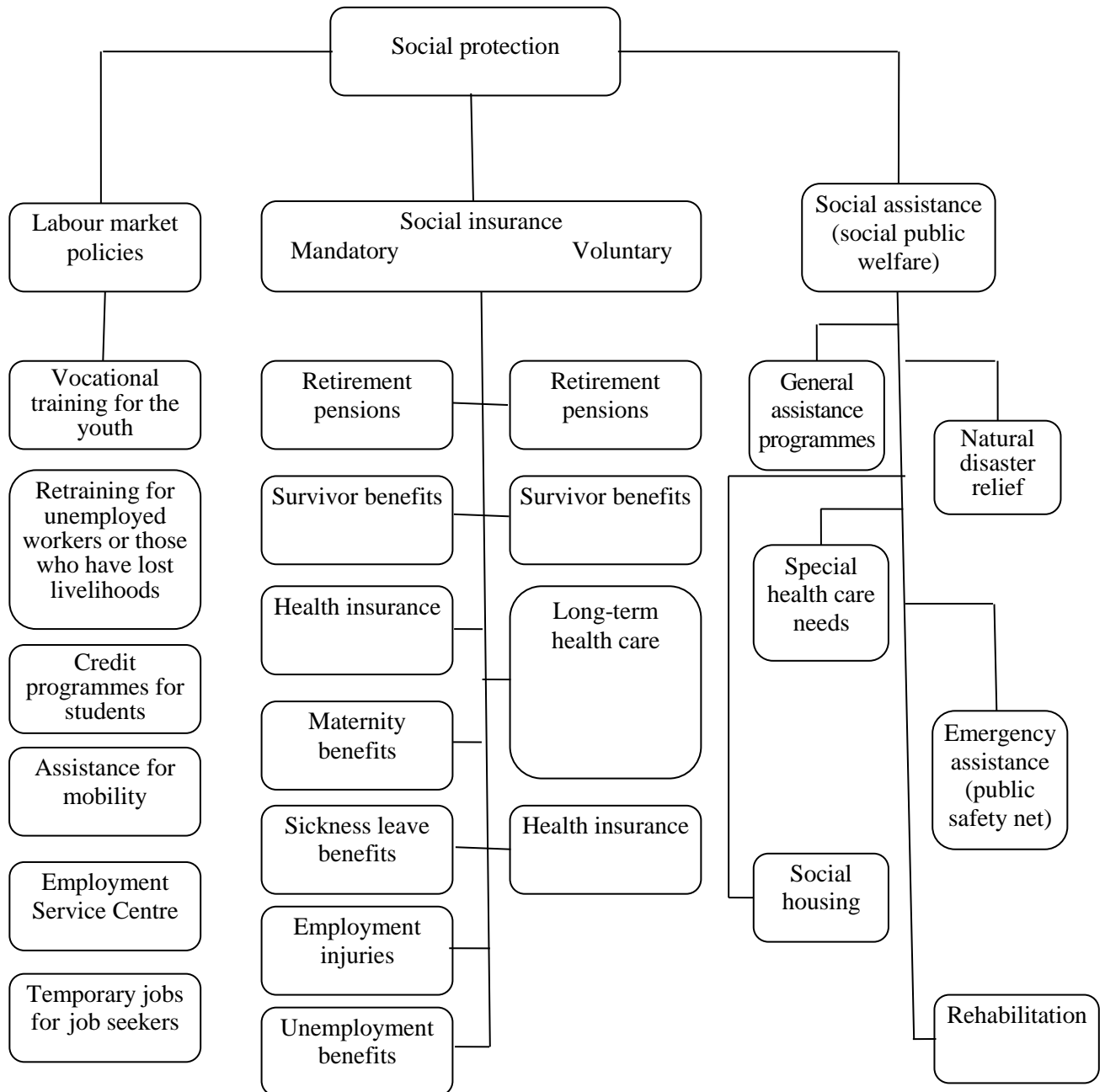


Figure 1: The Social Protection Models of Number of Countries in Central Europe, Eastern Europe, Central Asia and Latin America [13]

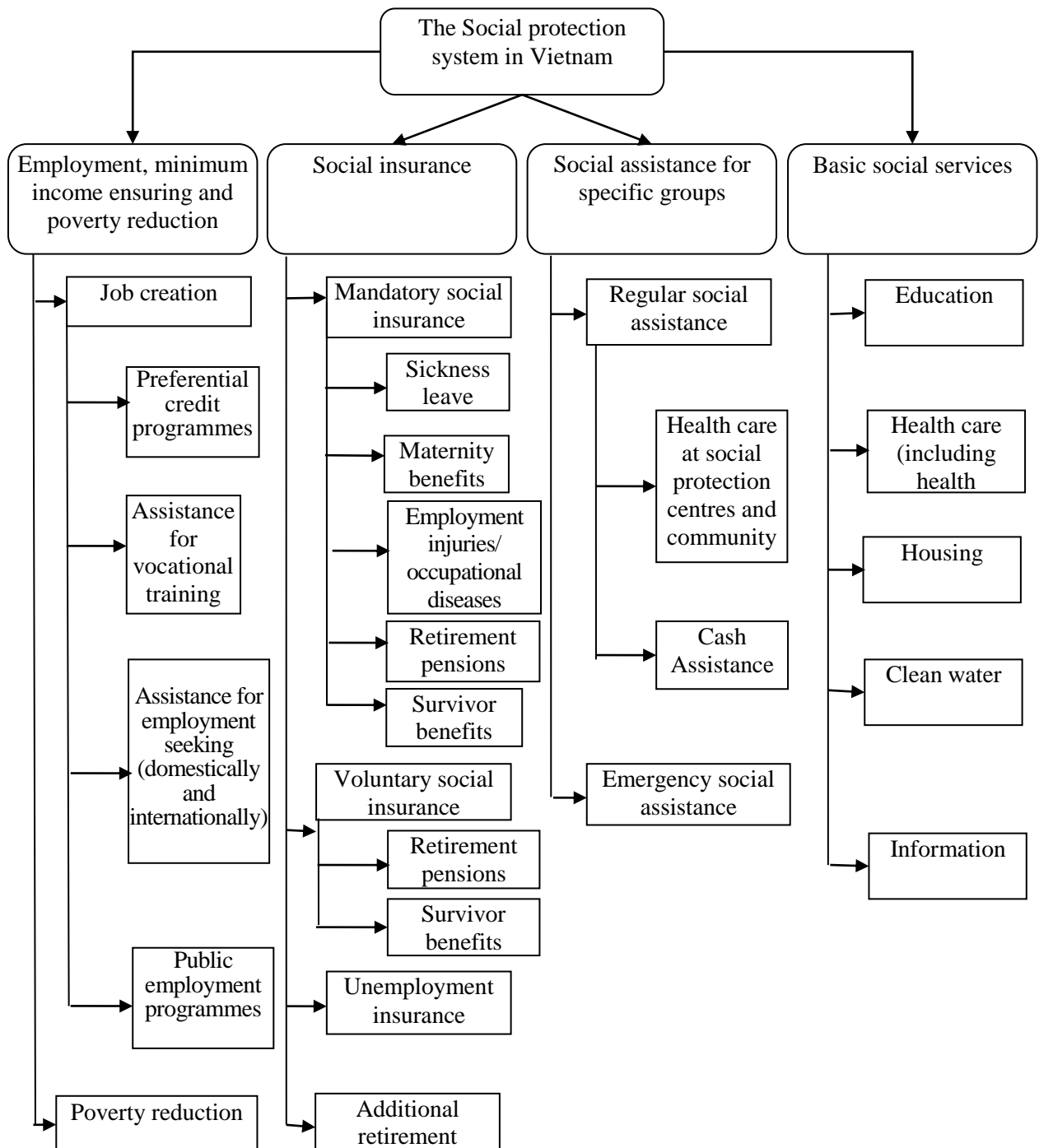


Figure 2: The Social Protection System in Vietnam from 2012 to 2020 [13]

In particular, goals have been identified in Resolution No.15-NQ/TW, which basically require the country to establish a

universal social protection system with wide coverage for the entire population. The requirements include, by 2020:

ensuring employment and a minimum income for everyone; encouraging the participation in social insurance schemes while providing timely and sufficient emergency assistance for those with especially difficult conditions (children with special needs, low-income elderly, individuals with severe disabilities, the poor...), helping the gradual increase of all income levels in general and pursuing a life of safety, happiness and equality for the people. Vietnam's 2013 Constitution also complemented the rights of social protection for the people, as stipulated in Article 34 - "Citizens have the right to social protection" and Article 59, in which the State assumes its responsibility to "create equal opportunities for citizens to enjoy social welfare, develop a system of social protection..." [18].

Thus, the Party's perception and the notion conveyed in Vietnam's 2013 Constitution on the assurance of social protection for every citizen towards the guarantee of social protection rights for the people have been institutionalised effectively.

3. The implementation and outcomes of social protection policies in Vietnam over the past few years

3.1. Achievements

Firstly, great efforts have been made to ensure that social protection is closely linked with social progress and development, as well as other successes in economic development in the context of a market economy. Moreover, despite numerous fluctuations in both domestic

and international economies recently, given the limited stock of national resources, the Party and State have always greatly emphasised the assurance of social protection in the agenda. It also puts the mission to develop people's livelihoods into a harmonious correlation and close connection with economic development, putting that between the investment to promote economic development and the investment to guarantee social welfare and social protection.

On the other hand, Vietnam's national poverty reduction programmes have yielded a series of positive outcomes which are widely recognised and highly appreciated by the international community, especially the results of poverty eradication for farmers living in mountainous regions or ethnic minority areas. Also, Vietnam is one of the countries which successfully completed its Millennium Development Goals ahead of the deadline and earned much praise from the international community. Notwithstanding the shortcomings and weaknesses against the requirement for fast and sustainable development, Vietnam has accomplished numerous remarkable results and achievements in terms of education development, community healthcare services, public health insurance for the population, medical examination and treatment for the poor, child and mother health-care, along with efforts to generate more employment, improve the living standards and living conditions for citizens, provide better social relief and social welfare, plus delivering a large amount of care to vulnerable and disadvantaged individuals... They imply solid evidence for the significant progress made in the course of ensuring social protection.

Secondly, the legal framework has been gradually completed to guarantee the right to social protection for every citizen. Vietnam's 2013 Constitution, for the first time, confirms the basic right to social protection of the people (Article 34: "Citizens have the right to social protection"; Article 59: "the State shall create equal opportunities for citizens to enjoy social welfare, develop a system of social protection..."). The amended 2012 Labour Code continues to develop the labour market and strengthen the conditions enabling participants to join the labour market (the State, enterprises, employment intermediaries and the employees). Besides, it also increases government assistance for disadvantaged workers on the market via policies supporting job creation. As regards the Law on Employment, which was issued for the first time in 2013), it was also the first time Vietnam had a law looking at the informal economic sector which continues to widen the opportunities for the labour force to join unemployment insurance (workers in any enterprises are obliged to participate in unemployment insurance after working under labour contracts for more than three months. The amended Law on Health Insurance (2013) aims to expand the health insurance coverage, shifting from the originally universal coverage with voluntary enrolment to compulsory health insurance for the entire population; broadening the participation of people in health insurance by completing regulations on insurance premiums and provider payment mechanisms, as well as the eligibility requirements to enjoy insurance benefits; and expanding the pool of citizens

eligible for full or partial subsidies from the State to join the health insurance. The amended 2014 Law on Social Insurance expanded the coverage of subjects of application for compulsory social insurance, including persons working under labour contracts with a term longer than one month; reinforcing the denunciations, sanctions and handling of behaviours related to the evasion of social insurance; improving the voluntary social insurance scheme in a flexible and rational manner appropriate to the employment and income conditions of those working in the informal sector; proposing solutions to encourage workers of the sector to participate in social insurance; and modernising the management of social insurance participants.

Thirdly, the government's spending on social protection is increasingly growing. Total expenditure on social protection accounted for 5.88% of the GDP in 2012 before rising to above 6.6% of the GDP in 2015. During the first nine months of 2016, the total funding for social protection and poverty reduction was 4.677 trillion VND, of which 2.964 trillion VND were used to offer gifts and assist social welfare beneficiaries; 1.173 trillion VND - to assist poor households; and 540 billion VND - for other famine and social relief projects). Despite the country's difficult economic situation, the Party and State have not reduced the spending on social protection, but increased it instead. They have managed to effectively execute social policies using various kinds of resources in which major resources came from the State, external sources, such as

ODA or foreign non-refundable aid programmes, contributions from enterprises, organisations and individuals.

Fourthly, Vietnam successfully completed, ahead of the deadline, many of the Millennium Development Goals of the United Nations. By the end of 2014, Vietnam's poverty rate (with respect to the national poverty line adopted between 2011 and 2015) fell to under 6% before further declining to under 5% by the end of 2015 [5]. The ratio of poor households nationwide dropped by roughly 1.3-1.5% in 2016 compared with that by the end of 2015 (regarding the national poverty line adopted in the 2016-2020 period); the life of the people, especially the poor, ethnic minorities and vulnerable individuals, has been significantly improved. A vast majority of the population are employed, the unemployment rate remained low at 2.31% for quarter 4 of 2016 [22]; the proportion of workers covered by social insurance reached 23.95% while that of those covered by unemployment insurance hit 20.3% [6]. Most of the labour force have access to basic healthcare services, the proportion of workers participating in health insurance was 81.7% during quarter 4 of 2016; approximately 3% of individuals with especially difficult conditions are assisted with a monthly cash allowance or other arrangements [22]; the goal of universalising primary education for children aged 5-15 (of primary and secondary school age) has basically fulfilled; the conditions of housing, water clean and information have been raised to a better quality. Below are a number of specific outcomes achieved during the process:

- In terms of job creation: The national programme on vocational training and employment creates job opportunities for around 320,000 people annually; many people with disabilities, those of ethnic minorities or individuals residing in regions where agricultural land were used to serve other purposes have been provided with loans for business development and job creation. As of quarter 4 of 2016, the number of people having a job was 53.41 million, increased by 133,180 (0.25%) compared with that of quarter 3 of 2016 yet decreasing by 94,840 (0.18%) compared with that of quarter 4 of 2015; the ratio of those working in agriculture, forestry, and fisheries fell to 41.54% (compared to the proportion of 42.30% during the same period in 2015); the unemployment rate in the working age remained low at 2.31% (that of urban areas was 3.24% and of young persons was 7.38%) [22].

- In terms of poverty reduction: According to the outcomes of a census, the proportion of poor and near-poor households nationwide was 15.14% (with respect to the multidimensional poverty line adopted between 2016 and 2020), in which the ratio of poor households was 9.88%. By the end of 2016, the ratio of poor households nationwide shrank by 1.3-1.5% compared with that by the end of 2015, to 8.58-8.38%; with the ratio of poor households in poor communes declined by approximately 4%, to around 46.4% [16].

- In terms of social insurance and unemployment insurance: By the end of quarter 4 of 2016, there were approx. 13,065,000 people (accounting for 23.95% of the labour force) joining the social

insurance scheme, in which there were approx. 12,862,000 people enrolled in mandatory social insurance (rising by 2.89% compared with that of quarter 3 of 2016 and by 6.5% compared with that of the same period in 2015) and approx. 203,000 people registered for voluntary social insurance (growing by 4.6% compared with that of quarter 3 of 2016 and decreasing by 6.5% compared with that of the same period in 2015). As of the end of 2016, total social insurance debts were 6.55 trillion VND, having fallen by 27.06% compared with that of quarter 3 of 2016 and by 7.2% compared with that of the same period in 2015. In 2016, funding was arranged to cover compensation for 148,359 people each month in respect of pensions, *tử tuất* (allowances to one's family members when he/she dies), work injuries and occupational diseases, a reduction of 13.68% compared to 2015; 665,306 persons were entitled to one-time social insurance benefits, raising by 5.75% compared to 2015 while 8,337,280 persons were entitled to sick leave allowances, maternity allowances, or payments for medical treatment and health rehabilitation until recovery, an increase by 10.74% compared to 2015. By the end of quarter 4 of 2016, 11,962,000 people had joined unemployment insurance, equivalent to 20.3% of the labour force, expanding by approx. 338,000 people compared with that of quarter 3 of 2016 [4].

- In terms of social assistance for individuals with especially difficult conditions: During the first nine months of 2016, the government provided 16.800 tonnes of food for more than approx. 251,000 poor households, most of whom

reside in the Northern midlands and mountainous areas, North Central Coast, Central Coast and Central Highlands. As of the end of 2015, the authorities had granted monthly cash allowances and health insurance cards to over 2,643,000 enrolees (37,348 orphans, 88,594 single parent with children in poor households, 1,480,000 people aged 80 or over, 896,644 people with disabilities, 69,257 families/individuals nursing those in need of social assistance of the community, 8,185 HIV carriers in poor households). On a national scale, the country has 408 social assistance establishments that nurture and care for more than 41,400 individuals, of whom people with disabilities and mental diseases made up for 56.5%.

- In terms of access to basic education: During the 2015-2016 academic year, the proportion of five-year-old children attending early childhood education reached 97.93%; that of children under four years old attending early childhood education was 86.61%; primary school net enrolment ratio (for children of primary school age) was 98.69%; lower secondary school enrolment ratio hit 90.89% whereas the secondary school enrolment ratio was 62%; the proportion of children with disabilities attending schools reached 60%; the number of students for every 10,000 people in the population was 250; the ratio of literate persons aged 15 and above grew to 99%. At present, the country has 1,467 vocational training centres (190 vocational colleges, 280 vocational secondary schools, 997 vocational centres and more than 1,000 vocational organisations). There was 2,367,654 enrolees in 2016, of which 550,000 trainees were assisted. The proportion of trained workers

with a degree/ certificate was 21.39% by the end of quarter 4 of 2016, increased by 20.20% compared with that of the same period of 2015 [4].

- In terms of access to basic healthcare services: By 2015, around 98.4% of communes had health stations; 96% of villages had community health workers; 80% of communes had doctors, 50% of communes met the national standards for community healthcare for the 2011-2020 period; over 95% of communes had obstetric nurses or midwives. Health insurance funds have been used to pay for the costs for pregnant women to receive antenatal care and give childbirth at health facilities.

Around 14.1% of underweight children suffered from malnutrition while that of children with stunted growth was 24.2%; the maternal mortality ratio fell to 58.3 out of 100,000 live births, the neonatal mortality rate (of children under one year old) shrank to 14.7‰. The ratio of pregnant women receiving antenatal care at least three times during pregnancy was over 90%, the ratio of women being attended by a trained health worker during childbirth was 98% whereas the ratio of mothers and newborns receiving care in the first week after delivery hit 81%. By the end of 2016, 81.7% of the population had officially been enrolled in health insurance. The figure exceeded the target set by the National Assembly (76%) by 5.7% and the goal set by the Prime Minister (79%) by 2.7%, reaching the milestone of over 80% of the population to join health insurance, which had been scheduled for 2020 [4].

- In terms of access to basic housing: After three years of implementation, by

2015, the State had assisted 7,600 poor households in construction of flood resistant and resilient houses in seven provinces of the North Central Coast and Central Coast. The Social Housing Development Programme for workers in industrial zones helped build 28,550 apartments and was continuing the construction of 69,300 apartments more. The housing programme for pupils and students which uses the funding from government bonds has arranged accommodation for 200,000 students, meeting around 80% of the demand.

- In terms of access to clean water: As of the end of 2015, more than 1,000 concentrated water supply facilities had been built, raising the proportion of rural population using clean water to 86%, and the percentage of population using clean water in line with the standards set by the Ministry of Health to 45%.

- In terms of access to information: After three years of implementation, the ratio of communes with public phone stations was 97%, with telecommunications lines using optical cables reaching 96%, and the lines using copper cables hitting 90%. The telecommunications network has been maintained with 16,000 transaction points, with approx. 7,640 post offices established also as commune cultural points. The programme of promoting information and communications to the mountainous, remote, border and island areas had broadcast 4,195 radio and television programmes; organising the printing and circulation of 1,327,631 books to communes, along with 1,378,933 publications to disseminate knowledge on agriculture and healthcare. The programme also launched seven information centres in border-gate areas. It provided free of charge

24 types of newspapers and magazines, with a total of over 40 million copies delivered, to the ethnic minorities and people living in mountainous and especially difficult areas.

3.2. Things to be improved

Although Vietnam has achieved numerous important accomplishments, the implementation of its social policies still encounters several weaknesses and limitations. Under the impacts of the global economic crisis, the country's GDP growth rate was reduced from over 8% (in 2008) to 6.21% (in 2016) while the capability to mobilise resources from the State budget for social protection is subject to severe constraints [21]. Besides, from 2012 onwards, Vietnam was officially classified as a (lower) middle-income country, so non-refundable international aid flows have been cut down significantly.

The war ended 40 years ago. Yet, the severe consequences it left behind have still been long-lasting, resulting in a large number of people in need of social assistance. Furthermore, Vietnam is among the Southeast Asian countries that are under strong impacts of climate change (such as storms, frequent floods, rising sea-levels...) with damage costing over 1% of GDP annually. The trend of rapid population ageing is growing faster than expected and posing serious challenges regarding the costs related to elderly healthcare and social protection policies. In 2009, Vietnam entered the "phase of ageing", when the proportion of people aged 60 and above accounted for 10% of the total population. By 2050, the proportion of Vietnamese elderly is predicted to have accounted for 20% of the total population [19].

The policy system currently regulating social protection is still fragmented and patchy. In general, the system lacks coherence and fails to encourage for the active participation of citizens... Policy effectiveness has been limited. Vocational training programmes for rural workers have not yet been linked to the demands of the labour market as well as the requirements of the production process; the labour quality is still low and the ratio of trained workers with a degree/certificate was only 21.39% as of the end of quarter 4 of 2016 [4]. Poverty reduction remains unsustainable with a high risk of falling back into poverty. In particular, the poverty rate in many ethnic minority and remote areas is stuck at over 50%, over 70% in some regions while the rich-poor gap, as regards income and access to social services, among regions and ethnic groups tends to expand, especially between the Northern mountainous area, Central Highlands and the others; or between ethnic minorities and the Kinh and Hoa, or Vietnamese of Chinese origin, ethnic groups.

A majority of the informal labour force have participated in neither voluntary social insurance nor unemployment insurance [17]. By the end of 2014, on a national scale, nearly 4.415 million people aged 55 and above enjoyed old-age benefits from the social protection system, including 2.2 million people eligible for retirement pensions, 1.6 million elderly people aged 80 or older and 670 elderly people in poor households qualifying for old-age benefits [21]. The proportion of beneficiaries receiving monthly cash allowances is around 3% of the total population but their life still faces a lot of difficulties due to the low values of allowances and benefits.

Also, the scope for emergency assistance remains fairly narrow and the mobilisation of social resources confronts several problems while coordination is still inadequate. Meanwhile, differences in access to education among regions, areas and ethnic groups have a tendency to enlarge. The goal of setting a universal health insurance scheme for the entire population is challenging, with nearly 30% of the population not yet enrolled in health insurance. The proportion of malnourished children is sluggishly declining, with the quality of healthcare services in rural and remote areas being still poor. On the other hand, the implementation of housing assistance policies for poor households has been slow. The housing issues of different groups of the population, such as migrant workers, pupils, students, ethnic minorities, have not been well settled. The mainstreaming of citizens with access to clean water, as in line with national standards, remains modest. The integration of various programmes has not been performed properly. State budget arrangements for programmes of information for remote areas are bounded with constraints. The quality of information infrastructures remains low...

3.3. Causes of the above things to be improved

- A number of Party committees, authorities, civil servants, party members, organisations, enterprises and individuals still lack rational and comprehensive awareness of the role of social protection since they purely consider social protection an exclusive responsibility of the State and nurture a strong perception of heavy reliance on the State and the central government.

- The capability to develop social protection policies is limited. The dissemination of laws and policies, as well as the inspection and supervision of the implementation of social protection policies have received just minor attention. State management of social protection is fairly inappropriate as there are too many policies issued during different periods to apply for various target groups, which has led to overlapping, lack of systematisation and to difficulties against the application of social protection policies and management of the scope of their beneficiaries.

- The implementation of social protection policies at different levels, especially the grassroots level, has been weak. The resources to perform these social protection policies and the assistance from the State budget are too limited, fragmented and have not focused on the right subjects. Specifically, it lacks proper coordination and integration during the stage of policy implementation and has not fully mobilised the participation of every community. Also, it lacks a policy to encourage the people to develop their own means of livelihoods and escape poverty.

4. Some challenges against the assurance of social protection today

Firstly, a number of targets have not been achieved as compared with the objectives set by the Resolution. Though having achieved praiseworthy outcomes, Vietnam has not fulfilled a number of specific targets, such as the ratio of employment in agriculture, the rate of participation in social insurance and

unemployment insurance; or other indicators measuring healthcare, education or access to clean water.

Secondly, the achievement of these targets is of low quality. The quality of jobs is relatively poor with a low proportion of the labour force working in agriculture. The outcomes of poverty reduction are unsustainable while the rich-poor gap among regions and ethnic groups tends to expand. The rate of participation in social insurance and health insurance goes up slowly. Meanwhile, the quality of education universalisation is uneven, particularly for children from ethnic minority groups, poor households and especially difficult areas. The enrolment of vocational colleges and vocational secondary schools meet countless difficulties. Moreover, around 25% of the population have not yet participated in health insurance. The implementation of housing assistance policies for poor households is fairly sluggish while the proportion of rural population being able to use clean water that is in line with the national standards remains modest.

Thirdly, the system of social protection policies is still cumbersome and overlapping. At present, over 230 policy documents have been issued and implemented by the Party, the National Assembly, the government, ministries and different agencies. Too many policies have been issued in different periods of time and applicable to a number of target groups. They essentially lack coherence and systematic designs which inevitably trouble the implementation of the policies and the management of their beneficiaries. The orientation of integrating policies and

mainstreaming their implementation for the same benefiting groups has not been realised.

Fourthly, a number of social protection programmes are not really effective. The vocational training programme for rural workers and social assistance programmes are still fragmented in terms of beneficiaries, funding and implementation. The provision of the information and communication strategy and dissemination of social protection policies in some localities are still weak and ineffective.

Fifthly, the responsibility to ensure minimum coverage of social protection for the people is facing numerous challenges. This is due to the limited number of social protection programmes which is not sufficient to satisfy the needs for social protection. The coverage of social protection policies is still quite narrow, only focusing on a particular group of individuals in the society, normally the “healthier and better-off” citizens. The issues also point at a lack of funding and inappropriate financial allocation among different programmes. Furthermore, the adopted instruments and policies clearly lack a degree of sensitivity, especially in the context of economic crisis, economic reforms and climate change.

Sixthly, the participation of agencies, mass organizations and the society in mobilising resources for the implementation of policies are dispersal and ineffective. The awareness of the role of social protection among some Party committees, authorities, civil servants, party members, organisations, enterprises and individuals are inaccurate and incomplete. There exists the mentality of heavily relying on the State

and the central government for policies and funding. The dissemination of laws and policies, as well as the inspection and supervision on the performance of social protection has not received adequate attention. The mobilisation of contributions from the private sector is still insufficient and has not fully promoted the potential participation of individuals, enterprises or other partners in the society.

5. Some solutions to improve the social protection policy system

Firstly, to continuously secure the objectives and orientations of social protection policies towards 2020.

The assurance of social protection is not only a permanent and important mission, but also the responsibility of the Party, the State, the political system and the whole society. Among them, the State plays the leading role in the implementation of social protection policies, while promoting the roles and obligations of individuals, households, employees, enterprises and communities to ensure the performance of social protection under the form of *xã hội hóa* (mobilising the resources in the society)³. It also creates favourable conditions for the people to improve the abilities to sustain their living conditions.

The assurance of social protection for the citizens is a correct and consistent guideline of the Party, which leads the country. Developing social protection is an essential policy solution to reduce poverty, guarantee the living standards for citizens, making important contributions to generating the impulse for economic growth,

attaining equality and creating consensus in the society, maintaining political stability, securing social order and social protection, and strengthening and reinforcing the national defence.

Thus, by 2020, Vietnam needs to have fundamentally formed a universal social protection system with wide coverage for the entire population, ensuring that the people will be able to access employment and poverty reduction policies, as well as fully participate in social insurance. We shall assist those with especially difficult living conditions (children with special needs, low-income elderly, people with severe disabilities, the poor...), enhancing the basic social services to the minimum level, in terms of healthcare, education, housing, clean water and information provision, while steadily raising the income levels and guaranteeing the life regarded as safe and equal for the people.

Secondly, it is suggested to complete the labour market, create more jobs and guarantee sustainable social protection. Other steps which need to be performed includes the modernisation of the labour market and connect the supply of labour to its demand, the development of small and medium enterprises so as to create more jobs and transform the structure of employments, the conducting of more dialogues on labour issues and guaranteeing labour standards, the strengthening of schemes on job training and skill development for the labour force, and the focus on developing programmes on occupational safety and hygiene, and decent work...

Thirdly, to continue to complete the legal framework, policies and solutions to ensure

social protection, to promote the development and completion of the legal system on social protection, in which it is necessary to study, develop and promulgate the Law on Employment, Law on Minimum Wage, Law on Social Relief, Law on Social Privilege; to study and amend the Labour Code, Law on Social Insurance, Law on Persons with Disabilities, Law on the Elderly..., to study and promulgate legal documents on social protection for different communities in order to ensure a fully-enforced legal framework for the comprehensive, effective, systematic and strict implementation of such regulations, policies and schemes on social protection, to review, adjust and complement the current policies on social protection, even with social insurance, health insurance, social assistance, social privilege, a system of active assistance..., to thoroughly link social protection policies with other socio-economic policies, such as the policy on employment, the policy on wage and income, the execution of active assistance programmes, and other target programmes on sustainable poverty reduction..., to strengthen the abilities to access basic social services for particular groups and regions.

Fourthly, to progressively mobilise the resources for social protection policies, to increase the State budget spending on social protection to the average level of Southeast Asia (7% of the GDP), and further mobilise the contributions of individuals, enterprises, together with the society, for social protection, to encourage and create a favourable environment for the development and diversification of various models of social protection, as well as community-based charitable and voluntary activities (local associations,

groups of those sharing the same hobbies/interests, trade unions, family, relatives, individuals...) in the provision of social protection services, to perform humanitarian efforts to assist and share risks among vulnerable groups and specific individuals, to foster the international cooperation and take advantage of the resources and experiences gained from other countries while building and implementing social protection policies.

6. Conclusion

In recent years, along with different successes gained from the pursuit of economic renovation, the development of a robust market economy and the enhancement of national economic potential, Vietnam has made considerable efforts to implement its social protection agenda, improving and taking care of the lives of its citizens. Many of the country's social protection schemes have attained extremely significant outcomes which are widely recognised and highly appreciated by the international community, especially the results of poverty eradication for farmers living in mountainous regions or ethnic minority areas. However, when it seeks to further promote the adoption of social and social protection policies in the context of realising the perception of rapid, effective and sustainable development, Vietnam has also been the facing several difficulties, obstacles and challenges. In order to reach the goal, the country needs to synchronously establish and implement a more inclusive and multi-tiered social protection system that

is linked closely with the process of economic development in each policy for, and at each specific stage of, its development.

Notes

² The term "*an sinh xã hội*" has been translated into English in documents published in Vietnam as "social security". The authors deem that the translation is not in line with the notion of the corresponding term used by the major international organisations, such as the World Bank (WB), World Trade Organisation (WTO) - "social protection". So, in the paper, "social protection" is used.

³ This term is often, incorrectly, translated into English as "socialisation".

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