

## **ON THE MODEL FOR GOVERNANCE OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT IN VIETNAM DURING THE 40 YEARS AFTER DOI MOI**

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***Abstract:** In this paper, the author shares some of his reflections on the model for governance of social development in Vietnam during the 40 years of the Cause of Renovation in Vietnam. After providing a brief discussion of the Vietnamese Communist Party's view on social development management, the author focuses on analyzing and evaluating the achievements, as well as recent issues related to the Social Development Management Model in Vietnam during the current period. In the final section of the paper, the author proposes several recommendations to enhance the current model of social development management in Vietnam.*

***Keywords:** Social Development, Social Development Management Model, Communist Party of Vietnam, Renovation Period, Vietnam*

### **1. The Conception of the Social Development Management Model**

Society is a multi-faceted concept. In a narrow sense, *social development* refers to the development of individuals and communities within the social realm, focusing on addressing social issues that arise during economic, political, and cultural development, thereby promoting social progress (Ngo Ngoc Thang et al. 2014: 21). According to the United Nations' widely accepted perspective, social development is a transformative process that leads to improvements *in human life, social relationships, and social institutions, aiming for equality, sustainability, and adherence to democratic governance principles and social justice* (United

Nations Research Institute of Social Development 2011). This perspective highlights two key aspects: i) Social development policies and achievements in social fields such as education, healthcare, and access to information...; ii) Policies directed toward social classes and groups, as well as achievements in social relationships and institutions, to ensure security, dignity, and social integration of individuals.

*Social development management* is the conscious and organized influence exerted by management entities on various subjects (individuals, communities, social relations, social activities, etc.) with the goal of

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advancing social development. Social development management aims to carry out core tasks: Developing social structures (such as social class structures, demographic composition, population distribution, ethnic, religious, age, gender, and occupational structures); Guiding and controlling social changes (such as social stratification and mobility); Ensuring social guarantees (including social security, social welfare, and social integration and reintegration); Implementing social policies tailored to specific groups and local areas to harmonize social and interest relationships; Addressing emerging social issues (such as social inequality, risks, conflicts, and social disputes, etc.) to ensure social stability and development (Phung Huu Phu et al. 2016: 260–261).

*The social development management model* has been a widely discussed topic in Vietnam in recent years, with ongoing differing viewpoints. Some perspectives suggest that, prior to the Renovation period, Vietnam managed social development under a planned model. In contrast, in the \*Đổi mới\* (Renovation) period, the social development management model in Vietnam shifted to “Sustainable social development management, ensuring progress and social equity” (Le Thi Thanh Ha 2022b). Other opinions suggest that Vietnam has yet to establish a fully complete social development management model (Trinh Duy Luan 2018: 35).

Another perspective asserts that, after more than 35 years of renovation, Vietnam has made significant progress in developing its social development management model (Nguyen Quang Thuan 2022). In our view, a social development management model is a synthesis of theoretical and practical characteristics, principles, institutions, mechanisms, and management methods for social development in a country during a specific historical period. In this sense, Vietnam’s social development management model has been shaped, implemented, adjusted, and refined in accordance with the goals and requirements of the revolutionary cause. The nearly 40-year process of renovation and national development has been, simultaneously, a process of renewing and perfecting a social development management model suited to the requirements of the transition toward socialism within the context of deep international integration.

## **2. Overview of the Vietnamese Communist Party’s Perspective on Social Development Management During the Renovation Period**

In terms of terminology, it was not until the 12th National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam in 2016 that the conception of “*social development management*” was formally introduced in Party documents. However, the Party and State of Vietnam have consistently prioritized addressing social issues and implementing social

policies throughout the revolutionary process, from the democratic national revolution to the socialist revolution. Accordingly, social policy encompasses policies related to healthcare, education, and those directed toward different social strata. Although the Party has not explicitly used the term “social development management model,” it has, both in theory and practice, clearly demonstrated a social development management model with specific content, objectives, characteristics, principles, institutions, and methods. These are:

*Firstly*, the objectives and characteristics of social development management in Vietnam are oriented toward a set of social values: prosperity, national strength, democracy, equality, civility, harmony, consensus, solidarity, sustainability, and happiness. The goal of social development aligns with the objectives of economic, political, and cultural development, all of which aim to harness and promote human potential for the benefit of the people.

Social development management seeks to achieve “effective and strict management of social development, ensuring social security and human security; achieving social progress and justice; and fostering a healthy, civilized cultural and moral environment” (Communist Party of Vietnam 2021, vol. 1: 116). Policies are crafted and implemented to address the needs of different social strata, harmonize

social relationships and interests, and effectively resolve specific social issues relevant to various classes, groups, and social sectors (ensuring employment, income, healthcare, education, food safety, transportation, and a healthy living environment). The goal is to build a “democratic, disciplined, unified, equitable, and civilized society” (Communist Party of Vietnam 2016: 104) in which *social classes and segments* have legitimate rights and responsibilities, are closely united, and contribute to building a prosperous and strong Vietnam” (Communist Party of Vietnam 2007, vol. 51: 145). This also involves continuously improving material and spiritual well-being and “enhancing the quality of life and happiness index for the Vietnamese people” (Communist Party of Vietnam 2021, vol.1: 202).

*Secondly*, social development management in Vietnam encompasses a broad and complex range of subjects, objects, and content. This includes social relations, social activities, social dimensions, and social processes involving people (such as social classes, ethnicities, religions, social groups, etc.), with diverse needs and interests during the transition to socialism. Since the 6th Party Congress in 1986, the Party has affirmed: “Social policies cover all aspects of human life: labor and living conditions, education and culture, family relations, class relations, ethnic relations...” (Communist

Party of Vietnam 2006, vol. 47: 768). Starting in 1995, the *Vietnamese Government's National Report* on social development at the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen identified 10 social issues that need to be managed and developed: (1) Employment creation; (2) Eradication of poverty; (3) Social integration; (4) Strengthening the role of the family; (5) Education development; (6) Population and family planning; (7) Healthcare for the people; (8) Social protection; (9) Environment; (10) Crime prevention and control (Nguyen Thanh Tuan 2012). In the documents of the 12th Party Congress (Section: Social Development Management - Implementing Social Progress and Social Justice) and the 13th Party Congress (Section: Sustainable Social Development Management - *Ensuring Social Progress and Social Justice*), the broad and comprehensive scope of social development and social development management in Vietnam is clearly outlined.

*Thirdly*, the principles, institutions, methods, and mechanisms that organize and operate social development management in Vietnam are based on the leadership of the Party, the management of the State, and the ownership of the people. Accordingly, it is essential to “fully recognize and ensure the socialist orientation in social policies” (Communist Party of Vietnam 2021, vol. 1: 148) and to implement a partnership between the State and the people in

managing social development. Social management must be comprehensive and stringent, with efforts to “build and implement a coherent system of institutions and policies for social development, managing sustainable and harmonious social development” (Communist Party of Vietnam 2021, vol.1: 148). Economic growth should be linked with social progress and justice, as well as environmental protection, in each policy. Democracy should be practiced alongside strengthening the rule of law to ensure social discipline. It is important to harmonize relationships of interests, rights, obligations, contributions, and benefits. Ensuring that no one is left behind in the process of renovation and national development towards socialism, and that Vietnam is not left behind in the global race (Nguyen Quang Thuan 2022), is essential for advancing with the times and standing alongside the world's great powers.

*Fourthly*, the subjects responsible for social development management in Vietnam include: the Communist Party of Vietnam, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, the Vietnam Fatherland Front, political and social organizations, individuals, social groups, communities, and economic organizations, etc (Hoang Chi Bao et al. 2012: 49). Social development management in Vietnam is the responsibility of the entire political system, the state, non-state organizations, and society as a

whole. Effective social development management requires a high level of self-awareness from all stakeholders, with the State playing a central role, while political and social organizations, and professional associations serve as the core, with the people remaining the decisive subject. The State is responsible for building the institutions and structures for social management, while political and social organizations, as well as professional associations, are the driving forces that mobilize, guide, and create conditions to promote the people's right to self-management and ownership (Phung Huu Phu et al. 2016: 260–261). In the current context, it is necessary to “strengthen the Party’s leadership, harness the strength of the entire political system, and promote the good traditions of mutual assistance and solidarity of our people. The State plays a leading role in developing and organizing the implementation of social policies, while also mobilizing the active participation of society at large and promoting international cooperation” (Communist Party of Vietnam 2012).

*Fifthly*, social development and social development management play a crucial role in the renewal process and the building of socialism in Vietnam. The Party affirms: “A correct and just social policy for the people is a powerful force that unleashes the creative potential of the people in the cause of building and defending the Fatherland” (Communist Party of Vietnam 2016:

79). Social policy is not merely about assistance, relief, or charity; it is a *comprehensive system of development policies*. Social policy is interconnected with and influenced by economic, political, and cultural policies. Yet, it also maintains a relative independence and plays a crucial role in influencing and integrating with these policies. Thus, social development and social development management must be placed on an *equal footing, coordinated, and harmonized* with economic, political, and cultural development, as well as the management of these areas.

### **3. An Overall Evaluation of the Results and Some Raised Issues Regarding the Social Development Management Model in Vietnam Today**

#### ***3.1. An Overall Evaluation of the Results of Social Development Management Implementation***

During the renovation process, our Party, State, and people have increasingly recognized the role and importance of social development and social development management. The scope and content of social development management in Vietnam have expanded, becoming more comprehensive, while ensuring key priorities. The institutional system, policies, and laws for social development management have become largely aligned, thorough, and feasible. In practice, they have better ensured the social welfare rights of the people. Compared to the period before the renewal, the average income per

capita has increased by about 17 times. By 2020, 99.5% of families with war heroes or martyrs had a living standard equal to or higher than the average in their residential area. Vietnam has been recognized by the United Nations as one of the leading countries, especially in efforts to eradicate hunger and reduce poverty, achieving the Millennium Development Goals. The poverty rate has decreased by approximately 1.5% annually. Social insurance and health insurance have been increasingly expanded, becoming an essential pillar of social welfare. The social services system has improved, ensuring people's rights to education, healthcare, housing, clean water, and communication, among other essential services (Communist Party of Vietnam 2020). Today, over 95% of adults are literate, and more than 70% of the population uses the internet. The poor, children under 6, and the elderly are provided with free health insurance. Life expectancy has increased from 62 years in 1990 to 73.7 years in 2020. Vietnam's Human Development Index (HDI) was 0.703 in 2021, placing it in the high HDI group globally. The Gini coefficient for income inequality is within a controllable range (below 0.4). The goal of a prosperous, strong, democratic, equitable, civilized, harmonious, united, sustainable, and happy society has become the driving force and value system of renewal and development in Vietnam. These values have contributed to enhancing

the country's potential, position, and prestige. In this sense, it is clear that Vietnam's development model and path not only have positive economic outcomes but also address social issues much more effectively than capitalist countries with similar economic development levels (Nguyen Phu Trong 2022: 33).

However, these results are still only a first step. The social sector and the management of social development continue to face numerous limitations, shortcomings, and sustainability issues. Some social policies do not cover all target groups, are implemented inconsistently, and there are uneven disparities between regions. The gap in living standards and access to cultural and spiritual benefits between different areas and social groups remains large. Social welfare benefits remain low, the quality of social welfare in some areas is limited, and the living conditions of certain segments of the population continue to be difficult. The management system remains inadequate, and the level of management is insufficient (Communist Party of Vietnam 2020). In some communities, there are still tendencies to rely on the state and society. There is also overlap in roles and responsibilities within management, as well as a lack of coordination and integration between different subjects in leadership and social development management, which persists in many places. In summary, in some

aspects, social development and social development management have not yet been fully aligned, coordinated, and compatible with economic, political, and cultural development.

### ***3.2. Some Issues Raised Regarding the Social Development Management Model in Vietnam Today***

First, in both terms of awareness and practice, it is evident that we face certain uncertainties in understanding and operating the social development management model. Is it possible that within the national social development management model, there are “sub-models” in place? In many studies, scholars and practitioners have raised the need to establish, define, and refine a suitable social development management model. We have discussed the socialist-oriented market economy model and the socialist rule-of-law state. Perhaps it is also necessary to officially define the cultural development model and the social development management model that aligns with the characteristics and requirements of the transition period to socialism in Vietnam.

Second, there is a need to ensure the socialist orientation and clearly demonstrate the superiority of socialism in the social sector, while the reality of social development management still faces many limitations and shortcomings. Before the renovation period, despite facing numerous difficulties, Vietnam and many socialist brother countries still strived and

achieved significant results, with social values that highlighted the superiority of socialism, particularly in education, healthcare, employment, childcare, and the protection of women’s and elderly people’s rights. Despite economic challenges, Cuba has maintained these advantages to date. During the COVID-19 pandemic, we also made significant efforts. We effectively addressed numerous social issues, which were recognized and highly praised by both the people and the international community, reflecting the superiority of the socialist regime (Nguyen Phu Trong 2022: 33). However, this context also served as a test that clearly revealed the country’s limitations and shortcomings, as well as the lack of sustainability in social development and its management, including issues that cannot be overlooked.

Third, there is a need for comprehensive, strict, and unified social development management; however, in practice, gaps exist in content, and legal institutions still lack consistency. Some policies and laws are not strong enough to protect the legitimate and lawful rights and interests of the people, or they may inadvertently foster passivity and dependency, failing to encourage initiative and creativity in implementing social policies (Le Van Loi 2021a). In many programs, plans, and reports on socio-economic development at various levels, sectors, and localities, social issues and aspects

are often mentioned less or given less emphasis. Many agencies, units, and organizations dedicated to protecting children, preventing domestic violence, and combating school violence,... for instance, still face the reality that many children, including infants, suffer from abuse and mistreatment within families, schools, and communities. Additionally, charitable and humanitarian activities in the community, while having notable advantages, have also given rise to several complex issues with negative consequences in recent years.

Fourth, social development and management must align with the requirements of modern, effective national governance, the rule of law, transparency, accountability, and the fulfillment of international commitments and responsibilities in addressing global challenges (Nguyen Huu Hoang et al. 2021: 35–51). Social development management should emphasize the role of multiple stakeholders, with the state playing a key role as the driving force for development. The organizational structure for managing social development needs to be streamlined and effective, reducing intermediaries and organizing multi-sectoral bodies in a rational manner. This is an inevitable demand. However, the infrastructure and organizational structure for managing social development in our country still face many limitations, being outdated and overlapping. Moreover, the need to modernize national governance,

particularly in social development management, is urgent and pressing. Yet, in recent years, a prevailing attitude of fear of responsibility, indifference, apathy, and irresponsibility has emerged. Many individuals are reluctant to speak out, take action, or act in the common interest, especially when it comes to pressing social issues.

Fifth, there is a continued need to innovate and refine the model of social development management with a social structure and composition that aligns with the structure, model (Do Van Quan 2022a), and development of the economy, politics, and culture, ensuring the socialist orientation and adapting to the conditions of Vietnam and the trends of the era. The model of social development management in Vietnam must be based on the country's practical requirements, while creatively drawing on international experiences. However, it cannot be based solely on subjective will but must be grounded in understanding and correctly applying the objective laws and principles of the transition to socialism (Le Thi Thanh Ha 2022a). Social development and its management in Vietnam must be based on the recognition and effective resolution of key relationships, such as: the relationship between the development of productive forces and the gradual establishment of a socialist mode of production; the relationship between the state, the market, and society; the balance between economic

growth and cultural development, the pursuit of social progress and equity, and environmental protection; the relationship between the Party's leadership, the State's management, and the people's ownership; and the relationship between practicing democracy, strengthening the rule of law, and ensuring social discipline.

#### **4. Some recommendations on the current model of social development management in Vietnam**

*First*, it is urgent to research and officially define and shape the model of social development management during the transition to socialism in Vietnam to ensure it is suitable, synchronized, and compatible with the model of a socialist-oriented market economy; the model of a socialist rule-of-law state; and the model of cultural development in Vietnam, which is advanced yet rich in national identity (the four pillars of the four basic areas of social life). Many countries have discussed the environmental pillar in the triangle of sustainable development, also known as the “ecological civilization” pillar in China’s “Five-in-One” model of distinctive socialism (Do Tien Sam 2021). The goals, content, and characteristics of the model of social development management, such as rich people, strong country, democracy, equality, civilization, harmony, consensus, unity, sustainability, and happiness, have been shaped and established both theoretically and

practically. Therefore, in our opinion, after more than 10 years of implementing the Resolution of the 5th Central Committee Conference of the 11th term on social policies for the period 2012-2020, the Central Committee of the 13th term should consider issuing a new resolution on social policies for Vietnam in the new period. This should include an official theoretical summary of the construction and completion of a sustainable and harmonious social development management model, aligned with socialist orientation.

Second, enhance social awareness of the roles, targets, conditions, content, and agents of social development and social development management. Investment in social development and its management is an investment in sustainable development. Rapid and effective economic growth is the central condition for social development (Ngo Thang Loi 2022). However, at present, social development and its management must be prioritized, synchronized, compatible, harmonious, and interconnected with economic, political, and cultural development, as well as with the management of these areas, to create a comprehensive, inclusive, and cohesive approach aimed at social benefits and social values (Do Van Quan 2021): a prosperous people, a strong country, democracy, equality, civilization, harmony, consensus, solidarity, sustainability, and happiness. Social development

and social development management are not only the responsibilities of specialized ministries, agencies, and organizations but are shared by all organizations, ministries, sectors, and localities. The State plays a central role while also encouraging every citizen, enterprise, organization within society, as well as foreign individuals and organizations, to participate in addressing social issues. These aspects must be thoroughly understood and internalized, especially by the heads of party committees and governments at all levels, to ensure proactive, responsible, and creative leadership in designing and implementing social development policies.

Third, continue to innovate and improve institutions, mechanisms, policies, laws, and organizational structures to refine the model for managing social development in line with the demands of renewing national governance (Communist Party of Vietnam 2021, vol. 1: 203). This is one of the three strategic breakthroughs that hold particular significance. Without overcoming institutional barriers and bottlenecks, the breakthroughs in infrastructure and human resources for the nation's renewal and development, including social development, cannot be achieved. Therefore, it is essential to further internalize and accelerate the institutionalization of the Party's directions and viewpoints, as outlined in the XIII Congress Documents,

regarding sustainable social development management, ensuring social progress and equity (Communist Party of Vietnam 2021, vol. 1: 147–152). All decisions by the Party and the State regarding policy, legislation, organizational structure (such as mergers or splits of agencies, ministries, sectors, and localities), and personnel must adequately consider the social dimension, social content, social costs, and social impacts. The institutions, policies, and laws for managing social development must ensure “unity, coherence, feasibility, openness, transparency, stability, international competitiveness, with the legitimate rights and interests of the people at the center, promoting innovation, and ensuring sustainable economic, social, national defense, and security development under new conditions” (Communist Party of Vietnam 2021, vol. 1: 285).

Fourth, study, refer to, and apply international experiences in modern national governance and intelligent, effective social development management. The experiences of many countries, especially in Northern Europe, demonstrate that the key to effective national governance and social development management lies in striking a balance among the market, the state, and society. The roles, levels, and influence of these factors may vary across stages and periods in each country. However, no country

can succeed in economic, political, cultural, and social development by relying solely on one of these three pillars while neglecting the other two: the state, society, or the market (Le Anh 2018). Labor and employment policies must be central priorities within socio-economic development policies. The pursuit of core goals and values should be consistent yet flexible, with specific policies adjusted creatively as situations and conditions change. The welfare state should not only redistribute wealth but also pre-distribute by investing more in education, infrastructure, and other areas to create equal opportunities for all (Piketty 2021: 592). The state should not merely act to correct market failures; it must also guide, support, and implement policies and institutions that encourage companies, the economy, and consumers to transition to greener practices (Beyer et al.). Digital transformation and innovation are inevitable, but this process must be organized systematically and steadily, with the understanding that people, not machines, will remain at the helm. These valuable international experiences are ones that Vietnam has studied and applied, and should continue to adapt to current conditions in a creative manner.

Fifth, rigorously implement policies and laws, including those related to social development and social development management. The XIII Congress Document of the Party clearly states: “Effectively implement

social policies to ensure social welfare and human security, create strong shifts in social development management, promote social progress and equity, and enhance the quality of life and happiness of the people” (Communist Party of Vietnam 2021, vol.1: 47). Social policies, social content, and social objectives must hold a prominent position within the national, local, and organizational socio-economic programs, plans, and reports. Alongside the annual national economic report, there should also be an annual national social report. Vietnam should continue to apply and adopt social and social development measurement indices and indicators at both the national and local levels, aiming to build a comprehensive social development index (Trinh Duy Luan 2018: 40) that includes the Human Development Index (HDI), the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI), the Social Progress Index (SPI), and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In practice, what can be measured can also be managed and improved. Using international indices to measure and assess socio-economic development serves as both pressure and motivation for Vietnam’s innovation, development, and proactive international integration (Le Van Loi 2021a). The more complete, comprehensive, and objective the criteria and evaluation indices, the easier and more favorable it becomes

to recognize, acknowledge, and honor organizations, individuals, and businesses that excel; to protect those who dare to think, act, and take risks for the common good; and to identify, combat, and promptly address violations in social issues and social development management.

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