

Vietnam Family After 30 Years of Renovation

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Abstract: After nearly 30 years of Renovation, along with the positive socio-economic development, Vietnam family life also has significantly changed that more issues need to get attention. The article focuses on analyzing the achievements of family activities, limitations of perception as well as gaps and causes in the current situation. Based on results gained, the article presents some key issues in planning policies for a prosperous, progressive and happy Vietnam family.

Key words: Family; family life; policy; Vietnam.

1. Introduction

Vietnam has officially become a middle income country (1,020 USD in 2009 and around 2,200 USD in 2015) per capital. However, Vietnam has experienced economic difficulties in recent years. Growth of Vietnam gross domestic product (GDP) has slowed for three consecutive years: 6.24% in 2011, 5.25% in 2012 and 5.42% in 2013. In 2011 and 2012, nearly 110,000 enterprises dissolved or decommissioned accounting for a half of all enterprises stopped operation since the Renovation. This seriously affected employment situation for example in 2012 the number of unemployment was 925.6 thousand and nearly 1.34 million people did not have a permanent job. These socio-economic achievements and difficulties have a strong impact on Vietnam family in the current period.

2. Achievements in family activity

State and Communist Party have always insisted that Vietnam family stability is one of the factors determining the success of national industrialization, modernization and building socialism. Family plays an important

role not only for the development of each individual, but also in the implementation of social functions, preservation and transmission of national culture values from generation to generation. Investments for the family are also for sustainable development; hence Party Congresses' resolutions always stressed the interest to families as "a cell of society, the cradle for one life, environment for educating lifestyle and character formation" (7th Congress). The Platform for national construction in the transition to socialism (supplemented and developed in 2011) emphasized to "build a prosperous, progressive, happy, really healthy family as a fine cell of society and an important environment for direct lifestyle education and character formation".

Along with Party Resolutions and Platform, Party Central Committee and the government have also issued specific instructions on this matter. On May 4th 2001, the Prime Minister issued Decision No.72/2001/QĐ/TTg to take June 28th the annual Family Day of

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Vietnam. The purpose of Vietnam family day is "to promote responsible management of sectors, at all levels, unions, social organizations and entire families interested in building a prosperous, equal, progressive and well-being family to promote children protection, care and education contributing to the Fatherland building and defending".

On February 21st 2005 the Central Committee Secretary (9th Congress) issued Directive No.49-CT/TW on building Vietnam family in the national modernization and industrialization. On May 29th 2012, the Prime Minister issued Decision No.-629/QD-TTg approving the Strategy for Development of Vietnam family until 2020, vision 2030 and stressed that building prosperous, progressive and well-being Vietnam family is an important goal of socio-economic development strategy in the period 2011 – 2020; it is also the responsibility of every family in the period of national industrialization and modernization acceleration.

Institutionalizing the Party guidelines and policies, many laws have been promulgated to build and develop Vietnam family in the past few decades, for example the Law on Marriage and Family (2000); Population Ordinance (2003) (amended and supplemented in 2008); Law of Gender Equality (2006); Law on Domestic Violence Prevention (2007); Law on Protection, Care and Education of Children (amended 2004); Law of Elderly (2009), etc.

Grasping the above viewpoints, the issue of building family meeting industrialization and modernization requirements has received much attention in recent years. In 2003, the Department of Family Affairs responsible

for national family management was established under the Committee for Population, Family and Children (now part of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism). After the state apparatus establishment, a lot of activities were implemented to build Vietnam family including family model implementation of "prosperity, progress and happiness".

The movement to build "family culture" with criteria such as family prosperity, peace, progress, healthy and happy, good performing civic duties widely held in many localities has made significant contributions to strengthening families and promoting the role of families for social development. Besides, many programs and policies on building family have also implemented, for example family planning policy, hunger elimination and poverty reduction policies, etc.

Many movements and specific social actions were undertaken to gradually bring its legislation and policies of the Party and State come to effect. For example, information dissemination on the mass media from the central to local levels of marriage and family, gender equality, family planning policy, family and village culture development, clubs of: happy family, exemplary adult and obedient children, family economic development, women's without a third child, prevention social evils, etc. Organizations created several practical advocacy forms of propaganda such as "grandparents, parents make the example and children follow", "light up the love in each family", "for a family without violence", etc.

The above efforts of committees, governments, unions and civil society have contributed effectively to the formulation

and development of prosperous, progressive and happy Vietnam family. Families living standards have been on the rise, family welfare is guaranteed for social strata. The right to decide marriage tends to increase the youth active role. Women's role enhanced and gender equality increased have made wife and husband share the work and care each other better. Women have increasingly been more independent in the family. Faithful remains a benchmark in the conjugal relationship. Respecting the old is still prevailing it has been increasingly more open, and children role and status in the family have increased gradually. More attentions have been paid to make children develop more comprehensively and the old get more care.

3. Limitation in family management

Although the Party and Government acknowledged family importance for social development, in reality policy building has not fully seen family role as an essential specific social institution having tight relations with other social institutions, the strength or inadequacies of the family may have a great impact on general social management. Families are only regarded as a crowd rather than an independent institution with its own movement and development and they are the subject of independent policies. Therefore, the family institution has no real role in high quality human resource development in participating national industrialization and modernization as well as consolidating social stability and development in general.

In terms of law and policy, the Party and State have paid attention in building a legal

framework paving the way for building and consolidating families, however they remain setbacks. Many laws have not been fully recognized, they are framework legislation and often need guidelines for enforcement (sadly, these guidelines are generally issued too late). For example, the law against domestic violence was adopted in November 2007 but until December 2009, there were two guiding documents for enforcement (Decree No.08/2009/ND-CP dated 4th February 2009 stipulating details and guiding the implementation of some articles in the Law Against Domestic Violence, and the Decree 110/2009/ND-CP dated December 10th, 2009 regulated administrative penalties).

State management on family has officially made in the last decade and is facing many difficulties. There lack skilled and experienced staffs specializing in family work at the grassroots level. Coordination mechanisms to implement family policies are not synchronized. The data source of family has just started to be collected and information gathering at local level faces many difficulties.

Another obstacle of family activity implementation of the relevant authorities including provincial, district and commune levels is the lack of funding. Many policies (such policies reinforcing family sustainability, building equal, progress, happy conjugal relationship) are specified in laws, ordinances, strategies but no budget is available to the implementation of these issues. This resulted in policy implementation integrated in the other local plans.

We do not have sufficient data at the national scale in term of Vietnam family

movement and development leading to lack of feasible policies. The formulation of social policies for family or attention to family in the socio-economic policy is not really based on scientific evidence and arguments. Many policies related to families in Vietnam are not the outcome of scientific analysis of Vietnam family movement and development. This raises a very big issue of building such policies lacking attention to the social dimension of this process, failing to acknowledge implementation of the policy performers and objects of policy.

The impact of the restrictions mentioned above are not all families have actually become "nest" for every human, personal relationships and family are loose, gender inequality and violence in families still exist. Those shortcomings in family life include:

- Relationship in the family is not really fair. In the spouse relationship, the division of labor based on gender is still maintained with more balance between the sexes in business or some other kind of jobs. In general, the involvement of men in housework is not significantly increased and not commensurate with the increase of women on the labor market. Housework is not adequately perceived from both men and women, this can lead to negative consequences for the spouse relationship and other members. Double labor burden with limited time, poor health is hindering women's development capacity, including physical and spiritual life resulting in quality of spouse relationships reduced.

The habit that husband register major assets of the family remains widespread, especially in rural areas. The concept of

who is a household head changes slowly, most people still consider men as heads of households. With the "big deal" of the family, the decisive factor of the man - the head of household is still little changed. Clearly, gender discrimination is still widespread, spouse relationship in many cases seem to reflect old Lord- slaver relationship. There should have strong efforts to implement the Law of Gender Equality to obtain substantive equality between women and men.

- Domestic violence is still severe, husband violence against wife is the most prominent that worries society. National survey data on domestic violence against women in Vietnam in 2010 showed that 58.3% of women surveyed had experienced at least one form of physical, mental or sex violence, of which 27% had experienced at least one form of violence in the 12 months preceding the survey; 32% of married women said they experienced physical violence; 6% of those experiencing violence within 12 months.

Domestic violence, especially husband violence against wife has caused many serious consequences for women and children. In terms of social effects, economic losses related to husband violent behavior against wife could account for 1.78% of annual GDP. Meanwhile, most of domestic violence cases still take place quietly behind the family door, the intervention of the State and social organizations are limited. There also lacks understanding, empathy, listening to each other and compromise of people involved. Worsening family violence, there are habits of using alcohol and substance, adultery, humiliating attitude for saving face

and embarrassment, community tolerance for violent behavior, patriarchy, economic inequalities, limited staff responsibility and skills to handle the situation, etc.

Despite the Law on Domestic Violence Prevention became effect from 2008, it has not yet legally guaranteed a profound impact on all people. Associated with the contradictions, conflicts and violence are issues of divorce. The statistics show that the number of divorce has increased over the years and the proportion of female applicants are more than men. This partly shows the status of women has changed, their right awareness has raised, they are becoming more independent in their married life. However, behind the divorce petition even in the names of women is the fact that the influence of the market economy today has crept into the family life, sometimes it dominates spouse relationship that leads to regrettable break-up. Major consequences of divorce are children lack comprehensive development and respect for their parents later.

One of the issues that need attention today is son preference trends, a significant percentage of people support the concept to have at a son at any cost. The important reason to have a son is to continue their family line. Remarkably, according to the [youth and adolescent survey in Vietnam](#) [survey assessment on Vietnamese youth](#) in 2009, 12.6% of young people aged 14-25 prioritize to have a son. The discrimination between sons and daughters lead to fetal sex selection. The sex ratio at birth in Vietnam is likely to increase from 110.5 boys/ 100 girls in 2009 to 111.2 in

2010, 111.9 in 2011 and 112.3 in 2012. Without intervention, the sex ratio at birth in Vietnam will soon too unbalance.

This trend may result in a few decades that there will not be enough women for men to marry as what already happened in East Asian regions such as China, South Korea, and Taiwan today. In case of the crisis "excess male teenager", not only men suffer but women share disaster consequences: they will become subject to scramble, prostitute and traffic, and national labor fields requiring women skilled hands and delicate aesthetics will become short. This is a very unusual phenomenon in the history of Vietnam population development and family, it should receive attention from social development policy makers, parents, especially those in the reproductive age.

In the context of market economy and international integration at present, Vietnam are witnessing quite an unstable phenomenon in many families: the lack of parents' care and education to the children though they still live under one roof, no matter of rich or poor. Vietnam Family Survey 2006 showed that a significant proportion of parents did not take the time to care for children under 15 years: 6.8% of mothers and 21.5% of fathers. The lack of parents attention towards their children can lead to many negative consequences in parent - children emotional relations or increased risk for deviant behavior in life. Many children lacking parents' attention drop out and fall into gamble, drug addiction, robbery, prostitution and other countless threats.

There is a significant proportion of parents educating their children improperly,

ignoring children's fault, spanking children regardless of the reason, or helpless attitude towards children mistakes. The Survey Assessment on Vietnamese Youth round 2 (SAVY 2009) showed that 4.1% of adolescents aged 14-17 reported to have been beaten by family members, we can assume that by their parents. Statistics of Vietnam Family Survey 2006 showed that 1.4% of young parents bate their children when their children made mistakes within 12 months before the survey. Improperly educating children can lead to negative consequences, many children are sad, fighting, drinking, using drug, etc. The situation is very serious for the children personality development and requires more attention from family and society in youth health protection.

The parents' lack of knowledge about children characteristics of cognitive development, psychological and physical changes in the juvenile stage and methods of educating children effectively are important reasons to increase the risk of conflict between parents and children. This requires an awareness change and enhances knowledge of both parents and adolescents in the period of adolescence, a very important stage shaping and developing human personality.

The aging population trend is happening rapidly in Vietnam: in 1979 the proportion of elderly in the total population was 7.1%, by 2009 this was 10%. The aging index (ratio of the population aged 60 and older compared with a population of under 15) has increased from 18.2% in 1989 to 42.7% in 2012.

Currently there are more than 30% of Vietnam families having elderly people. Among them, 70% are self-employed or

receive subsidies from offspring; 30% are living in poor conditions; 95% are suffering from at least one type of diseases. Compared with many other countries around the world, the old people in Vietnam are in quite specific circumstances. Due to a long war, most of them so not have pension, savings or other sources. This group of elderly people is thought to be struggling, not only in paying for healthcare services but also in earning their living. These difficulties force the elderly to depend on the family and offspring without any other choices given current insufficient social care services for elderly people.

Meanwhile, family still plays a major role to support and care for the elderly. The elderly live on offspring's support are experiencing difficulties because their own their life are still hard. According to statistics of Vietnam Family Survey 2006, about 1/3 of the households with elderly people was poor, so the care for aging parents in the household is really difficult given state support is still limited. With many families, the cost of medical treatment for the elderly is an economic burden, because the payment for medical services is often much higher than their income. There are also other difficulties such as disabled children, the sick, unstable jobs, few working forces. In such conditions, the support of the State through various forms (insurance, old age pension, etc.) to reduce the elderly dependence on their descendants' material is of significance.

The majority of children have regular visits to spiritually care for the elderly. Most the elderly share with their family

members' sad and good news. However, some descendants only care the elderly material life and neglect their spiritual life. The main reason is that they lack time, willingness to listen and common interests.

In the context of industrialization and modernization process and especially under the impact of globalization, the family value system in Vietnam is in a huge change. Besides the traditional values such as respecting the elderly, caring the young, new values as asserted such as "individual freedom", "gender equality", "children's rights". In a certain extent, this change makes the grandparent - parent - child relationship unfavorable than before and increases the conflict and generation gap. Vietnam Family Survey 2006 statistics revealed that about 1/10 members of three generation families living together admitted that there was disagreement on the issues of living style, managing money, doing business and educating children.

Especially, some elderly people are experiencing physical and mental and economic violence caused by their offspring. The main reasons contributing to violence against the elderly are greed for money, differences in lifestyle and lack of authorities' attention to the relationships between the generations in the family. The phenomenon of violence against the elderly causes serious consequences for the elderly, families and society.

Traditionally, the elderly lived with their descendants in the extended family and this was Vietnam family identity. Children care is of special emotional significance for the elderly. However, the system of family support for the elderly in the near future

will face obstacles due to changes in population size and trends of family nuclei. Reducing the number of children in the family will reduce sources of support for the aging parent. The participation of women in social labor force, many young migrants seeking employment makes the elderly feel alone and lack of shelter. Many elderly people will have to live alone and take care of themselves, face many difficulties in finance and medical. Besides the familiar form such as caring, nurturing at home, care at demand and nurturing service to meet the elderly people increasing needs, there have appeared many new types of private and join stock elderly caring services. However, there has yet a conclusion of such new services.

4. Key issues for policies

Family is clearly the irreplaceable institution for securing personal benefit today and in the coming decades. The matter is that domestic institutions can be over exploited without the necessary support. This feature should be taken into account sufficiently when studying and proposing welfare policy in general and care for children, the sick, the elderly, etc. in particular.

Related to the change of Vietnam family from the functional, structural, family relations, the following issues should receive sufficient attention:

The state should create necessary and favorable conditions for families to access to domestic and international market. Current serious imbalanced sex ratio at birth requires educating and changing the view of the son's role, creating equal responsibility between sons and daughters

to care for elderly parents and ancestor worship. Besides, the State should have long-term policies and strategies for the elderly receive social security to reduce the dependency on their children.

Along with the process of industrialization, a large number of workers migrate domestically and abroad to secure family life. This departure raises many issues of concern to consolidate and build families.

Domestic violence is happening quite seriously at the local level, negatively affecting the quality of family relationships, threatening the stability of the family. It is necessary to have more radical measures to change social awareness about domestic violence, increase protection and help victims, etc.

The change of male and female roles in the family also raises new issues about the relationship between gender equality and strengthening family ties in this context. We have to foster educating family function, building new relationships between parents and children on the basis of absorbing the new human values and inherit the good values of Vietnam traditional family.

For promoting the role and care for the elderly, there should be appropriate handle of the relationship among performers. In the next decade, family will remain a place for the elderly to promote their role in the community and society. It will also be the primary caregiver for the elderly beside other supportive forms. Therefore, everything should be done to support fostering and caring the elderly. Along with the process of industrialization and urbanization, it is inevitable that family will reduce its

function to care the elderly. Social security should be well prepared to serve the needs of the elderly, while creating conditions for private services involved in assisting the elderly because many of them have the ability to pay for services.

In relation to the protection, care and education of children, two main requirements should be made. First, it is the role of the State embodying in the investment resources for the protection, care and education of children. Second, more attention should be paid to the coordination the relationship between the State, families and other stakeholders in the protection, care and education of children.

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