

BUILDING NEW-STYLE RURAL AREA IN VIETNAM: 15-year achievements and orientation to 2035

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Vietnam's rural area is home to the majority of the population and is also the space that preserves the national cultural soul. Since early days of independence, the idea of building a new life for the people has been formed, at that time the rural population accounted for 90%. By 2024, this rate has decreased to about 62% due to urbanization. However, rural area, agriculture and farmers still play a strategic role in the cause of building and defending the fatherland. After many pilot steps, in 2010, the National Target Program on Building New-Style Rural Area was officially implemented nationwide. After 15 years, the Program has created comprehensive and profound changes in the rural area. Entering a new period, new-style rural area is expected to open up a larger scale, accompanying the era of national development.

1. IMPRINTS OF NEW-STYLE RURAL AREA THROUGH HISTORICAL PERIODS

The pre-renovation period: Form the idea about new-stylerruralarea

Nearly 80 years ago, in his work “New Life” (1947), President Ho Chi Minh wrote: “New life is how to make our people’s lives more materially complete and their spirits happier; new life is not something lofty or difficult, but just changing necessary things in daily life, such as the way of eating, living, dressing, traveling, and working; new life is not about abandoning everything old, or making everything new”. Those familiar words are the original idea of new-style rural area, because building new-style rural area is simply building a new life: With practical actions, with new ways of thinking and doing, aiming to constantly improve the quality of life for the people, from material, spiritual to health, and always remembering “Not abandoning everything old, or making everything new.”

During resistance war years and before the renovation period, many emulation movements made important contributions to building a new life in the rural area. Immediately after the August Revolution (1945), there were three urgent tasks: “Eradicating hunger, illiteracy, and foreign invaders”. By the 1950s, the “Land to the tillers” movement had given land to the poor. In the 1960s and 1970s, agricultural collectivization was promoted with typical flags such

as “Dai Phong wind” and “Duyen Hai waves”, while the “Three-talented women” movement was a solid rear. In particular, Directive No. 100-CT/TW (1981) expanded the product contract system, replacing the work point system, thereby significantly improving production efficiency and farmers’ lives. Thanks to that, the rural picture began to have bright spots before the threshold of renovation.

The 1986-2000 period: Agriculture takes the lead

The renovation process since 1986 was a historic turning point. During this period, agriculture became the pioneering sector, helping the country escape the crisis. Resolution No. 10-NQ/TW (1988), commonly known as “Contract 10”, gave autonomy to the household economy, abolished the collectivization model and liberated labour. Just one year later, Vietnam, from a place of chronic hunger, exported 1.4 million tons of rice. Since then, agriculture has grown continuously and become the mainstay of the economy. The Contract 10 also laid the foundation for building socialist new-style rural area, with major orientations: Synchronously planning and improving infrastructure, developing production, building new lifestyle, eliminating bad customs and social evils, and promoting democratization.

In the 1990s, a series of key programs and projects were launched, such as the Socio-Economic Development Program for Extremely Difficult Communes in Ethnic Minority and Mountainous Areas (Program 135), the Rural Clean Water and Environmental Sanitation Program, the Hunger Eradication & Poverty Reduction and Employment Improvement Program, the Rural Infrastructure Project, the 5 Million Hectare Reforestation Program, etc. These programs and projects have contributed to strengthening food security, improving farmers’ lives, promoting poverty reduction, expanding infrastructure, and creating momentum for comprehensive rural development. After a decade of implementing Contract 10, Resolution No. 06-NQ/TW (1998) of the Secretariat clearly stated the viewpoint: “Linking developing agriculture with building new-style rural area, bringing agriculture and rural economy to large-scale production is an extremely important task both in the short and long term”.



The 2001-2011 period: Pilot new-style rural area and a historic resolution

The 2000s was a period when rural development issues were given attention and comprehensive solutions were sought. The first was the Program on Building Rural Development Model towards Industrialization, Modernization, Cooperation, and Democratization, initiated by the Central Economic Committee and the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, piloted in 183 communes in 61 provinces and cities in the 2001-2005 period. Next, in order to find solutions to promote internal strength and the role of community participation, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development organized a pilot project to build a new-style rural model at the village and hamlet level in 15 villages in 14 provinces and cities in the 2006-2008 period.

In 2008, after 20 years of implementing Resolution No. 10-NQ/TW and 10 years of implementing Resolution No. 06-NQ/TW, the 10th Central Executive Committee issued Resolution No. 26-NQ/TW on 5 August 2008 on agriculture, farmers, and rural area. This is a historic resolution, because for the first time, the Central Executive Committee issued a specialized resolution on “agriculture, farmers, and rural area”, comprehensively recognizing achievements, limitations, and planning a strategic vision. The Resolution also outlines the expected new-style rural model, with modern socio-economic infrastructure, reasonable economic structure and production organization, linked with industry - services - urban area; stable rural society, rich in cultural identity; improved people’s knowledge, protected ecological environment; strengthened grassroots political system.

To concretize targets for new-style rural area with evaluation indicators, in 2009, the National set of criteria for new-style rural area was issued by the Prime Minister (Decision No. 491/QD-TTg dated 16 April 2009), applied at the communal level with 19 criteria covering all areas of rural development. On that basis, the third pilot program on new-style rural area was conducted, this time directly steered by the Secretariat, applied in 11 key communes in the 2009-2011 period, to verify the suitability of criteria and solutions, and create a foundation for replication.

It can be affirmed that Resolution No. 26-NQ/TW together with the promulgation of the set of criteria for new-style rural area has created a strategic shift, bringing the process of building new-style rural area from a pilot scale to a comprehensive National Target Program, opening a new development period for agriculture, farmers and rural area in Vietnam.

The 2010-2025 period: The new-style rural area as a second renovation

In 2010, when political foundation, legal basis, theoretical and practical arguments had met all necessary conditions, the Prime Minister decided to launch the National Target Program on Building New-Style Rural Area for the 2010-2020 period (Decision No. 800/QD-TTg dated 4 June 2010). After 5 years of implementation, in response to new requirements from practice, the Program was adjusted and upgraded in the 2016-2020 period (Decision No. 1600/QD-TTg dated 16 August 2016). Moving into the 2021-2025 period, the Program continued to be supplemented and improved (Decision No. 263/QD-TTg dated 22 February 2022) and achieved many impressive results, marking the success of the 15-year journey of building new-style rural area (2010-2025).

The official introduction of building new-style rural area into a national target program implemented nationwide can be seen as a “second renovation”. If the first renovation was the renovation of the agricultural economic management institution, the second renovation is the renovation of rural development thinking, with a comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach, considering the people as the subject, the State playing the role of a creator, and the whole society working together to implement. Results after 15 years of building new-style rural area have brought about great and comprehensive achievements: Rural infrastructure has been synchronously improved, farmers’ material and spiritual life has been significantly improved, the poverty rate has decreased sharply, political security and social order have been maintained, and the rural appearance has fundamentally changed. More importantly, building new-style rural area has created a strong change in thinking and awareness, arousing proactiveness, creativity and solidarity in the community and the grassroots political system. This is an important premise for the new period in the context of the country having strong changes in the political system and administrative units.

2. OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENTS OF 15 YEARS OF BUILDING NEW-STYLE RURAL AREA

According to the Summary Report of the National Target Program on Building New-Style Rural Area for the 2021-2025 period (Ministry of Agriculture and Environment, 2025), although 2025 has not ended, many basic targets have been early completed. Compared to 2010, when the whole country had no commune, district or province meeting new-style rural standards and 44.3% of communes only met less than 5 criteria, by the end of June 2025 the situation had

changed in a positive direction. The whole country had 79.3% of communes, 51% of districts and 13 provinces and cities recognized as meeting standards or completing the task of building new-style rural area. There were no more communes meeting below 5 criteria, only 376 communes (4.9%) meeting below 10 criteria, while the average reached 17.5 criteria/commune. This is an important milestone, marking the success of 15 years of building new-style rural area.

Looking back at the 15-year journey of implementing the Program, although there are still limitations, it can be affirmed that this is a major, correct, consistent and popular policy, demonstrating the cross-cutting strategic vision of the Party and State. Outstanding achievements can be summarized as follows:

Firstly, perfecting institutions, mechanisms, policies and organizational apparatus. The Program has established a synchronous direction, operation and management system from the Central level to the grassroots level; at the same time, perfected a clear framework of mechanisms and policies, creating a solid legal foundation, promptly detecting and removing many bottlenecks in organization for implementation.

Secondly, mobilizing the strength of the entire political system and society. The “Whole country joins hands to build new-style rural area” movement has created a strong influence, making new-style rural area a common political task, with the participation of

Results of implementing targets of building new-style rural area

No.	Contents	Targets to 2025	Results by the end of June 2025	Compared to targets by the end of 2025
1	Rate of communes meeting new-style rural standards	80%	79.3%	Basically met
2	Rate of communes meeting advanced new-style rural standards	40%	42.2%	Exceeded targets
3	Rate of communes meeting exemplary new-style rural standards	10%	12.2%	Exceeded targets
4	Rate of districts meeting new-style rural standards	50%	51%	Exceeded targets
5	Rate of districts meeting advanced new-style rural standards	20%	20%	Met targets
6	Number of provinces and cities completing the task of building new-style rural area	15	13	Achieved 86.7%
7	Average income per capita increase in the rural area compared to 2020	1.5 times	Estimated to increase 1.4 times by 2025	Achieved 93.3%

Source: Ministry of Agriculture and Environment (2025)

Party committees, authorities, organizations, businesses and especially the response of the people.

Thirdly, creating changes in development awareness and thinking. The Program has fundamentally changed the thinking, awareness and action of cadres at all levels and rural people. The spirit of “people know, people discuss, people do, people check, people benefit” was promoted, production thinking gradually shifted to economic thinking.

Fourthly, improving the quality and expanding the scope of building new-style rural area. Not only increased the number of communes, districts, and provinces meeting new-style rural standards, but the quality of implementing criteria is also increasingly going into depth. Many advanced, exemplary, and smart new-style rural models have appeared, associated with regional cultural identity, production and life characteristics.

Fifthly, promoting rural economic development. The Program has been closely linked to restructuring the agricultural sector and promoting the development of industry and services in the rural area. Many new, multi-value models applying high technology have been formed in association with the development of OCOP products, rural tourism, environmental protection, etc.

Sixthly, completing and synchronizing essential infrastructure systems. The rural infrastructure has been strongly invested in, from transportation, irrigation, electricity, schools, medical stations to cultural institutions,



information and communication systems. The synchronized infrastructure not only improves life but also narrows the gap between rural and urban areas, promoting connectivity and integration.

Seventhly, improving the quality of life of the people. Many rural areas have become liveable places, with spacious landscapes, improved environment, and markedly improved material and spiritual life of the people. The poverty rate has decreased sharply, social security has been ensured, and political security and social order have been maintained.

Eighthly, strengthening policy connectivity, coordination and integration. The Program has effectively linked with other national target programs and development policies for disadvantaged areas, ethnic minorities, mountainous and coastal areas, etc., thereby contributing to sustainable poverty reduction, ensuring social equity and inclusive development.

Ninthly, it is internationally recognized and considered as a reference experience. The Program not only affirms its strategic role domestically but is also highly appreciated by international organizations and development partners as a successful model, contributing to enhancing Vietnam's position and image in the international arena.

It is clear that the success of the Program over the past 15 years stems from the synchronous combination of many factors including: (i) A comprehensive and multi-dimensional approach, not only focused on infrastructure or economy but also covered culture, society, environment, security - defence, in which the Program's content was continuously supplemented and perfected through each period; (ii) Unified leadership and high political determination have turned new-style rural area into a common task of the whole system with a steering mechanism from the Central level to the grassroots level to ensure consistency and effectiveness; (iii) The Program promoted the role of the people as the main subject, in which the community not only contributed resources but also directly participated in decision-making and monitoring, thereby increasing sustainability; (iv) The flexible mechanism of decentralization and delegation of power according to characteristics of each locality encouraged initiative and creativity; (v) The National set of criteria for new-style rural area with clear quantitative targets, linked with the monitoring and evaluation mechanism, has contributed to improving the quality of implementation; (vi) The "Whole country joins hands to build new-style rural area" movement created a competitive driving force, spreaded strongly, and mobilized social resources widely; (vii) The continuity and long-term vision of

the Program - defined as "having a starting point, no ending point" - has turned new-style rural area into a process of continuous improvement, with increasingly higher targets.

3. SOME ISSUES ARISING IN THE NEW PERIOD

Entering the 2026-2035 period, building new-style rural area faces many new opportunities and challenges. Continuing achievements of the past 15 years needs to go hand in hand with innovation in thinking and approach, to ensure that the Program is not only maintained but also creates breakthroughs in the new context.

Inheriting, promoting good practices and overcoming old limitations

After 15 years of implementation, the Program has created an important foundation that needs to be maintained and replicated. The biggest lesson is to consider the people as the main subject: Works were chosen by the people, discussed by the people, done by the people that benefited the people, then quality and sustainability are always guaranteed. Many widespread emulation movements have demonstrated strong influence, such as "All people unite to build new-style rural area and civilized urban area", "5 no, 3 clean", "Youth join hands to build new-style rural area and develop rural economy", along with models of "Exemplary residential area", "Exemplary garden", OCOP.. The mechanism of decentralization and delegation of power to the grassroots level has also been effective, stimulating creativity appropriate to characteristics of each locality. At the same time, integrating new-style rural area with other programs such as sustainable poverty reduction, development of ethnic minority and mountainous areas has brought about a double effect: Developing rural area comprehensively while ensuring social equity. In particular, the approach from the village and hamlet community has increasingly proven effective. After the merger of communes, villages and hamlets became important "links", directly connecting the government with the people and also the core of the movement. In this familiar space, policies and guidelines were concretized into daily works, while promoting indigenous knowledge, preserving traditional culture and mobilizing community strength.

Along with inheriting achieved results, the new period of the Program also needs to thoroughly grasp and fully concretize targets and tasks set out in Resolution No. 19-NQ/TW dated 16 June 2022 of the Central Executive Committee on agriculture, farmers and rural area to 2030, with a vision to 2045, along

with Decision No. 150/QĐ-TTg dated 28 January 2022 of the Prime Minister approving the Strategy for Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development for the 2021-2030 period, with a vision to 2050. This is an important political and legal basis, helping the Program for the 2026-2035 period inherit, synchronize and be consistent with general development guidelines and strategies of the Party and State, while creating a clear orientation framework to implement specific solutions at the grassroots level.

In addition, besides achievements, the implementation process still reveals many limitations that need to be overcome. The development gap between the plains and mountainous areas, remote and isolated areas is still large, slowing down the process of narrowing inequality. In some localities, the mindset of chasing achievements still exists, valuing the number of communes meeting standards over the quality of implementing criteria, leading to unsustainable results. The mobilization of socialized resources is still uneven, especially in poor communes and disadvantaged areas. Environmental protection, waste treatment, ensuring clean water in the rural area and climate change adaptation still face many limitations, while new challenges in energy security, water security and cyber security have not been fully integrated into the Program. In many places, organization for implementation is still formal, the monitoring mechanism lacks focus, and the capacity of grassroots staff has not met new requirements for governance, coordination and digital transformation. In addition, the system of documents in the 2021-2025 period is too numerous, complicated and prone to overlap, making it difficult for grassroots staff to apply.

To overcome these limitations, a series of systematic solutions are needed. First of all, the approach needs to be innovated in the direction of classifying communes based on the level of development, instead of by region as before, to have a roadmap and standards suitable for each group of communes: Difficult, average, developed or modern. Resource allocation also needs to change, giving priority to difficult communes but must be linked to implementation capacity and output results, avoiding the situation of equal allocation. Along with that, decentralization must go hand in hand with accountability and transparency in management, while strengthening the independent monitoring mechanism and expanding the participation of people and businesses. Public services such as environment, waste, clean water, health care, and education need to be more strongly socialized, both mobilizing non-budgetary resources and improving service quality.

Along with that, it is necessary to focus on training a new team of grassroots cadres, especially the young generation, with governance skills, coordination capacity, ability to apply digital technology and understanding of local practices. Another key point is to streamline the system of legal documents, ensuring clarity, consistency and ease of application, avoiding overloading the grassroots.

Innovating and making major breakthroughs

In the context of many national and international changes, new-style rural area in the 2026-2035 period cannot simply continue but requires strategic breakthroughs. First of all, it is necessary to innovate the national set of criteria for new-style rural area - a fundamental tool for setting targets, formulating policies, assigning responsibilities, and recognizing localities that meet standards. The set of criteria needs to be approached by commune groups based on the level of development instead of by region. It is necessary to streamline criteria combined with adding new contemporary contents such as science and technology, digital transformation, human resource development, green economy, climate change adaptation, etc., and at the same time, it must be quantified to the maximum to ensure transparency and monitoring ability. This will be an important measure to orient rural development in accordance with new requirements.

Along with innovating criteria, the rural governance model also needs to be modernized, strongly applying digital technology to monitor, manage and operate. This is even more necessary in the context of the local government being reorganized into a two-tier model after the merger, when the province and commune must directly undertake many tasks that were previously performed by the intermediate district level. Digital governance will help ensure transparency, improve efficiency, reduce overlap and respond quickly to new requirements from the grassroots.

Resources for the Program must also be improved. Instead of relying mainly on the budget and credit as before, it is necessary to expand public-private partnerships, connect businesses with communities, and mobilize international capital sources, especially climate and sustainable development funds. At the same time, it is necessary to encourage participation and direct investment from the people, thereby enhancing community responsibility and benefits.

Rural economy is a field that needs comprehensive innovation. In the coming period, rural area must become a dynamic development space, forming smart new-style rural clusters, strongly applying science - technology and digital transformation. The



OCOP program needs to be strongly upgraded, linked with e-commerce and international markets. Circular economy, ecological agriculture, and green rural tourism models need to be promoted to both preserve culture and environment and create sustainable livelihoods. More importantly, rural economy must be closely linked to the global value chain, playing an increasingly clear role in enhancing national competitiveness.

One of the biggest challenges for Vietnam's rural area in the coming period is the impact of urbanization. Urbanization reduces agricultural land, leading to labour migration, changes in lifestyles and risks of increasing the gap and conflict of interests between urban and rural areas. If well-oriented, this will be the driving force for rural development through the expansion of logistics, processing, trading and community tourist services. Therefore, the Program needs to consider urbanization as a driving force, at the same time build harmonious and balanced urban-rural linkage models, reorganize development spaces according to inter-regional ecosystems and functions, including pilots such as "Village in the city, city in the village", "Satellite centres" or the model of "Rural harmony with urban", creating symbiosis and flexible role assignment, suitable for regional functions.

Developing human resources, especially retaining young people, is also a breakthrough. Rural youth need to be given opportunities to start businesses and find jobs locally in areas such as high-tech agriculture, digital economy, OCOP, community tourism, green and smart agriculture. Only when the young generation is attached to their homeland, the new-style rural area can have sustainable vitality.

Furthermore, building new-style rural area in the new period needs to be positioned as an international integration strategy. This is not only a national development program, but also an important tool to enhance national competitiveness, promote the image of Vietnam to the world, and affirm the country's responsibility in implementing global commitments on sustainable development. A typical example is at the Inter-regional High-level Forum, countries agreed to cooperate in building an international version of OCOP with the initiative "One country One priority product", thereby bringing the model from the national scope to a global initiative ■

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