



# BUILDING A SET OF CRITERIA FOR NEW-STYLE RURAL AREA FOR THE 2026-2030 PERIOD: Some issues arising in the new context

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## 1. FUNDAMENTAL ROLE OF THE SET OF CRITERIA FOR NEW-STYLE RURAL AREA

To concretize the goal of building new-style rural area according to Resolution No. 26-NQ/TW dated 5 August 2008 of the 10<sup>th</sup> Party Central Committee on agriculture, farmers, and rural area, the Prime Minister issued the National set of criteria for new-style rural area for the 2010-2020 period (Decision No. 491/QĐ-TTg dated 16 April 2009). The content of the set of criteria for new-style rural area covers many fields, from planning, infrastructure, economy, culture, society, environment to the political system, security, national defense... Through different periods, the set of criteria has been constantly improved, and has now become the “backbone” of the National Target Program on Building New-Style Rural Area (the Program).

The practice of implementing the Program over the past 15 years (2010-2025) shows that the set of criteria for new-style rural area is an important basis for determining the goal and formulating policies for building new-style rural area; is a basis for designing contents, assigning tasks of leadership and coordination to ministries, agencies, sectors, and socio-political organizations at all levels; is a tool for planning, organizing implementation and monitoring, evaluating results; is a measure for reviewing, examining, appraising, and recognizing localities that meet standards for new-style rural area.

Thanks to the set of criteria for new-style rural area, local authorities



*Modern new-style rural areas with a safe living environment and rich traditional cultural identity*

can identify specific goals that are suitable for their capacity in implementation and coordination of resources in a more practical and harmonious way between priorities. Results of building new-style rural area reflected through the set of criteria also show changes in the rural area in different fields, while helping identify existing problems, difficulties, and obstacles to draw lessons, serving the development of mechanisms, policies, and methods suitable to practical requirements. In addition, integrating sustainable development goals, national strategic goals or sectoral goals and tasks into the set of criteria for new-style rural area also enhances the implementation responsibility of local authorities, contributes to enhancing the effectiveness of state management in the rural area, and contributes to the overall development of the whole country.

With these roles, it can be said that the set of criteria for new-style rural area is a fundamental tool for comprehensive orientation for the process of building new-style rural area. Determining the goal, organizing the apparatus, directing the implementation, mobilizing resources, or decentralizing, delegating power, monitoring and evaluating all require the set of criteria for new-style rural area as a basis to ensure consistency throughout the entire process. In the new period, with profound changes in the political system and reorganization of administrative units, the requirement to build and improve a set of criteria for new-style rural area suitable for the new context becomes extremely urgent.

## 2. A NEW START FROM THE 2026-2030 PERIOD

The implementation of the two-tier local government model requires that building new-style rural area must be renewed in many aspects. After rearranging provincial and communal level administrative units, eliminating the district level, the country now has 34 provinces and centrally-run cities and 3,321 communal level administrative units (including 2,621 communes, 687 wards and 13 special zones). Communes after the merger have undergone comprehensive changes in scale and organization, leading to all criteria on infrastructure, economy, culture, society, environment, political system... being completely different in quality and quantity compared to the old model. Communal planning must also be rebuilt, therefore it cannot be considered that a new commune established on the basis of communes that have previously met standards for new-style rural area will automatically become a commune that meets standards for new-style rural area. Communes will need to be re-evaluated from beginning, the same is true for the provincial level, while the district level has completed its mission.

Thus, results of building new-style rural area by the end of June 2025 can be concluded when the two-tier local government model officially operates from 1 July 2025. Achievements are worth noting, it is a historical milestone after 15 years of building new-style rural area with the basic goal completed by the end of 2025. From 2026, all localities will return to the starting line with the destination of a new set of criteria, towards a new look, new vitality, more breakthrough, more comprehensive, accompanying the country's aspirations to rise.

## 3. SOME ISSUES RAISED IN BUILDING THE SET OF CRITERIA FOR NEW-STYLE RURAL AREA

*Firstly, the 2026-2030 period should only focus on implementing one National set of criteria for new-style rural area*

In the 2010-2015 period, when starting the Program, the whole country implemented only one set of criteria for new-style rural area, applied at the communal level, divided into 07 ecological regions. That was a suitable start for a new and large program, then followed by advanced new-style rural area and exemplary new-style rural area in coming periods.

The 2026-2030 period requires that the new-style rural area will be built on a new foundation. Compared to the past, experience is a great advantage, but the challenge is even greater. The historic step in "rearranging the country" requires that building new-style rural area must have an appropriate approach; it

is necessary to establish a management and leadership apparatus synchronous and compatible with the political system at all levels, which has been greatly streamlined; it is necessary to effectively integrate and combine national target programs, along with a series of issues related to improving mechanisms, policies, regulations, and implementation guidelines...

Therefore, like the 2010-2015 period, building new-style rural area in the 2026-2030 period should only focus on a set of criteria for communes meeting standards for new-style rural area, because that is the most basic foundation of the Program. This set of criteria inherits necessary contents from the set of criteria for the 2021-2025 period, ensuring that it is suitable for the scale and apparatus of a "large commune" or a "miniature district", and must also demonstrate breakthrough requirements, and pay special attention to the content of poverty reduction and social security (when orienting the next period, this Program and the National Target Program on Sustainable Poverty Reduction will be integrated).

For communes that "reached the finish line" early, the Central government did not stipulate criteria for advanced or exemplary new-style rural communes as in the previous period. In the spirit of bold innovation, implementing the policy of promoting decentralization and delegation of power, local authorities need to proactively promote their creativity in choosing appropriate steps, names, and models to continue to strive to implement, creating their own identity in the overall picture of new-style rural area in the whole country. In addition, provinces and cities also base on the actual situation and rural characteristics of wards and special zones in the area, apply appropriate criteria from the set of criteria for new-style rural communes as regulations to evaluate and consider recognition of completion of the task of building new-style rural area.

*Secondly, it is necessary to reclassify commune groups according to development conditions instead of classifying them according to ecological regions*

The goal of the National set of criteria for new-style rural area is to create motivation to strive for implementation according to actual conditions of each locality. Therefore, criteria built must ensure feasibility for each commune group with similar or not too different socio-economic characteristics, so that communes in the same group have common and appropriate targets within their ability to strive for implementation.

Although the classification of communes according to 07 ecological regions in recent periods has tried to be associated with specific natural, economic,



cultural and social conditions of regions, the most obvious shortcoming is that disadvantaged communes can hardly keep up with regional targets, creating a difference in results of building new-style rural area within the region and within the province. Typically, mountainous communes of Binh Phuoc province, which have many characteristics of the Central Highlands, must be evaluated according to criteria of the Southeast region; or the case of communes of 9 mountainous districts in the West of Quang Nam province, despite great efforts, results of implementing criteria are still very far behind communes of 9 districts, towns and cities in coastal plains in the East of the province.

Therefore, the classification of communes according to the National set of criteria for new-style rural communes for the 2026-2030 period needs to be redefined to suit development conditions of communes instead of the classification by region. The proposed direction for building criteria focuses on 3 groups of communes: (1) group of disadvantaged communes in mountainous, border, coastal areas and islands; (2) group of average communes, with agriculture as the main production sector, less affected by the industrialization and urbanization process; (3) group of developed communes, strongly affected by the industrialization and urbanization process, with economic structure shifting towards industry and services.

*Thirdly, criteria for new-style rural communes need to be more concise and synchronized with component content groups of the Program*

The National set of criteria for new-style rural communes and advanced new-style rural communes for the 2021-2025 period both include 19 criteria, each of which is divided into smaller targets. Compared to current requirements, the structure of the set of criteria for new-style rural communes for the 2021-2025 period reveals some limitations such as: not being condensed into groups of key issues of rural development (for example, socio-economic infrastructure is a group of key issues, but is divided into 8 criteria); not demonstrating major breakthroughs (for example, human resource development, science - technology and digital transformation); lack of depth in issues related to quality of life and social security (for example, some health targets are only prescribed for the advanced level, while they are also necessary requirements for the standard level; conversely, gender equality targets need to be enhanced but are only prescribed for the standard level); there are overlaps and dispersion, many contents are still “small” and

not suitable for the new scale of the commune after the merger (for example, targets on economic models applying high technology, having OCOP products, applying digital transformation to trace origin, key products sold through e-commerce channels, raw material areas with growing area codes... mainly revolve around one or two models that integrate all required elements); the structure of 19 criteria is not consistent with 11 component content groups (for example, contents related to public administration, application of information technology, access to law, and gender equality are in different criteria but are placed in a component content group number 08).

Basically, with the change in scale and organization of communes, the framework of the National set of criteria for new-style rural communes for the 2026-2030 period needs to be rearranged in a more concise direction, reflecting groups of the most basic issues, each group of criteria is divided into specific targets, and is designed to synchronize with component content groups of the National Target Program on New Rural Development and Sustainable Poverty Reduction for the 2026-2035 period. Accordingly, 10 groups of key issues are proposed as 10 criteria for new-style rural area including: (1) Planning; (2) Socio-economic infrastructure; (3) Rural economy; (4) Human resources; (5) Culture, education, health; (6) Poverty reduction and social security; (7) Science & technology and digital transformation; (8) Rural environment and landscape; (9) Political system and public administration; (10) Access to law and security, national defense.

*Fourthly, along with building new-style rural communes, it is necessary to research and pilot in building modern new-style rural communes*

Documents of the 13<sup>th</sup> National Party Congress (2021), Resolution No. 19-NQ/TW dated 16 June 2022 of the 13<sup>th</sup> Party Central Committee on agriculture, farmers, and rural area to 2030, with a vision to 2045, 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 all emphasize the orientation of building “ecological agriculture, modern rural area, and civilized farmers”. Of these three elements, “modern rural area” is the model that the National Target Program on New Rural Development and Sustainable Poverty Reduction for the 2026-2035 period needs to aim for.

Currently, the concept of “modern rural area” has no unified definition in legal documents, but it can be generalized that it is a rural space with synchronous,

modern and connected infrastructure; diversified economy, applying high and smart technology; civilized and equal society, ensuring social security; safe living environment, rich in traditional cultural identity; bright - green - clean - beautiful landscape; effective governance; political security, social order and safety are maintained. This model reflects a high level of rural development, clearly showing a superior difference from the general level.

In fact, some communes have begun to approach characteristics of a modern rural area. However, building modern rural area is still a new approach, not only in Vietnam but also in the world. Some new models such as “smart village” or “eco-village” have not fully covered the content of modern rural area. Due to the novelty of modern rural area, in the 2026-2030 period, pilot works should only be built at the communal level in localities that truly have conditions to meet requirements, creating a basis for replication in following periods. To implement, the Central government needs to issue a pilot framework for building modern rural communes, as a basis for local authorities to flexibly apply.

*Fifthly, orientation for building a set of criteria for new-style rural area at village and hamlet levels towards community development*

From the 2021-2030 period, building new-style rural area at village and hamlet levels began to be mentioned in Documents of the 13th Party Congress, Resolution No. 19-NQ/TW and Decision No. 150/QĐ-TTg, affirming the important position of village and hamlet levels in building new-style rural area, aiming to “bring more positive and clearer changes in the lifestyle to each village, hamlet, household and directly to the life of each person living in the rural area”. Nowadays, the role of village and hamlet levels becomes more essential when the merger of communes leads to a larger gap in management and access to public services between the government and the people. In that context, each village / hamlet becomes an intermediary link connecting the State and the community, between the government and the people.

According to some research results in the Science and technology program for building new-style rural area for the 2016-2021 period, the approach of building new-style rural area from village and hamlet levels shows innovation in thinking and methods to promote potential, internal strength, and enhance the role of the community as a subject; the nature of building new-style rural area at village and hamlet levels is community development, in which people need to be taken as the center of development; villages and

hamlets are places with natural connections, sharing benefits and responsibilities, building new-style rural area from village and hamlet levels will promote the common voice of the people, creating a solid foundation for implementing goals at the commune level. Many international experiences also demonstrate that rural development from communities will promote people’s initiative, creativity, participation and cooperation, arouse solidarity, endogenous strength and indigenous knowledge, and gradually reduce dependence on external sources.

With that characteristic, the set of criteria for new-style rural area at village and hamlet levels needs to have a different approach than at the commune level. Criteria should not only focus on material factors but also emphasize indicators reflecting the participation and self-sustaining capacity of the community, such as: happiness level; rate of people participating in community development planning; level of plan completion; income increase compared to the previous year; community leadership capacity; level of social cohesion; participation of women, children, and the disadvantaged; typical examples. At the same time, launching emulation movements between communities will contribute to encouraging the spirit of striving.

The issuance of the set of criteria for new-style rural area at village and hamlet levels should be decentralized to the provincial People’s Committee for specific regulations. Even more deeply, because most of provinces and cities are now larger, communes in the area are also larger, with more villages and hamlets, and more diverse (for example, provinces in the South Central Coast and Central Highlands, after the merger, have many types of communes: border communes, mountainous communes, plain communes, coastal communes, island communes; each type of commune has distinct differences in natural, economic, social characteristics and community characteristics in villages, hamlets...). The provincial People’s Committee can completely continue to decentralize to the communal People’s Committee to issue the set of criteria for new-style rural area applicable to villages, hamlets in the area. However, whether issued by the provincial or communal level, the Central government needs to have specific instructions to ensure consistency in basic criteria associated with the community nature to be applied to village and hamlet levels.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

Building the National set of criteria for new-style rural area can be considered a key foundation, closely linked to target orientation, policy planning,



content development, task assignment and resource mobilization to implement the National Target Program on New Rural Development and Sustainable Poverty Reduction for the 2026-2035 period. The new starting step requires the system of the set of criteria for new-style rural area to be re-established, with a focus on commune and village levels.

The commune is the most basic administrative unit for building the set of criteria for new-style rural area. Some proposals for the communal level include: (1) only apply uniformly nationwide one national set of criteria for new-style rural communes; (2) classify communes into 03 groups according to socio-economic development conditions; (3) reduce 19 criteria to 10 criteria for new-style rural communes; (4) the provincial level proactively orients building communes after they meet standards for new-style rural area; (5) the provincial level stipulates wards and special zones in the area to complete the task of building new-style rural area.

The village is becoming more important as the commune has become a “large commune” with a sharp increase in the number of villages, making the gap between the government and the people wider, requiring villages to strongly promote their connecting role. Building new-style rural area at village and hamlet levels needs to be approached in the direction of community development, in which criteria for new-style rural villages must be people-centered, based on measures of sustainable livelihoods, happiness levels and people’s participation. In conditions of limited resources, the path to sustainable new-style rural area can only be strengthened from the foundation of the community’s ownership and central role.

Another important issue that needs to be emphasized is to strengthen decentralization and delegation of power to local authorities, creating flexibility in stipulating the level of standards, ensuring that they are consistent with the reality and development needs of each locality, but not lower than regulations and instructions of the Central government. Criteria need to be quantified to the maximum by measurable targets, in order to objectively and accurately assess implementation results, while ensuring the mobilization and effective use of investment resources, avoiding dispersion and waste.

In short, it can be affirmed that the set of criteria for new-style rural area in the new period is not only a measure to evaluate results, but also a tool to orient and guide the rural development process. Completing the set of criteria, both ensuring national consistency and adapting to the new context after the rearrangement

of administrative units and innovation of the political system, will be the key for the National Target Program on New Rural Development and Sustainable Poverty Reduction for the 2026-2035 period to achieve substantial and sustainable results ■

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