

Program 135's Impacts on the livelihood of the Mường people in Cẩm Thủy district, Thanh Hóa province

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Abstract: *Under the influence of the Program 135, in recent time, the livelihood of the Mường people in Cẩm Thủy district, Thanh Hóa province, Vietnam (especially in four key communes in our research which are Cẩm Giàng, Cẩm Lương, Cẩm Liên, Cẩm Thành) although is still at low level, but has had a significant and rapid change. This change has been manifested in the human capital and the natural, financial, material and social capitals. So we can see the important role of the Program 135 to the development of Mường people's livelihood here, especially of the process of investment in the system of electricity, roads, schools, and medical stations, creating conditions for investment in production.*

Keywords: Program 135, Livelihood, Mường people, social capital.

The term “livelihood” was born in the 1980s when Robert Chambers approached it for the first time. He said that “livelihood” consists of capacity, assets, approach (the reserves, resources, ownership and rights of use) and the activities being necessary for life (citing after Bùi Bích Lan, 2013). But according to the Ministry of International Development (DFID), livelihood “includes the ability to plan, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities

required for a living” (citing after Nguyễn Văn Sửu, 2010).

When implementing the program of activities for community development in Vietnam, Center for Rural Development (CRD) said that livelihood “gathers all the resources and capabilities that humans get, combined with the decisions and actions they make for the living as well as to achieve the goals and their aspirations” (citing after Bùi Bích Lan, 2013).

Cẩm Thủy district (of Thanh Hóa province) has three ethnic groups: Kinh, Mường, Dao living together, in which the Mường population accounts for nearly 52.4% . Under the impacts of the Program 135 and some other programs, the livelihood of ethnic minorities in Cẩm Thủy district in general and of Mường people in particular has a significant change, both on the macro perspective of the whole district and the micro perspective of the households. That change can be seen through the livelihood resources and assessment of local people.

1. Program 135 and the activities implemented in Cẩm Thủy district

Program 135 was issued under Decision No. 135/1998/QĐ-TTg dated 31/7/1998 of the Prime Minister. Accordingly, about 1,000 communes in 1,715 communes in difficulty and extremely difficult districts were chosen by the Government to be in focus of investment. The remaining communes received investment through the national target programs and projects and other development programs.

According to initial plan, the Program would only last for 7 years and would divide into two periods: 1998-2000 and 2001-2005. However, because of the effectiveness in practice, the Program 135 has been continually prolonged from 2006 to 2010 by Decision 07/2006 QĐ-TTg.

The overall objective of the Program 135 is to enhance rapidly material and spiritual life of ethnic minorities in the extremely difficult communes in the mountainous and remote regions; create opportunity for these regions to get rid of poverty,

backwardness and retardation to integrate into the overall development of the country; contribute to ensure security and order, social safety and national security. The prolongation of the program aims to create rapid changes in production, promotes economic restructuring in agriculture towards production tied to the market, improves and enhances the material and spiritual life of the ethnic minorities in extremely difficult communes and villages.

Total expenditure of the entire Program in the period 1998-2005 was about 10 trillion VND. The country has built and put into operation more than 25 thousand of essential projects of various kinds, contributing significant change to the face of rural and mountainous areas, improving and enhancing the life of ethnic minorities in general. In the period 2006-2010, the central budget has allocated 14,025.25 billion VND, disbursed 13,604.5 billion, reached 97.1% of the allocation. This capital is arranged for four specific areas: Supporting the development of production and constructing infrastructure; Training and retraining village officials to undertake the assignment; Supporting services, improving and enhancing people's life; Providing legal consultancy to raise people's awareness of laws (Thanh Hóa Committee for Nationalities, 2012).

Review of 5-year implementation of Program for 2006-2010 has shown that the poverty rate in the particularly difficult communes and villages decreased from 47% (2006) to 28.8% (2010). Income per capita has improved, reaching 4.2 million VND/person/year by 2010. The increased

percentage of those communes having roads for motor vehicles from the commune center to the villages has reached 80.7%. 100% of communes have medical stations; 100% of people who were in need of legal consultancy have received free assistance (Thanh Hóa Committee for Nationalities, 2012).

In Cẩm Thủy district, Program 135 was implemented on many communes from 1999 up to now. Specific objectives of the Program 135 for deployment in 1,000 of 1,715 communes with special difficulties in the country in general were also objectives of Cẩm Thủy district in particular when setting out Program in some especially difficult communes of the district where there are most Mường people live, and this deployment process was divided in two periods:

Period 1998-2000: Basically, there were no more chronically hungry households, number of poor households was reduced annually by 4-5%; the providing with drinking water for the inhabitants was achieved in the first step, majority of children were attracted to school; some dangerous diseases were controlled; roads of economic welfare to the communal centers were built, majority of Mường people could enjoy the culture and information (Thanh Hóa Committee for Nationalities, 2006).

Period 2001-2005: The rate of poor households in the especially difficult communes of Mường people was reduced to 25% by 2005; supplying Mường people with running water was ensured; over 70% of children of Mường people were attracted to school, majority of Mường

people were provided with experiences of production, with scientific-cultural and social knowledges in order to apply them in production and life; majority of dangerous diseases were controlled; roads for motor vehicles and roads economic welfare leading to communal centers were built; development of rural markets was promoted (Thanh Hóa Committee for Nationalities, 2006).

The prolongation of Program 135 is considered as one of the largest poverty reduction programs for 2006-2010, focusing on the particularly difficult areas where residents are mainly ethnic minorities, including some communes in Cẩm Thủy district. Beside its common objectives when it was deployed across the country in prolonged period, the Program was determined to evaluate its effects as well as its limitations in order to improve and enhance the effectiveness of the programs of the government in the future. Cẩm Thủy district has some communes and villages in the prolonged Program 135 for the period 2006-2010.

Under the impacts of the Program 135, Cẩm Thủy district in general and those localities in which there are Mường people in particular have experienced a change through the periods and this change was depended on each stage with different levels of investment. The impacts of the Program on each locality and each commune were clearly expressed. Total investment in the period 1998-2000 was 10.5 billion VND, distributed to five components: construction of infrastructure; construction of communal centers; planning and

residential restructuring; stabilization and development of production... During the period 2001-2005, there were 19 projects was invested with total funding of 8.8 billion VND, including works as road, school, medical station, electricity, culture (Reporter, 2008). Thanks to the funds of Program 135 for the period 2006-2010, 4 communes which have the majority of M'ong people received investment of 6 works of roads for particularly difficult villages.

Since implementation, the Program has helped to make major changes in the life of the M'ong people, contributing to the development of production and to the socio-economic development. The whole district had basically no hungry households, poor households decreased from 31% in 1999 to 21% in late 2005 (Thanh Hóa Committee for Nationalities, 2006). In 2012, economic growth of the district reached 10.7%, the poverty rate fell to 13.03%; income per capita reached 980 USD/year (Thanh Hóa Committee for Nationalities, 2012)

2. The impacts on the livelihood of the M'ong people with regard to the capitals^(*)

*** Human capital**

In regard to peoples in Cẩm Thủy district in general and M'ong people in

particular, we can see the quality of human resources and labor resources are changing in a positive direction. The average population of M'ong households tended to decline, from nearly 5.1 inhabitants per household in 2001 to only 4.5 inhabitants per household in 2010. Meanwhile, the number of workers per household almost unchanged and tended to increase. This change was due to the fact that the birth rate and the population growth of M'ong households decreased significantly in recent years. This is the basis of the first step, creating conditions to improve living standards of the M'ong people recently.

Together with that, the level of learning of the M'ong people has improved considerably as the percentage of M'ong children attending school increased from 90% in 2000 to 100% in 2010. From 2003 to 2007, Cẩm Thủy implemented nomination policy for 48 students who are M'ong children of those communes under the Program 135 after the distribution criteria, and in 2007 there were 2 persons who were assigned to the state administrative bodies, and 9 persons were being considered to be assigned to work.

During the same period between 2003 and 2007, the district implemented policies to attract staffs and teachers to the highland regions, the region under Program 135 received 122 persons (these communes have 85% of the M'ong population). In addition, many new knowledges and new production models have also been received by M'ong people and then applied through various forms. Human capital in the local

(*) This article uses the results of the field ethnographic survey that we realized in April 2015 in 4 communes which are Cẩm Giàng, Cẩm Lương, Cẩm Liên, Cẩm Thanh of Cẩm Thủy district, on the 447 households representing about 2,000 households of M'ong people living in these 4 communes. These communes of Cẩm Thủy district have 85% of population being M'ong people.

Mường nationality was assessed as changing considerably and quickly.

The survey results show that most Mường people here (90%) said that human capital changed in good trend. However, there are several people recognized that this Program also has certain negative effects such as the gap between families, the inequity in access to support.

* Material capital

The material conditions are quite important in implementing the activities of making living. However, in tradition, the material resources or material capital of Mường people here were very limited, especially in infrastructure; the quality of electricity, roads, schools and health services as well as housing was in low level. Since the Program 135 has been implemented, the material facilities of Cẩm Thủy district increasingly improved and better meet the needs of living and production of local people, especially the Mường people.

Currently, Cẩm Thủy district has 4 High Schools (in 1999 only 3 schools). By the end of 2007, it has basically finished eliminating temporary bamboo houses of poor households of ethnic minorities in general and of Mường people in particular; the district also focus on finishing 8 running water projects for people in eight communes, 4 of which have Mường people mainly; supported 1,048 households with productive land. In particular, the district has 19/20 communes and towns which have asphalt roads to the communal center; annually in the surveyed sites there were built 3-5km

of inter-village concrete roads . The 19/20 communes and towns were connected to the national electricity grid. If in 2000 only 90% of Mường households used electricity, then by 2010 the figure was 99%. Health care was also attached importance, with 19/20 communes and towns having medical station to ensure the quality of health care for the people.

Under impacts of the above changes, the material capital on general households scale in general and on Mường families scale in particular has had significant changes. These changes in the lives were just recognized by the Mường people. According to the results of our survey, nearly 95% of Mường people said that material capital gets better, and only 5% said that material capital has not changed. Thus, we can say, the material capital has changed considerably in Cẩm Thủy district in general and in areas of the Mường people in particular.

* Natural capital

Natural resources are space and habitat of people. Land is extremely important to the living activities of Mường people here. Survey results show that, in the Mường households, the rate of natural land area per household was very high, but it has fallen rapidly in recent years, from 10.57 ha/household in 2000 to 8.05 ha/household in 2010. Previously, land was the advantage of the Mường people, but under the pressure of the population growth, this advantage is decreasing. However, in the past 10 years, agricultural land and forest area still increased, specifically in 2000 the rate of agricultural land per household is 0.85 ha, and in 2010 it has increased to

1.15 ha. When the Program of investing household with land and forest was implemented, these natural resources rose to 5.65 ha/household in 2010 compared to only 2.34 ha/household in 2000.

Thus, despite the growing pressure on land and forest resources, there were in general the positive changes in land use structure of the Mường people in recent years. Due to the mode of production of Mường people which is still unreasonable, the quality of land and forest resources tends to deteriorate. The cause of this phenomenon is due to the fact that in the past, the Mường minority households mainly practised the mode of nomadic farming by clearing up the forest for cultivation, making land increasingly infertile forest resources devastated. Resources from forest products, which supported livelihood of Mường people, are increasingly exhausted.

In terms of scale, a number of programs and projects supported the reclamation of land for production, so the farmers have stable production on their land, and the farmable areas are also increasing. Most of surveyed households said that the size of their land area has increased (83.5% of households replied that the land increased after 10 years of implementing the Programme 135, and 16.5% of the respondents said that their area didn't change). This reconfirms that, together with the local guidelines and policies on reclamation, on expanding the production area, changing the structure of plants to be suitable for the local conditions, the programs and projects also have a positive impact on the production of local people.

* Financial capital

Financial capital is considered as an important resource in supporting the livelihood of the Mường people. Poor households have access to credit funds of different programs, among which we have to mention the loan program of the Social Policy Bank with preferential credit for poor families (allowing one household to borrow 8 to 50 million VND for a period of 2 to 10 years, with the interest rate of 0.2% to 0.6% per year). In fact for some households, the loans of bank have brought huge benefits. The funds were to support and create favorable conditions for the Mường families in economic restructuring, increase incomes and contribute to poverty reduction. Mường households had equal access and benefit from the loan. Mechanism of low-interest loans for the Mường people created opportunities for Mường people to take advantage of resources and available labor forces for economic development, changing production practices, applying techniques in animal husbandry and cultivation.

Survey results indicate that the average income of Mường households was relatively low and there was no difference between surveyed sites. This average income was about 19.342 million VND per household. According to the income structure of surveyed households, we could see that the earnings from cultivation were highest and they were the main source of income of Mường families and there were no significant differences in this with other nations. However, income from services had large differences between regions as Mường households in the region of Divine Fish Stream, due to tourism services, had 9.5

times higher income than those households in other areas.

Although not high, but the income of Mùờng households have significantly improved in recent years. Besides, they could also have better access to credit to compensate the financial difficulties.

* Social capital and the emergence of new relationships

Traditionally, relations between the members, between the families of the Mùờng community were quite close and had mutual assistance nature. Besides the relationship between people of the same village, the relationship within the Mùờng family always had an important role in living activities. Strong coherence between the families in their line, between the clans in the village community was expressed quite well in helping each other both in material and moral aspects when the families had important affairs (building house, having illness, wedding and funeral,...), when were the crop season or natural calamities, crop failure, diseases,... This assistance did not have the term and not charge interest. The love and sentiments of the village and the family ties were strengthened and sustained by a system of traditional regulations of the Mùờng community.

In the past, the social relations of Mùờng people have formed good mutual assistance relationships, creating resources for subsistence activities. But besides these preminent characteristics, the social relations of the Mùờng people have some customs, habits,... which impact negatively on the development of today's livelihood, such as the egalitarianism of

enjoying benefits (the determination of criteria for poor households in each Mùờng village is still heavily leveling, conventional), the communitarianism in work, the self-contained attitude (which affects the access to the markets and expanding them), the reduction of the role of customary laws, contracts in traditional institutions... In fact, these issues have significantly limited the changes of Mùờng people's livelihood in the today market mechanism.

In addition, the relations of the Mùờng community in Cẩm Thủy today are also determined by the administrative system and the laws of the State. The new relations and social networks of Mùờng people here have appeared in the forms of local organizations of party, of government and of unions such as the local Farmers Union, Women's Union, the Youth Union, Former Warriors Society which have been enhanced and strengthened. By becoming members of the unions, the Mùờng farmers have chances to learn, exchange and receive the opportunities and benefits brought by the organizations and unions. Social networks such as the market system was initially developed. This really is a positive support network for the Mùờng people in livelihood development.

3. Conclusion

By analyzing the effects of Program 135 on the livelihoods of the Mùờng people in Cẩm Thủy district of Thanh Hóa province, we draw some conclusions as follows:

- Livelihood of the Mùờng people has changed considerably in recent years; the

livelihood capitals of the people have changed significantly from the community level to the household level. In particular, the material capital and human capital have the fastest change. These are basic conditions for changing opportunities of livelihood strategies of the Mường people.

- The Mường people have radically changed the livelihood from an entire dependency on the nature to the development of production for income. Although the production is not yet diversified and efficient, but major changes in recent years have made a premise for a sustainable livelihood strategy in the next stages. These achievements are due to multiple impacts, among which the Program 135 is one of the greatest and most effective impacts. This is reflected not only in the results of the Program but also through the recognition and evaluation of the Program by the Mường people here.

- The level of impact of the Program differed on regions, villages and households. In those places which have favorable natural conditions, such as the fertile lands, available water sources or the proximity of centers, the impact of the Program proved to be clearer and vice versa.

- The Mường people are bound to traditional practices, so they have difficulty in taking advantage of opportunities created by the program. Therefore the impact of the Program on the livelihood of the Mường people is not big.

- The lack of synchronization and monitoring of investment is one of the basic reasons for limiting the impacts of the

Program. Therefore, in some areas the efficiency of the Program is not high yet □

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