

Vietnam's Sustainable Development and the Role of Political Stability in Sustainable Development

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Abstract: Political stability plays an important role for sustainable development in Vietnam. The paper analyzes experiential lessons drawn by the Communist Party of Vietnam from the national socio-economic development in the recent years. The paper also provides an explanation of why political stability is seen as the premise and a necessary condition for sustainable development in Vietnam.

Key words: Vietnam, sustainable development, political stability.

In Vietnam, sustainable development has been viewed as a strategic goal set by the government in the 1980s. Since then, the concept of sustainable development has changed in its connotation and has been increasingly supplemented with new contents.

Regarding to the origin, the term “sustainable development” was initiated in the 1970s. After “the World Conservation Strategy” was published (in 1980), the term started to attract more attention from international development researchers as well as environmental ones. Afterwards, the concept of sustainable development was described in a range of publications such as “Our Common Future” (1987) and “Caring for the Earth” (1991). When talking about sustainable development, ones often use the definitions from the two above-mentioned publications. In the book “Our Common Future”, sustainable development is understood as a kind of development that

meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. In the meanwhile, sustainable development is defined in the book “Caring for the Earth” as a kind of development that provides real improvements in the quality of human life and at the same time conserves the vitality and diversity of the ecosystems. In general, both of the definitions consider sustainable development as to utilize sensibly natural resources and protect the environment so that development can be achieved for the present generation without causing damage to the future of next generations.

Regarding to the origin of this term, therefore, sustainable development is a kind of development that ensures economic growth on the basis of utilizing reasonably natural resources and protecting the natural environment, in order to satisfy the needs of

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the present generation without harming the living environment and the ability to meet the needs of future generations. In essence, sustainable development aims at dealing with the relationship between economic growth and protection of the natural environment and ensuring the justice between different generations in natural resource utilization and environmental protection. Thus, the concept of sustainable development also implies the harmony between economic growth and environmental protection as well as the harmony between different generations in exploitation of natural resources and living environment.

Apart from the above-mentioned contents, the concept of sustainable development in Vietnam, however, are supplemented with additional contents. Vietnam is trying to improve its sustainable development strategy so that it will be more appropriate with the conditions and context of the country. A sustainable development strategy was promulgated by the Communist Party in the documents of the 9th National Congress and it was further developed in the document of the 10th National Congress.

Talking about the development viewpoint, the documents of the 9th National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam highlight clearly the goals of national development, namely: “to achieve rapid, effective and sustainable development; economic growth must go together with social justice and progress as well as environmental protection”; “...

economic growth must be attached closely with cultural development; it is necessary to: improve the people’s material and spiritual living standards; perform social justice and progress; protect and improve the environment; and, combine socio-economic development with national defense and security [1, pp.89 – 162]”.

We can realize that the concept of sustainable development in the documents of the 9th National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam not only emphasizes the necessity of combining economic growth with environmental protection, but also mentions other contents, such as: “combination of economic growth and cultural development; gradual improvement of the people’s material and spiritual life; performance of social justice and progress; and, combination of economic growth and the national defense and security intensification”. In the classic viewpoint, therefore, the concept of sustainable development mainly emphasizes the relationship between human beings and nature and the relationships between humans and humans in correlation with nature; whereas, the viewpoint of the Communist Party of Vietnam expressed in the 9th National Congress additionally implies many other social relationships such as the relationships of the economic aspect with social and cultural aspects as well as the national defense and security.

When summarizing the recent socio-economic development practice, 5 valuable experiential lessons were drawn in the 10th

National Congress by the Communist Party. Of those 5 lessons, the first is the lesson on rapid and sustainable development. The content of this lesson is mainly shown in some aspects, as below:

First, rapid development must go together with sustainability. This requirement is really essential at both macro- and micro-levels and for both long-term and short-term strategies.

Second, growth in quantity must go together with improvement of quality, effectiveness, and competitiveness of our economy.

Third, while exploiting factors of breadth development, it is also necessary to pay attention to factors of depth development as well as development of knowledge economy.

Fourth, economic growth must go together with cultural development, comprehensive human development, performance of social justice and progress, creation of employment, improvement of living standards, encouragement of legitimate enrichment, and poverty reduction.

Fifth, it is necessary to attach much importance to environmental protection and improvement in every stage of development.

Sixth, economic development must go together with socio-political stability, which must be seen as the premise for rapid and sustainable development [2, pp.178-179].

Those can be said to be the basic contents of Vietnam's sustainable development strategy. The strategy demonstrates clearly the combination of classic, traditional, and particular viewpoints of Vietnam.

In Vietnam's rapid and sustainable development strategy, we can realize following points:

- The socio - political stability is considered the premise and a necessary condition for rapid and sustainable development.

- The strategy is focused on: improvement of development quality; combination of economic growth and comprehensive human development; performance of democracy, social justice and progress; creation of jobs, improvement of living standards, encouragement of legitimate enrichment accompanied by poverty reduction; and, environmental protection and improvement in every stage of development.

- Vietnam's rapid and sustainable development strategy shows comprehensively various aspects of development, in which an outstanding one is the harmony of relationships; for example, the harmony between rapid development and sustainability; the harmony between quantity growth and quality improvement; the harmony between economic development and social affairs; the harmony between economic growth and environmental protection/improvement, etc. One of the important contents in Vietnam's

sustainable development strategy is, therefore, to keep the harmony.

- The key goal of the sustainable development strategy is involved with the people's welfare.

The rapid and sustainable development strategy attaches much importance to quality of economic growth, comprehensive human development, and implementation of social justice, democracy and progress, etc.. Obviously, economic growth is aimed at enhancing the people's welfare, ensuring wealth and happiness for all people. In reality, the rapid and sustainable development strategy is an effective measure to ensure its Socialist - oriented development towards the goal of "making the country prosperous with wealthy people, social justice, democracy, and civilization".

Herein, the question is why political stability is seen as the premise and a necessary condition for sustainable development in Vietnam.

In our opinion, political stability is seen as the premise for sustainable development due to the following reasons:

Firstly, it is necessary to realize that politics is used in the broad sense. It consists of political systems, political institutions as well as relationships between various classes, ethnic groups, and social groups. Thus, politics implies not only a part inside the superstructure but also a part outside the superstructure.

According to the Marxist viewpoint, politics is a concentrated expression of

economics. Economics is a decisive factor for politics. If the economic base changes, the politics more or less will change rapidly. When arguing the decisive role of economics over politics, however, K. Marx and F. Engels talked about the ultimate role of economics and affirmed the independence of positively reverse impacts caused by politics on economics. This is shown in the very fact that politics will change rapidly more or less, when economics changes.

On the other hand, politics is a sensitive field, as it reflects the relationships between social classes. A change in politics usually leads to a social reversal. That's why V.I. Lenin affirmed that politics had to take precedence over economics, although it was just a concentrated expression of economics. Political stability, consequently, should be seen as a matter of priority and as the premise for sustainable development strategies.

Secondly, as described above, politics is a concentrated expression of economics. In essence, politics reflects the relation of interests between social classes, between social groups as well as between nations for the political power generally and the governmental power specifically. Ruling classes use their political power to cause impacts on economic and other sectors of social life.

Politics causes impacts on economic and other sectors of social life through guidelines of the ruling party as well as laws and policies of the State. The guidelines, laws, and policies not only set

up strategies for socio-economic development but also identify the legal framework for those sectors. Politics, therefore, plays a key role in building development orientations for economic and other sectors of social life in future.

Thirdly, politics not only sets up orientations but also plays a role in giving active support and adjustments to sustainable development. Once a policy or a strategy is implemented in practice, it may not be done exactly the same as intended; there is always something unexpected. To adjust the unexpected in practice, it is necessary to have intervention from politics and especially the State. Classically, the State plays a very significant role in national development strategies in all societies, no matter they follow the model of centrally - planned economy, liberal, neo - liberal economy, or free market economy. The most important is how much the State's interventions are; how those interventions are made; and, what the scope of intervention is. This has been illustrated clearly by economic crises for the past years. In the present context of economic crisis, there are not any States leaving the market regulating freely by itself. This demonstrates that politics plays a supporting role for socio-economic development.

Finally, socio - economic development realities in the world show definitely that no country can keep economic growth, let alone sustainable development, in the context of political instability. Once a

country falls in the political instability, all resources are focused on stabilizing the political situation; at that time, economic development is left as a matter of minor importance in comparison with political issues, according to V.I. Lenin. This is obviously illustrated by the recent political situation in Thailand and some other countries in the world as well.

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