

# CUSTOMS WITH LIVELIHOOD ACTIVITIES AND POVERTY REDUCTION IN THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS AREA

Pham Quang Minh

Vietnam Academy for Ethnic Minorities  
Email: [phamquangminh@cema.gov.vn](mailto:phamquangminh@cema.gov.vn)

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*In the past years, implementing the guidelines of the Party, Government and Ministries, from the central to local levels, especially the Central Highlands provinces have taken efforts on synchronous implementation of solutions and resource priorities for sustainable poverty reduction, focusing on ethnic minority areas and particularly difficult areas. In addition to the direct resource investment, the Government also incorporates poverty reduction content in the socio-economic development programs and projects. Although the results of poverty reduction and hunger eradication are achieved impressively, however, it is still not commensurate with the potential and advantages of the Central Highlands. Until now, the rate of poor households in remote areas and ethnic minority areas are still high. Therefore, ensuring people's livelihood to help them strive to escape from poverty to be a necessary issue that can solve the root cause of poverty among ethnic minorities in the whole country in general and ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands Area in particular in the context of accelerating the industrialization and modernization of the country and international integration.*

**Keywords:** Customs; Livelihood activities; Hunger eradication and Poverty reduction; Sustainable poverty reduction; The central highland; Ethnic minorities area.

## 1. Putting issues

In the past years, implementing the guidelines of the Party, Government and Ministries, from the central to local levels, especially the Central Highlands provinces have taken efforts on synchronous implementation of solutions and resource priorities for sustainable poverty reduction, focusing on ethnic minority areas and particularly difficult areas. In addition to the direct resource investment, the Government also incorporates poverty reduction content in the socio-economic development programs and projects. Completing and implementing policies to support production development, vocational training, apprenticing, job creation, labor export, housing, health insurance, tuition fee exemption and reduction, support for living expenses for ethnic minority students, preferential credit for poor and near poor households, have just escaped from poverty... At the same time, promulgating policies to support forest protection and development associated with poverty reduction in ethnic minority and mountainous areas.

Although the results of poverty reduction and hunger eradication are achieved impressively, however, it is still not commensurate with the potential and advantages of the Central Highlands.

Until now, the rate of poor households in remote areas and ethnic minority areas are still high. The rate of poor households in rural areas is higher than in urban areas. The risk of falling back into poverty among new farmers escapes from high poverty because of uncertain income, depending on market prices, weather conditions, diseases or health of family members.

Therefore, ensuring people's livelihood to help them strive to escape from poverty to be a necessary issue that can solve the root cause of poverty among ethnic minorities in the whole country in general and ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands area in particular in the context of accelerating the industrialization and modernization of the country and international integration.

## 2. The customs and main livelihood activities of ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands area

In the past years, the Central Highlands provinces have focused on supporting poor people about solutions to support production, settlement of residential land, production land, vocational training, settlement of job, and prioritization of poor households, near poor households borrowing loans to invest in production development, especially in rural areas and ethnic minority areas.

At the same time, organization of training and guidance for poor and near poor households to restructure their crops, supporting agricultural and forestry extension in order to create conditions for the Central Highlands people to well implement intensive farming techniques, raising, bringing high economic efficiency.

In particular, there are many organizations and enterprises in and outside the Central Highlands supporting hundreds of VND billions through the support of breeding cows, seedlings, deleting temporary houses and dilapidated houses for poor households<sup>1</sup>.

However, because the population has increased in both natural and mechanical directions, making the self-closing cycle has gradually lost its existence. While in the central areas, cultivation has gradually been removed to replace with new cultivation forms such as water fields, industrial crops, forestation, in remote villages, deforesting for cultivation to be still exist at different levels. Although there are no conditions to rotate the closed moments, the people either rotate crops on the field, or moving the fields from the closed field to the rotation of the open season. Rotation is a custom of changing the main crop on the field in a certain order, in order to adapt to the increasing population situation, it is very common in the middle villages. To cope with the land scarcity, besides crop rotation, people gradually shift from a closed rotation to an open rotation, to be a form of continuous farming for many years on a field that will greatly affect the development of forest and land.

Besides cultivation, there are also cultivation forms of dry fields, water fields and gardening. The emergence and existence of dry fields in relatively flat lands is an encouraging development step of upland fields in the condition of increasing population. This type of cultivation appeared early and popularly in Kon Tum province, in Dak Doa, Mang Yang (Gia Lai province), Buon Ma Thuot (Dak Lak province) and Bao Loc and Di Linh (Lam Dong province) before 1954, due to pressure of population and due to study of Lao and Kinh people. Dry fields are formed on the basis of land leveling, embankment, improving upland fields in relatively flat areas on highlands or in river valleys. Although it is also dry food crops, but different from fields, due to flat and shore, using fertilizer, dry fields can be used for intensive cultivation and long-term cultivation. With the use of cattle for plowing and harrowing, with the widespread use of large hoes, organic and inorganic fertilizers, cultivating legume varieties (peanuts, beans of all kinds), dry fields is one long step on technical progress compared to fields.

<sup>1</sup>. Quang Huy, Pham Cuong (2016), *Many solutions to reduce poverty in the Central Highlands*, the Ethnic and Mountainous Picture Newspaper, January 13rd, 2016.

In recent decades, dry fields in ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands are shifting to growing long-term commercial industrial crops. With outstanding advantages, dry field is an alternative model to effectively cultivate in highland terrain. In order to contribute to improving and eliminating fields, expanding the area of dry fields to be a solution that needs investment and encourage in the coming years. Difficulties and challenges for developing dry fields are not small. Not all terrain is relatively flat with a low slope, which is the first and important condition to form dry fields. Anyway, dry fields are currently a farming activity that plays a major role and brings the main income of a part of the Central Highlands people. In the current natural and residential conditions, the expansion and development of dry fields in both quantity and quality are both opportunities and challenges of cultivation in the Central Highlands area.

Water fields appear first around Kon Tum town (Kon Tum province) and Duc Trong and Di Linh (Lam Dong province), around the 17th century, because they learned from Cham and Lao people. The technique of water field cultivation was initially simple. Fields are cultivated a season for year, in the rainy season, starting in May, ending in September. The field was hoed two times, the first time when the field was still dry, to break the soil, the next time the field had rain water, to make the pure soil. When it rains heavily, the field is drained so that the water level is stable within about 10 cm -15 cm. The fields are not fertilized, there is no irrigation that looks into the rainfed so the productivity is low and unstable, about 1.8 - 2.0 tons/ha/crop/year again. Since 1975, especially since 1986, as a result of the work of sedentarization and settlement, water fields have been expanded and developed gradually in many ethnic areas on the spot. Although it is slow, new cultivation techniques are gradually applied. The area of two crop fields increased gradually due to investment in construction of irrigation works. Beside the big pickaxe, people used cattle to plow. The technique of sowing and transplanting fields to be received. New high yielding rice varieties are included. The application of organic and inorganic fertilizers and the use of pesticides to be applied. Productivity increased gradually from above 2.0tons/crop before the release date to 3.0-3.5 tons in recent years<sup>2</sup>.

Despite it is taken care for the development, due to limited irrigation potential, the ability to expand water fields in local people is not much, more farming techniques are still low, so far, water fields in ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands, only accounting for about a quarter of the total cultivated

<sup>2</sup>. Although higher than before, due to technical limitations, the productivity of paddy fields about 2.0 tons/crop of the Central Highlands people is low compared to the potential and compared with the productivity of 5.5 -6.0 tons/crop of Vietnamese immigrants.

area and 1/3 of food income. Besides dry fields and water fields, there exists as a new cultivation activity in the ethnic groups in the Central Highlands to be a gardening cultivation. According to many old people, the garden is a new form of cultivation, but it dates back to 1975 around towns and towns. In terms of crops and cultivation techniques, the garden is considered a special type of field, appearing after the field and separated from the field. There are some quite clear differences between gardens and fields. Firstly, while the field is often located away from the house, extracted from the forest, the garden is usually located near the house, around the village, along the river and stream, in the valleys near water and wet, not necessarily exploited from the forest; secondly, cultivation can be equal, can be steep, but the garden is always flat; thirdly, while the field has a relatively large area, about 0.5 - 2.0 ha/crowd, the garden has a small area, about several hundred m<sup>2</sup>/crowd; fourthly, while on the field, people planted many crops and intercropped all groups of plants, took food crops as the core, then in the garden, people planted the main types of vegetables and spices, with additional fruit plants around; fifth, compared to the field, due to the small area, cultivating essential products, the garden is more intensive and careful, climbing vines are made, the land is plowed, and the plants are weeded regularly; sixth, garden cultivation is mainly undertaken by women, unlike the fields that both men, women and children work together.

In recent years, it is common in the Central Highlands people about the situation to switch from self-sufficient, self-sufficient multi-cultivation gardens to industrial plants. The appearance and role of the garden allows to explain and elucidate partly the process of cultivation development of the Central Highlands. It can be seen that starting water and cultivating fields are the only form of cultivation, which is also a multi-purpose cultivation model, providing not only food products but also garden products. The role of self-sufficient garden products is also not really urgent, because people can rely on forests to satisfy the needs from gardens that fields have not been provided. Later, because the forest was increasingly narrowed, the garden was separated from the field into a separate cultivation type, although the mark of the field in the garden was still bold. There is a reciprocal relationship between gardens, fields and with natural resources. When natural resources are abundant, the garden is still located on the field, whereas, when natural resources are exhausted, the birth of the garden is indispensable. The appearance of a multi-cultivation garden before 1975 with the development of a specialized garden after 1975 to be an important and encouraging step<sup>3</sup>...

<sup>3</sup>. Bui Minh Dao (2014), Thematic Report "Ethnic characteristics, endogenous capacity and economic activities affecting poverty and sustainable poverty reduction of ethnic groups in the Central Highlands area", p.21, p.23, p.26, p.27, p.28, p.29.

Traditional breeding is no longer the same. The buffalo declined significantly due to the loss of the environment and the old living conditions, with only a small number. The cow becomes a spearhead animal, developed in all regions, both used as a traction in cultivation, and used as a commodity to exchange, significantly contributing to increase the income of the people. In addition to the local cow breed, imported cow breeds such as Lai Sin cows and dairy cows are also gradually introduced. Livestock gradually moves from self-sufficiency to goods, especially for livestock such as buffaloes, pigs, cows and goats. Animal husbandry techniques such as cooping, vaccination, feeding according to a stable regime to replace gradually half-pasted, half-past care. The current issue for the Central Highlands livestock sector is to strengthen veterinary work, change and improve livestock and restore pastures for livestock to ensure proper scientific processes to be necessary to bring high economic efficiency.

The change of natural conditions and the impact of the market economy has gradually lost a traditional handicraft. This situation occurs quickly and early in the central region, slowly and later in remote areas. Weaving is still maintained but the scale and popularity are much lower than before. The cause is due to the gradual absence of upland fields, due to scarcity of knitting materials, due to the customs of losing pestle and rice, especially due to the increasing availability of cheap products from other places such as sacks, plastic bags, plastic. The knitting is only available to the elderly. The pattern on knitwear appears with decreasing frequency. Some unique knitting patterns have gone away with the departure of those who know them. The number of young people who do not know how to knit to be increasing. The knitting as a famous craft tradition, creating unique cultural products of the Central Highlands needs to be maintained and developed to be a matter that needs attention.

On the one hand, due to the rampant importation of industrial wear, the gradual absence of the forest and the cultivation of upland fields, as well as the change in the young people's taste in the strong impacts of the new living way, except in the coastal villages that need to weave cloth for tourists, the traditional cotton weaving industry in many villages is either lost or gone. Only a few rare weaving looms are used, as well as only the old people are interested in doing this work. Most of the young females was asked they answered that they did not know how to weave or knew that weaving was only told by their parents.

Iron was sold at markets and private shops in villages, areas for forging and blacksmithing were reduced. There are only a few remote villages with forging and blacksmiths, narrowing in the old tool repair or machined agricultural tools to suit the tastes of the new buying tools at the market. The



pay for the blacksmith today is calculated in money.

Goods exchange has surpassed before. Due to the ancient prejudice against the trade, few Ba Na people found to exchange jobs. However, due to the impact of the market economy, due to the development of transportation, buying and selling services have expanded and conveniently reached the village.

The currency that has participated in the exchange process, though not yet popular. People often use money when buying and selling in the market, while at home, in the village, the preferred exchanging way is still objects. Each village has a few households of Kinh people who are permanent or temporary residents to do sales. Along with that, the public market system is established and expanded, including village markets, commune markets, district markets and provincial markets. It is impossible not to mention a large number of Kinh private traders every day to bring mobile goods to each village and every house to exchange with people. Due to the gradual absence of upland fields and the decline of forest economy, the demand for trade is increasing. Products sold are not only food, livestock and poultry but also forest products and industrial tree products. Purchased Products are not just technological necessities such as soap, tobacco, sugar, milk, candy,... but in many areas, especially areas near traffic roads and industrial plants grow to be also new living facilities such as bicycles, radios, televisions, motorbikes,...

The natural economy only has conditions that do not exist intact in some remote villages, where forests and environment have not been seriously degraded. In the majority of the remaining regions, hunting activities, gathering or no longer or gradually disappearing due to forest retreating from the residence. The general situation is that large mammals such as tigers, bears, buffaloes, bulls and wild cattle are absent. Wild pigs, deers, gills, monkeys are only found in few areas and are at risk of extinction. Collective hunting has dogs and putting traps, pits around the fields to catch big animals no longer exist. Only animals hunting can be hunted with small animals, wild chickens and birds. Catching rats with traps and catching wild chickens with noose traps is still popular. The reserve and quantity of fish, insects, mollusks in many places have been seriously reduced. Rough forms of catching fish such as groping, scooping, pruning,... are less effective and instead are mainly fishing with fishing nets and nets. Many vegetables, bamboo shoots, tubers and fruits in the forest are either no longer or insignificant and must be exploited in very difficult conditions.

### **3. Influencing customs and livelihood activities on poverty reduction in the Central Highlands area**

Cultivating economy and cultivation mentality leads to irritation and poverty reduction. In the tradition, before the French invasion, the ethnic groups in the Central Highlands area still reserved many elements of the original society. Similarly, in terms of economy, before entering into socio-economic development and industrialization, modernization after 1975 up to now, ethnic minority groups in the Central Highlands are already shifting cultivation residents, mainly rely on income from the field. So it persists and persists until today in ethnic groups in the Central Highlands as a traditional habit and cultivation psychology of people who are in the original disintegrating society.

Like the habits and psychology of rice fields in the Vietnamese people, besides the positive and supportive aspects, in the habits and farming psychology in the ethnic groups in the Central Highlands, there exist negative aspects and obstacles for sustainable economic development in the Central Highlands today.

Through this article, the author would like to mention some aspects of the influence of customs, habits and cultivation psychology on sustainable economy development in particular and sustainable socio-economic development in general in ethnic minority groups in the Central Highlands.

*Firstly*, cultivating on sloping land, taking forest ash as fertilizer, not applying science and technology, all the results are dependent on the land, in the forest, in the rain and sun, depending on the nature. People only depend on nature and trust in nature, into invisible spiritual beings but exist everywhere, in the sky and around people. Cultivation productivity is high or low, good or bad rice is not caused by humans, but by decided gods. The rich in the Central Highlands are people with a lot of rice. Much rice is not caused by the internal resources of the rich, but by the grant gods. The rich or poor is not caused by people but by gods. Rich is not proud, poor is not ashamed. When in a poor village, the rich people have to divide rice for the poor as natural. Rich is not mercy and poor is not disturbed. So in terms of awareness, in cultivation, the Central Highlands people are often passive, waiting for, relying on nature, how can they enjoy it but have less aspiration and efforts to get rich. This partly explains the difficulty of poverty reduction as well as the low efficiency of poverty reduction in the ethnic groups in the Central Highlands in the past decades.

*Secondly*, the natural dependence characteristic of the field means that on the field, people only need to use the simple maxed farming techniques system, including the generation, burning, poking, sowing, different from the Farming techniques system has been complicated and require scientific knowledge such as "water, fertilizer, tool, seed" in the rice fields of the Kinh people in the delta, even

less complicated techniques such as cultivation of commodity industry trees such as coffee, rubber, pepper, tea and silkworm like Kinh people in the Central Highlands today. In other words, shifting cultivation is simple and pre-captured, to be stable and transmissible. On the religious side, there are also psychological reasons that affect the acquisition of new science and technology. Religious spiritual beliefs or beliefs of the original spirituality are the specific characteristics of the ethnic groups in the Central Highlands. The focus of spiritual beliefs is still the belief in cultivation agriculture, in which, believing, admiring and worshiping many agricultural gods to be the main and transparent belief in all ethnic groups in the Central Highlands.

For the Central Highlands people, rice gods, gods of gods, earth gods, forest gods, rain gods, thunder gods, agricultural gods, rice gods are the most revered and worshiped gods.

In order to understand why the Ba Na and Xo Dang people do not use buffaloes to plow their fields because buffaloes were sacrificial animals, they were afraid of the rice gods, causing crop failure, abstaining from using sickles to cut rice, because they were afraid of making rice hurt, angry souls that cause crop failure, abstaining from fertilizing for cultivation because of fear of making dirty soil, angry gods that make rice bad, abstaining from burying the dead while harvesting because of fear of the rice god to be angry but leaving,...

Thus, both in terms of technical reasons and spiritual reasons, upland cultivation does not require the application of new science and technology, as well as it is strange and reacts to all desires and tests to apply new technique science. Looking further, upland cultivation leads to psychological desire to deny and react to the application of science and technology to cultivation activities in the ethnic groups in the Central Highlands, including new activities introduced in the recent decades. This explains why the post-liberation decades, paddy fields and industrial plants were introduced to Ba na and Xo Dang villages in many ways, as well as when they were imported into the Highland villages, water fields and industrial plants are much less productive and efficient than those of Kinh people.

*Thirdly*, upland cultivation in the Central Highlands does not use irrigation, but looks at rainwater and rain water. The climate of the Central Highlands is divided into two seasons in a year, which is the rainy season from May to November and the dry season from December to April. Cultivation cannot be cultivated in the dry season, but can only be cultivated in the rainy season, which means one year of only a seven-month crop, only the most labor and labor for food harvest, the highest and highest food on the field. The dry season is obvious and obligatory to be the leisure season, the resting season of upland farming, which lasts

for 5 months. But the dry season with the ethnic groups in the Central Highlands is not simply the leisure season and the resting season. In addition to leisure and resting seasons, the dry season is also a season of other economic activities, especially festival activities and cultural activities. The dry season comes when the Central Highlands people raise, knit, weave, make pottery, make forging, gold panning, exchange and exploit resources in the forest, transfer new villages, build new houses, marry, sing epic, organizing community festivals with buffalo-stabbing rituals, often seeing the celebration of the harvest, the celebration of the new communal house, the ceremony of the water trough, the celebration of victory, the twinning celebration of the two villages,... the dry is also the season of festivals of abandoned grave, but the cultural and spiritual meaning is well known and confirmed for a long time.

It is important through the above-mentioned presentations that on-farm cultivation activities, once existed in ethnic groups in the Central Highlands with a two seasons-living cycle/solar year cycle: Cultivated season and resting season, in which the cultivated season is mainly for workers to meet material needs and living needs, while the rest season is mainly devoted to meeting the spiritual needs and cultural needs. The working and resting cycle in the solar year is a necessary and sufficient condition for time and space to make up the life and traditional culture of the Central Highlands. It is deeply rooted in the mind, emotions and becoming an inherent psychology of the people in the Central Highlands from thousands of generations. Changing that pace is also changing the customs, habits and culture of the ethnic groups in the Central Highlands. This psychology is really a significant obstacle to the transition from the cultivation agriculture of the primitive and traditional one - crop - a - year labor to the cultivation agriculture of water fields and the modern industrial crop of the year - round crop currently in the ethnic groups in the Central Highlands. This psychology, habit and custom contribute to explain why in the past years, in many villages, ethnic groups in the Central Highlands have paddy fields but they do not cultivate but let other people to rent in the winter-spring crop, why in this place, there are ethnic groups in the Central Highlands who prefer to cultivate in the upland field than in the paddy fields and cultivate industrial crops, why dry season is the season for ethnic minority workers in agricultural and forestry farms or arbitrarily leave work or leave long-term jobs,...

#### 4. Conclusion

In order to effectively solve this issue and ensure the livelihoods of people in general and ethnic groups in the Central Highlands in particular, especially poor households, on the basis of implementing the guideline “for fishing rod not only for fish” in

order for people to try and strive to become rich, escaping poverty is an important solution to solve the root causes of poverty in ethnic minority and mountainous areas today. At the same time, the Central Highlands provinces should actively promote the attraction of investment resources through calling for socio-economic development programs and projects, determined to build the Central Highlands into key economic region of the country, with rapid growth and solid economic restructuring; especially

the cultural life, the intellectual level of ethnic minorities is increasingly improved; ensuring social security, maintaining national security; soon to bring rural areas in the Central Highlands area out of the situation of slow development, step by step to develop sustainably, this is an issue of particular concern from the Party, State and Government throughout the past years.

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## PHONG TỤC, TẬP QUÁN VỚI HOẠT ĐỘNG SINH KẾ VÀ GIẢM NGHÈO Ở KHU VỰC TÂY NGUYÊN

Phạm Quang Minh

Học viện Dân tộc  
Email: [phamquangminh@cema.gov.vn](mailto:phamquangminh@cema.gov.vn)

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**Tóm tắt:** Trong những năm qua, thực hiện chủ trương, đường lối của Đảng, Chính phủ và các Bộ ngành, từ Trung ương đến địa phương, nhất là các tỉnh Tây Nguyên đã tập trung nỗ lực thực hiện đồng bộ các giải pháp, ưu tiên nguồn lực cho giảm nghèo bền vững, tập trung vào vùng đồng bào dân tộc thiểu số và địa bàn đặc biệt khó khăn. Ngoài việc đầu tư nguồn lực trực tiếp, Chính phủ còn lồng ghép nội dung giảm nghèo trong các chương trình, dự án phát triển kinh tế - xã hội. Mặc dù, kết quả xóa đói, giảm nghèo đạt được là rất ấn tượng, tuy nhiên, vẫn chưa tương xứng so với tiềm năng, lợi thế của vùng Tây Nguyên. Đến nay, tỷ lệ hộ nghèo ở vùng sâu, vùng xa, vùng đồng bào dân tộc thiểu số còn cao. Vì vậy, việc bảo đảm sinh kế cho người dân nhằm giúp họ nỗ lực vươn lên thoát nghèo bền vững là vấn đề cần thiết có thể giải quyết được tận gốc nguyên nhân dẫn đến đói nghèo của các tộc người thiểu số cả nước nói chung và các tộc người thiểu số khu vực Tây Nguyên nói riêng trong bối cảnh đẩy mạnh công nghiệp hóa, hiện đại hóa đất nước và hội nhập quốc tế.

**Từ khóa:** Phong tục tập quán; Hoạt động sinh kế; Xóa đói giảm nghèo; Giảm nghèo bền vững; Tây Nguyên; Vùng dân tộc thiểu số.