KEY NOTE SPEECH


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I. IMPORTANCE OF HR DEVELOPMENT IN ETHNIC MINORITY AND MOUNTAINOUS AREAS FOR OUR COUNTRY

Among the resources for development of each country, besides such factors as financial potential, natural resources, scientific technology etc., human resource (HR) are considered the most important, precious and decisive to the sustainable and comprehensive development of a nation.

The Party’s platform on national development in the transitional period to socialist (amended in 2011) has clearly specified: “Human beings is the center for development strategy as well as the subject of development”. The Socio-economic development strategy for the period 2011-2020, passed by at the XI Party Congress confirmed: “Developing and improving the quality of HR, particularly high-qualified human resource is a strategic break-through, is a decisive factor to promote the development and application of scientific technology, economic restructuring competitiveness advantages to ensure for the rapid, sustainable and effective development”.

Viet Nam has 54 ethnic minority groups, of which 53 are home to ethnic minorities (EM), accounting for more than 14% of total national population. There are 52 provinces where EM are living in communities (villages, hamlets, etc). Most of ethnic minority is living in ethnic, remote and bordering areas (accounting for more than 2/3 of terrestrial land) which is endowed with rich potentials in natural resources, hydro-power, agro-production, mineral resources and a specially crucial position in national security and defense. In the two resistance wars to defend our nation, most of the key bases of Vietnamese army were located in ethnic minority and mountainous areas.

For the last thousands of years, especially since 1995 so far, the Party and the State has issued many macro policies on investment in developing ethnic minority areas. Thanks to this, there have been positive changes in many areas, including economy, livelihood, health, cultural customs, etc. Particularly, there has been a rapid growth in ethnic minority areas in Northern Region, Highland, and Southern Region, which are now catching up with the development progress of the whole country.

Besides the positive aspects, there are still remaining limitations which should be addressed by the Party and the State, particularly the development level and average income of ethnic minority communes and ethnic minority households, etc. The question here is why? What is the underlying reason for the shortcoming? That is: internal strength of ethnic minority areas is very limited, which is not enough to meet with requirements of the socialist-oriented market economy. Among this, the crucial issue is lying in the education and training for ethnic minority
labourers in both quality and quantity which is far behind the average level of districts and provinces.

Therefore, it can be said that improving the quality of HR for ethnic minority areas is decisive to increase the internal strength for the areas to meet with requirements for national protection and development.

II. DIFFICULTIES AND CHALLENGES TO HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT IN ETHNIC MINORITY AND MOUNTAINOUS AREAS

Currently, ethnic minority accounts for a quite large proportion of human resources in ethnic minority areas. The working forces are living in 32/52 provinces, cities, of which 12 are in the Highland, Northern Mountainous and Highland with ethnic minority of over 50%. However, quality of HR in ethnic minority areas is still limited, reflecting via the following aspects:

1. Current status of HR in ethnic minority areas:

1.1. In terms of structure of HR: Among ethnic minority, those in the age of 15 years old or over makes up for nearly 8.5 million people, accounting for 69% and the rest 31.3% is under 15 years old. This composition is different with the standard structure and not included in the “Golden population structure” of the region and of the whole country because the proportion of over 15 year olds is lower than the national average meanwhile those of under 15 years old is higher.

There is also an imbalance between female and male in the ethnic minority population.

Labour in ethnic minority and mountainous areas are mainly working in the agricultural sector (Northern Mountainous Areas and Highland, accounting for over 70%). Meanwhile a very small proportion is working in industrial, services and trading sector. This composition is far different with that of the whole country (the national proportion of agriculture, industry and trading-services is 51.9%, 21.5% and 26.5% respectively).

The occupational structure also shows that labour in ethnic minority areas are mainly working in agricultural sector and manual jobs. Very few are engaging in medium and high-technological standards (Central and Northern Mountainous Region accounts for 6.2% and High Land makes up for 5.93%).

1.2. According to the criteria on Physical strength: HR in ethnic minority areas is poorer than that in lowland and other advanced regions: High malnutrition among children (25.9% in Northern Mountainous areas and 27.4% in Highland meanwhile the national average is 19.9%).

The death rate of children under 1 year old (1 death/1000 birth) is high, of which Central Northern Mountainous Areas (8.5) and Highland (27.3) are experiencing the highest ratio, much higher than the national average (11.3).

Life expectancy of ethnic minority in the areas is lower than national average figure. The national average life expectancy is 72.8 years old meanwhile that in the largest ethnic minority areas (Northern Mountainous Area and Highland) is only 70 years old and 69.1 years old respectively.

1.3. Limited educational qualification among ethnic minority HR: High illiteracy rate (from 15 years old or more), especially in the Northern Mountainous Areas and the Highland areas with 12.7% and 11.3% respectively. For many ethnic minorities, the illiteracy rate among those of
over 15 years old is considerably high: Thai (18.1%); Khmer (24.4%); Mong (54%), etc. Most of 15 or over 15 years-old children only graduated from primary and junior secondary education.

86.21% of ethnic minority HR in working ages have not been trained. This figure is quite high among some ethnic minority groups such as Mong (98.7%), Khmer (97.7%), Thai (94.6%), Muong (93.3%) and Central Highland.

- In terms of professional qualification: 77.26% of those working at Provincial People Councils have graduated from universities. This figure is 45.63% for District People Councils and 5.87% for Commune People Councils. Village staff are of much poorer educational background.

1.4. Health care system has not met with requirements. Nearly 50% of health centers in extremely hard communes don’t have enough required facilities. Attention has not been paid enough to health centers at village levels. Just only 40% of commune health centers have doctors (who are sent from higher levels to work here for a certain period of time). Health human resources are commonly insufficient in remote areas, especially in the Northern West and Highland regions. Health care communication to local residents is still limited in resulting in the impossibility to control the birthrate. In some localities, giving birth to third child is still high; inbreeding marriage is still occurring.

2. Difficulties and challenges:

2.1. Limited educational quality: the rate of kindergarten enrollment, particularly among the groups of 3 to 5 years is still low. Infrastructure in many areas is still very poor. Many schools have to use temporary classrooms. The available teacher is not sufficient. Limited number of teachers meeting with requirements on professional qualification. Ethnic teachers account for only a small proportion. Culture and languages are also barriers. Education and communication to ethnic minority students are facing with many limitations. Enrollment of ethnic minority students to secondary boarding schools is very limited. Semi-boarding schools for ethnic minority students have not ensured basic facilities: lacking rooms, beds, toilets, clean water, etc. Selection of ethnic minority students for training are still facing with shortcomings: selection has not based on the actual demands and training is not suitable to the practical requirements. Many students can’t find a job after their educational completion. There are 47 ethnic minority groups enrolling at secondary level, college and university. However the enrollment rate is very low (the higher the educational level is, the lower the enrollment rate is) compared with provincial average enrollment rate.

2.2. Mountainous and midland areas: The areas have complex terrain with high and fragmented slope, scatterly-distributed population in a large area. Therefore, many students have to walk for at least 5km to go to their schools. Building infrastructure for the schools facing with difficulties due to capital-intensive requirement meanwhile enrollment rate is low due to inconvenient traffic.

2.3. Average income for ethnic minority is much lower than the average figure of provinces: the rate of poor and nearly-poor households is still high (often double the provincial average). As a result, thousands of households can’t afford to send their children to vocational training schools or colleges and universities. Age-based working structure is not appropriate in that many ethnic minority households, due to the lack of labour, many children under 17 years old have to work for earning.
2.4. Customs (particularly related to marriage, family relationship and sex) have not been paid enough attention by many ethnic minorities, particularly in ethnic minority and remote areas. Children are not encouraged to study or work in other areas rather than their living places.

2.5. Scientific technology is hardly applied in production in the ethnic minority areas. Agricultural productivity is very limited.

2.6. Communication on agro-forestry and fishery extension as well as on cultural, political and socio-economic issues in the ethnic minority areas is still very modest to improve awareness of the need for further study and application of scientific technology.

2.7. Due to specific characteristics of each ethnic group, there should be a consistency in educational purposes, targets and curriculum in the national educational system. One of the mandatory requirements is using Vietnamese. Therefore, if we don’t pay enough and appropriate attention to and have suitable solutions to both educational universalization and maintaining their cultural uniques, educational system, it is likely that we will generate “a new generation” without understanding about their own culture. We will be then “accidentally ashamed” of contributing to erase the cultural customs among ethnic minorities.

2.8. There is a shortage of both quantity and quality of teachers at all levels, including kindergarten, primary and secondary schools. Most of the teachers don’t know ethnic languages as mentioned above.

These are the shortcomings and challenges which require enough attention to address and improve quality for HR in ethnic minority areas in order to meet with requirement demands for the areas in the current context.

III. PROPOSED FUNDAMENTAL SOLUTIONS FOR HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT IN ETHNIC MINORITY AREAS

Based on the monitoring of Ethnic Council over many proposals, including those on HR in ethnic minority areas, we would like to suggest the following recommendations:

1. It is necessary to well develop the socio-economic development master plan for ethnic minority areas to underpin HR development as follows:

Based on the socio-economic development master plan for each region, it is necessary to review the HR development master plan in according with an appropriate roadmap to underpin the planning and arrangement of educational system from the kindergarten to secondary levels, including specialized schools, vocational training schools, colleges and universities.

To improve the quality of HR in ethnic minority and mountainous areas, it is required to take the following measures in a systematic manner: prioritize planning and building infrastructure in the centralized residential places. Make commitment to address the shifting cultivation and uncontrolled migration. Establish centralized residential units with over 40 households per unit (for Northern Mountainous areas). Make plans on building schools from the primary to secondary levels (primary, junior secondary and senior secondary schools) to meet with requirements of all school-aged children in ethnic minority areas. Widen kindergarten network to villages to provide educational access to universalize Kinh language to ethnic minority children before their primary education.
2. Train and increase both quantity and quality of primary teachers and managers (including kindergarten, primary and secondary education) for ethnic minority areas. Teachers at primary, kindergarten schools should be required to be able to use ethnic language.

3. Make plans and re-arrange the system of semi-boarding and boarding secondary schools

   - Currently, universalization of junior secondary education has been basically completed. Almost all of the communes have at least one junior secondary school. Therefore, it is not necessary to maintain boarding junior secondary schools at district level. Instead, the schools should be converted into semi-boarding hostels for ethnic minority children who are living more than 7km from their home and would like to pursue their higher secondary education. They can stay in such hostels and study in higher secondary schools at district level. If possible, the State should support their accommodation by one-fourth of the average allowance provided to the students studying in boarding ethnic secondary schools.

   - For boarding ethnic higher secondary schools: it is necessary to maintain and extend their scope. Firstly, in terms of student numbers, it is suggested that each boarding ethnic higher secondary school should have around 500 to 600 students. There should be two boarding ethnic higher secondary schools for the provinces of more than 250,000 ethnic minorities and three for those of more than 350,000 ethnic minorities.

   - Build and maintain semi-boarding ethnic higher secondary schools: this type of schools should be built only in the mountainous communes of more than 4,000 ha and not adjacent to commune centers.

   - In the commune centers: Semi-boarding and combined secondary schools (combining both junior and higher secondary education) should be built.

   Strengthen the Proposal on “Vocational training for rural labourers until 2020” according to the roadmap approved by the Government as this is the fastest and most effective way to integrate science and technology into agricultural production in rural areas to generate income for farmers in their off-seasons. Scholarships should be provided for ethnic minority children studying at intermediate professional schools and colleges. At the same time, it is necessary to develop the vocational training systems in combination with HR development master plan and the demand of local markets.

4. In terms of curriculum for primary schools in communes, boarding and semi-boarding ethnic higher secondary schools, the following points should be taken into consideration:

   4.1. Bi-lingual (universal and local ethnic language) for ethnic groups having their own writings: This should be applied only from class one to class four. For the localities where there is only one ethnic group, there could be some extra-class periods for class five to class seven.

   4.2. Pay attention to develop and maintain cultural customs for ethnic minorities (including dancing, singing, festivals and costumes). Encourage and inspire the feeling of being proud of their own ethnicity. Attention should be given to cultural exchange activities with students of other ethnicity to strengthen the solidarity. Encourage ethnic minority students to wear their costumes.

   4.3. Develop and sharpen the sense of respecting for common discipline among ethnic minority students. Instruct them to work and improve their living conditions, apply science and technology into production, have a sense of respect for workers.

   4.4. Pay attention to maintain sport activities to improve health.
5. For the HR development for ethnic minority areas: Based on the current policies to amend and supplement the out-of-dated policies to be suitable with all educational levels and specific conditions of each ethnic area.

In the short-term, it is necessary to revise the allowance for ethnic minority students from primary to secondary schools, in remote areas as well as in extremely hard areas. There also should be policies to build schools and provide more teachers of all levels for ethnic minority and mountainous areas.

6. Develop training curriculum for the ethnic intellectuals. Pay attention to increase quantity and quality as well as the structure of training. There should be incentive policies for training ethnic minority talents.

7. Reform the policy on recruiting ethnic minorities to universities and colleges: expand the eligibility scope for the policies with priorities given to ethnic minority groups of thin population and those with limited enrollment rate at universities and colleges (equivalent to only 1/3 of national average). Consider to extend the pre-university period (not more than 2 years) for some special subjects. Cooperate with localities, colleges, universities, professional schools to have cooperation and responsibility sharing regulation over the recruitment, training and mobilization of ethnic minority students.

Allowances should be provided to ethnic minority students in remote and extremely hard areas who have received to study at university without taking entrance exams or those taking pre-university courses.

8. Focusing on family planning communication: reduce the number of households having more than 3 children. For some small ethnic group, there should be policies to increase their physical population growth.

9. Based on the socio-economic development master plans, all the agencies from Central to grassroots levels, should strengthen the staffing planning. For the sectors related to ethnic minorities, there should be ethnic staff included in the planning. Education and training for ethnic minority has been paid attention by the Party and the State, but has not been effective enough in the reality. It should be affirmed that without a good planning of ethnic minority staffing, it is certainly impossible to develop the internal strength of ethnic minority groups in the cause of developing and protecting our republic socialist.

Regarding to staffing arrangement, I would like to request to reform the policy on staff rotation and mobilization for ethnic minority and mountainous areas. There should be a policy to rotate staff within a locality and between advanced socio-economic provinces with ethnic minority and poorly socio-economic provinces. Ethnic minority officials should be provided with training in advanced provinces and cities (then returning to their localities).

10. Strengthen communication to improve local awareness of hygiene and environmental protection. Attention should be paid to the following fields: marriage, family, reproductive health and child health; remove out-of-dated living customs which can impact on the quality of human resources.

Aforementioned are some comments of Ethnic Council to the Forum.

Thank you the Chairman./.

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