

A summary on

Ethnic Minorities in 2005

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Ethnic Minorities in 2005

1. General issues

1.1. Ethnic minorities – a picture of population and inhabitation

At present, there are 54 recognized ethnic groups inhabiting in Vietnam, in which the Kinh majority makes up 86.2% while the other 53 ethnic minority groups make up 13.8% of the total population. Ethnic minorities in Vietnam are uneven in terms of population. According to the last census, 5 groups had over a million people (Tay, Thai, Kh'mer, Muong, Hoa), and 17 groups had over 100,000 people. At the other end of the spectrum, 17 groups had less than 10,000 people and five groups with less than 1,000 (Odu, Romam, Brau, Pupeo, Sila). Under some ethnic groups, there are different subgroups with varieties in languages and cultures, and that makes the picture of ethnic minorities in Vietnam very diverse and colorful.

Ethnic minority groups inhabit in a large area and scatter widely across the country. While Hoa, Cham and Kh'mer live in the lowland and coastal lines, the other 50 groups live mostly in rural and mountainous regions, with 75% living in the Northern Mountains and the Central Highlands. And while most groups are concentrated in the actual mountains, the Thai, Muong, Tay and Nung tend to live in midlands and mountain valleys. These groups cultivate wet rice similar to the Kinh but have not yet developed non-agricultural industry so they are still mainly subsistent farmers. The most distinct characteristic of population of ethnic minorities is that they disperse and intermingle in all levels, from villages to provinces and to the whole country. In one village, there are 2 or 3 ethnic groups living together. Each ethnicity has its own cultural identity, and unity in diversity is the salient feature of multi-ethnicity culture in Vietnam.

Ethnic minorities in Vietnam, like indigenous or hill people in other countries, tend to be the “poorest of the poor” due to their distance, remoteness, and backwardness from the developed society. Almost all of them face poverty and hunger and lack access to basic services such as healthcare, education, water and sanitation.

1.2. Ethnic minorities – a picture of economic, socio-cultural and political context in 2005

1.2.1. *Economic situation*

Infrastructures

Vietnam has implemented the 10-year Social-economic Development Strategy 2001-2010 and other development programs for ethnic minorities such as the Socio-economic development program for extremely difficult communes, the socio-economic development for the Central Highlands, the Mekong Delta and 6 extremely disadvantaged provinces of northern mountainous regions. These programs had gained some achievements in providing essential infrastructure (transportation, irrigation, water, schools, health clinics, ...) and basic services for extremely disadvantaged communes, improving the ethnic living standard, preserving and maintaining the ethnic minorities culture, and so on. According to the report of the 135 programme phase 1, most of the communes locating near the economic or political areas had been out of extreme difficulty. Infrastructure system had initially satisfied the essential needs of production and living conditions: 498 inter-communal infrastructure facilities were built, of which 300 was completed, handed over, and put into operation.

However, most communes locating in faraway and remote areas had very poor infrastructure. Infrastructure, if there was, is insufficient with small size and low quality: 88 communes in ethnic minority and mountainous area did not have car road access to commune centers, 505 did not have power grid, 290 communes lacked clinics, 685 lacked telephone connection, and the most serious shortage was irrigation work. In some areas, irrigation capacity in mountainous areas only covered 6.13% of cultivation land, especially in central southern provinces and central highland (CEM report, 2005).

Living condition

Although the living condition of ethnic minorities was reported to be improved and poverty to be reduced, in 2005, poverty in disadvantaged regions was still higher than the national average. According to MOLISA, ethnic minorities accounted for 36% of total poor households nationwide in 2005. In the Northeast, the Northwest, the Central Highlands and the North Central Coast, where the majority of ethnic people inhabit, the poverty rate was 4-5 times higher than the average level of the whole country. Lives of ethnic minorities in remote, isolated and disaster prone was still very difficult. Many households had fallen back into poverty (Vietnam Achieving the Millennium Development Goals, 2005). (See table 1).

Table 1: Estimated poor households according to new poverty line in 2005

Source: MOLISA

Ethnicity	1992	1998	2005
Minorities	21.0	29.0	36.0
Kinh	79.0	71.0	64.0
Total	100	100	100

Besides, not only poverty ratio among ethnic minority groups but also the gaps between different regions and ethnic groups were increasing (See table 2). Paco, Van Kieu, and H'mong ethnic groups were among the poorest households while Tay, Nung, and Muong are more well-off. Percentage of poor households, which were close to poverty line, was rather high (CEM report).

Table 2: Estimated poor households according to new poverty line in 2005

Source: MOLISA

Region	Number of HHs (thousand)	Number of poor HHs (thousand)	Percentage
North West	432.4	312.7	72.3
North East	1,778.9	642.3	36.1
Hong Delta	4,616	914	19.8
Central Northern region	2,252	894	39.7
Central Southern costal region	1,541.6	357.6	23.3

Central Highland	899	469.5	52.2
South East	2,587.6	263.7	10.2
Mekong Delta	3,592.5	746.1	20.8
Total	17,700	4,600	26.0

Production and marketing situation

Economy is characterized by predominantly agricultural production and autarky orientation. Cultivation skills are poor and productivity is relatively low in ethnic minorities and mountainous areas. Settlement and sedentary farming were not well established. Slash-and-burn farming, nomadic dwelling and deforestation remained high in some areas. It is estimated that about 15,000 households were practicing slash-and-burn farming and nomadic dwelling; 4,000 households lived in natural disaster probing areas; and more than 20,000 households lived in nomadic pattern in protection and specialized forests (CEM report). It is difficult to explore the ethnic people's potential in enhancing the productivity by introducing high technology as their intellectual level is very low.

Market economy was rather passive and underdeveloped. It was difficult to sell products and goods, or at a very cheap price. Such constrains as high production and transportation cost, low productivity, and lack of information had posed big challenge to attract mechanised network from different economic sectors.

1.2.2. Socio-cultural situation

53 ethnic minority groups with their own cultural identities create a very vivid picture of culture in Vietnam. However, due to the assimilation of a prominent group in a community, the impact of Kinh culture, and the unavoidable effects of the social-economic development programs in ethnic and mountainous areas, some good characteristics of the ethnic minority culture are fading. Ethnic youth no longer wear their traditional clothes but enjoy Kinh clothes instead, many fail to know their ethnic language scripts, traditional legends and customs. Some ethnic minority festivals were either formalistic or commercialized to lure tourists. However, Vietnam government had tried to preserve ethnic cultures by different ways, such as building/repairing communal cultural houses, broadcasting radio and television programs in ethnic languages, promoting ethnic handicraft villages, and opening fair markets to preserve the ethnic customs. Preservation was also made through displays in ethnological museums, publications related to ethnic lives, and different festivals for ethnic groups.

Nevertheless, access to mass media, especially socio-economic development information, legal information, and technology was limited in ethnic minority areas. Social evils such as gambling, drug dealing, opium planting, superstitious practicing, women and children trafficking, HIV/AIDS, etc. among ethnic communities were still complicated (CEM report).

Access to health care services was still limited, too. The lack of clinics and skilled health workers was very common in ethnic communes. As mention above, in 2005, about 290 communes did not have clinics. Old traditional customs and distance to clinics also added to the situation of ineffective operation of clinics in mountainous areas. The maternal mortality of 170/100,000 live births mostly occurred in rural and mountainous regions, where birth delivery was unattended. In some areas, malnutrition rate of children below 5 was 40% (UNICEF Vietnam 2005 Report).

In terms of education, Vietnam government has implemented policies to assure equal access to education for ethnic children and children from disadvantaged regions through special programs. Primary school models appropriate to economic conditions of difficult regions had been experienced, and “education state bonds” to assist mountainous provinces were issued in 2005. As a result, there were some positive changes. Repetition of classes and drops out, though still high, had been reduced. 30 ethnic groups have written scripts, both ancient and Latin-based ones; 8 ethnic minority languages, including Kh’mer, Cham, Hoa, Ede, Bana, G’rai, H’mong, K’ho, were taught in 25 provinces/cities. In the school year, nearly 100,000 children and 2,200 teachers teaching and learning ethnic languages, which led to substantial reduction in the illiteracy among ethnic minorities. However, there was still big gap in quality of and access to education between mountainous regions and deltas. Ethnic minority children still experienced the ineffective teaching methodology, the shortage of teachers, the lack and primitive facilities, the limited resources for training and learning. Gender gap also remained and ethnic minority girls and women had less access to education (Vietnam achieving the millennium development goals, 2005). According to the latest survey in 2005, 19% of ethnic youth had never been to schools.

1.2.3. Political situation

Central Highlands refugees

Religious persecution and land grabs can be said to be the reasons for the Central Highlanders to leave their real homeland. After the demonstration and clashes with police in 2001 and 2004, about 700 ethnic minority people, almost all of whom were members of Dega Church, had left the Central Highlands to Cambodia, where most of them still resided by early 2005.

The refugees were settled in UNHCR (United Nations High Commission for Refugees) refugee camps in Phnom Penh. Some asked for refugee status in a third country and others asked the UNHCR to help them recover tribal lands. The Vietnamese government regarded the refugees fleeing to Cambodia as people “illegally departing the country”; and denied that they had left the country because of suppression. They maintained that the refugees were lured into Cambodia by hostile foreign forces. Some refugees said that broadcastings had promised them that UN could help to get their ancestral land back. Other refugees mentioned that they had been promised a house and money.

On 25 January 2005, Vietnam, Cambodia and UNHCR first met in Hanoi for settlement discussion and came up with an agreement on a Memorandum of Understanding, concerning 700 Vietnamese minority people under UN protection. The Memorandum required these people should either be repatriated to Vietnam or resettle in a third country. The Vietnamese government affirmed its policy to ensure no discrimination or legal action against the repatriates.

In 2005 a total of about 600 refugees went to the US, Canada and Finland. A few hundreds returned to Vietnam. Human Rights Watch reported that those who had returned to Vietnam were treated with suspicion and put under surveillance. In response, international voices insisted Vietnam on allowing foreign visitors to enter the Central Highlands. Vietnam accepted the first visit of the US Consul General in March, and in May and June two UNHCR delegations were allowed to meet returnees. They reported that they were well integrated and returning to normal life.

Religion and Ethnic Minorities

Under the Constitution of Vietnam, the freedom to belief and religion is regarded as one of the supreme rights of citizens that are respected and guaranteed by the State. However, Vietnam government has, for a long time, being criticized for violating religious freedom, especially those that are believed to be a threat to the national security. Protestantism, which has hundreds of thousand followers inhabiting in the Central Highlands and northern mountainous regions, and which is closely associated with the United States, is persecuted by security forces.

In 2005, under pressure from different humanitarian organizations and UN agencies, Vietnam government relaxed the conditions for the protestant evangelic church. Protestants are encouraged to follow their religious belief and received public support for the creating of worship places and training clerics accordingly to the eligible chapters of the Vietnam Protestant Church.

As the procedure to follow religion was simpler, the number of ethnic people, especially H'mong in northern mountainous regions and ethnic groups in the Central Highlands, participated in Protestantism increased. According to an authority, 2005 witnessed an unusual development of religion in ethnic minority communities, which posed a rather complicated challenge for Vietnam government.

Free migration.

In 2005, free migration among ethnic people, including Tay, Nung, Dao and especially H'mong people, still continued. Due to their traditional nomadic habit and the economic pressure, ethnic groups from several northern mountainous provinces such as Yen Bai, Cao Bang moved to the South-eastern and Central Highland provinces to seek for a better life. This movement was uncontrollable as ethnic people moved in small and scattered groups in order to avoid the local authorities.

This migration creates conflict in both the authority level of provinces about how to solve the problem and clashes of interest between the old settlers and the new arrivers. The government had issued policies to require the ethnic migrants to return to their home provinces and create favourable conditions for them to resettle into their communities.

1.3. Major events in 2005

Drought in the South and the Central Highlands

Serious drought, which prolonged from mid 2004 till beginning of year 2005, happened to people in the South Central and the Central Highlands, the homeland of many ethnic groups. Different measures had been discussed and given to fight against drought but the situation was very critical. Local lakes, rivers, streams and underground water sources had been close to exhaustion. According to the Irrigation Institute, there were 1,118,650 people in the shortage of water and 524,450 faced hunger in these regions by March. The prolonged drought also caused 1,148 forest fires that destroyed 5,765ha of forest and 1,500ha of natural forest.

The government had drawn 98 billion VND from state budget to launch anti-drought programs and to support provinces suffered from drought to guarantee enough clean water for people and cattle and prevent epidemics.

MMSEA IV Conference

The Mainland Mountainous South East Asia Indigenous Knowledge Fair and Conference on Sustainable Use of Natural Resources and Poverty Dialogue was organised in Sa Pa from 8-16th May 2005, parallel to the Sa Pa Tourism and Culture Week. The event brought together indigenous and ethnic minority groups together with national and international researchers, development workers and policy makers from the South-East Asian mainland, including Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia and southern China.

Organisation of MMSEA IV was led by a Vietnamese Organising Committee, working together with members of the South East Asia Indigenous Knowledge and People (IKAP) network and with local authorities in Lao Ca.

MMSEA IV was the country's first conference to involve field trips, a festival, a conference, and to actively encourage Ethnic Minority people from across the region to partake. Bringing together at least fifteen different languages, the conference was alive with colourful dress, traditional decorations and a range of experiences and perspectives. While this led to some logistical complications with respect to the number of participants and difficulties with translation, it nevertheless provided an opportunity for ethnic minority people to travel and interact amongst themselves, strengthening regional networks for poverty alleviation.

Special visits to the Central Highlands

By September UNHCR had established a programme of regular visits to ethnic people returned from Cambodia. Another US delegation visited the Central Highlands to inspect the religious situation and the returnees. The delegation reported that it appeared to be open for many Protestant groupings belonging to different chapters of Protestantism.

In November, Canadian, Norwegian, Swiss and New Zealand ambassadors paid a series of visits to DakLak, Gia Lai, and Dak Nong provinces of the Central Highlands. The delegation investigated the social, cultural and economic life of ethnic people, especially the ethnic Protestants and Christians in these provinces. The ambassadors also paid special attention to the quality of primary education for ethnic children in the provinces. According to the Vietnamese press, the delegation approved the efforts of the government in improving the socio-economic situation of ethnic people and in integrating returned people into their community.

The Festival of Cultures of Vietnam's ethnic minority groups

The festival was held for the first time in Dong Mo district, Ha Tay province from 18-20 November. The event, taken place at the culture and tourism village of Vietnamese ethnic minority groups, featured typical characteristics of traditional cultures of the minority groups with dances, folk games, cultural exchanges, and displays of traditional hand-made products and tourism activities. The festival, entitled "Vitality of Vietnam," is aimed at raising awareness of the community to preserve and promote cultural values of the nation and attract response from the international community.

Gong Tay Nguyen (Central Highlands) – a masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity

On 25 November 2005, Gong Tay Nguyen was awarded as "Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity" by UNESCO in the third Proclamation in Paris.

Gong, one of the two most valuable cultural heritages of Tay Nguyen ethnic groups, the gongs and epics, has been the distinct cultural aspect of the Central Highlands. Traditionally, Gong

culture was closely attached to the cultural history of ethnic groups living along the Truong Son range, and has been used in traditional rituals and festivals, such as funerals, house warming, new rice festival, the rain-calling festival, etc. However, due to the economic transition and the increasing investment in socio-economic development to improve the living condition, the role of Gong Tay Nguyen in ethnic cultural lives has been fading. The threat to lose this cultural masterpiece, together with Tay Nguyen epics, poses great challenge to ethnic people in the Central Highlands and Vietnam government.

A ceremony to receive the title "Oral masterpieces of Tay Nguyen gong culture as intangible cultural heritage of mankind" was held on 28 March 2006 as a sideline event of the Tay Nguyen Solidarity Congress at the end of March 2006

Construction of Son La hydroelectric plant

On December 2, the Electricity of Vietnam Corporation (EVN) began construction on the Son La hydroelectric plant on Da river in Muong La district of northern Son La province. This Son La plant would be built at an estimated cost of 36.93 trillion VND (apprx. \$ 2.5 billion), becoming one of the biggest hydroelectric plants in Southeast Asia.

It is estimated that around 91,000 people from 15 ethnic groups in Son La, Dien Bien and Lai Chau will be displaced from their native land for the dam and the reservoir site.

Preparation for the rehabilitation of displaced people had been considered since 2001. Vietnam government had made a resettlement scheme for those people and in 2005, a model for resettlement areas was established. However, this model had received some negative feedbacks. The model only focuses on economic aspect and neglects the social, cultural and environmental aspects: the living area is small, around 200-400m² for each family; houses are built with cement, concrete, and iron, which are very different from the old traditional houses and the living style that ethnic people are familiar with. Moreover, the relocation scheme faced difficulties in transporting people to resettlement areas, failing to come to an agreement about appropriate level of compensation, creating conflict of interest and favourable conditions between old and new residents.

The Ethnic minority culture Fund

Established on 30 December 2005 and sponsored by the Danish Government, the fund aims at helping ethnic minority people and artists have chance to preserve and develop their traditional ethnic values through cultural activities in their localities. The total fund for 5 years is 2 millions curon.

2. Major programs implementing in 2005

Hunger Eradication and Poverty Reduction Program (HEPR)

Began in 1998, this program coordinates and integrates a number of sectoral anti-poverty projects directed at poor households, including targeted support to ethnic minorities. This program includes targets in infrastructure, special subsidies, sedentarization and resettlement, agricultural extension, credit, health and education, and job creation. Executed by the Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA), the new HEPR plan through 2010 was being drafted during 2005.

Program 135 – Socio-economic development program for extremely difficult communes

The program 135 initiated in 1998 aims at improving the living condition of ethnic minorities people in extremely difficult areas in many socio-economic aspects. In the period 1998-2005,

it concentrates on conducting communes and inter-commune infrastructure projects, which comprise transportation, small scheme irrigation works, schools, clinics, water supply, electricity, markets, and reclamation. Executed by the State Committee for Ethnic Minorities (CEM), the total budget for the program by 2005 is VND 8,434.6 billion

The implementation of programme had brought about positive changes in the infrastructure of rural and mountainous areas. Under the program, 25,000 communal infrastructure facilities and 498 inter-communal infrastructures facilities were built, of which more than 20,000 essential facilities were put into operation. This achievement, somehow, created necessary conditions for the poverty reduction in ethnic minority and mountainous areas.

However, the program is criticised for just focusing on the building of infrastructure and failing to acknowledge the distinct social and cultural aspects of each ethnic group. The sustainability of these projects was uncertain. Some projects had not been performed effectively, which results in wastefulness.

In year 2005, Program 135 was under review and revision to develop a “Program 135- phase II” strategy for the next five years with an explicit focus on ethnic minority and the mountainous regions.

Program 134 – land allocation for ethnic minorities

From 2002-2004 the government implemented the Decision 132, which aims at solving the shortage of arable and living land on the spot for poor ethnic households in the Central Highlands. In July 2004, Decision 132 was replaced by Decision 134, which covers a broader scope: decision 134 establishes policy to give production land, living land, housing and clean water for all poor ethnic minority households across the country from the end of 2004 toward 2006.

In the year 2005, effort was put to build houses for poor ethnic families but the process was very slow. With the motto “people do, community assists, and the government supports”, Vietnamese government did not subsidy the whole cost of building houses but allocated each household 5 million VND. Therefore some houses were built in an unsettled and temporary way as ethnic people did not have enough money to build spacious and solid ones. Additionally, local governments had difficulties in finding the land fund, breaking the fresh ground, and building infrastructure system. In some area, such as in Kh’mer communities in the Mekong delta, people did not even have land to buy let alone to live.

Primary Education for Disadvantaged Children Project (PEDC project)

The overall goal of the project is to help primary school-aged children in Vietnam (including street children, disabled children, and girls in certain ethnic minority areas) to complete the full cycle of primary schooling. The project is supported by a partnership between Vietnam, the governments of Australia, Canada, Norway, the United Kingdom, and the World Bank to ensure that Vietnam meets and maintains its goal of universal primary education and also improves the quality of primary education for disadvantaged girls and boys. The total project cost is estimated as US\$244 million with the duration from 2003 – 2009.

The project covers 189 targeted districts, where approximately 70% of Vietnam's educationally disadvantaged children are living. Specific elements targeted to ethnic minorities include School Readiness for children under the age of 5, curriculum and material design for Vietnamese teachers as a Second Language, and local teaching assistant recruitment, which after a certain tenure, these assistants may be able to receive official teacher training.

After two year of implementation, nearly 400 satellite schools were built, thousands of teaching and learning materials were provided to teachers and pupils in difficult regions, the minimum quality level for primary school was set up and project criteria for education was approved and issued nation-wide.

Project 137 and the 5MHR Program - Reforestation

Decision 327 from 1993 for the Re-Greening of Barren Hills, and Decision 661 from 1998 for the 5 Million Hectare Reforestation Program (5MHRP) have guided efforts to rehabilitate degraded forest lands. Project 327 provided direct payment to households in exchange for forest protection and for State Forest Enterprises to establish forest plantations. Because of the weaknesses in Program 327, the 5MHRP was created from 1998 to 2010 to increase nation-wide forest coverage up to 43 percent of the total land cover, provide job opportunities to the rural poor and ethnic minorities and increase the supply of forest products.

Program 139 - Health and Education Subsidies

Decision 139 from 2002 established province-level Health Care Funds for the poor. These provide health cards for ethnic minorities and poor individuals, which entitle them to free medical treatment. The Vietnam government had also waived tuition and construction fees for disadvantaged children and had subsidized school supplies and boarding schools for ethnic minorities in remote locations.

Geographically targeted programs -program 168, 173, 186 and 120

Decision 168 in 2001 called for a long-term regional policy for social and economic development of the Central Highlands and set specific targets for economic development, poverty reduction, infrastructure and social services. It also addressed the need to open markets and called for teachers and health care workers to learn local languages.

Similar geographically targeted programs have also been established for other regions including the Mekong Delta Program/Decision 173, the Northern Mountains Program/Decision 186 and program for sensitive border areas/Decision 120. All these programs are for the socio-economic development in the period of 2001-2005.

Grassroot Democracy Degree

Vietnam government has strengthened administrative reforms and provided legal knowledge to poor people at all levels, especially in mountainous communes. The Government Grassroots Democracy Decree 79 aiming at popular participation in public policies and programs with the slogan “people know, people discuss, people do, and people supervise” had been implemented since 2004. According to the decree, people can exercise their democratic rights by requesting information from local government, discussing and making comments and participating in decision-making process in their communes.

In 2005, this decree continued to be applied and implemented but also revealed some problems, especially in ethnic mountainous areas. The ineffective models of GRD, language and distance barriers between local authorities and ethnic people made it difficult for local ones to understand the decree. Moreover, the widespread ideas that the ethnic minorities have ‘low capacity’ and ‘low intellectual levels’ created a huge obstacle to the participation in minority areas.

Besides the above nation-wide programs, the Committee for Ethnic Minorities also had some policies in 2005 for ethnic minority people, such as the Partial Price Subsidy policy, which financially supports the cost of seeds and seedlings, fertilizer, transportation cost for carrying

oil and salt for ethnic minorities; the development program for 5 ethnic minority groups that have very little population; and policy on supporting very poor ethnic minority households.

3. A picture of donors

Almost the entire donor community, the World Bank, UNDP, Asian Development Bank, SIDA and several other agencies and INGOs have identified ethnic minorities as one of the groups left behind in Vietnam's recent development and is in need of prior attention.

The World Bank has specific policies in all its projects affecting indigenous people to ensure that the dignity, human rights, economies, and cultures of indigenous people are fully respected in the development process. According to the policies, "the bank provides projects financially only where free, prior, and informed consultation results in broad community support to the project by the affected Indigenous People"(The World Bank Indigenous People Policy). The projects should also have measures to avoid potentially adverse effects or minimize, mitigate or compensate for the effects on indigenous people.

Since July 1st 2005, the old policy OD 4.20 has been replaced by the OP and BP 4.10 with some differences in screening for the presence of indigenous people, social assessment, consultation, and indigenous people plan. The strengthened provisions are broad community support, land and physical relocation, natural and cultural resources, and indigenous people plan.

Although other donors did not have specific policy for ethnic minorities in 2005, special attention was still given to ethnic minorities and the ethnic people were among beneficial targets of different projects sponsored by these donors.

DFID funded and cofinanced with ADB and WB in different poverty reduction and primary education programs.

SIDA had supported ethnic minorities through several programs, such as CHIASE program in Yen Bai, Ha Giang, Quang Tri; the SEMLA Program in Ha Giang, Nghe An; culture promotion program for different areas; legal aid, health cooperation program in Yen Bai, Quang Nam; and cofinanced with ADB for the Central Highlands health program. Besides, small funds, namely gender fund, environmental fund and culture fund working with various ethnic minority communities were established.

SDC carried out its projects in agroforestry/forestry and small and medium enterprises for ethnic people in Cao Bang, Hoa Binh, DakLak, and Tuyen Quang.

Ford Foundation had had a focus on poverty alleviation in the uplands of northern Vietnam, where the majority of ethnic people settle and had been concentrating on research in ethnic minority areas.

Oxfam International, in 2005, was collecting information about ethnic minorities to give a comprehensive picture of ethnic people in Vietnam and was preparing its own policies for ethnic minorities in 2006.

4. Some key legal documents related to ethnic minorities in 2005

Vietnam's policies on ethnic minorities are largely shaped and steered by the Communist Party of Vietnam. At the top, Party resolutions issued by the Politburo, Central Committee or Party Congress guide Vietnam government decisions and policy-making and the activities of the mass organizations.

The year 2005 was a year of revising current programs and planning the new ones, and therefore, not many decisions were made during this year. Some key legal decisions and circulars related to ethnic minorities in 2005 are as follows:

- Decision 15/2005/QD-TTg on 19/1/2005: The supplementary inclusion of communes into the Socio-economic development program for extremely difficult communes in remote, bordering, mountainous and ethnic areas.
- Decision 185/2005/QD-TTg on 24/3/2005: Approval of the program “Strengthen the provision of scientific and technological information for young people to serve the cause of socio-economic development in the Northern bordering and mountainous region”.
- Decision 146/2005/QD-TTg on 15/6/2005: Policy to withdraw land from state-run and afforestation farms to allocate for poor ethnic minority families.
- Decision 164/2005/QD-TTg on 4/7/2005: Approval of the program “Develop distance education in the period of 2005-2010”
- Decision 363/2005/QD-UBDT on 15/8/2005: Acknowledgement of communes, districts, and provinces to be the mountainous ones
- Decision 393/2005/QD-UBDT on 29/8/2005: Criteria to divide ethnic and mountainous areas into development levels
- Circular 218/2005/TT-UBDT on 29/3/2005: Guidelines for the assessment of communes that have fulfilled the 135 program’s objectives.
- Decision 23/2005/Q D-BNN on 7/1/2005: The exploitation of timber to support houses for ethnic households in extremely poor and difficult situation
- Joint-circular 11/2005/TTLT-BNV-BLDXH-BTC-UBDT on 5/1/2005: Guidelines for the implementation of subsidy system in different regions.
- Joint-circular 39/2005/TTLT-BTC-BKHCH on 23/5/2005: Guidelines for the financial management of the program “Establish models on the application and scientific and technological transmission to serve the cause of economic development for rural and mountainous areas from now on till 2010”

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