

Ethnic Minorities

First Quarter 2006

1. Current issues:

- ❖ **March 30: Government conference** on measures to boost the Northern Mountainous region's socio-development

During the conference, how to increase the living standards of ethnic minority people, as usual, was given as the motto for discussion. The need to preserve the traditional cultures of ethnic groups, to provide sufficient and educational and healthcare services to local communities, and to build roads, irrigation, schools, and clinics for local residents was the main topics for discussion.

The conference also set a goal of reducing the poverty rate of this region by 2.5 – 3% annually towards 2010.

- ❖ **The project "In Support of Poverty Reduction in Vietnam"**

Granted by the Germany Technical Cooperation Agency (GTZ), the project was finalized in Hanoi on March 14. The project will be carried out in 12 villages of three provinces representing three regions considered to be the poorest in the country. One of them is the northern mountainous province of Hoa Binh, the second is the central coastal province of Thanh Hoa and the other is the Central Highlands province of Dak Lak. In the three-year term beginning in 2006, the project aims to help the target provinces developing concrete policies on poverty reduction and to improve the capacity of the staff working for poverty alleviation at the grassroots level.

- ❖ **Central Highlands Ethnic Minority Groups' Solidarity Congress**

The congress was held in Pleiku city, Gia Lai province on 28-29 March. It celebrated the 60th anniversary of President Ho Chi Minh's letter to the Congress of Ethnic Groups on April 19, 1946. Attending the Congress was 500 representatives of ethnic groups and high-ranking officials from the Communist Party and government.

The Congress, according to a Vietnam newspaper, is an occasion to enhance solidarity among all ethnic groups, based on the principles of equality and mutual assistance for further development in general. In particular, it is hoped to enhance cooperation among organizations/agencies and people to create a dynamic economic zone for the central region and to improve the living standards of ethnic minorities.

At the end of the Congress, there was a celebration for the Central Highlands Gong culture to receive the title "masterpiece of oral and intangible cultural heritage of mankind", awarded by UNESCO in November 2005.

- ❖ **Approval of the SEDEMA and HERP programs**

On 10 January, the SEDEMA/ 135 program phase 2 was officially approved after a series of consultative meetings with the government, agencies, mass organizations, and donors. Committee of Ethnic Minorities was appointed to continuously execute the program and now is in the process of preparing the draft guidelines for implementing the program.

The National Programme for Hunger Eradication and Poverty Alleviation, which phased out in 2005, was extended into a second phase in early 2006. According to Minister of MOLISA, the state will invest around US\$ 4 billion from now till 2010 to fight against

poverty. This National Programme will prioritize mountainous areas and provide funds for developing infrastructure in poor coastal and island communities.

❖ **Seminar on 15 year of preserving and developing ethnic culture on 7 March**

The seminar summed up all efforts in support to the preserving ethnic cultural traditions/costumes and improving the cultural life of ethnic communities during the past 15 years.

Some of the achievements are the preservation and promotion of outstanding tangible and intangible cultural heritages of ethnic groups, especially the recognition of Gong culture as a masterpiece of oral and intangible cultural heritage of mankind; the restoring of folk and traditional festivals of ethnic groups, for example the Kate festival of the Cham in Ninh Thuan, the Gau Tao festival of H'mong in Lao Cai, Long Tong festival of the Tay Nung in Lang son; the reconstruction of the 'rong' houses in the Central Highlands; the upgrading of ethnic temples and pagodas; the printing of ethnic epics, and so on.

The seminar also pointed out the necessary to preserve and promote cultural values that are being lost, including cultures of Bo Y, Si la, Khang, La Ha, Xinh, Mun and Odu ethnic groups.

❖ **Irrigation infrastructure in Son La (March)**

Eight irrigation projects, including a reservoir and irrigation systems will be constructed in disadvantaged districts of Yen Chau, Tuan Chau, Song Ma, and Phu Yen in Son La province. With the aims of supplying water for the modernised irrigation system and providing clean water for inhabitants of the province, the project hopes to improve the incomes and living conditions of the people in the region.

The project, estimated at 15.5 million euros, was co-financed by the French Development Agency, Son La province and local beneficiaries.

2. Legal documents

- Decision 07/2006/QD-TTg on 10/1/2006: Approval of the Socio-economic development program for extremely difficult communes and ethnic people in mountainous areas in the period of 2006-2010.
- Document 42/CTPH/UBDT-VHTT on 19/1/2006: Program to reinforce the culture preservation and development for ethnic minorities in the period of 2006-2010.
- Decision 34/2006/QD-TTg on 8/2/2006: Approval the program on training and fostering ethnic cadres at grassroot level in the period of 2006-2010.
- Decision 56/QD-TTg: Reinforce cadres to work in ethnic and mountainous districts and communes
- Decree 23/2006/ND-CP on 3/3/2006: Regulation on the implementation of Forest protection and development law