

Ethnic Minorities

Second Quarter 2006

1. General information

Hunger eradication and poverty alleviation

Poverty alleviation was carried out in every corner of rural region with a focus on ethnic inhabited areas. During the poverty fight, different initiatives were made to help ethnic people escape from extremely difficulties.

Borrowing loans for family's own business is seen as a traditional and an effective way to combat poverty. In Ia Grai, Gia Lai, poor households can borrow loans from the Bank of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Social Policy Banks. Besides, there had been the movement of receiving loans from well-off households. Together with this, thanks to the women association, women could receive training courses on different topics on tree plantation, cultivation and animal raising. Poor households have become confident enterprising farmers, who raise animals and grow tree to increase their living standards.

Another way to help poor people to escape poverty is to explore and exploit local specialities. In Son La, "tao meo" (a variety of local apple) was rediscovered as a source of raw material for wine-making industry. As "tao meo" tastes sweet and sour, it can be made into an aromatic and sweet smelling red wine. The exploitation of tao meo in local communities as well as potential of using ethnic labour in wine processing plant is very promising.

In Ca Tang hamlet in the northern province of Ha Giang, a farmer grew elephant grass successfully to feed his livestock on the rocky hillside terrain of the mountain, the land that in the past could only covered by corn. Abundant amount of grass makes H'mong cows fatter and that makes growing grass more profitable than growing corn. This is a good model for other people in the community to follow.

In terms of education, the government and many provinces had paid much attention to the development of the education and training in ethnic-inhabited areas. In Tra Vinh province, the system of schools was fundamentally improved, more ethnic children had opportunity to go to school, more subjects were taught; Khmer ethnic pupils are studying Vietnamese and Khmer languages. In the Central Highlands, the PEDC continued to prove its usefulness and effectiveness. The program made a remarkable difference in Kon Tum educational system: new schools were built, children could attend school regularly, teachers received training course to improve the quality of education, studying equipment and facilities were provided. During the second quarter, 363 classrooms were being built in poverty-stricken areas in Gia Lai so as to be ready for the new academic year.

To help young ethnic people approach to information and advanced technology, the Ministry of Science and technology had implemented e-library project in northern provinces. By the end of June, an e-library was launched in several districts in Dien Bien.

In terms of health, support was given to faraway communes in terms of modern equipments, facilities and rooms in health clinics. Under program 139, poor ethnic people received free health checks, treatment, and information to increase their awareness of the essential of healthcare. However, not many ethnic people could get access to healthcare because they live far from the centre and did not have enough money or condition to travel.

In late May, a group of doctors and nurses from Vietnam Family Medical Practice, in collaboration with the Embassy of Israel in Vietnam and the Vietnam Fatherland Front, visited Kon Ray District in Kon Tum to conduct free health checks and treatments. Besides offering free treatments to ethnic people and transferring patients to hospitals in HCM city with free of charge, the team delivered a large amount of general supplies and foodstuffs directly to local people.

Drought in the Central Highlands

Like previous years, drought attacked farmers of the Central Highland in the second quarter of the year. Farmers and crops in the Central highland were facing a destructive drought and farmers were in danger of losing many hectares of cultivated crops this year. The scorching heat had made reservoirs, streams and irrigation canals drying and the shortage of water for watering the crops was clearly to be seen.

Concerns over the returnees in the Central Highlands

Once again, the Human Rights Watch accused Vietnamese authorities of continuing to persecute ethnic minority people in the Central Highlands, who had come back from Cambodia. The Human Rights Watch reported that Vietnamese authorities had detained, interrogated, and even tortured Central Highland ethnic refugees and asylum seekers. It also urged the UN High Commission for Refugees to have close observation on Vietnam government's treatment to returned refugees and called on the US government to consider Vietnam as a country of Particular Concern for religious freedom violations. In response, the UNHCR rejected the Human Rights Watch's accusations and made repeated public statement that the refugees were under "no particular threat or duress", and the UNHCR had "no serious concerns" about Vietnam government's treatment on the refugees.

According to the latest data, 95.2 percent of 750 ethnic minority Central Highlanders had returned to Vietnam from Cambodia.

2. Events

Khmer Chaul Chnam Thmey (New Year's Day)

April witnessed the celebration of the Khmer Chaul Chnam Thmey (New Year's Day) in the Cuu Long (Mekong) Delta provinces. For the three days of Chaul Chnam Thmey, Khmer people in the delta took a break from farming and celebrated the festival. The festival could be seen as the threshold of a new raining season that Khmer people were waiting for.

UNHCR delegation visited the Central Highlands

In April 26-28, one UNHCR delegation paid a visit to several localities in the Central Highlands and met a number of ethnic people who were repatriated from Cambodia. The delegation reported that the returnees were neither punished nor discriminated for migrating illegally and were supported by Vietnam government to reintegrate into their community.

Voice of Vietnam (VOV) launched its broadcast in the Dao ethnic language

Radio the Voice of Vietnam (VOV) launched its broadcast in the Dao ethnic language on 7 May to disseminate policies of the party and the state to the Dao community and other ethnic minority groups. This is the 10th programme of the VOV for ethnic minority groups. The broadcasting stations are in the mountains of Quan Ba (Ha Giang province), Sin Ho (Lai Chau province), Mau Son (Lang Son province) and Pha Din (Son La province).

Festival of ethnic groups in the Central and South-eastern regions

The first cultural festival of ethnic groups in the Central and South-eastern regions opened in Tuy Hoa city, Phu Yen province, on June 16 with the participation of more than 500 artists, artisans and athletes from cities and provinces in the regions.

The four-day event included art performances, traditional festivals, ethnic costume shows, cultural exchanges, culinary contests and folk games. During the festival, together with a seminar on "Preservation and Development of Traditional Culture", there were exhibitions on 54 ethnic groups and cultural heritage in the central and south-eastern regions.

Art performance of H'mong ethnic group villages in Lao Cai

The third art performance of H'mong ethnic villages took place in Lao Cai from June 25-27 with the participation of 29 H'mong ethnic troupes from 9 districts and Lao Cai city. The art performance was to preserve and promote folk culture of H'mong ethnic people and to consolidate art troupes in village cultural communal houses. Also, this performance was the preparation for the "Cultural days of H'mong ethnic group", which would be held in Son La in September 2006

3. Projects

Projects to eradicate hunger and poverty and improve living standard of ethnic people:

Child protection and child trafficking prevention project

In April, SCUUK launched a three-year project on setting up networks to disseminate information on child protection and child trafficking prevention in Bac Giang, Quang Ninh, Dong Thap and Ca Mau. The project particularly pays attention to under-15 children, the disadvantaged, ethnic minority children and those who do not attend school.

Electricity supply project

A project to supply electricity to households in 1200 hamlets and villages in five Central Highlands' provinces was approved in May. This project, which will be carried out from 2006-2008, was hoped to raise the rate of households having access to the national grid to improve the spiritual lives and promote socio-economic development in the Central Highlands region.

Training centre for ethnic minority midwives

The first training centre for ethnic minority midwives opened in the last week of May at Ho Chi Minh city's Tu Du Obstetrics Hospital. This was an effort to elevate reproductive knowledge for ethnic minority midwives and reduce the infant mortality rate in mountainous regions.

The centre was developed by Tu Du Hospital with funding of US \$459,000 from UK-based pharmaceutical company GlaxoSmithKline Viet Nam. The project began in late 2004 and aims to train 500 ethnic midwives from the 54 ethnic minority groups.

Kuwait Fund for Irrigation project

On 29 May, Vietnam received a loan of US\$ 11.6 million from Kuwait Fund to carry out a two year Irrigation project in Dak Lak. The project aims at increasing water reserves in the region and helping ethnic farmers to access advanced techniques in agricultural production. Under the project, small and medium-scale irrigation works would be built in 12 districts of the province and the neighbouring areas of Buon Ma Thuot City.

The works would provide irrigation for 5,000ha of rice and coffee and 1,000ha of reservoirs which would serve aquaculture production.

Flash flood warning stations

The first two flash flood warning stations in Vietnam were established in Thach Ban district, Thanh Hoa province in June. These stations have two main functions: measure rain and keep records of rainfall for scientific research and warning purposes. If flash floods happen, the system will automatically sound the alarm from the first to the third level in accordance with the danger of the flash flood. The installation of flash flood warning stations will help 7,800 local people actively mitigate the hazards of this natural disaster.

Forestland allocation project in Kon Tum

A forestland allocation project aiming to benefit 2,300 ethnic minority households in KonTum province was just to commence in June. It allocated forestland for ethnic minority households and provides people with technical training and loans. It also aims to increase the public awareness about the Law on Forest Protection and Development. Started from this year to 2010, the project was estimated to cost 1.78 million USD and expected to develop nearly 51,300 ha of forest when it completes.

Forestry development programme in the Central Highlands

A new forestry development programme to fight poverty and protect the environment in the Central Highlands received approval from the government in June.

The 8-year project focuses on reducing the number of poor ethnic households, and enhancing the management capacity and forest production skills of the community. Besides, better access to infrastructure such as transport, clean water, irrigation, healthcare, and cultural houses would also be paid attention to.

The project was estimated to cost 83.98 million USD, covering 60 communes in 22 districts of 6 provinces, including Kon Tum, Gia Lai, Dak Lak, Dac Nong, Lam Dong and Phu Yen.