

The Reality of Hunger and Poverty Among Khmer People in The Mekong Delta Region

VU NU TU QUYEN, TRAN BA PHAN

Nanjing University of Science and Technology, Nanjing, China

Abstract: Today, hunger and poverty are not only national problems but also global problems. In Vietnam, our party regards eradicating hunger and reducing poverty as goals throughout the country's economic and social development process. Poverty eradication is a fundamental factor in ensuring social justice, enhancing sustainability, creating material strength, and providing opportunities to support poor people in getting out of poverty. This is clearly reflected in the principles and policies of the Party Congress on eradicating hunger and reducing poverty. Recently, at the 13th National Congress, our party declared: "Focus on the development of hunger eradication and poverty reduction in remote areas and extremely poor areas. Diversification of resources and means of poverty reduction, linked to agricultural and rural development, educational development, vocational training and job creation, to eradicate hunger and reduce poverty sustainably." In the Ten-Year Socio-Economic Development Strategy (2011-2020), the task of "implementing poverty reduction policies more effectively" is determined, poverty alleviation is adapted to different periods, diversifying resources and methods, ensuring sustainable poverty reduction, especially in the poorest areas and extremely poor areas, encouraging the enrichment of the people and the government in accordance with the law, and narrowing the Policies and solutions to the wealth gap. The Mekong Delta is an area with a large Khmer population, with approximately 1,201,691 people, accounting for 6.93% of the region's population. The provinces with the largest Khmer population are Soc Trang (397,014 people), Tra Vinh (318,288 people), Kien Giang (213,310 people), and An Giang (91,018 people). There are approximately 400,000 poor households in the region, of which more than 72,000 are Khmer poor households (ranking the highest proportion of ethnic minority poor households in the region). Faced with this situation, it is very important to study and understand the hunger and poverty problems of the Khmer people, and is of great significance to the country's overall development strategy, especially the development strategy of the Mekong Delta region

Keywords: Poverty alleviation policy, Vietnam, Mekong Delta region.

1. Research Scope, Space and Time

The project targets poor Khmer people in Tra Vinh and Soc Trang provinces. Within these two provinces, three areas were selected for interviews: Tra Cu district and Tieu Can district in Tra Vinh province and Vinh Chau town in Soc Trang province. These two provinces were selected for the study because they are two provinces with concentrated Khmer populations in the Mekong Delta. The total number of interview questionnaires in the two provinces was 150 (50 households in each survey area).

In addition, in order to provide a basis for income comparison between poor households, quasi-poor households and well-off households, this study also conducted a survey on 100 Khmer near-poor households and 50 Khmer well-off households (data collection, research and analysis 2021-2022).

2. Results and Discussion

2.1. The reality of hunger and poverty among Khmer people in the Mekong Delta

The Khmer people live concentratedly in nine provinces and cities in the Mekong Delta. According to data from the local ethnic minority committees of the Third Division, as of 2022, the Khmer population in nine provinces and cities was 1,198,499, accounting for 10.6% of the total population. Accounting for 6.9% of the population of the 13 provinces and cities in the Mekong Delta. However, in terms of the above-mentioned population size, more than 90% of the Khmer people live in rural, remote, difficult, and extremely

poor areas; only a small number of people live in urban areas. According to the criteria for poor and quasi-poor households in Prime Minister's Decision No. 09/2018/QĐ-TTg of January 30, 2018 (New Poverty Standards for 2018-2022), the overall poverty rate and Khmer poor households in each province of the Mekong Delta The proportion is quite high, with Soc Trang and Tra Vinh provinces having the highest proportion of Khmer poor households among other provinces in the region. The proportion of Khmer poor households in Tra Vinh and Soc Trang provinces accounts for a larger proportion of the total number of poor households in the province, 52.2% and 43.4% respectively.

2.2. Understand the current poverty situation through surveys of Khmer families

2.2.1. Overview of Tra Cu district, Tieu Can district and Vinh Chau town

Tra Cu District: Tra Cu is a poor and remote area in Tra Vinh Province. There are 17 communes, 2 towns, and 160 villages in the region. The natural area is 36,992 hectares, of which 31,261 hectares are agricultural land, accounting for 84.5% of the natural area. The district has a population of 176,256 people (44,610 households), of which 109,024 are Khmer, accounting for 61.9% of the district's population. According to the census results of poor and quasi-poor households at the end of 2021, the total number of poor households in the region was 14,515 (55,925 people), accounting for 33.3%, of which 10,540 were Khmer poor households, accounting for 72,000 poor households, accounting for 6 of the total poor households. %; there are 7,006 households (29,957 people) near poverty, accounting

for 16.1%, among which 5,120 Khmer households are near poverty, accounting for 73.1% of the total near poverty households in the region. (Source: Tra Cu District People's Committee, 2022).

Tieu Can District: Tieu Can is a rural area in Tra Vinh Province. The whole region governs 9 communes, 2 towns, and 89 villages. The natural area is 22,178 hectares, including 13,500 hectares of agricultural land. There are 27,287 households in the district, including 8,744 Khmer households, accounting for 32% of the district's population. There are 4,972 poor households (19,334 people) in the district, accounting for 18.2%, of which 2,132 are Khmer poor households, accounting for 42.9% of the total poor households in the district; 2,640 near-poor households (10,828 people), accounting for 9.8%, of which There are 1,172 Khmer households near poverty, accounting for 44.4% of the total near-poor households in the region. (Source: Tieu Can District People's Committee, 2022).

Vinh Chau Town: Vinh Chau Town was recognized as a town in February 2018 and is a poor county in Soc Trang Province. The total natural area is 47,339 hectares and the population is 168,766. The town has jurisdiction over 04 districts, 06 communes, and 91 villages. There are 12,505 poor households in the town, accounting for 33.9% of the households. Among them, there are 8,259 Khmer poor households, accounting for 66.0% of the total poor households in the town; 4,877 near-poor households, accounting for 13.2% of the total rural households, of which 2,659 Khmer households are near-poor, accounting for 54.5% of the total near-poor households. . (Source: Vinh Chau Town People's Committee, 2022).

2.2.2. Survey on the current situation of poverty among Khmer families in three districts and towns

Population structure by age: Through a survey of 745 people in 150 households in 3 districts and towns, 182 people were under working age, accounting for 24.4%, 59.9% were under working age, and 59.9% were over working age. The number of workers is 117, accounting for 15.7%. If we look at each region, the total proportion of the population below working age and above the working age accounts for about 40% of the total surveyed population. Therefore, in terms of age, there are quite a number of people below and above working age. What is interesting is that among the population above working age, there are many people who are sick due to malnutrition, fatigue and fatigue, and there is a lack of medical expenses. . This reflects the high dependence and burden placed on poor Khmer families by the elderly and sick.

Educational attainment by age and gender: The survey results of 150 poor Khmer households with 745 people show that: the proportion of illiterate people and those with higher primary school education is higher (41.7% and 45.1% for males respectively); while People with secondary school education and above accounted for only 13.2% of the total population surveyed. Among them, 19.7% are illiterate women under 15 years old, 17.4% are in primary schools, and 3.0% are in middle schools; 22.0% are illiterate women over 55 and 60 years old, 27.7% are in primary schools, and 10.2% are in middle schools. The results show that working-age workers among the poor Khmer have received little training and a high proportion of illiterate people. Even among the literate working-age population, educational attainment is low and concentrated at the primary level.

Although in recent years, through the support plans and policies of the state and social organizations, investment in

sports facilities serving education and training has increased significantly, creating better conditions for schooling. However, the dropout rate and the number of people staying only in primary and secondary education remain high. The main reason is that they are unable to complete their studies due to financial difficulties and must work to supplement their family income. In addition, their learning opportunities are also limited by factors such as being older than the class they attend, being ill, and having limited access to information.

A survey of poor Khmer families shows that low education levels are one of the reasons for their low and unstable income. Their workers are mainly simple workers with no skills or qualifications, are not qualified for employment, and have very limited access to information. As a result, their jobs are unstable and their incomes are unstable. This is a great hardship for workers, permanently trapping them in a cycle of poverty.

Current occupation (main job): In the employment structure of 150 poor Khmer households (625 people, some of whom have not reached working age), the survey shows that Khmer people are engaged in the agricultural sector (planting rice, vegetables), breeding (cattle farming), chicken, duck, etc.) etc. Agricultural sector workers accounted for 33.9%, wage workers accounted for 54.2%, and the rest were concentrated in other occupations. This situation is also one of the factors that explain the many difficulties faced by the Khmer people in the area, because: for agricultural production workers, the biggest difficulties are input and output prices, unstable production, coupled with natural disasters and pests and diseases, has occurred continuously in recent years, affecting the income of farmers; it is also difficult for hired workers. According to analysis, most workers have low levels of education and professional knowledge, mainly from farming, so they are often unable to meet the employment requirements of the employer. At the same time, their labor level is also lower. Differences in academic qualifications and professional knowledge also partly affect employees' perceptions, lack of employment goal orientation, and low attachment to work, leading to frequent job-hopping and job-hopping. In addition, employed workers often rely on physical strength and have poor living conditions and limited medical care. Therefore, after a certain age and poor health, they are unable to meet their needs. The possibility of unemployment is high and there are few opportunities to apply for new jobs.

Current status of household facilities: Through a survey of the existing facilities of poor Khmer households, including housing, land, production facilities, production machinery, etc., the survey shows that most poor Khmer households have simple houses. These houses were built mainly with the support of national policies, but they are simple in structure, built with temporary materials, and are unstable.

Survey data show that households lack production facilities, with respondents explaining that it is beyond their means to ensure food and clothing, so having production facilities is out of the question.

In terms of the number of households with productive land, the survey shows that the proportion is low, with the highest in Tieu Can District (accounting for 46% of households owning productive land among 50 households) and the lowest in Vinh Chau Town (accounting for only 50 households out of 50). 11 households own production land). However, most poor households own small-scale production land (500-1000 square meters), typically in Tieu Can District. The number of

households with production land is the highest among the three survey areas, but the number of households with small-scale production land is the highest among the three survey areas. Families account for 95.7% of the total number of farmers who own production land. Reasons for this situation include previous land transfer mortgages and the division of production land to children when they get married and become independent. Insufficient or insufficient funds for families to expand land cultivation is one of the reasons why the poor Khmer people in these areas have a higher proportion of migrant workers, and it is also one of the consequences of their low income.

In terms of production machinery, survey data show that poor farmers in these areas mainly use simple labor tools (farm tools). A few poor Khmer families own some water pumps, lawn mowers and other machinery, which are used for household production services or for other families. live. Due to poverty and lack of sufficient conditions to equip production machinery, productivity and labor efficiency are low. This is also one of the important problems that need to be solved by the majority of poor households, especially the poor households of ethnic minorities in the Mekong Delta region.

Per capita income: According to the poverty line standards of the Prime Minister's Decision No. 09/2018/QĐ-TTg, the standards for poor and quasi-poor households from 2018 to 2022, a survey of 150 poor households showed that the per capita income of the family is low, at 345,300 VND/person/month, there are also large differences within low-income families. Among them, the highest income group is VND 435,000/person/month, which is 2.19 times that of the lowest income group.

The study also investigated 100 Khmer households near poverty and 50 well-off households, and found that there are large income differences among poor households, near-poor households and well-off households. Survey data shows that the average income of 100 near-poor households (459 people) is 520,900 VND/person/month, while the average income of 50 households (164 people) in wealthy households is 1,158,700 VND/person/month. Considering the average income gap between poor households and quasi-poor households as well as moderately well-off households, there is a considerable difference. The average income of wealthy households is 3.4 times that of poor households and 2.2 times that of quasi-poor households; the average income of quasi-poor households is 1.5 times that of poor households.

Changes in family living standards: When asked about changes in family economic life compared with five years ago,

51 households of 150 households in three districts and towns said the situation was better, accounting for 34%; 32 households said the situation was better. Poor, accounting for 21.3%; 58 households said there was no change, accounting for 38.7%; 9 households said it was difficult to evaluate, accounting for 6%. This reflects people's evaluation of poverty reduction efforts, and also shows that the reality of poverty and the possibility of returning to poverty are still high.

3. Conclusion

The survey analysis shows that there are still many difficulties and limitations in the lives of the Khmer people in the Mekong Delta region, especially in the two provinces studied. This will become a major obstacle to the socio-economic development of the Mekong Delta region, especially for ethnic minorities, and is also a factor that needs to be addressed in the process of eliminating hunger and reducing persistent poverty in the region. Therefore, it is very important and necessary to find an appropriate set of solutions to effectively reduce poverty among the poor in the Mekong Delta, especially the Khmer poor. Simultaneous and flexible implementation of several sets of solutions proposed is the condition, foundation and key to implement the socio-economic development strategy of the delta and the Khmer minority areas of the Mekong River in the period of innovation and international integration.

References

- [1] Communist Party of Vietnam, 2021. Documents of the 11th National Congress, National Political Publishing House.
- [2] Decision No. 09/2018/QĐ-TTg, Decision: On promulgating standards for poor and near-poor households applicable for the period 2018 - 2022, issued by the Prime Minister, January 30, 2018.
- [3] General Statistics Office, Statistical Yearbook, 2022.
- [4] People's Committee of Tieu Can district, 2022. Summary report on the current situation of hunger and poverty of the People's Committee of Tieu Can district.
- [5] People's Committee of Tra Cu district, 2022. Summary report on the current situation of hunger and poverty of the People's Committee of Tra Cu district.
- [6] Vinh Chau Town People's Committee, 2022. Summary report on the current situation of hunger and poverty of Vinh Chau Town People's Committee.