

Solutions for Building a Team of Ethnic Minority Cadres in the Mountainous Areas of Nghe An Province, Vietnam

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Abstract: *The article focuses on analyzing the current situation and proposing solutions to establish a contingent of ethnic minority cadres in the mountainous areas of Nghe An province, one of the localities with a large ethnic minority population, a vast area, and a strategic position in terms of national defense and security. Based on the theoretical approach to representative governance and sustainable development, combined with analysis of policy documents, statistics and expert interviews, the study shows that; although the contingent of ethnic minority cadres in Nghe An has improved in quantity, it is still limited in quality, unevenly distributed, the rate of holding leadership positions is still low, especially lacking female cadres and young cadres. The causes stem from both objective (geographical, educational, and social conditions) and subjective (unsynchronized policies, and a lack of mechanisms for generating and utilizing resources effectively). On that basis, the article proposes 5 solutions, including (1) perfecting policies and directing the work of ethnic minority cadres; (2) creating sources and innovating recruitment; (3) improving capacity through training and fostering; (4) arranging and planning for reasonable use; (5) improving remuneration. The study has important practical implications for the development of ethnic minority cadres not only in Nghe An but also in other mountainous provinces in Vietnam.*

Keywords: *Ethnic minority cadres, Nghe An; mountainous areas; ethnic policies; human resource development.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The mountainous area of Nghe An province accounts for over 83% of the province's total area, with 248 communes and nearly 3,800 villages and hamlets, and is home to over 490,000 ethnic minorities, belonging to 6 main ethnic groups such as Thai, H'Mong, Kho Mu, O Du, Tho and Hoa. Ethnic minorities here are not only an organic part of the provincial community but also an important force contributing to protecting national border sovereignty, maintaining security and defense, developing the economy in difficult areas, and preserving national cultural values. In the context of sustainable development and deep integration, the role of ethnic minority cadres becomes increasingly crucial, because they are the bridge between the Party, the government and the people, the ones who directly organize the implementation of policies in the locality and promptly reflect the voices and legitimate aspirations of ethnic minorities to the State (Ha et al., 2024)

Ethnic minority cadres have the advantage of understanding local culture, language, beliefs, and customs, and are an indispensable factor in ensuring the suitability and effectiveness of state administration, especially in areas with concentrated ethnic minority populations (Hai et al., 2023). However, in Nghe An province, although the number of ethnic minority cadres has increased in recent years, there are still many shortcomings: uneven quality, lack of ethnic minority cadres holding key positions, the proportion of female or young ethnic minority cadres is still very low, and some provincial agencies do not have ethnic minority representatives. Specifically, by 2023, ethnic minority cadres and civil servants will account for about 13.3% of the total number of cadres and civil servants in the province, approaching the ethnic minority proportion in the population of 14.8%. They are mainly concentrated at the commune level in mountainous areas, with a serious shortage at the provincial level.

The above situation raises urgent requirements for innovation in thinking and action in developing human resources and ethnic minority cadres, especially in the context that Vietnam is implementing key strategies such as the National Target Program for Socio-Economic Development in Ethnic Minority

and Mountainous Areas (2021–2030 period), Resolution No. 26-NQ/TW in 2018 of the Central Executive Committee on building cadres at all levels, and the Ethnic Work Strategy to 2030, vision 2045 according to Decision No. 1657/QĐ-TTg in 2022. These documents all emphasize the need to prioritize planning, training, fostering, arranging, and using ethnic minority cadres, while at the same time linking the development of this team to ensure the right to participate in state management of ethnic communities, as a concrete manifestation of social justice and representative governance.

Research by domestic and foreign scholars has shown that a team of ethnic minority cadres with sufficient capacity, political will, and moral qualities will play an important role in improving the quality of institutions, strengthening the effectiveness of state management, and contributing to preserving traditional cultural values in modern development. At the same time, the presence of ethnic minority cadres in management positions also helps to increase the trust of ethnic communities in the government, creating conditions for the implementation of ethnic policies more effectively and transparently. However, to build such a team, it is necessary to have a system of synchronous solutions from the source creation stage (education, recruitment), to recruitment, training, fostering, planning, use, and remuneration. The development of ethnic minority cadres must also ensure not only quantity but also quality and distribution, creating conditions for ethnic minority cadres to participate substantially in the management apparatus at all levels, especially in areas with a large population (Hang & Chien, 2023).

Based on the above practical requirements, this article aims to comprehensively analyze the current situation of ethnic minority cadres in the mountainous areas of Nghe An province, thereby proposing appropriate solutions to improve the quality, quantity, and effectiveness of this team. Based on the method of policy analysis, document synthesis, expert interviews and descriptive statistics, the article consists of 6 parts (1) Introduction to the problem; (2) Research overview and theoretical basis; (3) Research methods; (4) Current situation of ethnic minority cadres in Nghe An; (5) Solutions for sustainable development of ethnic minority cadres; and (6) Conclusions and policy recommendations. Through that, the study not only contributes to clarifying the specific situation of Nghe An but also brings valuable governance implications for other mountainous provinces and ethnic minority areas across the country.

2. LITERATURE OVERVIEW

In modern public administration, building a team of civil servants that is representative in terms of ethnicity, region, and gender is one of the criteria for assessing the capacity for effective and fair state governance. Theories of “representative bureaucracy” emphasize that the presence of ethnic minority officials in the public apparatus not only demonstrates the principle of democracy but also enhances the effectiveness of policy implementation thanks to the understanding and cultural sharing between officials and the people. In particular, in areas where ethnic minorities live in concentration, the team of indigenous officials plays a key intermediary role between the government and the community, directly conveying the Party's policies and the State's laws and policies to the people and reflecting the people's aspirations to higher levels.

From the perspective of sustainable development, the development of ethnic minority cadres also plays a decisive role in implementing inclusive development goals, ensuring that all ethnic groups have the opportunity to participate in the development process, reducing inequality, and enhancing the autonomy of ethnic minority communities. The lack of ethnic minority representation in the leadership and management apparatus in mountainous areas can increase the risk of losing trust in the government, reducing the effectiveness of policy implementation, especially policies specific to ethnic minority areas (Huong, 2021).

In the world, many studies have analyzed the relationship between the participation of indigenous people and minorities in the political-administrative system and the level of local governance effectiveness. In the United States, it shows that indigenous communities that are self-governing and have indigenous cadres often achieve higher socio-economic efficiency. In India, a flexible administrative model has been applied to increase the proportion of ethnic minorities in the public apparatus, thereby enhancing the connection between policies and community needs. In Thailand and the Philippines, programs such as the selection of indigenous civil servants or the training of cadres in mountainous areas have also been implemented to promote multicultural governance.

In Vietnam, the cadres of ethnic minorities have received early attention from the Party and State, especially after Resolution No. 24-NQ/TW dated March 12, 2003, of the 9th Party Central Committee on ethnic affairs. The Resolution stated that there must be a plan to train, foster, and reasonably use ethnic minority cadres, linked to the planning of cadres at all levels. On that basis, the Government issued Decision No. 402/QD-TTg dated March 14, 2016 approving the Project on developing the contingent of ethnic minority cadres, civil servants and public employees in the new period, setting the goal of increasing the proportion of ethnic minority cadres in state administrative agencies at all levels by the population structure and local characteristics.

Recent research works by Van Tuan et al. (2023) have emphasized that the contingent of ethnic minority cadres not only contributes to promoting ethnic policies into practice, but is also an important factor in maintaining political stability and strengthening national solidarity. However, the studies also pointed out many shortcomings, such as weak cadre source creation, low training quality, limited promotion opportunities, and policies on allocating and using ethnic minority cadres are still formalistic and inconsistent between localities (Van Tuan et al., 2023). Some studies in the Northwest and Central Highlands regions show a shortage of ethnic minority cadres at the department level, and the proportion of ethnic minority cadres holding leadership positions is still low, especially among female and young cadres.

Resolution 24-NQ/TW, important policies such as Resolution 26-NQ/TW (2018) on building cadres at all levels, Decision 402/QD-TTg (2016), and the Ethnic Affairs Strategy for the 2021–2030 period (Decision 1719/QD-TTg) have set specific goals for training, fostering, and using ethnic minority cadres. In addition, the National Target Program for Socio-Economic Development in Ethnic Minority and Mountainous Areas (2021–2030) also devotes sub-project 5 to human resource development and capacity building for ethnic minority communities, including the creation of sources, planning, and fostering of ethnic minority cadres.

Although the policy orientation is quite comprehensive, implementation in localities, including Nghe An, still has many bottlenecks. Assessment reports by the Central Committee for Mass Mobilization show that many provinces have not yet met the minimum proportion of ethnic minority cadres according to the population structure, and lack specific mechanisms to attract, arrange, and promote ethnic minority cadres. Recruitment through competitive examinations puts ethnic minority candidates in disadvantaged areas at a disadvantage compared to Kinh candidates with better learning conditions, leading to an unstable “input” of ethnic minority cadres.

An overview of the literature shows that although there have been many studies on the role and status of ethnic minority cadres, most of them are descriptive and have not gone into in-depth policy analysis. One gap is the lack of specific local studies, such as Nghe An, a province with the second largest ethnic minority population in the North Central region, with a large area, where ethnic minority cadres play an extremely important role in maintaining border security and political stability. In addition, there has been no study that has comprehensively synthesized solutions from sourcing, training, recruitment, planning, and using ethnic minority cadres in an inter-sectoral relationship, and associated with the new development context (digital transformation, sustainable development, globalization).

This article will fill part of that gap by focusing on the case of Nghe An province, analyzing the current situation of ethnic minority cadres, proposing specific and feasible solutions, and contributing to perfecting the ethnic minority cadre policy framework for the period 2025–2030.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The article uses qualitative research methods combined with descriptive quantitative methods, mainly based on document analysis and secondary data. First, document analysis of the system of policy documents of the Communist Party of Vietnam and the State related to ethnic minority cadre work (such as Resolutions, Decisions, Action Programs) to clarify the goals, targets, and major orientations for building ethnic minority cadres. At the same time, reports and statistics from competent state management agencies are collected, including data on population, human resources and civil servants in Nghe An province (especially focusing on the period 2016–2023); summary reports on cadre work of the Nghe An Provincial Party Committee and People's Committee; the results of thematic supervision of the National Assembly's Ethnic Council on the implementation of ethnic minority cadre policy in the period 2016–2023.

In addition to secondary data, expert interviews were used to collect in-depth assessments. Discussions were held with a number of experienced managers at the Nghe An Provincial Party Committee's Organization Board, the Department of Home Affairs, and the Provincial Ethnic Committee, and a number of leaders of mountainous communes. The interview content focused on clarifying difficulties and obstacles in the work of ethnic minority cadres in the locality, and at the same time, discussed the feasibility of proposed solutions. These opinions, although qualitative, helped supplement practical information and verify the comments and analyses in the article.

During the analysis process, the article combined descriptive statistics to sketch an overview of the ethnic minority cadre team (size, structure, qualifications), and comparison methods to compare actual indicators with policy goals or experiences from other localities. The rate of ethnic minority cadres in Nghe An is compared with the national average or with some similar mountainous provinces to draw out its strengths and weaknesses. Combining many reliable sources of documents and appropriate qualitative and quantitative analysis methods, the article tries to ensure objectivity and comprehensiveness in assessing the current situation, thereby proposing a system of solutions with a scientific and practical basis. The limitation of the study is that it has not conducted a large-scale survey (due to time and resource limitations), however, the collected data and expert opinions have somewhat reflected the current situation of ethnic minority cadres in Nghe An.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Current Status of Ethnic Minority Cadres in the Mountainous Areas of Nghe An

As of 2023, the number of cadres, civil servants, and public employees who are ethnic minorities in Nghe An has increased compared to before. According to data from the provincial Department of Home Affairs, the province currently has 9,159 ethnic minority cadres and public employees out of a total of 83,894 cadres and public employees working, accounting for 13.3%. This rate is generally close to the rate of ethnic minorities in the province's population (about 14-15%), demonstrating the locality's efforts to increase the participation of ethnic minorities in the public apparatus. In particular, in recent years, Nghe An has had a policy of prioritizing ethnic minorities in order to supplement young human resources for mountainous areas. Specifically, from January 2020 to June 30, 2023, the province recruited 272 civil servants and public employees who are ethnic minorities out of a total of 1,288 new recruitment targets, accounting for 20.9%. The recruitment rate is much higher than the proportion of ethnic minorities in the population, showing that the province is proactively implementing "special" policies to create a source of ethnic minority cadres, gradually improving the previous imbalance.

In terms of structure by area and administrative level, the ethnic minority cadres in Nghe An are mainly distributed in mountainous communes, where many ethnic minorities live. The proportion of ethnic minority cadres in the local payroll is often quite high; in many places, ethnic minorities account for over 30-40% of commune-level civil servants. On the contrary, in the plains and cities, due to the small ethnic minority population, the number of ethnic minority cadres in provincial departments, branches, and sectors is still limited. Regarding the ethnic composition of the cadres of ethnic minorities in Nghe An, the majority belong to ethnic minorities with large populations in the province, such as Thai, Tho, Kho Mu, and H'Mong.

Along with the increase in quantity, the quality of the cadres of ethnic minorities in Nghe An has been gradually improved, although not uniformly. Regarding educational level, most of the young ethnic minority cadres recently recruited have graduated from university, and some have master's degrees. The province also creates conditions for ethnic minority cadres to participate in training courses on political theory and state management. In the period of 2016-2023, 4,372 ethnic minority cadres were sent for training and development in professional expertise, political theory, information technology, foreign languages, and state management knowledge. Thanks to that, many ethnic minority cadres, especially young cadres, have improved their working capacity and confidently undertaken assigned tasks. According to annual assessments, the percentage of ethnic minority cadres who complete their tasks well and excellently is increasing, proving that they are more clearly affirming their role and position in the apparatus.

The capacity and qualifications of the ethnic minority cadre team are still uneven, and some have not yet met the requirements of the task. In remote communes, ethnic minority cadres are limited in professional qualifications or modern management skills. Difficulties in using the common language or

information technology fluently are also barriers for some older ethnic minority cadres, affecting work efficiency. In addition, the number of female and young cadres among ethnic minorities is still small. The majority of ethnic minority cadres are currently men; the number of ethnic minority women holding leadership and management positions is very small (Thang et al., 2023).

Objectively, the development of ethnic minority cadres in Nghe An is still facing many difficulties and challenges that need to be overcome, including uneven distribution and shortages in some units; there are large differences between regions. Some provincial departments and branches currently do not have ethnic minority cadres, leading to a lack of voice representing ethnic minorities in provincial policymaking. This imbalance reduces the diversity of cadres at all levels of government.

The quality of ethnic minority human resources is still limited, and the educational and professional qualifications of several ethnic minority cadres (especially the older generation) are still low compared to the increasing requirements. The ability to use foreign languages, information technology, and update new knowledge of some ethnic minority cadres is still weak, affecting productivity and work efficiency. A small number of young ethnic minority cadres have not yet fully developed their capacity due to a lack of confidence or practical experience.

Despite objective factors regarding socio-economic conditions, the mountainous region of Nghe An still has many difficulties, poor transportation, and low living standards. This is a major challenge in attracting and retaining qualified human resources (including ethnic minorities). Many ethnic minority students, after completing their training, do not want to return to work in their locality due to limited working conditions, income, and promotion opportunities. In addition, the intellectual level and quality of general education in ethnic minority areas are lower than in the lowlands, leading to limitations in local staff resources.

4.2. Solutions to Develop Ethnic Minority Staff in Nghe An

Based on the analysis of the current situation and reference to lessons learned, below are some main groups of solutions to build and improve the quality of ethnic minority staff in the mountainous region of Nghe An province.

First, perfecting policies and strengthening direction for the ethnic minority cadre work

Localities should continue to perfect the policy and legal framework related to ethnic minority cadre work, ensuring consistency and suitability with local characteristics. Nghe An province needs to recommend that the Central Government promulgate or amend and supplement missing regulations on the management and use of ethnic minority cadres (Ta et al., 2023). Promptly promulgate special recruitment policies for ethnic minorities and areas with particularly difficult conditions, allowing the recruitment of ethnic minority civil servants and public employees under preferential regimes (some standards on education, age, or separate recruitment exams can be relaxed).

Perfecting policies, the leadership and direction role of Party committees and authorities at all levels need to be strongly promoted. The Party Committee and authorities of Nghe An province need to make the task of developing ethnic minority cadres a key content in the annual work program, with leaders assigned to be responsible for monitoring. Creating a high level of consensus in awareness and developing ethnic minority cadres is not only the task of the ethnic or internal affairs agencies, but also the common responsibility of all levels and sectors. Only then can specific solutions be implemented synchronously and effectively in practice (Yen & Thang, 2022).

Second, strengthening the source creation and innovation in the recruitment of ethnic minority cadres

Creating a long-term source of cadres from education and training should build a young, qualified human resource as "input". Nghe An should continue to effectively implement policies to encourage education and improve the intellectual level of ethnic minority children. The province can coordinate with the Ministry of Education and Training to implement the Project on training high-quality human resources for ethnic minorities" in the period of 2021-2030, focusing on key areas. In addition, it is necessary to take advantage of the current recruitment policy - sending ethnic minority students to university training according to the assigned quota - in a more effective way, linking recruitment with a commitment to use after training.

Innovating the recruitment process of civil servants and public employees towards increasing representation for ethnic minorities: In the immediate future, the province needs to ensure strict implementation of preferential regulations in recruitment for ethnic minorities (Iyer et al., 2021). The Law on Cadres and Civil Servants and guiding documents all have provisions for adding priority points for candidates who are ethnic minorities when taking civil servant exams and recruitment exams. Organizational and internal affairs agencies at all levels must thoroughly understand this policy so that it is fully and transparently applied. In addition, the province can proactively develop a specific recruitment mechanism for some positions in ethnic minority areas.

Third, promote training and capacity building for ethnic minority cadres

Innovate training and development programs and methods, and increase on-the-job training and on-the-job training. Agencies that receive newly recruited ethnic minority cadres need to have a plan to be mentored by veteran cadres (who may not be ethnic minorities but have experience working in ethnic minority areas). Direct guidance during the work process will help ethnic minority cadres quickly grasp the work and practice practical skills (Kiên, 2023).

Improve the professional qualifications and political theory of ethnic minority cadres (Michaud, 2009). The province should allocate a certain percentage of quotas in intermediate and advanced training courses on political theory and state management for ethnic minority cadres. Priority should be given to sending young, promising ethnic minority cadres to participate in these courses to create a source of future leaders. The goal is to strive for the majority of ethnic minority cadres and civil servants in Nghe An to have a university degree or higher by 2030, and 100% of ethnic minority leaders to have an intermediate level of political theory or higher.

An effective solution is to create conditions for ethnic minority cadres to rotate and experience many working positions to accumulate experience. The province can implement the policy of transferring and rotating cadres between localities: sending ethnic minority cadres from more favorable communes to help particularly difficult communes, while also being ready to arrange competent ethnic minority cadres to work in provincial agencies to learn about the new environment.

Fourth, planning, arranging, and effectively using the contingent of ethnic minority cadres

The work of planning ethnic minority cadres needs to be proactively and systematically implemented at all levels. Right from the stage of building the Party Committee's planning and the leadership planning of the agencies for the next term, the Party Committees at all levels must pay attention to ensuring a reasonable structure of the proportion of ethnic minority cadres in the planning (corresponding to or higher than the proportion of the ethnic minority population in the area). The Provincial Party Committee's Organization Board and the Department of Home Affairs should periodically review and evaluate the existing ethnic minority cadres to detect outstanding individuals and include them in the planning list for leadership and management positions.

Arrange and use ethnic minority cadres according to their strengths, with ethnic minority cadres with outstanding abilities, the province boldly arranges them into important positions, regardless of whether they are Kinh or ethnic. On the contrary, with areas of work that are highly ethnically specific (such as cultural management, customs, or cadres to strengthen villages), prioritizing the arrangement of ethnic minority cadres will facilitate the implementation of tasks (Nguyen et al., 2024).

Agencies and units need to build a friendly and united working environment for ethnic minority cadres to integrate and contribute. Unit leaders play an important role in mentoring and supporting newly assigned ethnic minority cadres, avoiding confusion or self-consciousness. At the same time, evaluate ethnic minority cadres objectively, scientifically, and impartially, based on the results of performing tasks to promptly promote and appoint competent people.

Fifth, improve treatment and support policies for ethnic minority cadres

The Government should improve salary and allowance policies to ensure the lives of cadres working in ethnic minority and mountainous areas. Currently, the State has a number of allowances such as regional allowances, attraction allowances, and long-term work allowances in particularly difficult areas (according to Decree 76/2019/ND-CP). The province needs to supervise the full and timely payment of these regimes to cadres and civil servants in mountainous communes (Nguyen et al., 2023).

For ethnic minority cadres with achievements, they should be promptly rewarded and given opportunities for promotion. The province should have a form of commendation for exemplary ethnic minority cadres every year. When considering promotion and appointment, if ethnic minority cadres and other cadres have similar abilities, they should boldly choose ethnic minority cadres to ensure the structure and create more trust for the people.

5. CONCLUSION

Ethnic minority cadres play an important role in the development of Nghe An mountainous region in particular and ethnic minority areas in general. Ethnic minority cadres are the ones who implement the Party and State's policies and guidelines to the people, and represent the interests of the ethnic minority community in the political system. Practice has shown that wherever there is a team of ethnic minority cadres with enough heart and capacity, the relationship between the government and the people will be stronger, and the implementation of socio-economic development programs will be more effective and sustainable. On the contrary, if this force is absent or of poor quality, even correct policies will be difficult to put into practice, and the development gap between the mountainous and plain areas will be difficult to narrow.

The article has analyzed the current situation, showing that although there has been progress in quantity and gradual improvement in quality, the team of ethnic minority cadres in Nghe An still faces many limitations, requiring more synchronous efforts. The proposed solutions focus on: (1) Completing policies and strengthening direction on ethnic minority cadre work; (2) Innovating recruitment, creating ethnic minority human resources through education and attracting talents; (3) Improving the quality of training and fostering, focusing on the characteristics of ethnic minority cadres; (4) Implementing well the planning, rotation, and arrangement of ethnic minority cadres according to their abilities; (5) Strongly improving the treatment regime and working environment to retain and encourage ethnic minority cadres. These solutions are closely related, mutually supportive, and need to be implemented simultaneously to maximize effectiveness.

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