

Solutions for innovating approaches to mobilizing ethnic minority communities under the two-tier local government model in Vietnam

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Abstract: *The reform aimed at streamlining the organizational apparatus and the implementation of a two-tier local government model have generated fundamental changes in the methods of mass mobilization, particularly those for ethnic minority communities. This article analyzes and evaluates recent studies on local governments' approaches to mobilizing ethnic minorities in Vietnam. It also identifies the challenges and opportunities facing this activity in the country's current stage of development. On that basis, the article proposes a number of solutions to develop innovative approaches to mobilizing ethnic minority communities in a manner consistent with the two-tier local government model, thereby improving governance effectiveness and strengthening the national unity bloc in the present context.*

Keywords: *Mobilization; ethnic minorities; approach; two-tier local government; Vietnam.*

1. Introduction

The transition from a three-tier to a two-tier local government model, aimed at enhancing administrative streamlining, effectiveness and efficiency, together with the process of merging provinces and communes, has fundamentally reshaped the local governance structure and space. Newly formed administrative units now encompass larger geographical areas, greater levels of social diversity, and more complex demographic structures, thereby placing new demands on the governance capacity of the administrative apparatus and the

cadre system within grassroots political institutions. In this context, mass mobilization - particularly in areas with large ethnic minority populations - is facing numerous challenges. Stemming largely from dispersed settlement patterns and the diversity of cultural traditions, religions, beliefs, and languages, these challenges increase the complexity of governance and social cohesion.

Alongside organisational restructuring, factors such as digital technologies, institutional reforms, and the reconfiguration of governance spaces are simultaneously creating

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both opportunities and challenges for approaches to mobilizing ethnic minority communities in Vietnam. This situation both calls for a more in-depth research approach grounded in theoretical perspectives on mass mobilization, and is also closely linked to the practical operation of the two-tier local government system. Through clarifying the concepts and characteristics of ethnic minority communities, this article reviews key domestic studies on mobilization approaches and proposes solutions for innovation that align with Vietnam's new development context in the era of digital transformation and deep international integration.

2. Studies on ethnic minority communities and approaches to mobilization in the operation of local government in Vietnam

Regarding the concept and characteristics of ethnic minority communities in Vietnam, from an interdisciplinary perspective combining sociology and public governance, an “ethnic minority” is understood as a unified entity encompassing social, cultural, and economic structures as well as its position within the systems of power, governance, and public policy. This approach moves beyond a purely administrative-legal interpretation and clarifies why ethnic issues hold a strategic position in national governance in Vietnam, not only as objects of management but also as active participants in the development process.

From the perspective of legal frameworks and state governance, Ministry of Ethnic and Religions Affairs (2025) defines ethnic minorities as ethnic groups with smaller populations than the majority ethnic group (i.e. the Kinh) within the territory of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. This definition reflects a modern governance mindset that employs quantitative criteria - specifically population size - to determine policy beneficiaries. Such an approach provides a

basis for allocating resources, designing development programs, and evaluating the effectiveness of public interventions. From the perspective of national governance, this serves as an important foundation for ensuring consistency, fairness, and transparency in the state management of ethnic affairs.

Expanding the perspective from ethnic communities to residential space, the study by Tinh & Binh (2020) clarifies the concept of “ethnic minority regions” as areas where large numbers of ethnic minority groups reside and form stable communities within Vietnam's territory. These regions are commonly categorized into six major areas: the Northeast, the Northwest, the South Central Coastal region, the Southeast, the Southwest, and the Truong Son - Central Highlands region. This concept emphasizes that ethnic minority regions are not merely administrative units but also socio-cultural spaces with long historical formations, characterized by distinctive languages, customs, beliefs, indigenous knowledge systems, and traditional social institutions.

Accordingly, the term “compatriots” (đồng bào) carries not only administrative or political significance but also reflects the bonds of solidarity, equality, and unity among ethnic groups within the Vietnamese national community. This interpretation aligns with the constitutional principle of equality, solidarity, mutual respect, and mutual support among the ethnic groups. Such a foundation establishes specific requirements for approaches to mobilization within local governments' operation, particularly in the current context of administrative restructuring and the expansion of governance spaces under the two-tier local government model.

From a sociological perspective, several core characteristics of ethnic minority communities in Vietnam can be identified.

First, regarding social and residential space. Most of the ethnic minority communities reside in mountainous, highland, border, remote, and isolated areas - regions rich in natural resources but often characterized by significant socio-economic limitations. These settlement patterns foster strong communal bonds and collective lifestyles on the one hand, yet they also, on the other hand, increase the costs and barriers associated with accessing public services, education, healthcare, transportation infrastructure, and modern labor markets. The dispersed settlement patterns and unique geographical conditions require specific considerations in policy design and organization of public service delivery at the local level.

Second, regarding the community social structure. Kinship relations, clan networks, village communities, and the roles of village elders, community leaders, and other respected individuals continue to regulate social behavior, resolve conflicts, and maintain community order. These elements represent a distinctive form of “social capital” that can effectively support local governance when properly recognized and integrated into grassroots government's operational mechanisms. Conversely, if traditional institutions are overlooked or merely treated through administrative approaches, governance processes may lack consensus and long-term sustainability.

Third, regarding cultural identity and indigenous knowledge. Ethnic minority communities possess rich cultural value systems, ranging from languages, festivals, and customs to traditional agricultural practices, natural resource management, and ecological adaptation strategies. From the perspective of development sociology, these elements should not be viewed as obsolete traditions to be replaced but rather as soft resources that can be integrated into strategies for sustainable

development and national governance, particularly in the context of climate change and globalization. However, rapid modernization and urbanization also increase the risk of cultural erosion if development policies fail to balance economic growth with cultural preservation.

When these characteristics are examined from the perspective of national governance, it becomes clear that ethnic minority communities are both beneficiaries of public policy and active participants in governance processes. Recent studies suggest that the effectiveness of ethnic policies depends not only on the scale of resource investment but also on community participation, social consensus, and the capacity for self-governance within communities. This highlights the need to shift from a purely administrative management model toward a multi-centric governance model, in which the state, local governments, communities and other social actors jointly participate in policy formulation and implementation.

From this interdisciplinary perspective combining sociology and public governance, it can be affirmed that the characteristics of ethnic minority communities reflect the multidimensional nature of development and governance in contemporary Vietnam. On the one hand, they represent sociological issues related to inequality, social structure, and cultural identity; on the other hand, they constitute governance issues concerning policy design, decentralization, the functioning of local government, and the maintenance of socio-political stability. Therefore, a comprehensive and accurate understanding of the concept of “ethnic minority communities” is not only of academic significance but also serves as a foundational condition for building a modern, inclusive, and sustainable socialist rule-of-law state in the new stage of development.

Regarding approaches to mobilizing ethnic minority communities in local government operations in Vietnam, many recent studies have examined this issue from different perspectives, mainly focusing on practical experience and the need to innovate mass mobilization activities in the context of contemporary development.

Anh (2025), in a study on mobilization practices in ethnic minority areas in Lam Dong province (formerly Dak Nong province), argues that effective mobilization requires several foundational conditions. These include close leadership and direction from Party committees; the concentration of resources on socio-economic development; innovation in ethnic affairs management by state agencies; strengthened coordination between ethnic affairs and people-to-people diplomacy in protecting the national borders; and the consolidation of organizational structures and personnel responsible for mass mobilization. This approach emphasizes the central role of the political system and the need to combine economic development with national defense, security, and grassroots mobilization efforts.

From another perspective, Ke (2023) notes several limitations in his research on mass mobilization in areas inhabited by very small ethnic groups. These include uneven attention from some Party committees, limited coordination within the political system, and insufficient emphasis on monitoring and supervising the implementation of ethnic policies. Based on these findings, the author proposes innovating leadership approaches to mass mobilization by linking them with specific objectives and performance indicators while strengthening the implementation capacity of local authorities at different levels. This study highlights the importance of institutional arrangements and accountability in the organization and implementation of mass mobilization activities.

At the local governance level, Linh (2025) analyzes the leadership role of the Tuyen Quang Provincial Party Committee in mobilizing ethnic minority communities. While recognizing several positive achievements, the study also identifies limitations related to awareness, content, and leadership approaches. The author emphasizes the need to strengthen research and to innovate leadership methods to promote ethnic solidarity, improve living standards, and ensure national defense and security in the new context.

Meanwhile, Hai (2024) approaches the issue from the perspective of rights and access to justice. The author stresses the importance of diversifying communication methods and using appropriate languages to raise awareness among ethnic minority communities about legal aid services, thereby protecting their legitimate rights and interests. This perspective situates mobilization activities within the broader framework of human rights protection and improved access to public services.

Overall, existing studies consistently affirm the importance and urgency of mobilizing ethnic minority communities for socio-economic development and political stability at the local level. Researchers have also identified various specific challenges, including limitations in educational attainment, socio-economic conditions, access to new knowledge, and the ability to utilize public services. However, most studies primarily focus on the content, practical experience, and requirements for reforming mass mobilization activities within the framework of traditional organizational models. They have not yet conducted in-depth analyses of mobilization approaches from the perspective of actors within the political system operating under a two-tier local government model.

In the context of administrative restructuring toward a two-tier governance model, the governance space is expanding, while the roles and responsibilities of provincial and commune-level governments are being redefined. At the same time, resource allocation and coordination mechanisms are undergoing adjustment. These changes generate new requirements for approaches to mobilizing ethnic minority communities and call for more systematic, comprehensive, and scientifically grounded analyses. It is precisely this research gap that provides the basis for the present article, which analyzes and proposes innovative approaches to mobilizing ethnic minority communities in alignment with the current operation of the two-tier local government model.

3. Opportunities and challenges for mobilizing ethnic minority communities under the two-tier local government model in Vietnam

3.1. Opportunities

First, the two-tier local government model creates conditions for restructuring the political system in ways that are closer to and more responsive to ethnic minority communities.

The transition to a two-tier local government model is not merely an adjustment in administrative structure; it also opens opportunities to innovate governance approaches and mass mobilization practices. Previous limitations related to the distance between the administrative apparatus and local communities - especially in ethnic minority areas - indicate that there remains significant potential for reform. In the context of building a streamlined, effective, and efficient national governance system, this transformation provides an opportunity to restructure the local political system, placing communities at the center and shifting from a purely administrative management approach

to a governance model oriented toward service and collaborative development.

Clarifying the functions, responsibilities, and roles of actors within the political system will enable mobilization activities to move beyond fragmented and overly bureaucratic practices, thereby increasing both focus and substantive effectiveness. As decentralization and authority delegation are further refined, grassroots authorities - those most directly connected to ethnic minority communities - will have greater opportunities to demonstrate initiative and creativity. When provided with appropriate authority and resources, local governments can design mobilization approaches that are closely aligned with the cultural traditions, beliefs, and social structures of specific ethnic groups, rather than applying uniform, top-down administrative models.

Moreover, the requirement to optimize resources in the context of administrative streamlining also encourages new thinking in mobilizing social resources. Promoting the roles of respected community members, such as village elders, community leaders, collaborators, and traditional social institutions, enables mobilization activities to shift from a “propaganda and explanation” approach to one based on “collaboration and participation.” When ethnic minority communities are recognized as active agents of governance and development, mass mobilization will gain a more sustainable foundation built on social consensus and community cohesion.

Second, the digital era and artificial intelligence open up new possibilities for innovating mobilization approaches based on data and two-way interaction.

Comprehensive digital transformation and the rapid development of artificial intelligence (AI) are fundamentally reshaping the information environment and social

interactions, thereby creating new opportunities to enhance the effectiveness of mobilization activities among ethnic minority communities. First, digital platforms and grassroots information systems allow policies and governmental guidelines to be disseminated rapidly, flexibly, and widely - even in remote and mountainous areas. Compared with traditional methods that rely on face-to-face meetings and administrative documents, digital communication helps reduce spatial and temporal barriers between government authorities and local communities, thereby improving the timeliness and accessibility of information.

More importantly, digital data on population characteristics, livelihoods, social needs, and public opinion trends provides a foundation for shifting mobilization activities from passive responses to proactive forecasting. The application of AI in analyzing large datasets can help identify emerging or sensitive issues related to ethnicity, religion, and belief systems at an early stage. This allows authorities to adjust communication messages, mobilization strategies, and intervention timing to better align with the specific conditions of each locality. A data-driven approach enhances analytical accuracy, reduces subjectivity, and improves the effectiveness of policy interventions.

In addition, digital technologies create new spaces for two-way dialogue. When official information is delivered in comprehensive, culturally appropriate ways - including the use of local languages and respect for indigenous cultural values - mobilization activities go beyond merely "explaining policies" and instead help build digital trust and social consensus. The development of digital communities for ethnic minority groups, where citizens can express feedback, participate in discussions, and co-create values, will help strengthen the national unity

bloc in a rapidly transforming social environment.

In this sense, the two-tier local government model, combined with the opportunities of the digital era, not only requires adjustments in mobilization approaches but also creates favorable conditions for fundamentally innovating these practices in a modern, flexible, and grounded in meaningful community participation.

3.2. Challenges

First, the organizational structure and coordination mechanisms under the two-tier local government model have not yet fully aligned with the requirements of mobilizing ethnic minority communities.

In principle, the local political system in Vietnam operates through a mechanism in which the Party provides leadership, the State performs management functions, and the people exercise mastery. Within this framework, the Vietnam Fatherland Front and socio-political organizations play a core role in mobilizing the population. However, in the practical implementation of the streamlined two-tier local government model, the division of responsibilities and coordination mechanisms among the actors involved in mobilizing ethnic minority communities have not yet been clearly defined or consistently implemented. The Party's leadership role has not always been institutionalized into specific coordination mechanisms; local governments face significant pressure in administrative management and public service delivery which cause mobilization activities to become overly bureaucratic. Meanwhile, the Fatherland Front and mass organizations have not fully recognized their central role in policy formulation, implementation, and oversight of mass mobilization activities.

While eliminating intermediate administrative levels may enhance managerial efficiency, it may also create gaps in grassroots

social connectivity, particularly in ethnic minority areas characterized by harsh natural conditions, dispersed settlements, and strong traditional community structures. In the absence of a unified coordination mechanism and clearly defined responsibilities, mobilization efforts may become fragmented, less proactive, and less effective in achieving sustainable outcomes.

In addition, downsizing administrative personnel increases pressure on specialized staff responsible for ethnic affairs and grassroots-level mass mobilization. The limited number of personnel must handle increasingly complex tasks, particularly amid digital transformation and the expansion of governance spaces.

Second, public officials have not yet fully adapted to the expanded governance space and the profound cultural diversity of ethnic minority communities.

With the expansion of administrative jurisdictions and the streamlining of governmental structures, grassroots officials now perform not only administrative tasks but also serve as crucial “bridges” between the political system and local communities. However, many officials still lack interdisciplinary knowledge of ethnic sociology, ethnography, religious studies, and customary law, and may not fully understand the social structures and cultural value systems of specific ethnic groups. This limitation reduces their ability to grasp social psychology and community dynamics, often resulting in mobilization approaches that are overly simplistic or top-down, thereby undermining social consensus and trust.

In the digital era, the skill set required for mobilization has also changed significantly. Mass mobilization activities now occur not only through direct interaction but also are expanded into digital environments. Nevertheless, many officials remain

insufficiently equipped with skills in digital communication, multi-directional dialogues, online information management, and public opinion response. Their capacity to use digital technologies, leverage data resources, and apply analytical tools remains limited, slowing the adaptation of mobilization activities to the evolving context.

Beyond human resource constraints, technological infrastructure in various ethnic minority areas remains underdeveloped. Limited access to digital devices, unstable telecommunications networks, and the absence of integrated data platforms contribute to a widening digital divide between inhabitants of mountainous and urban regions. This situation further constrains the implementation of technology-based mobilization approaches.

Third, resources supporting mobilization activities remain insufficient and inadequately coordinated.

The effectiveness of mobilization activities depends heavily on the availability and coordination of essential resources, including physical infrastructure, financial resources, human resources, and information resources. However, technical and technological infrastructure remains inadequately developed in a multitude of ethnic minority areas; telecommunication connection is often unstable; and, equipment is outdated. These limitations reduce the effectiveness of modern mobilization approaches and restrict citizens’ access to public services.

Financial resources allocated to mobilization activities are often fragmented, short-termed, and insufficiently aligned with the specific socio-cultural characteristics of each locality. Yet mobilizing ethnic minority communities requires sustained, stable, and context-sensitive investments.

Furthermore, influential community members, collaborators, and other local social

actors play an important role in mobilization but have not received sufficient training and capacity-building support. In addition, appropriate incentive mechanisms for these actors remain limited, which diminishes the long-term sustainability and outreach of mobilization efforts.

Another significant issue concerns the development of “information resources,” particularly digital information. Communication materials and information systems have not yet been adequately localized to reflect the cultural characteristics and languages of specific ethnic groups. As a result, communication content often appears overly rigid, lacks interactive elements, and fails to resonate deeply with community members.

It can be observed from the above analysis that mobilizing ethnic minority communities under the two-tier local government model faces multidimensional challenges, including those posed by organizational structure, human resource capacity, and resource availability. Only by addressing these factors in a coordinated and comprehensive manner can the new governance model effectively strengthen social trust, reinforce community cohesion, and promote sustainable development in ethnic-minority dominated regions in the current period.

4. Solutions for innovating approaches to mobilizing ethnic minority communities under the two-tier local government model in Vietnam

First, improving the organizational structure and enhancing the quality of personnel engaged in mobilization activities.

The apparatus streamlining under the two-tier local government model will only achieve its intended effectiveness when it is designed in a manner that is compatible with the specific characteristics of mobilizing ethnic

minority communities - a field simultaneously influenced by political, cultural, religious, and traditional community structures.

The primary focus should be on clarifying and harmonizing the functions of different actors within the political system. It is necessary to clearly define the leadership role of Party organizations; the management and implementation responsibilities of local authorities; and, the core mobilization and coordination roles of the Vietnam Fatherland Front and socio-political organizations. When functions are clearly delineated and coordination mechanisms are designed coherently, mobilization activities can avoid problems such as overlapping responsibilities, excessive bureaucratization, or a total delegation of responsibilities to a single actor.

At the provincial level, particularly in localities with large ethnic minority populations, it is necessary to promulgate specialized resolutions on mobilization activities in the new period, thereby providing unified policy orientation across the political system. On that basis, local authorities and the Fatherland Front at different levels should translate these orientations into concrete action programs and implementation plans, ensuring coherence among leadership, management, mobilization, and supervisory functions.

Apparatus streamlining must be accompanied by improvements in personnel quality. Mobilization officials should receive interdisciplinary training in sociology, ethnography, and religious studies; possess knowledge of customary laws and indigenous cultural traditions; and, develop competencies in community dialogue, public communication, and digital skills. In the context of digital transformation, the ability to utilize data and apply technological tools is no longer an optional advantage but an essential professional requirement.

Second, establishing a digital data ecosystem with community participation.

Digital transformation should be approached as a means of innovating mobilization practices rather than merely as a technical tool. To achieve effectiveness, mobilization content must be “localized,” transforming administrative texts into digital information that is accessible, culturally appropriate, and aligned with the languages and value systems of specific ethnic groups.

Accordingly, two-tier local governments should shift from a one-way communication approach to a platform-building role. This includes developing user-friendly digital platforms that facilitate two-way dialogue, enabling ethnic minority communities to provide feedback, share indigenous knowledge, and participate in policy discussions. Promoting the roles of respected individuals - such as village elders, community leaders, and religious dignitaries - is essential to ensuring the credibility and dissemination of digital content within communities.

At the same time, while encouraging content creation, stronger information governance mechanisms must also be established. Local authorities should develop systems to detect, filter, and address misinformation while simultaneously building digital knowledge repositories that highlight the cultural identity and spiritual life of ethnic minority communities. When digital information is closely connected with community identity, mobilization efforts can achieve greater depth and long-term sustainability.

Third, mobilizing and diversifying resources through socialization and special policy mechanisms.

In the context of limited state budgets, innovating mobilization approaches requires flexible strategies for mobilizing resources. First, national target programs and ethnic

policies should be effectively integrated into mobilization activities to ensure that socio-economic development is closely linked with strengthening social trust and consensus within communities.

In addition, socialization and the application of locality-specific mechanisms should be considered breakthrough measures. The implementation of public-private partnership (PPP) models, particularly in the development of information technology and telecommunications infrastructure in ethnic minority areas, can significantly accelerate the establishment of modern digital communication platforms. Once digital infrastructure is improved, data-driven and interactive mobilization approaches can be implemented more effectively.

Furthermore, mechanisms should be established to encourage enterprises’ participation in corporate social responsibility initiatives aimed at developing ethnic minority communities, thereby creating synergy between economic and social benefits. Such an approach not only addresses financial constraints but also promotes innovation in local governance’s thinking toward greater openness and cooperation.

Overall, these three groups of solutions aim to transform the mobilization of ethnic minority communities from a traditional administrative model to a governance model grounded in institutional coordination, digital data, and meaningful community participation. This transformation is a crucial condition for ensuring that the two-tier local government model effectively contributes to strengthening national unity and promoting sustainable development in ethnic minority regions.

5. Conclusion

Innovative approaches to mobilizing ethnic minority communities under the two-tier local government model in Vietnam are

not merely an issue of administrative restructuring; rather, they constitute a strategic matter for national governance in the new stage of development. In the context of streamlining the political system, expanding governance spaces, and accelerating digital transformation, mobilization activities face multidimensional challenges, including coordination mechanisms, the quality of human resources, resource availability, and the capacity to adapt to the digital environment.

The study indicates that, despite existing internal challenges, the two-tier local government model and the digital era also create important opportunities to restructure mobilization approaches in a more modern direction - one that is data-driven, promotes two-way interaction, and enhances the role of communities as active agents of governance and development. On this basis, the proposed solutions are designed to be comprehensive and mutually reinforcing, including improving organizational structures and coordination mechanisms within the political system; enhancing the quality of the cadre workforce; establishing a digital data ecosystem with community participation; and, diversifying resources through socialization and locality-specific policy mechanisms.

The consistent implementation of these solutions will help transform mobilization activities from a traditional administrative model into a governance model characterized by service orientation, collaboration, and co-creation. Such a transformation will help strengthen social trust, enhance community cohesion, and reinforce the great national unity bloc. It will also serve as an important condition for ensuring sustainable development in ethnic minority regions and

contribute to the broader goal of building a modern, inclusive socialist rule-of-law state in the new era.

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