

Improving the effectiveness of legal communication and education for ethnic minority and mountainous people

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Abstract: *The Party and State of Vietnam have focused on communicating and educating laws, especially for ethnic minorities and mountainous areas. This is confirmed in the Constitution 2013 and concretized in Decree No. 05/2011/ND-CP dated January 14, 2011, of the Government on ethnic affairs and other relevant legal documents and policies. The communication and education of the law are considered the first stage of the law enforcement process and play a crucial role in strengthening socialist legislation and building a socialist rule-of-law State of the people, by the people, and for the people. The article analyzes the legal basis, current situation, and limitations of legal communication and education for ethnic minorities and mountainous areas, thereby proposing some solutions to improve the effectiveness of this work.*

Keywords: *Legal communication and education; ethnic minorities and mountainous areas; policies; solutions.*

1. Introduction

Ethnic minorities and mountainous regions in Vietnam are strategically positioned in the country's socio-economic development and are crucial for national defense and security. These areas are home to 53 ethnic minority groups and possess significant potential in natural resources, biodiversity, and the sustainable protection of the ecological environment. Despite these advantages, these regions remain among the poorest in the country. The challenging terrain, frequent natural disasters, and environmental

degradation contribute to the difficulties faced by these communities. Furthermore, the quality of education and healthcare services in these areas remains low. Issues such as nomadic cultivation and unregulated migration persist, complicating efforts to stabilize these regions. Additionally, the rich cultural identities of ethnic minorities are gradually eroding (Committee for Ethnic Affairs, 2022). The prevalence of illegal evangelism is increasing, and reactionary forces exploit the poverty and vulnerability of ethnic minorities to incite disturbances and inter-ethnic conflicts.

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Ethnic minority staff at the grassroots level still exhibit many shortcomings and fail to meet the demands of socio-economic development. Additionally, the legal policies related to ethnic affairs reveal certain inconsistencies in the socio-economic realities of ethnic minorities and mountainous regions. Consequently, the communication and education of law in these areas have become necessary and urgent in the current context (Cong, 2022). This effort contributes to realizing the principle of "great unity of the whole people to build the country more and more prosperous and happy" (Lien, 2023) under new circumstances.

2. The Party's guidelines and the State's policies on legal communication and education in the ethnic minority and mountainous areas

The legal communication and education on ethnicity and ethnic affairs at the grassroots level initiatives received significant attention from society, researchers, and policymakers. The core objective of spreading and educating the legislation in ethnic minorities and mountainous regions is to deliver essential information to ethnic communities. This effort significantly contributes to fostering consensus among the people, implementing socio-economic development strategies, ensuring political security, maintaining social order and safety, and preserving political stability in these areas. Concurrently, this process enables grassroots authorities and committees to understand the people's thoughts, concerns, and aspirations, allowing them to devise solutions that align with the practical realities at the grassroots level.

Over the past few years, Vietnam has implemented numerous priority policies to promote legal communication and education

in ethnic minorities and mountainous areas, ensuring the people's right to access legal information. These policies include training, fostering, and supporting individuals involved in legal communication and education. For example, village elders, heads, and reputable community members are provided with the necessary resources and support to participate in local legal education efforts. Additionally, the policies create opportunities for organizations and individuals to disseminate and educate legal knowledge among ethnic minority populations voluntarily. As outlined in Conclusion No. 80-KL/TW dated June 20, 2020, of the Secretariat on continuing to implement Directive No. 32-CT/TW on strengthening the Party's leadership in legal communication and education, raising awareness of law observance of officials and the people, the Secretariat reaffirms the policy of prioritizing resource allocation for legal communication and education targeted at ethnic minority groups. This emphasizes the importance of strengthening the Party's leadership in legal education and enhancing legal awareness among cadres and the people.

Resolution No. 88/2019/QH14, issued by the National Assembly on November 18, 2019, approves the Master Project on the socio-economic development of ethnic minorities and mountainous areas from 2021 through 2030. This resolution emphasizes the need to promote propaganda in these regions, enhance social consensus, utilize internal resources to overcome challenges, integrate and develop in alignment with the nation's goals, and reinforce national unity while fostering trust in the Party and the State. Additionally, on October 14, 2021, the Prime Minister signed Decision No. 1719/QĐ-TTg, which promulgates the national target

program for socio-economic development in ethnic minority and mountainous areas from 2021-2030. This decision outlines phase 1 of the program from 2021 to 2025, which includes Content No. 2, Sub-project 1, and Project 10, focusing on strengthening legal propaganda, communication, education, and awareness-raising among various stakeholders, including village elders, village heads, respected individuals, religious leaders, ethnic minorities, and the people.

3. Some issues in legal communication and education in the ethnic minority and mountainous areas

Some issues exist within legal communication and education concerning ethnic minorities and their affairs at the grassroots level. One significant issue is the untimeliness of such efforts, coupled with a lack of appeal from official information and propaganda channels. These shortcomings have led to information gaps in ethnic minorities and mountainous regions, providing conditions wherein hostile forces and malicious elements can exploit opportunities to manipulate and deceive the people. They exploit these gaps to distort facts and malign the reputation of the Party, the State, and local authorities. The immediate consequence of this manipulation is the disruption of social harmony, impacting public sentiment and gradually eroding trust in the Party, State, party committees, and local authorities among ethnic minority communities. This erosion of trust poses a severe threat to the Party and the regime at the grassroots level, necessitating prompt adjustments to mitigate these risks.

Due to their untimely delivery and lack of appeal, the conventional methods for official communication have resulted in information gaps at the grassroots level in Vietnam. This

is a fertile land for hostile forces to exploit, deceiving the people by disseminating misinformation and denigrating the Party, the State, and local authorities. These informational voids pose a significant threat to the Party, the State, and local governance structures in Vietnam (Trinh et al., 2023), characterized by (1) the uncritical reception of unverified information via social media platforms, often diverging from official narratives; (2) low levels of the people's awareness, particularly prevalent in regions inhabited by ethnic minority communities, serving as formidable barriers to effective information communication; (3) the inadvertent or deliberate dissemination of distorted information on social media platforms, resulting in unforeseen consequences that alter public perceptions and behaviors, thus complicating the leadership, management, and administration efforts of the Party committees and government authorities at various levels; (4) the perilous erosion of trust in the Party, the State, and local authorities.

The particular issues presented are as follows:

Firstly, Vietnam's legal framework concerning ethnic minorities is characterized by its limited and fragmented nature across various legal documents. There is a notable absence of comprehensive legal instruments at the legislative level that address the overarching goal of ensuring the equal rights and development of ethnic minority populations within Vietnam's territory (Committee for Ethnic Affairs, 2017). Additionally, in the development and execution of policies and legislation concerning ethnic minorities, there exists a deficiency in regulations delineating the policy formulation process. Clear and explicit assignments of tasks, authorities, and

responsibilities at each administrative level for policy enactment are yet to be defined. While the Party has identified numerous issues concerning ethnic minorities and mountainous regions in its documents and resolutions, these concerns have yet to be fully reflected or explicitly addressed in legal documents, ordinances, and resolutions.

There is a lack of sustainable development policies for ethnic minorities and mountainous areas. Many aspects of ethnic policies exhibit redundancies, lack alignment with reality, or suffer from insufficient implementation resources, thus constraining the efficacy of the legal policy framework. Regular inspections, assessments, preliminary evaluations, and comprehensive reviews of the implementation of ethnic policies are deficient. Furthermore, reviewing, revising, and improving specific ethnic development projects and policies is slow-moving and characterized by insufficient quality control; it has not ensured a cohesive linkage between ethnic development policies and regional development. Most policies are supportive, but investment policies have not met basic requirements, thus their effectiveness is not truly sustainable.

The development of some policies for ethnic minorities and mountainous areas is impractical and unsuitable for the specific characteristics of these regions. The organization of policy implementation is still weak; the assignment of responsibilities is unreasonable. Coordination between ministries and sectors is not close, leading to overlapping directives. Integrating policies in ethnic minority and mountainous areas faces many difficulties and shortcomings. Inspection, evaluation, and summary of policy implementation remain limited. Directing and implementing policies in some

localities is still confusing. The planning and review of beneficiaries in implementing some policies are not closely aligned with reality. Some policies are issued without being integrated into the overall regional planning, addressing only immediate situations, and failing to connect economic development with social issues (such as resettlement migration projects, population arrangement planning, and the development and preservation of certain small ethnic groups) (Duc, 2017). Additionally, some policies are developed and issued without considering the specific economic, cultural, and social characteristics of the regions and lack community involvement. These policies do not account for the sustainability of their effectiveness post-implementation. Consequently, when applied to the conditions of each region and each ethnic minority, the policies are not highly effective.

Secondly, implementing ethnic policies in certain areas is inadequate, resulting in insufficient improvements to the material and spiritual well-being of ethnic minorities and mountainous communities. Insufficient allocated resources have hindered the achievement of policy objectives as outlined in approved projects (Committee for Ethnic Affairs, 2017). Some policies require an extension, leading to norms that no longer align with current realities. When funding is not synchronized, capital mobilization policies face challenges, impeding implementation efforts. State budget funds primarily offer support and are insufficient to catalyze change in challenging areas. The arrangement of counterpart funds in most localities does not comply with regulations. Some policies lack relevance to local realities, feature low support levels, and are slow to guide and revise (Committee for Ethnic Affairs, 2017). Additionally, specific policies lack transparency and democracy, limiting

public participation and oversight during implementation. Political security, social order, and safety in ethnic minority and mountainous areas remain threatened by potential destabilizing factors, providing opportunities for hostile forces to exploit national issues against the Vietnamese revolution. Despite a large cadre contingent working in ethnic communication, the involvement of ethnic minorities remains limited. Furthermore, many communication staff are of Kinh people and lack proficiency in ethnic minority languages.

Thirdly, legal education communication efforts in ethnic minority and mountainous regions lack consistency and effectiveness. Meetings and gatherings of various committees and organizations are not considered official communication channels, and when communication does occur, it often lacks persuasiveness. Despite having a large team of communicators, their role in grassroots communication is underutilized. Some commune party committees are unaware of the importance of communication and fail to guide and inspect communication activities. Investment in communication facilities is insufficient, and professional skills among communicators are neglected, resulting in poor quality and irregular communication activities. Additionally, grassroots communication staff lack proficiency in modern communication technologies, hindering effective outreach. Media efforts to counter misinformation and combat hostile forces' propaganda remain passive and lack impact.

The inspection and evaluation of communication's impact through village elders and other respected individuals among ethnic minorities is inconsistent and irregular. Efforts to collect public opinion and guide communication content are untimely

and passive. Support for direct communication with participants is inadequate and inconsistently implemented, undermining their motivation. While loudspeaker systems are used in villages, program production remains limited. Furthermore, communication and dissemination of official documents from Party committees and authorities, particularly those concerning people's rights and interests, have not received sufficient attention. Inappropriate content and placement of banners, slogans, and posters result in minimal influence on ethnic minority perceptions.

Fourthly, financial resources, infrastructure, and media tools for legal education in ethnic minority and mountainous areas remain limited and insufficiently spread across regions, particularly in remote areas. This constraint reduces the effectiveness of legal education efforts and results in lacking cultural centers, community facilities, sports grounds, and communication equipment in communal areas. Consequently, community gatherings are often held in private homes, hindering large-scale participation and regular communal activities. Some cultural centers fail to attract people due to poor management practices and inadequate provision of reading materials and newspapers. Moreover, limited capacity among communicators, village elders, and respected individuals diminishes the effectiveness of persuasion and dissemination efforts. Restricted funding and inadequate infrastructure fail to meet the increasing demand for information dissemination among ethnic minorities, exacerbated by low literacy rates and limited access to information services.

Fifthly, hostile forces continue to intensify their media activities, targeting ethnic

minorities and mountainous regions, competing fiercely with official channels for influence. Exploiting socio-economic challenges such as land scarcity, dwindling forest resources, emerging social conflicts, and shifting cultural values, they propagate misinformation and subversive ideologies through various media platforms, particularly the Internet. Their primary focus is on youth, who are more susceptible to ideological manipulation due to their exposure to information technology and social media. Although some awareness among ethnic minority youth regarding the nature and intentions of hostile forces, external influences, and internal subversive activities have led some to misconstrue or doubt the Party and State's national unity policies. Consequently, some young individuals exhibit skepticism towards local authorities, refrain from social participation, and even fall prey to the deceit of hostile entities. Notably, youth display distorted ideologies, pragmatism, and irresponsibility towards themselves, their families, and communities, resulting in legal violations and susceptibility to activities detrimental to national security.

4. Some solutions to improve the effectiveness of legal communication and education in the ethnic minority and mountainous areas

Addressing the challenges in legal communication and education in ethnic minorities and mountainous regions necessitates a multifaceted approach as follows:

Firstly, continual refinement of policies and laws concerning ethnicity and ethnic affairs is imperative, emphasizing integrating policies to ensure comprehensive coverage across various domains. Revision and supplementation of existing documents are

essential to align with the nation's socio-economic development trajectory and the nuanced implementation of ethnic policies tailored to specific regions and demographics. Central to this endeavor is promoting transparency and coordination among governmental bodies, prioritizing the agency of local communities in policy implementation. Notably, efforts should concentrate on fortifying the legal framework to safeguard civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights, particularly those of ethnic minorities.

Ensuring the rights of ethnic minorities must be a focal point in policy formulation and legal amendments. Striving for equality and non-discrimination within legal provisions is paramount, translating into practical guarantees of citizens' rights across civil, political, and socio-economic domains, anchored in egalitarianism before the law. The institutionalization of rights necessitates a tailored approach, aligning with the nation's socio-economic context and developmental stages, thereby fostering inclusive growth and social justice while mitigating regional and ethnic disparities.

Secondly, enhancing communication skills integral to legal education dissemination in ethnic minority and mountainous areas is imperative. The efficacy of oral communication in contemporary contexts, as highlighted by the Communist Party of Vietnam (2024), should be emphasized. Additionally, there is a need to integrate other practical skills, such as using visual aids during presentations (e.g., flyers, posters, communication images, audio recordings, and videos) to illustrate key points or hang on walls. Furthermore, utilizing familiar images and the vernacular of the local population, along with concise and comprehensible language, is crucial.

Encouraging community members to contribute to educational materials (students, youth organizations, women's groups) and establishing radio and television programs (leveraging visual and auditory advantages) are recommended. Moreover, promoting the use of ethnic languages, employing ethnic minority hosts for television and radio programs, and involving respected community figures are strategies to consider. Organizing community meetings to disseminate legal education and involving reputable individuals, students, youth, and women in the community are essential, as well as detailed scenario planning and conflict resolution strategies.

Thirdly, legal education initiatives should be contextualized to suit the socio-cultural milieu of ethnic minority regions, recognizing their cultural agency in preserving and revitalizing indigenous traditions. Governmental directives akin to Circular No. 15/2019/TT-BTTTT and Decision No. 219/QD-TTg underscore the pivotal role of ethnic minority communication endeavors in advancing national development agendas. By fostering an inclusive legal ecosystem, these directives pave the way for holistic reforms across economic, political, and socio-cultural domains, aligning with the state's commitment to legal education in ethnic minority and mountainous areas.

The communication of legal education in ethnic minority and mountainous areas must be tailored to the conditions and living environments of these regions. It should be appropriate to the level of understanding and awareness of the local people, reflecting the cultural context of the community and influenced by the current socioeconomic infrastructure development level. It is essential to recognize the ethnic minorities themselves as the cultural subjects to

promote the preservation and promotion of their traditional cultural identity. Therefore, all legal policies and measures should serve the people in ethnic minority and mountainous regions.

The government and its agencies should continue issuing similar documents, such as Circular No. 15/2019/TT-BTTTT dated December 5, 2019, by ministry of information and communications, or Decision No. 219/QD-TTg dated February 21, 2019, by the Prime Minister. These documents aim to emphasize the crucial role of information and communication activities for ethnic minorities in the country's sustainable development. They provide timely strategies and policies to bring about comprehensive changes in legal and policy frameworks, as well as in economic, political, cultural, and social aspects. This is in line with the Party's directives and state legal policies regarding the communication of legal education in ethnic minority and mountainous areas in the current context.

Fourthly, supplementing funds for legal education dissemination in regions inhabited by ethnic minorities and in mountainous areas and addressing deficient infrastructure conditions are essential for a coherent dissemination and educational process. Particularly enhancing the ethnic minority workforce for specialized radio and television programs and other forms of legal education related to ethnic minorities and ethnic affairs through grassroots information activities to improve frequency and quality and establish dedicated television channels serving ethnic minority communities in mountainous areas. The coordination between the Committee of Ethnic Affairs, the Ministry of Information and Communications, the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism, and the Ministry of Education and Training should

ensure effective implementation, focusing on legal education for ethnic minority areas and mountainous regions regularly, covering all target groups, and innovating programs and methods for effectiveness.

Fifthly, enhancing the strong leadership and promoting the awareness among the Party committees and organizations at all levels underscores the strategic imperative of ethnic affairs. Therefore, the "determination of ethnic affairs is a fundamental, long-term and urgent strategic issue; a task of the entire Party, people, army, and political system" (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2019). First of all, Party committees, local authorities in ethnic minority and mountainous areas and media subjects need to strengthen propaganda and education to raise awareness of cadres, party members and people about plots and tricks to take advantage of this issue against Vietnam to heighten vigilance, not to listen to bad people, not to be taken advantage of by enemies; voluntarily implement the Party's views and policies, the State's policies and laws on ethnicity and religion; promoting the national spirit and respecting the differences of ethnic minorities is not contrary to the common interests of the country; resolutely fighting against the ideology of discrimination, national, religious and ethnic divisions, narrow-mindedness, extremism or national and religious complexes; constantly take care of building, strengthening and consolidating the political system in ethnic minority and mountainous areas; improve the effectiveness of state management, the effectiveness of the operation of the Fatherland Front and people's unions in order to build a more robust great unity bloc for the whole people.

5. Conclusion

Legal communication and education in ethnic minority and mountainous areas play

a crucial role in fostering consensus among all social strata, implementing socio-economic development solutions, ensuring political security, maintaining social order and safety, and upholding political stability at the grassroots level. This endeavor should also ensure the rights of ethnic minorities and align with their cultural contexts. Maximizing the participation of all community members, under the principle that each citizen acts as a legal propagandist, is vital for reinforcing the grand national unity bloc. This approach contributes to harnessing the collective strength of the nation, preserving national independence and unity, and successfully advancing the country's industrialization and modernization for a prosperous, strong, equitable, democratic, and civilized society, thereby steadily progressing towards socialism (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2003). It aligns with the principle of "ensuring equality, solidarity, respect, and mutual development among peoples, and resolutely countering all plots and actions aimed at dividing and undermining the great national unity bloc" (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2021). Additionally, it is imperative to persistently and effectively continue the communication of legal education, recognizing it as an essential requirement in the development process of legal education dissemination in ethnic minority and mountainous areas.

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