

The Research for Sustainable Poverty Reduction in Khmer Ethnic Community

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The research for sustainable poverty reduction for Khmer ethnic people in Tra Vinh province was conducted by the use of statistic approach, the current situation of poor households of Khmer ethnic people in Tra Vinh province, the interview with 300 Khmer households living in seven districts and cities of Tra Vinh province. Research findings show that there are a number of factors affecting the income of Khmer households, including the career of householders, the level of education, the ratio of dependants, living experience of the householders, the land square area, people's participation in different festivals; the number of household members, the number of activities for income and the gender of the householders. Of all the factors, occupation, level of education, and the ratio of dependants are considered to have the biggest influence on the income of Khmer ethnic people in Tra Vinh province.

Keywords: income, career, Khmer ethnic people, level of education

Introduction

Tra Vinh, one of the provinces in the Mekong River Delta, houses many Khmer ethnic people with approximately 324,877 households, accounting for 31.62% of the total number of residents in the whole province (Tra Vinh Statistics Yearbook, 2015). The Khmer ethnic people mainly live in the districts of Tra Cu, Cau Ngang, Cau Ke, and Tra Vinh city. There are totally 35,506 poor households in Tra Vinh province, accounting for 13.23% of the total households in the whole province. Of the total poor households, there are 19,756 poor households of the Khmer ethnic people, occupying 23.12% of the total Khmer households in the whole province (which makes up 55.64% of the total poor households in Tra Vinh province) (Tra Vinh People Committee, 2016).

During the past years, Tra Vinh province has proposed policies for formulating programmes, activities for developing the Central Resolution VII (Session 2) of term IX towards the ethnic minorities, Resolution 06 of Tra Vinh provincial Party Committee towards the overall development of the Khmer ethnic community, etc.. These have resulted in considerable changes in socio-economic fields, and improved the livelihood of local people. Also, the proportion of poor households of Khmer ethnic people has decreased with an average of 4.3% per year. The policies for ethnic minorities, policies for recruitment, tuition exemption, vocational training, and job creation have been carried out quite well and effectively. Moreover, traditional festivals, cultural identities, and national unity have continued to be preserved and promoted. Since then, the livelihood of the Khmer ethnic people in Tra Vinh province has been greatly improved and there has been a dramatic decrease in the number of the Khmer poor households.

Table 1

The Current Situation of Poor Households in Tra Vinh Province (Unit: Household)

No.	Targets	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
1	Total poor households	43,326	36,841	28,430	35,506	30,359
	- Khmer poor households	23,653	20,841	16,310	19,756	17,946
2	Proportion of poor households/total household in the whole province	16.64%	13.9%	10.66%	13.23%	6.6%
3	Proportion of poor Khmer households/total Khmer households	28.44%	24.65%	43.32%	23.12%	20.46%
4	Proportion of the Khmer households/total poor households	54.59%	56.57%	59.13%	55.64%	59.31%

Note. Source: a synthesis from the reports of Tra Vinh provincial People's Committee and other departments of Tra Vinh province.

However, due to objective and subjective conditions, the social and economic life of the Khmer ethnic community is often unstable (see Table 1). In the last years, the provincial Party Committee and the provincial People's Committee have carried out the policies in order to stabilize and improve the livelihood of the Khmer ethnic community. Nevertheless, many Khmer ethnic families have encountered a number of difficulties in life due to the restrictions of educational level, financial resources and other objective causes. Based on this fact, this research has found the factors affecting income of Khmer ethnic group in Tra Vinh province. From that point of view, a number of suggestions for improving sustainable poverty reduction will be recommended, and at the same time a number of policy implications for relevant agencies will be proposed regarding the planning of social security related policies for the Khmer ethnic people in Tra Vinh province in future.

Literature Review

Foreign Studies

Shrestha and Eiumnoh (2000) discussed the determinants of household income in Thailand. Multivariate regression results show that factors affecting total household income include income from agriculture, non-farm income, education level, productive land area and the number of active members. Zhou (2002) studied the determinants of youth's income: the case of Harare, in this study, work experience, demographic and socio-economic variables are not statistically meant. Schwarze (2004) studied the determinants of rural income-generating activities in the Lore-Lindu National Park neighborhood in Sulawesi, Indonesia. The results show that the dependency ratio affects total household income. Aikaali (2010) pointed out the determinants of rural income in Tanzania. In addition, the study found that female headed households had lower incomes than male-headed households.

Domestic Studies

Nguyen, Tran, and Bui (2011) studied the factors affecting household income in rural areas of Tra On district, Vinh Long province. The results show that, although the living standard of the rural population has been improved, many households still have relatively low income levels. Nguyen and Bui (2011) studied the factors affecting income of ethnic minorities in the Mekong River Delta. The results show that the educational level of the householders, household members, income-generating activities, household working age and access to supporting policies all affect the income of the Khmer ethnic group. Huynh (2011) studied the factors affecting the income of non-agricultural farming households in Duc Hoa district, Long An province. The results show that the average education level of the householders, the number of household workers, household size,

access to credit, and the number of years of schooling of the householders influence the income of the non-agricultural farmers. The studies conducted by Vien (2012) and Truong (2013) showed that there were seven factors affecting the income of farmers, including the level of education, the number of laborers in the household, the area of farming land, the number of agricultural extension visits, access to roads, total capital, and the access to water resources.

Research Methods

Research Model

Based on the research from experts, surveys and the use of previous research findings, a study on “Sustainable Poverty Reduction in the Khmer ethnic minority in Tra Vinh Province” was conducted as follows:

$$Y = b_0 + b_1X_1 + b_2X_2 + b_3X_3 + \dots + b_{11}X_{11} + b_{13}X_{13} + e$$

where Y is a dependent variable. Average income/household/month (Unit: 1,000 VND/household/month); X_1, X_2, \dots, X_{13} are independent variables. These variables are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

A Summary of Independent Variables in the Model and Expectations

Variables	Explanations	Variable selection base	Expectation
X_1 : NNCH	Occupation of the householders	Shrestha and Eiumnoh (2000); Nguyen (2004)	(+)
X_2 : TDVH	Level of education for the number of years of schooling	Shrestha and Eiumnoh (2000); Bui (2008)	(+)
X_3 : NK	The number of household members	Mai (2009)	(-)
X_4 : GTCH	The gender of the householder	T. N. Nguyen et al. (2002) and T. H. Nguyen et al. (2010)	(+)
X_5 : TLPT	The dependency ratio	Nguyen (2004); Schwarze (2004)	(-)
X_6 : HD	Activities: generating income, receiving value corresponding to the number of income-generating activities of the householders	Vu (2007); Dinh and Hoang (2010)	(+)
X_7 : KNCH	Working experience of the householder: receiving correspondent values the number of working years of the householder (year)	Bui (2008); Nguyen et al. (2011)	(+)
X_8 : V.VON	Loans	Au (2008); Mai (2009)	(+)
X_9 : DTD	Land area: showing the farming land area of each household (m ²)	Shrestha and Eiumnoh (2000)	(+)
X_{10} : TGDT	Group participation	Nguyen (2010); Bui (2011)	(+)
X_{11} : TCCS	Policies approaching	Luong (2010); Nguyen (2010)	(+)
X_{12} : TG	Religion	Pham (2008); Tran (2009)	(-)
X_{13} : TGLH	Attending festivals: the expenditure festivals every year	Group discussion	(-)

Data and Methods

From the theoretical basis and through the results of qualitative research, research data collection will be carried out by interviewing householders in the districts of Tra Cu, Cang Long, Cau Ke, Cau Ngang, and Tieu Can, etc. from August 2015 to November 2015 through direct questionnaire survey, with the sample size of $n = 300$ (Hoang & Chu, 2008).

Research Findings and Policy Implementation

Results of the Survey on Per Capita Income of the Khmer Households

According to the survey, 300 households in the survey sample are Khmer ethnic people. The average income of the sample is 2,809,321 VND/household/month (see Table 3).

Table 3

Income of the Households (Unit: Thousand Dong)

Ethnic group	The number of households	Lowest income	Highest income	Average/household/month
Khmer	300	2,500,778	3,118,236	2,809,321

Note. Source: Survey data from Tra Vinh province, 2016; Nguyen (2015).

Factors Affecting the Income of the Khmer Households

To determine the factors affecting income of Khmer households in Tra Vinh province, multivariate regression analysis was employed. In order to test the multi-collinearity in the model, testing through multipliers (VIF) of the variables did not show multi-collinearity.

Table 4

The Regression Results of the Model

Average income/person/month	Coefficient	Standard error	<i>t</i>	<i>P</i> > <i>t</i>
Occupation of the householders (X_1)	23,630.8***	87,896.84	2.82	0.007
Level of education (X_2)	34,841.77***	13,016.02	2.68	0.008
Number of the household members (X_3)	-65,690.46**	29,265.15	-2.24	0.026
Gender of the householders (X_4)	141,109.3*	81,939.53	1.72	0.087
Dependency ratio (X_5)	-367,138.6***	80,251.67	-4.57	0.000
Number of activities (X_6)	80,959.21**	36,873.73	2.20	0.030
Working experience of the householders (X_7)	26,274.82***	5,536.05	4.75	0.000
Loans (X_8)	53,831.87	77,271.80	0.70	0.487
Farming land area (X_9)	78,109.42***	21,507.28	3.63	0.000
Group participation (X_{10})	27,397.32	80,508.70	0.34	0.734
Approaching policies (X_{11})	55,101.21	87,290.49	0.63	0.529
Attending festivals (X_{13})	-97,255.98***	30,177.72	-3.22	0.002
Constant	1,483,428	252,421.90	5.88	0.000
Adjusted R^2	0.7297			
Statistical values F	34.44			
Numeric value prob. > F	0.000			

Notes. *, **, and *** indicate significance at the levels of 10%, 5%, and 1%. Source: extracted from regression results.

The regression result shows that occupation, education level, dependency ratio, working experience of the householders, area of farming land, and participation in festivals reach a significance level of 1% (see Table 4); Number of household members, number of income-generating activities at 5% significance level and the gender of householders at 10% significance level. Specifically, the average income of the Khmer households is in line with the occupational variables of the householders, the level, and the gender of the householders, the number of income-generating activities, the working experience of the householders, the size of the land area and it has a contrary correlation with the demographic variables, dependency ratio and participation in festivals. The factor of religion has not effected on income due to the fact that there is no difference between careers and pensions in the society for the followers of Buddhism and other religions so this variable is not statistically significant in this model.

Conclusion and Recommendations for Sustainable Poverty Reduction

Research shows that sustainable poverty reduction is the main way of improving the income of the Khmer ethnic minority, whose income depends heavily on agriculture. Research has shown limitations in improving the lives of the Khmer. Although the level of householders' income diversification has improved, due to the limited level of expertise, knowledge, skills, credit, access to policies, etc., the average income of the Khmer householders is quite low. Despite the limitations of time and space, research has shown the need to improve the lives of the Khmer by the solutions mentioned below.

Recommendations for Sustainable Poverty Reduction

Organizing vocational training courses for the Khmer ethnic people. The Department of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs (DOLISA) should propagate and encourage the Khmer ethnic people to participate in local vocational training courses, to help them actively participate in the economy, and actively create income-generating activities. Specially, non-agricultural activities such as knitting, sewing, biting, etc., which are in accordance with beliefs and trade villages, etc., should be encouraged in order to bring into play the available resources of the household.

Vocational training centers in the localities where Khmer ethnic people live should organize vocational training courses for ethnic minority people and at the same time adopt policies to support production establishments and cooperative economic organizations, enterprises and farm owners who are doing their jobs effectively in the locality, creating conditions for these units to create more jobs for ethnic minority people. Preferential policies for labor-intensive units of ethnic minorities should be adopted. The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, Department of Industry and Trade, Department of Planning and Investment, Department of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs, Science and Technology, etc. should actively support the Khmer ethnic people about methods of production with highly effective export business through training activities, technology transfer production, practical workshops, replication of effective production and business models, and study tours inside and outside the locality.

Formulating special credit policies for the Khmer ethnic people. The State Bank and commercial banks, as well as the Social Policy Bank, should promote information on credit programs for Khmer people. Information publicity, transparency popular to all people in need of form of loans, interest rates, time with many incentives, simple procedures (focus on syndicated loan through guarantee or local government).

Consultancy to set up business plan, supervise the process of using capital. Maintaining production cycle loans, increasing the size of loans so poor households can organize production in the long run, avoiding the risk of policy loans becoming relief. It is also important to note that rural credit development must always be closely coordinated with land issues and income diversification.

Local microfinance funds need to be supported, making it easier for the Khmer household to access state and local government support policies.

Building special infrastructure in the areas of the Khmer ethnic people. The Department of Construction and the Department of Transport Affairs... should pay attention to building traffic systems, roads, bridges, electricity and clean water, ensuring that poor households can afford these utilities at reasonable prices.

From these, they can help Khmer poor householders to develop their economy and improve their livelihoods.

Upgrading telephone and Internet infrastructure in ethnic minority areas, thus helping them understand and integrate knowledge of foreign languages in order to accumulate knowledge for production.

Promoting cultural and religious structures in the area of the Khmer ethnic people. The Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism, together with the Department of Information and Communication, should focus on building and promoting the cultural values of the Khmer ethnic group, such as setting up funds for conservation, restoration. The development of intangible cultural values of the Khmer, ... These help Khmer people peace of mind to produce, and stabilize spiritual life in the harmony between traditional cultural values and life improvement.

Improving and building up healthcare clinics. The Department of Health of Tra Vinh province should pay attention to upgrading and building modern medical facilities in ethnic minority areas, in which it is possible to develop a specific health insurance policy for ethnic minority people. Of which 100% of ethnic minorities have health insurance, have quick access to basic health services, to protect the health of the community as well as protect the environment in the place where residents live.

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