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**NEW RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN VIETNAM: A LOCAL CASE STUDY – IA BANG  
COMMUNE, DAK DOA DISTRICT, GIA LAI PROVINCE**

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**ABSTRACT**

This article analyzes the process of implementing the National Target Program on New Rural Development (NRD) in Ia Bang Commune, Dak Doa District, Gia Lai Province – a mountainous area in the Central Highlands with complex terrain and a large ethnic minority population (the Jrai people). Utilizing a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, the study identifies achievements, ongoing challenges, and the key factors that facilitate or hinder the NRD program in this locality. From this, the paper proposes several practical solutions to enhance the effectiveness of NRD implementation in similar contexts.

**Keywords:** New Rural Development (nong thon moi), Central Highlands (Tay Nguyen), Gia Lai, Ia Bang, Rural Development, Public Policy, Ethnic Minorities.

**1. INTRODUCTION**

**1.1. Overview of Ia Bang Commune**

Ia Bang Commune is located in the southern part of Dak Doa District, approximately 20 km from the district center. The commune consists of 11 villages, including 4 Kinh villages and 7 villages inhabited by the Jrai ethnic minority. Ia Bang has a total of 3,195 households and 13,687 residents, including 1,307 Kinh households (4,934 people), 2,233 Jrai households (8,676 people), and 18 households of other ethnic groups (77 people). Ethnic minorities, especially the Jrai people, make up 63.5% of the total population. Their main economic activities include wet rice cultivation and coffee farming. The commune has four satellite school campuses and one communal health station. By the end of 2023, there were 237 poor and near-poor households, with the multidimensional poverty rate at 7.42%.

The commune covers a natural area of 5,334.69 hectares, of which 4,826.97 hectares (90.48%) are agricultural land, 472.89 hectares are non-agricultural land, and 0.97 hectares remain unused. The working-age population is 7,085 people, with 4,965 trained workers (70.1%) and 1,422 certified with degrees or certificates (20.07%).

Over recent years, the Party Committee, local authorities, and residents of Ia Bang have made concerted efforts to gradually shift the rural and agricultural economic structure, apply scientific and technical advances in production, and improve infrastructure such as schools, healthcare stations, and roads. These improvements have enhanced housing, electricity, and water conditions,

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improving residents' material and spiritual lives. Political security and social order have remained stable, and the local Party and government have fulfilled their responsibilities with solidarity.

**Favorable Conditions:**

The commune has received strong guidance and support from the provincial and district-level Party Committees, People's Committees, and relevant departments, creating favorable conditions for NRD implementation. Local cadres, from commune to village levels, are proactive, enthusiastic, and responsible. The people trust in the leadership of the Party, the direction of the government, and the involvement of the entire political system. They have shown strong support for NRD, including land donations, financial contributions, and voluntary labor.

Ia Bang has a large area and a growing population. Its economy continues to develop steadily, mainly based on agriculture. The main crops are coffee, pepper, rubber, and wet rice, along with livestock such as cattle and pigs. Additionally, small-scale services and handicrafts are expanding and diversifying to meet the needs of agricultural production and consumption. The commune has a large labor force for agricultural activities. Infrastructure such as electricity, roads, irrigation, and public facilities have been upgraded, meeting socio-economic development needs. Political and social security remains stable.

**Challenges:**

Despite favorable conditions, Ia Bang Commune still faces several difficulties. The local economy remains unstable, with a low proportion of industry and services, and agricultural production is still highly dependent on weather conditions. The level of education is generally low, and the application of scientific and technological advances in agriculture is limited, resulting in low yields and product quality. The COVID-19 pandemic and natural disasters have driven down agricultural prices, affecting residents' ability to contribute resources to build rural infrastructure, such as roads, cultural houses, playgrounds, and schools.

Several criteria remain unmet, including those related to schools, cultural facilities, and sports infrastructure. Delays in funding disbursement have slowed progress. Moreover, there is a lack of comprehensive and appropriate solutions for developing high-tech agriculture, improving income, production organization, and housing. Some assigned officials have not shown sufficient commitment, particularly in promoting health insurance participation among residents.

**2. THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL BASIS**

The New Rural Development (NRD) program in Vietnam is a comprehensive initiative initiated by the Vietnamese government in 2010, aimed at improving the material and spiritual life of rural residents, developing infrastructure, promoting production, protecting the environment, and preserving cultural identity. The essence of NRD can be observed at three levels:

- a. Comprehensive Rural Development: Not limited to improving income, it also includes culture, education, healthcare, environment, security, and infrastructure. Vietnam's NRD model is based on 19 criteria (now adjusted and expanded).
- b. Community-Based Approach: Rural residents are the key actors in NRD, with the government providing guidance and initial support. The program promotes autonomy, self-reliance, and internal community mobilization.
- c. Modern State Governance: NRD reflects innovative public policy and involves collaboration

between central and local authorities and communities, aiming to narrow the rural-urban development gap.

### **International Comparisons**

Several countries have implemented rural development programs similar to Vietnam's NRD:

#### **a. South Korea – Saemaul Undong Movement:**

Launched in the 1970s under President Park Chung-hee, this movement promoted 'Diligence – Self-reliance – Cooperation' to enhance the material and spiritual lives of rural people. It became a successful model inspiring many developing nations, including Vietnam.

#### **b. China – New Socialist Countryside Program:**

Initiated in 2005 as part of the 'Three Rural Issues' (Farmers – Countryside – Agriculture), this program emphasized infrastructure development, public services, agricultural modernization, and rural poverty reduction.

#### **c. Other Countries:**

India has implemented PURA (Providing Urban Amenities to Rural Areas), while Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand have each developed strategic national rural development programs.

Comparison Table:

Criteria	Vietnam	South Korea	China
Start Year	2010	1970s	2005
Focus	Infrastructure, production, environment	Self-reliance, community cooperation	Comprehensive rural modernization
Implementation Mechanism	From central to local levels, with clear criteria	Nationwide mass movement	Comprehensive government direction
Community Participation	Very High	Very High	Relatively High

### **Legal Framework and Implementation in Vietnam**

Vietnam's NRD program was established under Decision No. 800/QĐ-TTg dated June 4, 2010, by the Prime Minister. It is a comprehensive rural development initiative focused on socio-economic infrastructure, agricultural restructuring, income improvement, social order, and cultural preservation. To be recognized as a 'new rural commune', a locality must meet 19 criteria (now expanded to 57 sub-criteria) across fields such as transport, electricity, schools, healthcare, income, poverty rate, production organization, environment, culture, and security.

## **3. NEW RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROCESS IN IA BANG**

### **3.1 Initial Conditions and Challenges (2006–2010):**

Prior to the implementation of the National Target Program on New Rural Development (NTM), Ia Bang was a remote and disadvantaged commune with underdeveloped infrastructure, high

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poverty rates, and a subsistence agricultural economy. In 2006, the poverty rate stood at 42.8%. Infrastructure was limited, and basic services in education and healthcare were inadequate. The economic structure relied primarily on rain-fed agriculture with minimal technological application, resulting in low productivity and low household incomes. Though some investment was made between 2003 and 2013, including VND 11.9 billion in basic infrastructure—of which VND 5.8 billion was allocated for educational facility upgrades—these efforts fell short of addressing broader socio-economic needs.

### 3.2 Implementation and Progress (2011–2020):

The commune began participating in the NTM program in 2011. Initial results showed that Ia Bang achieved 4 out of 19 national criteria: electricity, education, healthcare, and political-security stability. In subsequent years, the commune progressively fulfilled more criteria, reaching 9/19 by 2014. Through integrated investment and the mobilization of multiple funding sources—including central and provincial budgets, local contributions, and labor—Ia Bang achieved significant progress. By the end of 2020, the commune had met 15/19 criteria. The focus was placed on road construction, cultural infrastructure, housing, and improving economic livelihoods, with total investment for the 2015–2020 period reaching VND 218.679 billion. The local government promoted participatory governance and mobilized contributions from residents, businesses, and aligned organizations to ensure shared ownership of rural transformation.

### 3.3 Final Achievements and Outcomes (2021–2023):

The commune intensified efforts to meet the final 4 criteria—schools, cultural facilities, environment, and governance. By the end of 2023, all 19/19 criteria were satisfied, leading to official provincial recognition of Ia Bang as a new rural commune in 2024. Specific projects included upgrading village roads, improving health stations, building cultural houses, enhancing irrigation systems, and expanding access to electricity and clean water. The commune recorded marked improvements in income, education, healthcare, housing quality, and environmental sanitation. Average income rose to VND 48.04 million/person/year by 2023, while the multidimensional poverty rate declined to 7.42%.

Between 2011 and 2023, the total investment mobilized for Ia Bang’s new rural development was VND 270.975 billion, sourced from central, provincial, and local budgets, as well as contributions from credit sources, businesses, donors, and local residents. All infrastructure and public service projects—ranging from schools and roads to cultural and sports facilities—were completed and placed into use. Community participation was essential, especially in labor mobilization, land donation, and environmental management. The commune also launched educational and vocational training programs, agricultural extension services, and cooperative production models to improve income and employment sustainability.

## 4. RESULTS OF IMPLEMENTATION

In 2024, Ia Bang Commune was officially recognized by the Gia Lai Provincial People's Committee as having met the New Rural Development (NRD) standards for the year 2023 (according to Decision No. 596/QĐ-UBND dated October 14, 2024). A formal ceremony was held on November 18, 2024, to celebrate this achievement. The commune now boasts two agricultural service cooperatives (with seven members each), one agricultural cooperative group with eleven

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members, one garment linkage group with seventeen members, and two agricultural production groups with twenty-two members. Small and medium-sized enterprises have emerged, and household businesses have expanded across the commune.

The average per capita income increased significantly over the years, from VND 22 million in 2011 to VND 48.04 million by 2023. The poverty rate fell from 49.8% in 2011 to just 7.42% in 2023. The total capital mobilized and invested during the NRD process amounted to VND 270.975 billion, sourced from the central, provincial, district, and commune budgets, along with credit loans, private enterprises, donors, and resident contributions. The commune met all 19/19 NRD criteria, including urban planning, transport, irrigation, electricity, schools, cultural infrastructure, commercial services, communication, housing, income, poverty reduction, employment, production organization, education, healthcare, cultural preservation, environmental sanitation, legal access, and national defense-security.

## **5. CHALLENGES AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR ADVANCING TO ADVANCED NRD STATUS**

Despite the success of the NRD program, Ia Bang Commune still faces several challenges. Financial mobilization remains difficult due to limited state budgets, low household incomes, and the absence of large enterprise investment. Some achieved criteria are only met at a basic level. The cooperative economy is underdeveloped, and citizen engagement in agricultural linkages remains limited. Criteria such as healthcare, rural housing, electricity quality, roads, and schools, though formally satisfied, require further enhancement.

Key lessons drawn from Ia Bang's experience include: (1) Effective communication to ensure local communities understand and participate meaningfully in the NRD program; (2) Strong leadership and close supervision by the Party Committee and flexible execution by local authorities; (3) Empowering communities through the principles of 'people know, people discuss, people do, people supervise, and people benefit'; (4) Maintaining a long-term vision and avoiding a hasty, achievement-oriented approach; and (5) Recognizing and rewarding positive contributors while ensuring regular monitoring and corrective actions. These lessons are crucial for guiding Ia Bang in its next goal—achieving the status of an 'advanced new rural commune' (nông thôn mới nâng cao).

## **6. CONCLUSION**

The New Rural Development (NRD) program represents a major policy initiative of the Vietnamese Party and State, aimed at promoting deep-rooted transformations in rural agriculture and society. It focuses on enhancing agricultural productivity through the formation of specialized production zones, while concurrently developing rural infrastructure—particularly transport, irrigation, electricity, telecommunications, schools, and healthcare facilities. These improvements have elevated the living standards of rural residents, contributed to improved health and education, and boosted socio-economic vitality.

Commercial and service sectors have seen consistent growth, creating new employment opportunities, increasing income levels, and accelerating the restructuring of the rural economy toward a greater share of services and industry. The political system at the grassroots level has been strengthened, grassroots democracy enhanced, and political security and social order stabilized. As of 2023, Ia Bang Commune has successfully met all 19 NRD criteria, signifying a

comprehensive transformation.

The significance of achieving new rural status is not only economic and social but also cultural, environmental, and political. Specifically:

1. Improved living standards through increased income, sustainable poverty reduction, better housing, electricity, clean water, and environmental sanitation.
  2. Upgraded infrastructure for transportation, education, healthcare, culture, and utilities.
  3. Enhanced education, healthcare, and cultural vitality with higher enrollment rates, reduced dropout rates, and greater access to basic health services.
  4. Environmental protection and sustainable development with waste collection, green landscapes, and climate-adaptive agricultural practices.
  5. Strengthened grassroots political systems and social consensus, with citizens participating in decision-making and benefiting from public programs.
  6. Maintenance of national defense and rural security.
  7. Rural-urban integration through improved infrastructure and market connectivity.
- Successfully building a new rural commune not only fulfills Vietnam's agricultural and rural development goals but also lays the groundwork for achieving the nation's aspiration for rapid, sustainable, and inclusive development based on fairness, democracy, and progress.

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