

Results of the Implementation of the National Target Program on New Rural Development in the Period 2021–2024: A Case Study of Phu Đò Commune, Phu Luong District, Thai Nguyen City

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ABSTRACT: *Phu Đò Commune, located in a remote area of Phu Luong District, Thai Nguyen Province, encompasses a total natural area of 2,276.93 hectares. The commune consists of 14 hamlets with a population of 6,419 individuals from 1,554 households, representing 12 ethnic groups, of which ethnic minorities account for 60%. The economic structure of Phu Đò is predominantly based on agriculture and forestry, with tea cultivation and afforestation serving as the primary sectors. The commune achieved the "new rural standards" designation in 2018. The research team employed various methodologies, including data collection and processing, field surveys, and comparative analysis, to identify limitations and underlying causes in the implementation of the new rural development program. The study revealed several key challenges: Geographical and Demographic Factors: Phu Đò covers a relatively large area with a dispersed population and uneven educational attainment among residents. Agricultural Production: Agricultural activities remain fragmented and small-scale, with slow progress in crop structure transformation. Infrastructure Development: While investments in infrastructure have been made, they are uneven and insufficient to meet current needs. Resource Constraints: The financial and material resources required for sustaining new rural development are substantial. However, in recent years, the declining market price of tea—a key economic driver of the locality—has adversely affected household incomes. Community Participation: A segment of the population exhibits dependence on government support, lacking initiative and active participation in contributing resources for new rural development efforts.*

KEYWORD: *Criteria, National target program, Countryside, New countryside, Phu Đò commune*

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I. INTRODUCTION

New Rural Development (NRD) has been a matter of significant concern and priority for both the Party and the State. The National Target Program for New Rural Development, implemented during the period of industrialization and modernization from 2010 to 2020, has concluded and is now being continued in the 2021–2025 phase. This program is being carried out across rural areas nationwide, with the goal of fostering sustainable rural development, improving livelihoods, and modernizing agricultural practices in alignment with broader national development strategies. This ongoing initiative reflects a comprehensive and long-term approach to addressing the multifaceted challenges of rural areas, ensuring balanced development and resource optimization while promoting economic growth, social equity, and environmental sustainability.

The National Target Program on New Rural Development in Vietnam has achieved significant results since its implementation in 2010 [1]. The program has improved rural socio-economic development, strengthened basic infrastructure, and enhanced living standards for residents [2]. Studies show that 45.3% of households in some areas reported improved living conditions, including increased income, better housing, and access to healthcare and education [3]. The program has also contributed to poverty reduction and social justice [4]. Stakeholders generally agree on the program's significance, but there are differing perspectives on roles and participation levels [5]. Addressing these challenges and bridging stakeholder gaps are crucial for the program's continued success in the 2021-2025 period. The National Target Program on New Rural Development positively impacted household income in Vietnam [6]. However, People's participation in the National Target Program for New Rural Development in Vietnam is limited, with the highest level being awareness and the lowest being monitoring [7]. The National Target Programme for Building New Rural Areas in Vietnam from 2011-2015, finding that rural development programs should specify difficulties for each area and prioritize them accordingly [8].

Each locality employs its own tailored strategies for implementing New Rural Development (NRD) initiatives, adapted to the unique characteristics of its rural areas. A body of research has addressed various criteria within NRD, offering valuable insights into specific aspects of its implementation: Human Resource

Development: Several studies have examined the critical role of developing human resources in advancing NRD [9]. Women's Contributions to Environmental Protection: The research team led by Trần Thị Ngọc Hà emphasized the pivotal role of women in NRD, particularly in environmental protection efforts [10]. Economic Development: The importance of economic development in NRD has been analyzed extensively by Le Van Bay and colleagues [11][12]. Mobilizing Community Resources: Hoang Van Cam explored the strategies for mobilizing community resources as a key factor in NRD implementation [13]. Improving Water and Sanitation Services: Đào Thị Thu Hang focused on enhancing the quality of clean water and rural sanitation services, contributing to the development of advanced and exemplary new rural models in Hung Yen Province [14].

Phu Đò Commune, located in Phu Luong District, achieved the designation of a "New Rural Standard" area in 2018. In recent years, the New Rural Development (NRD) initiatives in the commune have demonstrated significant progress, with several hamlets successfully engaging the local population in achieving key criteria and enhancing the rural landscape and community aesthetics. Despite these achievements, the commune faces persistent challenges, including low educational attainment, inadequate infrastructure, limited human resources, and fragmented, small-scale agricultural production with slow progress in crop structure transformation. Furthermore, funding mobilized from enterprises and philanthropic sources for NRD remains limited. The ability of some hamlets to contribute and generate local resources for NRD is constrained, resulting in insufficient capital for sustainable development efforts. In light of these challenges, the research team undertook this study to evaluate the current status of NRD implementation in Phu Đò Commune. The objective is to provide a scientific basis for recommending context-specific solutions to enhance the effectiveness of NRD initiatives and support sustainable rural development in the locality.

II. RESEARCH METHODS

- Data Collection and Processing Methods

The study involved the collection of legal and regulatory documents relevant to the New Rural Development (NRD) Program in Phu Đò Commune, Phu Luong District. Secondary data gathered by the research team included: Information on the commune's natural conditions and socioeconomic characteristics. The current status of the implementation of NRD criteria in the locality. The team compiled scientific publications and information from mass media platforms (e.g., online news articles, internet resources) as well as related research topics, theses, and dissertations. Once collected, the data were classified and processed using Microsoft Office software, such as Word and Excel, to synthesize and analyze the research content systematically.

- Field Survey Methods

Field surveys were conducted to examine the natural conditions, socioeconomic characteristics, natural resource potential, and the actual implementation of NRD criteria in Phu Đò Commune. These surveys assessed the alignment between observed outcomes and the results indicated by collected data. The surveys involved direct field observations and consultations with key stakeholders, including local residents, NRD officials, hamlet leaders, and representatives of various community organizations. This approach ensured the acquisition of detailed and reliable information regarding the implementation process and provided a foundation for evaluating the NRD program's progress and identifying priorities for subsequent phases.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Planning

Phu Đò Commune received approval for the adjustment of its general construction planning through Decision No. 2880/QĐ-UBND, dated December 30, 2023, issued by the People's Committee of Phu Luong District. This plan outlines the commune's development framework through 2035. However, Phu Đò has not yet developed a detailed planning document and therefore does not meet the criteria for advanced New Rural Development (NRD) in terms of planning requirements. The total budget allocated for meeting this criterion is 302 million VND, distributed as follows: State budget (central, provincial, district, and communal levels): 0 VND. Socialized funds (mobilized from enterprises, local residents, etc.): 142 million VND, sponsored by FLC Group. Outstanding debt: 103 million VND remains unpaid.

3.2. Development of Socioeconomic Infrastructure

- Transportation

The commune has not yet met the transportation criterion outlined in the advanced New Rural Development (NRD) standards. Indicators and reported data have been compared against the objectives set forth in the proposed plan, highlighting areas requiring further improvement.

The total budget allocated for achieving this criterion is 5,437 million VND, distributed as follows: State budget (central, provincial, district, and communal levels): 3,129 million VND. Socialized funds (mobilized from enterprises and local residents): 2,308 million VND

Table 1: Current status of traffic criteria in Phu Do commune in 2024

No.	Road type	General requirements (%)	Total road network (Km)	Plain/hardened/clear (Km)	Percentage achieved (%)	Evaluation (Passed/failed according to each criterion)
1	2	3	4	5	5/4 = 6	7
1	Communal and inter-communal roads are asphalted or concreted to meet the technical standards of the Ministry of Transport	100%	8.4	8.4	100	Obtain
2	Hamlet roads are hardened to meet the technical standards of the Ministry of Transport	100%	36.37	32,78	90,1	Obtain
3	Alleys and hamlets are clean and not muddy during the rainy season	100% (of which >= 70% is hardened)	17,81	9,89	55,5	Obtain
4	Main intra-field roads are hardened, convenient for motor vehicles to travel	>= 50%	0.74	0.64	86	Obtain

- Irrigation and Disaster Prevention (Reported by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development)

In 2023, the Management Board of Construction Projects under the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development in Thai Nguyen Province undertook significant improvements to irrigation and disaster prevention infrastructure in Phu Do Commune. Key activities included:

Cuc Lung Reservoir Repairs: The reservoir was repaired, and a concrete road with dual functionality as a residential access road was constructed. Additionally, upgrades were made to the primary irrigation canal, and a reinforced concrete ring road bridge around the reservoir was built. Approximately 150 meters of internal roads in the Cuc Lung hamlet were paved to facilitate agricultural production.

Disaster Preparedness and Response: The commune promptly restructured its Command Committee for Disaster Prevention, Search, Rescue, and Civil Defense. It also reorganized its Rapid Response Teams for disaster prevention and search and rescue (PCTT-TKCN) and developed comprehensive disaster prevention plans. Equipment provided for disaster response included raincoats, boots, helmets, life jackets, warning signs, flashing lights, reflective ropes, and other essential tools, ensuring readiness for the “four-on-the-spot” principle (on-site command, on-site forces, on-site equipment, and on-site logistics). 2024 Enhancements: The commune is set to receive one rescue boat, one parachute, life jackets, warning lights, and additional tools to further strengthen its disaster prevention and search-and-rescue capacity.

- Electricity

In 2023, the commune received upgrades to medium-voltage power infrastructure in Phang 2 hamlet and improvements to low-voltage power lines in Cúc Lùng hamlet.

The commune meets Criterion No. 4 on Electricity as outlined in the advanced New Rural Development (NRD) standards.

- Education

The commune has 3 out of 4 schools meeting national standards. The remaining school, Phu Do Secondary School, has a funding plan in place to achieve the standard by 2025.

New classrooms and functional facilities have been constructed for Phu Do Primary School 1.

Two classroom buildings have been funded by the KFHI organization: one for Phu Nam preschool at a cost of 1.5 billion VND and another for Phu Do Primary School 1 at a cost of 2.7 billion VND.

- Cultural Infrastructure

Efforts are being made to preserve and promote traditional cultural values sustainably, aligned with rural tourism development.

Local communication efforts include the use of electronic information systems and grassroots broadcasting stations to disseminate information on socioeconomic development.

Significant cultural preservation projects have been implemented:

In 2022, the Pháng communal house, a provincial historical site, was repaired.

In 2023, the Cúc Lùng communal house was recognized as a provincial historical site.

Cultural restoration activities include reviving the Mong ethnic group's Gau Tao Festival and preserving Sán Chay ethnic traditions such as Tắc Xình dancing and Sắng Coo singing.

Although no new cultural houses have been built during this period, existing ones in Phu Nam Moi, Phu Nam 7, and Phang 1 hamlets have undergone renovations.

- Rural Trade Infrastructure

According to Decision No. 2343/QĐ-UBND (dated September 16, 2020) by the Phu Luong District People's Committee, the Phu Đò Market management model was transferred to the Northern Market Joint Stock Company.

In 2021, road surfaces around the market were upgraded.

In 2022, signs and the market gate were installed.

Total costs covered repairs, upgrades, and construction of new markets in the district, transitioning them to enterprise or cooperative management models.

The commune meets Criterion No. 7 on Rural Trade Infrastructure in the advanced NRD standards.

- Healthcare Infrastructure and Equipment

The commune's health station meets national healthcare standards as defined by the Ministry of Health, providing basic medical care for residents.

No repairs or upgrades to the health station were carried out during this period. Key health indicators include: Health insurance participation rate: 90%. Malnutrition rate among children under 5 (stunting): 8.5%.

Ongoing efforts focus on raising awareness and implementing electronic medical records for residents.

- Information and Communication Systems

The commune has submitted a proposal for approval of Level 1 information security to the provincial authorities, supporting the completion of an integrated information technology and data infrastructure for digital transformation.

Investments have been made to enhance communication facilities, such as upgrading commune broadcasting stations with IT-telecommunications technology and ensuring coverage down to the hamlet level.

Multi-functional communication service points at postal locations have been developed to improve public access to government services, media, and other information services. The commune broadcasting system operates effectively, with IT-telecommunications clusters providing consistent coverage to hamlets.

- Clean Water Systems

The commune has four clean water facilities, with two currently operational:

The Phu Đò-Pho Tho-Vu 1 inter-hamlet facility.

The Cuc Lung hamlet facility.

Two inactive facilities (Phang 2 and Vu 2 hamlets) are under consideration for decommissioning.

Residents of Cuc Lung have collectively contributed over 100 million VND to repair their water facility.

Key water usage indicators:

Proportion of rural population using hygienic water: 82.26%.

Proportion of schools and health stations using clean water: 100%.

3.3. Economic Development and Production Organization

The total tea cultivation area in the commune is 676 hectares. Fresh Tea Bud Production: Prior to the implementation of the Development Plan, annual production was 5,850 tons; currently, it averages over 7,500 tons, an increase of 1,650 tons.

Dried Tea Bud Production: Initially at 20 tons per year, production has risen to an average of 27 tons, an increase of 7 tons.

Economic Value of Dried Tea Products: The value of dried tea bud production, calculated at current prices, increased from 228.48 billion VND before the plan to 240.15 billion VND presently.

The commune has developed two OCOP-certified products under the leadership of the Saemaul Phu Nam 1 Agricultural, Commercial, and Service Cooperative: 2021: The "Special Shrimp Tea Bud" product achieved a 4-star OCOP rating. 2023: The "Hong Phuoc Tea" product was awarded a 3-star OCOP rating.

Efforts to enhance agricultural productivity include the application and transfer of advanced scientific and technological innovations: Phú Đò Safe Tea Cooperative: Utilizes biomass gasification technology for tea roasting. Saemaul Phu Nam 1 Cooperative: Employs electric and gas-powered tea roasting machines. Agricultural Modernization and Value Chain Integration: The commune has established and expanded centralized production areas with synchronized mechanization, improving the capacity for agricultural processing and preservation. Value chain production models are being developed to ensure food safety and traceability for key agricultural products.

Certified Areas: Before the plan, 150 hectares were certified under VietGAP standards. This has expanded to 304.2 hectares, with 12.2 hectares now holding planting area codes, an increase of 154 hectares.

QR Code Labeling: Six products currently use QR codes for traceability, achieving 60% of the 2025 target (10 QR-labeled products).

The commune integrates the National Target Program for Sustainable Poverty Reduction (2021-2025) with the New Rural Development Program to narrow the income and living standards gap for ethnic minorities and mountainous regions compared to the provincial average.

Social welfare policies are effectively implemented for disadvantaged groups, including the poor, ethnic minorities, and vulnerable populations.

Income Growth: 2020 Average Annual Income: 30 million VND per capita. 2023 Average Annual Income: 47.619 million VND per capita, surpassing the 2025 target of 36 million VND as set by the Party Congress Resolution. 2024 Projection: Average annual income is expected to reach 50.6 million VND per capita.

3.4. Enhancing the Quality of Education, Healthcare, and Community Health Services

Educational institutions in the commune ensure the provision of adequate infrastructure for teaching and learning activities. The schools maintain a conducive environment for both instruction and student engagement, ensuring that educational standards are met.

The commune's health station meets national standards as defined by the Ministry of Health, providing essential initial healthcare services. The station is equipped with the basic tools necessary for primary health care delivery. Public health efforts include comprehensive disease prevention and control campaigns, ensuring that the population is well-informed about health risks and preventive measures. Regular monitoring and health management services are also provided to ensure the well-being of the residents.

Additionally, the commune has received support for educational infrastructure development through the KFHI organization, which funded the construction of two school buildings: Phu Nam Phu Đò Kindergarten School Building, valued at 1.5 billion VND, Phu Đò 1 Primary School Building, valued at 2.7 billion VND.

3.5. Enhancing the Quality of Cultural Life

Efforts to improve the quality of local cultural activities continue with the aim of optimizing the infrastructure and cultural facilities that have been invested in. The expansion of cultural clubs and artistic activities is a key strategy for preserving traditional cultural values. Additionally, the development of tourism models linked to the conservation and promotion of traditional cultural values is expected to enhance the economic value of these cultural assets. In terms of cultural heritage, significant actions have been taken, including the repair of the Pháng Village Historical Site in 2022, and the recognition of Cuc Lung Temple as a provincial historical site in 2023. The commune also collaborates on the restoration of Mong ethnic cultural practices, such as the Gau Tao Festival, and continues the preservation and promotion of the culture of the San Chay ethnic group, including the Tac Xinh Dance and Sang Coo Singing.

3.6. Environmental Protection

A comprehensive approach to environmental protection has been implemented, with the objective of creating a bright, green, clean, beautiful, and safe landscape. Efforts are focused on establishing and guiding the execution of waste classification, collection, transportation, and disposal practices, especially emphasizing source separation of waste. Rigorous monitoring of waste sources and waste disposal processes is in place to ensure environmental compliance. Furthermore, there is a push to address pollution management, particularly in the context of agricultural production, craft villages, solid waste, and domestic wastewater.

Monthly, local communities actively engage in environmental cleanup activities, including the cleaning of village roads and alleys. Inspections are also carried out to ensure compliance with food safety and environmental protection regulations, particularly for livestock farming facilities and timber processing units.

The commune has organized environmental awareness meetings to promote the proper handling of pesticide packaging and the restoration of river and stream flow in Phu Nam 2 and Phu Nam 3, attracting over 150 participants. Additionally, a model for converting organic waste into organic fertilizer has been launched in Phu Đò, and 40 pesticide packaging collection containers have been distributed to local villages to improve waste management practices. These efforts not only contribute to the local environmental sustainability but also foster greater community participation in environmental stewardship.

3.7. Political System and Legal Access

Currently, the commune has a workforce of 21 officials, consisting of 11 civil servants and 10 administrative officers. The educational qualifications of these individuals include 1 with a Master's degree, 19 with Bachelor's degrees, and 2 with Associate degrees, specifically in fields such as Cultural-Social Affairs, Land-Construction-Agriculture-Environmental Management.

The Party Committee, local government, and political-social organizations within the commune are consistently rated as performing their duties at a satisfactory level or above. Annually, the commune meets the legal access standards set by relevant regulations. The commune ensures gender equality and the prevention of domestic violence, gender-based violence, and child abuse. It also provides protection and support for children in special circumstances, as well as vulnerable individuals within families and society at large. A strategic plan is developed and implemented to enhance the community's understanding of rural development, particularly regarding the New Rural Development initiative. This plan involves training to improve community capacity, in alignment with increasing the effectiveness of the village development committees.

3.8. National Defense and Security

Local military work is stable, with annual recruitment targets being consistently met at 100% as assigned by higher authorities. The organization and staffing of the militia follow the legal requirements, and defense drills are adapted to local realities. Additionally, the commune ensures that national defense education is adequately provided to all relevant groups.

Each year, the Party Committee issues a resolution to direct the People's Committee to develop and implement a comprehensive plan for ensuring security and public order. Furthermore, effective measures are adopted to maintain political stability, public security, and social order, including the organization of the movement "The Entire Population Protects the Homeland Security".

Regular quarterly, semi-annual, and annual reviews are conducted to assess progress, extract lessons learned, and establish future directions. The commune's public security protection movement has consistently been rated as good or higher by the district police. Several models, such as "People's Security Teams" and "Mediation Teams", operate in all 14 villages within the commune, contributing to maintaining law and order. These models should be further expanded for broader application.

IV. CONCLUSION

The implementation of the National Target Program for New Rural Development in Phu Do Commune during the 2021-2024 period has brought significant changes to agriculture, farmers, and rural areas. Agriculture has developed, farmers have altered their mindsets, and rural areas have received systematic training. Farmers have seen increased incomes, reduced poverty, and improvements in environmental quality, with landscapes that are brighter, greener, cleaner, and more beautiful. Public security and social order have been maintained effectively.

However, based on field surveys, it is evident that Phu Do is a commune where agricultural production continues to play a dominant role in the local economy. The production model remains primarily based on family-run farms, characterized by small-scale, fragmented practices, and has yet to establish cohesive product value chains. Although infrastructure has been invested in and developed, it does not meet current demands due to the high resource requirements and the prevailing economic challenges in the region. There is also a lack of resources for agricultural development, and a small portion of the population still holds a mindset of dependence, waiting for state support rather than proactively contributing to local development

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