



CURRENT SITUATION AND SOLUTIONS TO STRENGTHEN MASS MOBILIZATION WORK IN THE KHMER ETHNIC MINORITY REGION IN AN GIANG PROVINCE, VIETNAM

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Abstract:

Mass mobilization work in ethnic minority areas has a critical position and role. It is a part of the Party's mass mobilization work to strengthen the close relationship between the Party and the people. An Giang is a mountainous, border province with a large population of ethnic minorities, especially Khmer people. Realizing this, the An Giang Provincial Party Committee has determined that mass mobilization work in Khmer ethnic minority areas plays a particularly important role in strengthening the trust of ethnic minorities in the leadership of the Party and the management of the State, consolidating national defense, maintaining political security, social order and safety, promoting the strength of the great national unity bloc, contributing to the successful implementation of the tasks set out by the An Giang Provincial Party Congress.

Keywords: mass mobilization work, Khmer ethnic minority people, An Giang province, Vietnam.

1. Introduction

An Giang is a province with a particularly important geostrategic position, with a 200 km long coastline and a border of more than 148 km with the Kingdom of Cambodia. An Giang is a locality with a multi-cultural identity, originating from the ethnic communities living together in the area. An Giang Province has 29 ethnic groups living together, with a population of 4,952,238 people, of which the Khmer ethnic group accounts for 17,2% of the province's population [4; p.2]. In the history of the nation in general, and the history

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of the An Giang Party Committee in particular, the Khmer ethnic group has made many great contributions and is very important in the cause of building and defending the country.

In recent years, with the leadership of all levels, the mass mobilization work in the Khmer ethnic group area of the political system from the province to the grassroots has made important contributions to the work of Party building, promoting the strength of the great national unity bloc, and contributing to the successful implementation of the set socio-economic goals. However, the leadership and organization of the implementation of the work of mobilizing ethnic minorities are not comprehensive and timely; the work of organizing and building a team of cadres to do mass mobilization work of some Party committees has not received due attention, a part of cadres is limited in qualifications, capacity, skills, and methods, leading to the quality and effectiveness of mass mobilization work in ethnic minority areas is not high. This situation requires An Giang province to promote mass mobilization work in Khmer ethnic minority areas, raise people's awareness, care for their material and spiritual life, and create a solid "people's hearts" position.

2. Overview of some basic issues on the economy, society, and characteristics of the Khmer people in An Giang province

In addition to the common characteristics of the Khmer people in the Mekong Delta, the Khmer people in An Giang have their own unique characteristics. The Khmer people in An Giang live concentratedly in the communes of Tinh Bien, Tri Ton, Chau Thanh, Giong Rieng, Go Quao, Hon Dat, and Giang Thanh; the rest live scattered in the communes of Chau Phu, Chau Thanh, and Thoai Son. The Khmer people in An Giang province often live on two highlands, mainly around the mountain range, and gather in phum, soc - the traditional social organization of the community.

The majority of the Khmer people in An Giang province are attached to the highland phum, soc surrounding the foot of the mountain, or Theravada Buddhist pagodas, living relatively separate from the Kinh people. Therefore, in An Giang, there are a number of communes with a large Khmer population (including communes with up to 90% Khmer people) [3; p.35]. The Khmer people in An Giang are often sparsely populated, and the phum and soc are far apart, with a lower population density than other regions. The landscape of this area has many similarities with the other side of the Cambodian border, with common features such as rows of palm trees, small hills with few trees, and herds of cows grazing on the mountain slopes. There are Khmer people who are immigrants from the border country of Cambodia who have come to live in this area. This is also a unique feature that only exists in the Khmer ethnic area of An Giang.

Firstly, in terms of economy and society.

The Khmer people in An Giang promote agricultural production and rice and crop cultivation, which soon becomes the economic foundation of the community. In addition, the Khmer people in An Giang also develop livestock and poultry farming, pottery

making, weaving, palm sugar cooking, etc. More than 90% of the Khmer people in An Giang specialize in rice production, and almost all of the land of the Khmer people is used for rice and crop cultivation [6]. The economy of the Khmer people is still self-sufficient and depends heavily on nature, backward farming practices, and economic life mainly provides for the consumption needs of families and villages, so when switching to the market mechanism, the Khmer people in An Giang are very confused. Because they are used to living with old experiences and habits, they lack flexibility, are slow to grasp new things, and are not bold in changing their ways of doing business, production, and trading.

Second, in terms of social structure.

For the Khmer people in An Giang, phum and soc (Srôk) are traditional social units. Soc includes many phums, which are the smallest administrative unit that is more of a clan than an administrative unit. Phum is often considered as a village or hamlet of the Vietnamese, pây of the Cham, or buôn of the Central Highlands. Phum and soc include Khmer families with the same bloodline on the female side. Phum has its own name, usually called after the person who founded the phum (For example, Phum Ta on Chau Lang commune; Soc Ba Sen Nhon Hung commune). In each phum and soc, a leader called Mêsok (squirrel mother) is usually elected, who must be knowledgeable about customs and practices, have experience in production, understand Buddhist teachings, and have the responsibility to protect, care for, maintain relationships, resolve disputes, and manage common assets (wildland, water sources, alluvial land, crematoriums, etc.). Consider allowing other phum and soc people to reside, preside over religious activities, and ethnic festivals.

Today, hamlet and commune organizations have become popular in the Khmer community in An Giang province. However, the imprint of phum and soc in the clan-based settlement, in hamlet community activities, and in the pagoda activities of Khmer residents remains.

Third, about religion.

The Khmer people in the South, in general, and the Khmer people in An Giang in particular, follow Theravada Buddhism. Currently, according to data from the An Giang Museum, there are 141 Khmer Buddhist temples in the whole province. Many beautiful, large, and ancient Khmer temples in An Giang date back about 200 years [2; p.17].

In general, each Khmer hamlet in An Giang today has one or more of their Buddhist temples. Khmer temples are built in large, majestic grounds, forming a typical architectural complex, unique to the Khmer religious architectural tradition. For the Khmer people, temples are the center of religious, cultural, and social activities, a place to preserve and pass on national culture, so there is a close connection between temples, villages, and Khmer people. It can be seen that the pagoda plays a particularly important role and position in all aspects of the Khmer people's life, so if a good relationship is established between the local government and the pagoda, it will contribute positively to the economic and social development and the construction of new rural areas in the Khmer region.

Fourth, about beliefs, customs, and festivals.

The Khmer people in An Giang province still preserve several folk beliefs that reflect the spiritual life of agricultural residents who worship animistic things. As agricultural residents, most of the community festivals of the Khmer people in An Giang province have agricultural rituals. The festivals are more or less related to pagodas.

The Khmer people in An Giang province have many rich and unique customs and cultural arts. Every year, the Khmer people have many religious and folk festivals (dozens of festivals), but the two most important festivals are Chol Chnam Thmay (New Year's Eve) and Dolta (forgiving the sins of the dead), associated with the people's bull racing festival [8].

Chol Chnam Thmay is usually held in the middle of the fourth lunar month every year. Chol Chnam Thmay is the biggest festival of the year and is related to the life and beliefs of the Khmer people (lasting for 3 days), held at pagodas and in every family of the Khmer people. Because this festival is an occasion to get rid of bad luck in the old year and enter the new year with more luck in life.

Dolta festival is held from August 15 to the end of August of the lunar calendar; this is one of the important festivals that the Khmer people consider as the second New Year of the year. The Dolta Festival aims to erase the sins of the deceased according to Buddhist teachings, like the Vu Lan Festival at Vietnamese Buddhist temples. During this festival, people in the village will take turns serving food and water to the temple in that village for 15 days of the festival. This is the time when monks are in the rainy season, and these days, monks do not have to beg for food but are offered food and water by Buddhists and invited to chant sutras to pray for the souls of deceased relatives. In addition, they meet to exchange experiences in life: farming, raising animals, and introducing production models with high economic efficiency. Combined with the festival are traditional folk games with strong indigenous and religious colors. The Khmer people in the Bay Nui area of An Giang province still maintain a unique traditional custom, which is the bull racing festival. This is a most exciting and attractive folk game during the Dolta festival. The Khmer people of Bay Nui live and produce mainly by farming, so the image of a cow and a field is very close and familiar to them.

Regarding marriage, there is still the mark of matriarchy (men marry). The funeral of the Khmer is quite progressive; the dead are cremated, and the ashes are brought to the pagoda to be kept and worshiped.

3. Current status of mass mobilization work in ethnic minority areas in An Giang province

3.1. Achievements

First, An Giang has thoroughly grasped, concretized, and organized the implementation of the Party and State's policies on mass mobilization work in ethnic minority areas.

After the Central Party Secretariat issued Directive No. 49-CT/TW dated October 20, 2015 "on strengthening and innovating the Party's mass mobilization work in ethnic

minority areas", the Provincial Party Standing Committee issued Plan No. 08-KH/TU dated November 20, 2015 "on implementing Directive No. 49-CT/TW" with 05 groups of tasks and solutions, directing the subordinate Party Committees, the government, the Vietnam Fatherland Front of the province and socio-political organizations, and armed forces to concretize them into programs and implementation plans in accordance with the practical situation of the locality, agency, and unit. Implementing the direction of the Provincial Party Committee, 100% of Party cells and Party committees have seriously organized the study and implementation of Directive No. 49-CT/TW to all cadres, Party members and the masses, creating a strong change in the awareness of Party committees at all levels, authorities, the Vietnam Fatherland Front and socio-political organizations, cadres and Party members in the whole province about the position and role of mass mobilization work in ethnic minority areas.

In addition, the Provincial Party Committee Standing Committee also issued Program No. 21-CTr/TU dated August 31, 2021 to implement the Resolution of the 11th An Giang Provincial Party Congress "on improving the material and spiritual life of ethnic minorities in the period 2021-2025"; Resolution No. 15-NQ/TU dated November 16, 2021 of the An Giang Provincial Party Committee "on sustainable poverty reduction for the 2021-2025 period and orientation to 2030"; Resolution No. 43/2022/NQ-HDND dated December 12, 2022 of the Provincial People's Council stipulating the level of housing support for poor and near-poor households in poor districts of An Giang province under the National Target Program on Sustainable Poverty Reduction for the 2021-2025 period.

Second, propaganda and education to improve the qualifications of the Khmer ethnic minorities.

Party committees and organizations at all levels have proactively developed propaganda plans suitable to the situation of localities and units; led and directed news agencies and newspapers in the province, especially the Provincial Radio and Television Station, An Giang Newspaper, etc. to coordinate with relevant departments and branches to organize extensive propaganda, open specialized pages and columns close to reality (Khmer language program, "Ethnic Development" column), in accordance with the awareness of ethnic minorities about the Resolution of the 13th National Party Congress, the Resolution of the 11th Provincial Party Congress, term 2020-2025 and the election of National Assembly deputies and People's Council deputies at all levels for the term 2021-2026. This has actively contributed to bringing information and propaganda from the province to the grassroots, helping ethnic minorities clearly understand the Party's guidelines and policies, the State's policies and laws, not listen to and believe bad people, fight against distorted and inciting arguments of hostile forces, and eliminate superstitions and backward customs.

Third, taking care of the material and spiritual life of the Khmer ethnic minority people.

The implementation of ethnic programs and policies in general and the National Target Program on socio-economic development in ethnic minority and mountainous areas for the period 2021-2025 in An Giang province in particular has been regularly paid

attention to, led, directed, organized, and implemented by the Provincial Party Committee, People's Council, and People's Committee of An Giang province. The chains linking production, processing, and consumption of agricultural products in ethnic minority areas have always been supported for development. Implementing Resolution No. 45/2022/NQ-HDND dated December 15, 2021 of the People's Council of An Giang province "*on interest rate support policy for ethnic minority households in An Giang province*", communes and wards have allocated total funds, specifically: Housing support work, overcoming the shortage of residential land and production land for ethnic minorities has received special attention from all levels, sectors and localities; the organization of reviewing and counting poor ethnic minority households in need of housing repair or new construction is regularly carried out to have a priority support plan. In 2024, 10,910 million VND was implemented and disbursed, reaching 16.26% of the capital plan [7]. The implementation of housing support policies for poor and near-poor households of ethnic minorities has helped many households, from having no housing or temporary housing to having decent housing to stabilize their lives, escape poverty, and become rich legitimately.

Health care for the people has always been given attention and focus. Medical examination and treatment facilities ensure good on-call and treatment; disease prevention and control measures, and disease surveillance are effectively implemented. The quality of the ethnic boarding school system and semi-boarding school system has been gradually improved. Vocational training classes for rural workers (including ethnic minorities) on cultivation, animal husbandry, preliminary processing, processing, and preservation of agricultural products are regularly opened. Specifically, An Giang province has organized vocational training for 4,378 people, including vocational training for ethnic minorities: 07 college level, 479 intermediate level, 938 elementary level, and under 03 months. Developing education and training to improve the quality of human resources has disbursed 11,315 million VND [1].

Fourth, organize people to participate in building a strong Party and government; participate in social supervision and criticism.

The provincial Vietnam Fatherland Front and organizations at all levels have regularly innovated and improved the quality of mass mobilization work in ethnic minority areas with specific, practical, and effective content. Diversify forms of gathering people, focusing on the grassroots, especially in remote areas, ethnic minority areas, to strive to eliminate hunger, reduce poverty, develop the economy and society, build new rural areas, etc. Effectively implement Decision No. 217-QD/TW dated December 12, 2013 of the Politburo "*on promulgating the Regulation on supervision and social criticism of the Vietnam Fatherland Front and socio-political organizations*", Decision No. 218-QD/TW dated December 12, 2013 of the Politburo "*on promulgating regulations on the participation of the Vietnam Fatherland Front, socio-political organizations and people in giving opinions on Party building and government building*". Organize many supervision sessions, the supervision content focuses on the implementation of policies and laws directly related to people's lives at the grassroots level, and the work of handling petitions, complaints, and

denunciations at the grassroots level. Specifically, the responsible agencies received 1,670 citizens, received 380 complaints and denunciations, handled them, and created consensus among the people; had direct dialogue through contact with voters in over 280 sessions with over 20,130 participants, more than 3,288 opinions, and 25,163 opinions contributing to the draft law (amended) [5; p.15].

Fifth, organize the "skillful mass mobilization" movement to encourage and motivate ethnic minorities to develop the socio-economy, ensure security and order in the locality.

The emulation movement "skillful mass mobilization" has been led, directed, and facilitated by Party committees and authorities at all levels to be widely deployed and increasingly go into depth among ethnic minorities, sectors, agencies, and units. The movements aim at patriotic emulation in residential areas, shock activities, volunteering, hunger eradication, poverty reduction, and building cultural life in residential areas associated with the National Target Program on new rural construction, the National Target Program on sustainable poverty reduction, period 2021-2025, and the National Target Program on socio-economic development in ethnic minority and mountainous areas. Over the past 10 years (2013-2024), the whole province has 520 collective models and 266 individual models recognized as "skillful mass mobilization" [7; p.11]. Many models have created consensus, response, influence, encouragement and motivation from a large number of ethnic minorities, such as the "Border Class" model of the Party Committee of the Border Guard Command of An Giang province; the model "Sustainable poverty reduction in the local ethnic minority area" of An Cu commune, Chau Lang... and many other models have been and are being implemented throughout the province.

3.2. Some limitations and shortcomings

First, the implementation of the Party's guidelines, policies, and laws in some places is not timely and effective.

The concretization of resolutions, directives, and conclusions on mass mobilization work in ethnic minority areas is still confusing. The quality and effectiveness of the consultation and proposal work on mass mobilization work in ethnic minority areas of some Party committees and grassroots authorities are not high. Many cadres do not understand the culture, customs, and practices, do not speak the ethnic minority language, and do not regularly go to the grassroots. In some localities, the implementation of the Party's guidelines has not created a change in people's awareness, leading to the situation of illegal house construction, encroachment on protective forests for housing, farming, etc.

Second, the work of propaganda, education, and improving the qualifications of Khmer ethnic minorities in some communes is not suitable and not very effective.

The propaganda work of some party committees is still in the old way. The quality of cadres doing mass mobilization work in some villages and hamlets in ethnic minority communes is still limited. Many cadres have not been trained in public reception skills, communication skills, mobilization skills, and persuasion skills, and do not have a deep

understanding of the language and customs of ethnic minorities, so they face many difficulties and confusion when propagating and mobilizing.

Third, the thoughts, feelings, and aspirations of Khmer ethnic minorities have not been promptly grasped, especially in complex areas.

Caring for the material and spiritual interests of ethnic minorities in some communes has not been ensured. Some pressing issues, such as a lack of residential land, production land, and domestic water, have not been effectively resolved; vocational training in rural areas has not really brought sustainable livelihoods to help people escape poverty.

Fourth, the Vietnam Fatherland Front and socio-political organizations at all levels in An Giang province have not effectively promoted the role of ethnic minorities in participating in Party building, implementing social supervision, and criticism.

Ethnic minorities' participation in giving opinions on Party building in terms of politics, ideology, organization, cadres, and ethics is still monotonous, mainly through organizing people's meetings, meeting voters, and dialogue with the people. Receiving, handling petitions, checking and verifying the content of complaints and denunciations, at times and in some places, have not been carried out in accordance with the authority and procedures. Direct dialogue with citizens, mobilizing, explaining, and guiding people to make complaints and denunciations in accordance with the legal procedures have not been focused on; many urgent cases have not been resolved at the grassroots level, so there are many petitions and complaints that go beyond the level.

Fifth, the implementation of the "*skillful mass mobilization*" movement has not had positive changes.

The construction of "*skillful mass mobilization*" models by some district party committees is not much, and the experience in expanding the "*skillful mass mobilization*" model has not been given attention. The direction and implementation work at times and in some places is not regular and thorough; the selection of models for registration is still formal, scattered, and not close to local reality, so the models and typical examples of "*skillful mass mobilization*" are not sustainable, lack spreading power, and are not very effective.

4. Solutions to strengthen mass mobilization work in the Khmer ethnic minority area in An Giang province

In the coming time, to improve the effectiveness of mass mobilization work in the ethnic minority area in An Giang province, it is necessary to effectively implement the following solutions:

First, raise awareness and responsibility of Party committees, authorities, the Vietnam Fatherland Front, socio-political organizations, cadres, party members, armed forces, and people of all walks of life in the province about the position and role of mass mobilization work in the new situation, paying special attention to mass mobilization work in ethnic minority areas. Focus on discovering, gathering, training, and fostering

knowledge and skills in mass mobilization for village elders, village chiefs, and prestigious people in the community.

Second, strengthen and innovate mass mobilization work in state agencies; review, promulgate, and effectively implement ethnic policies. Innovate the way of implementing mass mobilization work, promptly resolve people's petitions and problems, implement policies in a timely, public, and democratic manner; proactively issue specific policies of the province to support ethnic minorities in economic and social development, and improve their material and spiritual life.

Third, integrate programs and projects in the area to achieve the goal of poverty reduction and improve the material and spiritual life of ethnic minorities. In the implementation process, it is necessary to harmoniously combine economic development with solving social problems, linking programs and projects with agricultural extension training, vocational training, and disseminating knowledge and experience in economic development for poor households and ethnic minorities.

Fourth, pay attention to perfecting the organizational apparatus, building cadres for mass mobilization work. Take care to build a team of cadres to ensure quantity and quality, especially the core staff, who are directly involved in mass mobilization work. Pay attention to planning, training, fostering, arranging, using, and mass mobilization cadres in the direction of standardization and rejuvenation. Focus on training and fostering ethnic minority cadres in general and cadres for mass mobilization work in particular. Continue to effectively implement Plan No. 435/KH-UBND dated December 1, 2022, of the Provincial People's Committee on "*implementing the Project on training ethnic knowledge for cadres, civil servants, and public employees in the period of 2021-2025 in An Giang province*".

Fifth, promote the patriotic emulation movement, associated with the "*skillful mass mobilization*" movement in all areas of social life. Party committees, authorities, and the Vietnam Fatherland Front at all levels need to closely follow political tasks, grasp the psychology and aspirations of ethnic minorities to determine the content and form of launching emulation movements that are close to the practical situation of the locality, sector, and unit. Mobilize and create conditions for ethnic minorities to fully promote their potential, creativity, and actively work and produce; Raise vigilance and resolutely fight against plots and tricks of taking advantage of ethnicity and religion to divide solidarity and cause political instability in the area.

5. Conclusion

In recent times, the Khmer ethnic minority area in An Giang province has been stable, the people have well implemented the Party's guidelines and policies, the State's policies and laws, worked with peace of mind, responded to local patriotic emulation movements and campaigns. Party committees, authorities, the Fatherland Front, and socio-political organizations at all levels have paid attention to implementing socio-economic development policies and guidelines in the ethnic minority area. Mass mobilization work

in ethnic minority areas has had many positive changes; step by step, the quality and effectiveness of propaganda and mobilization work have been improved. Therefore, the material and spiritual life of ethnic minorities has been increasingly improved, backward customs have gradually decreased, political security, social order, and safety have been stable, security on the border has been maintained, contributing to strengthening the great national unity bloc, consolidating the people's trust in the Party and the State. However, at present, the lives of a part of ethnic minorities are still difficult; some households do not have the awareness to improve themselves in labor and production, and still rely on the help of Party committees and authorities at all levels. Therefore, in the coming time, it is necessary to continue to promote and strengthen the implementation of a number of solutions to improve the effectiveness of mass mobilization work in the Khmer ethnic minority area in An Giang province, contributing to the stability and development of the socio-economy.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interests.

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