

## Multidimensional Inequality in Vietnam

March 2021 – No. 34 | UE-AFD Research Facility on Inequalities

### PITCH

Even though Vietnam has achieved great social and economic development over the past 30 years, notorious gaps remain not only in income, but also in other critical dimensions of well-being and political influence between population subgroups.

Nonetheless, research efforts have focused on understanding monetary inequality in Vietnam, and no study has comprehensively examined inequalities from a multidimensional perspective.

This study is a first attempt to examine multidimensional inequality in those less known domains of inequality in the country: life and health, education and learning, and participation, influence, and voice.

### Context

Since 1987 Vietnam has achieved remarkable success in economic growth and poverty reduction over the past decades. However, a large gap persists between the majority (Kinh) and ethnic minorities (EM)

groups' living standards. Although both groups have seen their poverty rates decrease, EM still face much higher poverty rates than the Kinh. EM, who made up only 15% of the country's population, constituted 73% of the poor in 2016. The poverty rate for the whole country in 2016 remained at 9.8%, while that of the Kinh was slightly below the average, at 3.1%. In contrast, EM's poverty rate was 15 times higher than that of Kinh groups: 45% of people belonging to EM still lived in poverty in 2016.

Among ethnic groups as well as across geographic areas, there is also a striking difference in well-being standards, a gap that is in fact growing. When looking at poverty rate of ethnic groups in rural areas for 2016, groups such as the Mong, La Hu, Mang, and Lo Lo attained the highest poverty rates, at around 80%.

### METHODS

The study uses the Oxfam and LSE Multidimensional Inequality Framework (MIF) which draws on Sen's capability approach to assess inequalities in individual well-being within seven domains.

In addition to income and asset inequality, the study analyses inequality in key domains of life, including life and health, education and learning, and participation, influence, and voice.

The study follows a mixed-methods approach, with quantitative and qualitative methods carried out in sequence. For the quantitative phase, the two main datasets used are the Vietnam Household Living Standard Surveys (VHLSS) and the Vietnam Governance and Public Administration Performance Index surveys (PAPI).

The qualitative research phase was accomplished in 3 provinces (Tuyen Quang, Dak Lak and Soc Trang), where 6 Focus Group Discussions and 25 in-depth interviews were carried out to collect data on local human stories to shed light on perceptions of inequality and identify its main drivers.

**Authors:** This research has been carried out by the Mekong Development Research Institute and Oxfam Intermon.

**Geography:** Vietnam

**Find out more about this project:** <https://www.afd.fr/en/carte-des-projets/multidimensional-inequalities-study-vietnam>

**Key words:** Vietnam, inequalities, multidimensional, life, health, education, learning, participation, influence, voice, ethnicity

**Themes:** Economy, Capabilities, Health, Education

## RESULTS

The research findings point at persisting, critical inequalities across several life domains. After conducting quantitative and qualitative analysis, the research identifies large gaps between subpopulation groups across spatial, socio-economic, and ethnic axes of inequality in their capability to enjoy

the right to a proper, quality education and to experience a life free of illness and access to quality healthcare facilities. People belonging to ethnic minorities (EM), women, and people living in rural provinces are more affected by inequalities in health and education than the Kihn, men, and higher-income households living in predominantly urban areas.

Furthermore, inequality in the capability to participate, raise one's voice, and influence public matters is extremely acute between men and women and the poorest households, with a lower level of education, compared to the richest, urban, highly educated households.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

To reduce multidimensional inequalities, it is necessary that public stakeholders in the country take a human-centered approach to policy design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Such an approach focuses not only on promoting economic growth in an inclusive manner, but also on the diverse dimensions of populations' well-being. Besides this overarching approach to inequality reduction, it is recommended that the following sectorial policy proposals are taken into consideration:

- ▶ To implement income redistribution policies and pro-poor policies, making national taxation more progressive, as it is one of the main instruments to promote income redistribution, and fund for essential public services, essential to make sure no one is left behind.
- ▶ To increase budget spending on public health and education, improve access to safe drinking water infrastructure in schools and homes, improve access to safe drinking water infrastructure in schools and homes, and provide the infrastructure for sanitation and safe water.
- ▶ To design specific policies and programs for the disadvantaged groups especially impacted by inequalities, such as people belonging to ethnic minorities (EM), women, and small-scale farmers from remote areas.
- ▶ The government should also implement appropriate policies to promote the private sector to attract the labour force from rural areas and from EM, to increase non-farm employment opportunities for them, as well as to improve agricultural productivity and ensure living wages and dignified working conditions.
- ▶ To implement policies that promote equal access and quality healthcare, and education in disadvantaged areas, in particular areas mostly populated by EM. For example: promote the education of parents on the importance of care, child education and support for nutrition and healthcare, attract qualified healthcare workers and teachers, and develop vocational trainings to meet the labor market demand.
- ▶ To improve data, analysis, research, in particular by collecting disaggregated data as it is essential for the improvement of the knowledge on inequalities and other fields, to make this information accessible to citizens and civil society, and to integrate this indicators into national development policies.
- ▶ To put in place critical thinking, active-citizenship education and awareness-raising programmes will be critical to support and strengthen the abilities of women, the poorest households, and less educated people to be equipped with key critical tools and to become fully aware of the potential of public participation and voice raising.