

# ĐỒNG THÁP ITS PAST DEVELOPMENT AND PROSPECTS

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**Đ**ồng Tháp is a province in the Mekong Delta which has favorable geographical conditions and convenient network of roads and waterways appropriate to the development of agriculture and mariculture. Đồng Tháp has an area of 334,000 hectares, 200,000 of which are cultivable land.

Knowing advantages of the province, the local authorities since the Liberation Day, have invested intensively in developing the system of canals, communications, electricity supply, education, health care, marketplace building and application of technical achievements to agricultural production, therefore the province could supply an abundant amount of agricultural products to both domestic and foreign markets.

The rice output of Đồng Tháp has increased by 4.2 times over the past 20 years, from 276,000 tonnes in 1976 to 1.8 million tonnes in 1995. The per capita rice output reached 1,240kg a year. Over 80% of the amount of rice for sale reached the standard for exportation. The provincial authorities have pushed forward with the application of technical achievements, such as usage of new seeds, IPM method of protecting crops, irrigation (1,300 km of canal were made, 60,000 hectares of rice field were surrounded by dykes so they could be planted with two crops a years), etc. Many measures have been taken to struggle against, and make the best use of, flood and inundation, so as to stabilize rice production.

From a remote and marshy area, where one could travel only by waterways, Đồng Tháp has developed into a province with a network of roads reaching 96.3% of its villages. Some 142 km of roads have been built, the national route 30 and 80 have been well repaired, the Đồng Tháp river port could welcome even 5,000-tonne liners. In short, the communication between Đồng Tháp and other provinces has become more convenient.

In supplying electricity, three 110KVA transformer stations have been built in order to supply electricity to 130 of 137 villages in the province. Around 57% of total households have been supplied with it. In 1995, all villages have telephone boxes connecting to the national and international systems. The education is developed: a system of schools, from elementary to tertiary levels, has come into being. In health care serv-

ice, there are three hospitals at provincial level, many hospitals in districts and one first-aid station for a village. The number of doctors increased from 23 in 1975 to 385 in 1995, the number of nurses from 73 to 850 during the same period. Many doctors is working in districts, many campaign against polio and leprosy have been carried out successfully. The birth rate was reduced from 3% in 1975 to 1.84% in 1995.

Each village has had its own marketplace which facilitates the development of trading and service businesses. State enterprises in the province have adapted themselves to the market economy, survived the crisis from 1989 to 1993 and kept on developing. Non-state sector, especially private one, have developed well in many businesses such as: food processing, producing tile, construction, farming fish in cages put under waters, growing fruit orchards, supplying different services, etc.

In order to complete the task of making the people rich the country strong and the society civilized, and encourage everybody to get rich legally, the provincial VCP Committee, local authorities and popular organizations have led various campaigns to carry out national plans such as creating more jobs, developing new economic zones, exploiting derelict land, struggling against poverty and hunger, etc. These campaigns have helped with reducing the gap between the rich and the poor.

In the past 20 years, the provincial economy has been improved considerably (in the period between 1990 and 1995, its growth rate fluctuated between 10% and 15%). The agricultural production developed speedily and become the principal business of the province. It represented 78.66%



of provincial gross product in 1975, and 71.58% in 1995, while the manufacturing industry increased from 7.01% to 8.78% and service industry from 14.33% to 19.64% in the same period. The manufacturing industry and construction are still small although their output increased.

In the province, two industrial estates in Cao Lãnh and Sadec towns have come into being along with many specialized zones producing rice for export, longan (Châu Thành), mandarin orange (Lai Vung), mango (Cao Lãnh), etc.

Both material and spiritual lives of the people, in general, has become stable and developed. There is no household suffering from hunger.

From the past 20 years of development, we can draw the following lessons:

- We should master all policies of the Government and the Party, and select targets, plans and measures appropriate to local conditions to carry out these policies.

All methods of propagandizing and publicizing should be used in order to mobilize all local residents to cooperate with the local authorities in achieving all plans targets.

- We should pay attention to the task of consolidating the organization of governing party. In the past 20 years, all party organizations have been fostered and cleansed incessantly. All party members have been trained in political, administrative and economic knowledge in order to meet requirements of the new period of development in the country. The provincial VCP committee has tried its best to change its way of managing the administrative machinery according to the renovation policy of the Government.

- We must try our best to develop the solidarity among party members and between party members and the people in order to encourage all residents to take part in realization of development targets.

- The best way to win the trust of the people in the Party and the Government is to do anything we can to improve the people's quality of life. The local authorities and party committee have helped the people set up public organizations with a view to carrying out various programs for socio-economic development.

Besides good achievements, Đồng Tháp also meets with many difficulties and problems needed to be solved. The potentials of land and labor force weren't exploited fully. The structure of industry was backward and needed to be changed. The economy is mainly a purely agricul-

tural one. The production is of small scale and scattered. There is no key industry and no leading business. Market gardening isn't developed enough and agricultural production is menaced by natural disasters every year. The people's quality of life is improved but in general, it is still at low level.

Local authorities and people of Đồng Tháp should try their best to solve these problems. From now until 2000, the following target set forth by the local authorities should be achieved:

#### 1. Industrialization

The manufacturing and service industries must be developed in parallel with the agriculture. Real efforts should be made to build two vital zones: The South of Tiền river (including Châu Thành, Sadec, Lai Vung, and Cao Lãnh), and the frontier zone (Hồng Ngự, Tân Hồng). In agricultural development, the province should produce from 1.8 to 2 million tonnes of rice every year, grow 20,000 hectares of fruit trees, and maintain 10,000 hectares of cajuput forest, encourage flower planting business and animal husbandry. Developing agriculture should be connected with solving problems facing farmers.

As for manufacturing industry, the target is to develop food processing industry (and consider it as the leading business), and building materials, and repair service. The infrastructure will be improved according to the following order of importance: roads and waterways, communications, irrigation, electricity, schools, first-aid stations, marketplaces...

The tourism business should be developed into a leading business in cooperation with tourism agencies of HCMC and other provinces.

Quality of all existing services supplied in the province such as transportation, finance, insurance, banking, technical advisory...should be improved in order to prevent falling behind other provinces.

As for foreign trade, the main targets are: attracting foreign capital, technology and equipment; creating more jobs; increasing revenue of provincial budget; selling agricultural products and supply consumer goods and needed materials to local residents. There must be plans to buy new technology, and add more value to products for sale, especially to foreign markets. The local authorities will try to increase the foreign trade turnover by 20% every year.

#### 2. Techno-scientific achievements should be studied and applied to all fields of activity in order to

develop the economy, renovate the management mechanism and satisfy the increasing need of the people. The army of technicians, managers, and skilled workers, especially competent experts in every field of activity, is a necessity, so there must be plan to form this army.

#### 3. The Government's policy on economic sectors should be carried out with a view to securing the public sector the leading role in the economy. Cooperation between different sectors is a way to offset shortcomings of the private sector in the industrialization.

The local authorities should keep on changing the mechanism for managing the economy, eliminating the centralized bureaucratic mechanism and separating the administrative management function from the business management function. The administrative procedures should be reformed. The market, both domestic and foreign ones, should be a basis for making short and long-term plans for economic development.

#### 5. The local authorities must have plans to develop social and cultural activities with a view to improving the spiritual life of the people and preserving the traditional culture.

The education service should be developed in order to train skilled workers and talents which are necessary to the economic development. The quality of education service should be around the national average by 2000.

We believe that with experience from the past, with right policies and measures, and help from the central government and other provinces as well, Đồng Tháp people and authorities will overcome difficulties and achieve successfully all their planned targets■

