



SOLUTIONS FOR MIGRATION TO HCMC

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I. PROBLEMS IN SIGHT

At present, Vietnam is in a period of transition from the centrally planned economy to the market economy, in which big cities become busy economic centers that provide their residents with better income along with better infrastructure, therefore they have strong magnetism attracting rural residents. This is the main cause of the mass migration to big cities for better jobs and life quality.

HCMC is now the most crowded city where the personal income is of the highest level in comparison with other cities. Besides a minority of migrants who come to HCMC to reunite with their families and those who return from forlorn new economic zones, most migrants make their way to HCMC for economic purposes. They could go to live and work in HCMC before their families come to join them or they go in groups of villagers.

Until recently, many studies have been of the opinion that migrants could find jobs in HCMC within days. However, reality shows that most migrants are no skilled

workers so they usually get only 3D jobs or become casual labor, therefore they are frequently under threat of unemployment.

Generally, the Constitution ensures everybody rights to live and work where they find most favorable. In theory, the migration takes place under the impact of economic laws and it will adjust itself when differences between regions are removed. However, this adjustment will take a long time to come and we can't wait for it to happen. So we must take feasible measures to adjust the migration from surrounding rural areas to HCMC.

II. SOME FEASIBLE MEASURES

We want to suggest here some short-range measures to make use of the migrated labor force and solve immediate problems posed by the migration, and some long-range measures (they are mainly macro-economic policies) to tackle the root of the problem with a view to tapping the labor force for the good of both cities and rural areas.

1. Short-range measures

a. Vocational guidance and train-

ing for migrants

As was stated above, most migrants to HCMC aren't skilled workers and only a few could find suitable jobs, the rest must be content with poorly-paid and casual jobs. To make the best use of this labor force, it's necessary to provide them with suitable vocational guidance and training, instead of letting them choose training courses by themselves. In HCMC today, there are hundreds of privately-run vocational training centers but most of learners take courses in repairing motorbikes and cars, or making clothes because they think they can find jobs easily after these courses. Their way of thinking is right but isn't suitable to the demand for skilled labor in HCMC. So HCMC authorities, including Services of Industry, of Construction, of Transport and Public Works, and of Labor-War Invalids and Social Affairs had better work out programs to provide the youth with vocational guidance and training with a view to orienting this labor force towards development targets planned for the city and preventing them from taking a wrong view of employment.

The vocational guidance must be carried out in a long-term plan and must be made suitable to planned development targets in order to save the labor force from being wasted or becoming a burden to the society.

b. Residential areas for migrants

Being away from home, most migrants have to reside in the slums with poor living conditions. Without permanent residency in HCMC, they and families can't enjoy health care or education services offered by the local government. This situation usually poses many social problems to the city, including both permanent residents and migrants. We can adopt Chinese experience: building dormitory towns for migrants and their families, and allowing their children to go to schools in HCMC. This approach can help to control flows of migrants and supply vocational guidance and training, thereby helping them find appropriate jobs in the city or returning home towns to build their own busi-

nesses. Dormitory towns can also provide a precondition for propagating the family planning methods and limiting the growth of social evils.

An important question is who will pay for these dormitory towns. It's obvious that the central government has to cooperate with local authorities to carry out this scheme for the good of both HCMC and other provinces.

c. Labor card for migrants

Granting labor cards or labor books to migrants is a way for controlling flows of migrants to HCMC and protecting them from exploitation of cheap labor. Reality shows that in many companies in HCMC, there is no labor union to protect laborers' interests with the result that laborers are forced by employers (including foreign ones) to spend too much time on their apprenticeship or work overtime without extra payment. Many employers also retain a large proportion of wages in order to prevent laborers from leaving for better-paid jobs and pay no attention to laborers' living conditions when there isn't enough work for all laborers.

Labor cards also help local government collect income tax exactly and fairly and provide the unemployed with unemployment benefit, or require companies that employ migrated laborers to take part in building dormitory towns, vocational training centers and infrastructure, while laborers can use their cards to apply for any job they find suitable in HCMC.

At the larger scale, the labor card can be granted to all laborers, regardless of whether they are permanent residents or not. However, this work is hard to accomplish for the time being because the working population is about 40 million.

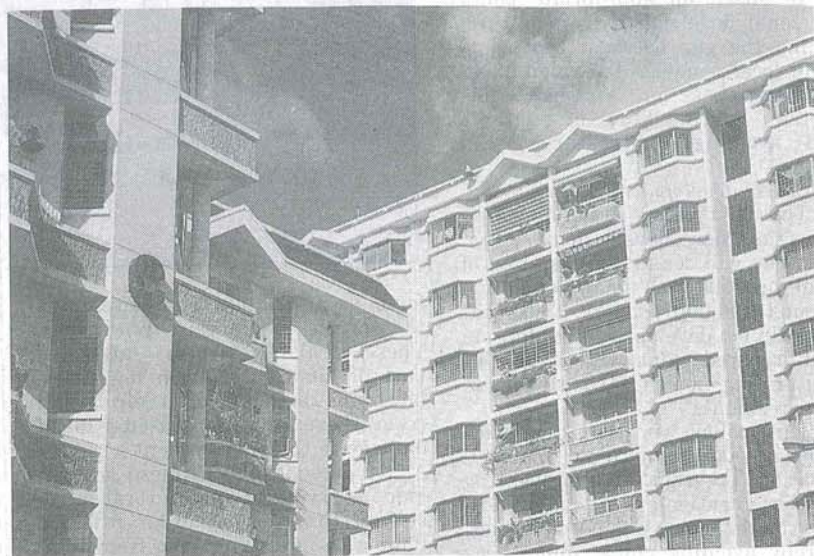
2. Long-range measures

Besides the above-mentioned short-range measures, in my opinion, we had better build a system of policies to develop not only big cities but also rural areas. The following are some policies that we consider as suitable to present conditions in Vietnam and useful to solve the problem of migration in HCMC.

a. Land reclamation

This policy aims at provide farmers with more land so they can spend more time and money on improving their production and income instead of going to cities for work.

At present, Around 79.5% of the population live in rural areas but a large proportion of land is uncultivated as shown in the following table.



Structure of Land in Vietnam

Kind	Area (sq.km)	% of the total
Total	330,991	100
Farming land	73,484	22.20
Forest	96,412	29.12
Specialized land	11,177	3.38
Residential land	7,740	2.34
Unused land	142,178	42.96

The table shows that the area of farming land is over 7 million hectares, however its quality are poor because most of this area has been planted with rice for so a long time. The rice yield in Vietnam is rather low in comparison with the world average (about 3.7 tonnes per hectare).

In short, the policy to reclaim land and improve the fertility of the soil will help to supply more jobs to rural residents, thereby reducing the flows of migrants to big cities. This policy has produced intended results in many Asian countries such as Malaysia and India.

b. Zonal development

This policy aims at increasing the real income of rural areas, re-

ducing the gap between different zones, especially between cities and rural areas of the country.

The policy on zonal development concentrates on optimal use of natural resources and labor force of each zone. This requires a long-run strategy for socio-economic development for each zone. In the process of development, rural areas can be modernized gradually and integrated

into cities, thereby reducing the gap between them.

At present, the differences in the real income between seven economic zones of Vietnam are noticeable. According to the General Department of Statistics, the personal income per month in 1993 in Eastern South Vietnam was VNĐ225,540; the Mekong Delta: 125,540; the Hồng Delta: 109,280; coastal provinces of the Central Vietnam: 109,610; West Highlands: 95,850; mountainous provinces of the North: 85,850 and Northern Central Vietnam: 81,720.

The main cause of poverty in zones with low personal income is the poor employment of natural resources, climatic conditions and cul-

tural features resulting in poorly-developed infrastructure, low ration of food, obsolete production and low intellectual standard. These factors have forced people from the North to migrate to West Highlands and Eastern South Vietnam to exploit natural resources with obsolete methods, or to HCMC for work. But most of them failed to escape poverty.

In short, an appropriate policy for zonal development can help reducing the gap between zones and allow local residents to exploit existing resources for a better life, thereby limiting flows of migrants and avoiding unnecessary social costs.

c. New development poles

This policy aims at building new cities as "new development poles" and they will constitute a system of satellite cities with small population (around 200,000 people). These cities will be developed according to well-prepared plans with industries that are big enough to supply jobs to their residents.

This policy can also help with carrying out the national industrialization program and preventing the concentration of too many industries in the more prosperous cities, thereby avoiding undue imbalances between zones of the country. Regarding town planning, to develop big cities with large population is much costlier than building and governing small-scale towns. This approach has been adopted by many countries.

The growth of new development poles is also an important way to spread industrial activity around rural areas. Certain technologies and labor-intensive industries can be transferred to rural areas along with facilities for vocational training. By this process, rural residents can take part in the national industrialization program, thereby improving their living standard.

d. Redistribution of industry

This policy aims at spreading industrial activity more evenly over geographic zones with a view to facilitating the growth of all zones. This policy can be carried out by distributing industries from big industrial centers to depressed zones, especially rural areas.

This policy has been carried out well in China: in each provinces, many rural factories were built and run by the Ministry of Agriculture with the aim of supplying jobs to rural residents, thereby reducing the migration to cities and part of labor



force in agriculture and developing the service industry in rural areas. These rural factories also attracted part of labor force from big cities, however, because of their small scale, these factories caused a lot of damage to the environment.

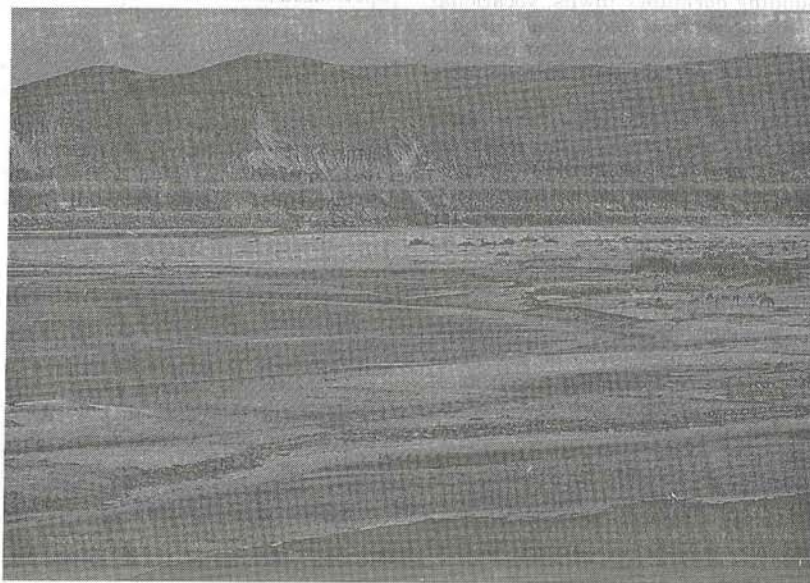
At present, the Chinese government is trying to spread rural factories to the west in order to limit flows of migrants moving from west (depressed areas) to east (coastal big cities)

In Vietnam, industrial activity is concentrated in some big cities such as Hà Nội, HCMC, Hải Phòng, Thái Nguyên, Đà Nẵng, Biên Hoà, and Cần Thơ while the rest are depressed areas. To deal with this imbalance, the Government has had many export processing zones and industrial parks built in many prov-

inces. This is a precondition for spreading more evenly industrial activity over the country, however, the development of these industrial parks and export processing zones has to depend on foreign investment because domestic sources of finance are limited. Thus, many obstacles are facing the policy on redistribution of industry and in its turn, failure of this policy will affect unfavorably formation and changes in flows of migration in the future.

e. Rural development

This policy aims at not only improving personal income of rural residents, but also changing rural areas into production zones that can support the development of big cities. What we must reconsider is that rural areas can't be seen as backyards of big cities.



To carry out successfully the policy on rural development, we must coordinate a series of policies (as mentioned above) and different measures. The following are some noticeable measures:

- Reclaiming land and allocating (or leasing) it to farmers in order to satisfy the demand for jobs and better living standards.

- Forming rural credit funds, price stabilization funds and price support funds to supply soft loans to farmers and purchase agricultural products, thereby saving them from suffering sudden changes in prices.

- Paying attention to measures to improve labor efficiency, such as supplying technical and scientific information, introducing new agricultural machines and new methods of using fertilizer and insecticide; preventing diseases and coupling crop farming with animal husbandry.

- Transferring new techniques for storing and processing agricultural products after harvest suitable to local conditions: the government can develop a system of agricultural products processing factories in each zone with a view to increasing the value added to products and supplying more jobs to rural residents.

- Developing the infrastructure in rural areas and allowing direct export of agricultural products from rural areas: this solution will be a precondition for rural areas to develop their inherent advantages.

The development of direct export market in rural areas must be based on local potentials. It will help to cut out intermediaries and increase export earnings for rural residents.

The policy on rural development must be coupled with urbanization program in order to increasing the amount of towns and proportion of townspeople in rural areas and turning farmers into agricultural workers who can use modern techniques and machines to produce agricultural products.

f. Limiting the expansion of HCMC

Big cities, in their development process, concentrate more and more population and industrial activity and become too big and cause a lot of worry to town planners. This is what usually happens in developing countries.

The expansion of cities tends to swallow up farming land in suburbs. In other words, poorly-planned urbanization usually turns farming land into residential areas and causes damage to agricultural production and the ecosystem. A pro-

portion of rural residents fails to become townspeople because they have no suitable knowledge and skills, and as a result, they easily fall prey to poverty.

As for HCMC, the resolution made by the 6th Conference of the HCMC Party Committee advocated "keeping the HCMC population under 5.5 million by 2000, and under 7 million by 2010" and "limiting the physical growth of population and modernizing the inner city with a limited population of 3 million people". In addition to this policy, the municipal government has planned to build five new districts and turn them into new economic centers in order to attract residents from the inner city. In general, HCMC will become a multipolar city which includes certain rural districts and can help to distribute migrants more evenly over the city instead of letting them concentrate in the inner city.

However, HCMC in recent years has demographically become one of supercities in Southeast Asia. What must be paid full attention to is to keep the urbanization well under control in which the illegal occupation and sale of land must be stopped. In addition, town planners must care about the building of residential areas for the poor. The building of apartment blocks which will provide the poor with accommodation is an important task. However, the poor are facing new difficulties: firstly, prices of apartments are too high for them; secondly, they find hard to make a living when they reside in multi-storey blocks because most of them work in the informal sector; thirdly, they can't afford different fees and bills (for water pumping, parking space, dustbin service, etc.) when living in apartment blocks. Moreover, if there is no residential areas for the poor, local authorities will never get rid of slums, because if the poor are forced to move from one slum they will build a new one in another place. This is also what has happened in many countries.

In the plan to build residential areas for the poor, the local government need only build the most basic infrastructure (water and power supply, sewerage, and dustbin service), and then, divide the area into lots and sell them to the poor at reasonable prices. All houses in the area must be built according to a common model, thereby avoiding disordered construction.

In short, the policy on limiting

the expansion of HCMC aims at saving rural areas around it and preventing HCMC from becoming a center attracting flows of migrants from surrounding provinces and rural residents from a life under the poverty line.

g. Population control and family planning

This is an important policy must be carried out nationwide, especially in rural areas where the birth rate is generally high.

This policy aims at educating the people in benefits of birth control. To carry out other social policies along with the family planning can help farmers feel satisfied with their lives in rural areas instead of going and looking for jobs in big cities. Measures to control birth rate and population growth in rural areas can also help to reduce the population pressure when the area of farming land is on the decrease. If other rural development policies are carried out in parallel with this policy, they will produce better results and help farmers develop their businesses.

In this article, we have presented short- and long-range measures to limit flows of migrants from rural areas to cities, especially to HCMC. In our opinion, the government had better carry out short-range measures in parallel with long-range ones, because outcomes of the former will provide preconditions for realization of the latter.

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