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Multidimensional Poverty Reduction Under the National Target Programme on Sustainable Poverty Reduction in Viet Nam: Evidence from the 2021-2025 Cycle and Implications for 2026-2030

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Abstract

The National Target Programme on Sustainable Poverty Reduction for 2021-2025 closed at a moment of fundamental institutional change: Viet Nam's national target programmes were consolidated from 2026, and the multidimensional poverty standard will be raised from 2027. This study evaluates the full implementation cycle of the programme, measures the degree of disparity across regions, and identifies the bottlenecks facing the new period. A desk-research design is used, combining synthesis, analysis, evaluation and comparison of secondary data drawn from annual official reviews of poor and near-poor households, the Viet Nam Household Living Standards Survey, and the

body of legal instruments governing poverty reduction. The results show that the national multidimensional poverty rate fell from 7.52 per cent in 2022 to 2.95 per cent in 2025, exceeding the targets assigned by the National Assembly and the Government, although the annual reduction margin narrowed progressively; the near-poor rate surpassed the poor rate from 2024; and the gap between the highest and lowest regions reached more than forty-five fold. The study proposes five groups of recommendations, centred on preserving measurement continuity and reallocating capital at commune level.

Keywords: Multidimensional Poverty, Sustainable Poverty Reduction, National Target Programme, Multidimensional Poverty Standard, Social Protection

1. Introduction

Over the past decade, poverty measurement worldwide has shifted from a unidimensional, income-based approach to a multidimensional one, in which poverty is understood as the simultaneous deprivation of several basic capabilities and social services. Viet Nam has been among the leading countries in Asia in institutionalising this approach. A multidimensional poverty standard was formally adopted in 2016 and further refined through Decree No. 07/2021/ND-CP on the multidimensional poverty standard for 2021-2025, which provides the basis for identifying beneficiaries of the National Target Programme on Sustainable Poverty Reduction approved under Decision No. 90/QĐ-TTg of 18 January 2022. This transition is directly linked to Viet Nam's commitment to Sustainable Development Goal 1 of the United Nations on ending poverty in all its forms, under which the national multidimensional poverty rate is a mandatory monitoring indicator.

The timing of this study is of particular significance. The 2021-2025 policy cycle has just closed with results that are formally recognised: the national multidimensional poverty rate fell from 7.52 per cent in 2022 to 2.95 per cent in 2025, corresponding to 1,089,151 poor and near-poor households, of which the poor household rate was 1.30 per cent and the near-poor household rate 1.65 per cent (Ministry of Agriculture and Environment, 2026b) ^[8]. In parallel, the institutional framework has changed fundamentally. From 2026, sustainable poverty reduction is no longer a stand-alone programme but a component of a consolidated programme, with total resources for 2026-2030 of VND 808,558 billion (National Assembly, 2026) ^[16]. At the same time, the poverty line will be raised from 2027 to VND 2.2 million per person per month in rural areas and VND 2.8 million per person per month in urban areas (Government of Viet Nam, 2025c) ^[5]. Three changes occurring simultaneously, namely programme consolidation, an upward revision of the measurement standard, and the restructuring of administrative units, create an urgent need for a systematic summative assessment before the new cycle begins.

In terms of theoretical framework, multidimensional poverty measurement rests on the capability approach, under which

poverty is the deprivation of basic capabilities rather than simply a shortfall of income (Sen, 1999) ^[23]. Building on this foundation, Alkire and Foster (2011) ^[1] developed a counting approach with dual cutoffs and an adjusted headcount ratio, which now underpins the Global Multidimensional Poverty Index published annually by the United Nations Development Programme and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (UNDP & OPHI, 2025) ^[25].

Within Viet Nam, the existing literature has drawn mainly on the Viet Nam Household Living Standards Survey to measure multidimensional poverty and analyse its determinants. Pham, Mukhopadhyaya and Vu (2020) ^[18] demonstrate that allocating poverty reduction resources on the basis of income poverty incidence substantially overlooks the extent of multidimensional deprivation at provincial level. Nguyen *et al.* (2023) ^[17] measure multidimensional poverty among ethnic minority households in the mountainous areas of Central Viet Nam and find a multidimensional poverty rate of 33.57 per cent, several times the national average.

The research gap is therefore clear. Most existing work evaluates poverty outcomes year by year or locality by locality; no study has assessed the complete 2021-2025 cycle in relation to the legal framework that took effect in 2026. More importantly, no study has analysed the measurement and governance consequences arising from programme consolidation, the raising of the poverty line, and the restructuring of administrative units, even though these are precisely the issues that public administrators must resolve during 2026 and 2027.

Proceeding from this gap, the study addresses three questions. First, how did the legal and institutional framework for multidimensional poverty reduction operate during 2021-2025? Second, what results were achieved and what is the degree of disparity across regions, given that in 2025 the Northern Midlands and Mountainous Areas recorded 13.27 per cent against 0.29 per cent in the Southeast? Third, which bottlenecks must be addressed in the 2026-2030 period? In practical and managerial terms, the findings provide evidence for three decisions currently on the table: how to publish statistics during the transition year so that comparability is preserved; how to design a capital allocation formula based on communes rather than districts; and how to redefine priority target groups now that near-poor households outnumber poor households.

2. Theoretical framework and research methodology

2.1 Theoretical foundations of multidimensional poverty

The theoretical foundation of multidimensional poverty measurement is the capability approach, under which human well-being should be assessed through the set of capabilities a person is genuinely able to exercise rather than through income or expenditure. Poverty is thus a deprivation of basic capabilities, and income is a means rather than an ultimate yardstick (Sen, 1999) ^[23].

On this foundation, Alkire and Foster (2011) ^[1] proposed a counting method with dual cutoffs. The first cutoff determines whether an individual or household is deprived in each indicator. The second cutoff, denoted k , identifies a unit as multidimensionally poor when the number of deprived indicators reaches or exceeds that threshold. The summary measure is the adjusted headcount ratio:

$$M_0 = H \times A$$

Where $H = q/n$ is the multidimensional poverty headcount, with q the number of units identified as poor and n the total number of units, and A is the average deprivation intensity among the poor, calculated as the total number of deprived indicators of this group divided by the product of q and the total number of indicators d . The advantage of M_0 is that it can be decomposed by population subgroup and by indicator, allowing identification of which deprivations contribute most to multidimensional poverty.

The application of this framework in Viet Nam contains one important difference, which must be stated explicitly because it determines how all the data presented below should be interpreted. The national multidimensional poverty standard is not an index in the strict Alkire-Foster sense but a dual screening mechanism: a household is recognised as poor only when it simultaneously meets an income criterion below the threshold and is deprived in three or more basic social service indicators (Government of Viet Nam, 2021, 2025c) ^[2, 5]. The income component therefore remains a necessary condition. As a consequence, the annual administrative review publishes the headcount H but not the deprivation intensity A , and thus does not capture the depth of poverty. This is a systematic measurement limitation, discussed further in section 3.4.

2.2 Analytical Framework

The study employs a three-pillar analytical framework following the logic of institutional inputs, output results, and the sustainability of those results.

The first pillar is the legal framework and the institutional arrangements for implementation, comprising the body of instruments governing the poverty standard, the programme management mechanism, the division of responsibilities among ministries, and the resource allocation mechanism. The second pillar is output results, measured by the multidimensional poverty rate, the number of poor and near-poor households, and the degree of attainment of the targets assigned by the National Assembly and the Government, disaggregated over time and by socio-economic region. The third pillar is sustainability, assessed through the relationship between poor and near-poor households, the degree of regional disparity, and the capacity to maintain results as the measurement standard is raised and the implementation apparatus changes. The three pillars are linked in the sense that the institutional framework shapes output results, while sustainability serves as a criterion for testing the quality of both preceding pillars.

2.3 Research Methodology

The study applies a desk-research design using four operations: synthesis, analysis, evaluation and comparison. Synthesis serves to systematise the legal framework and data dispersed across multiple publication sources. Analysis identifies the trend and the internal structure of poverty reduction outcomes. Evaluation compares implementation results against assigned targets. Comparison is conducted along two dimensions: a time series for 2022-2025 under a single measurement standard, and a cross-section of the six socio-economic regions at the end of the period.

Secondary data were collected from four groups of sources. The first comprises the annual decisions announcing the

results of the review of poor and near-poor households, issued by the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs for 2022, 2023 and 2024 and by the Ministry of Agriculture and Environment for 2025. The second is the Viet Nam Household Living Standards Survey conducted by the Statistics Office under the Ministry of Finance (Statistics Office, 2026) [24]. The third is the summative report on the National Target Programme on Sustainable Poverty Reduction for 2021-2025. The fourth is the body of legal instruments currently in force. Data were standardised to common units and a common measurement standard before comparison.

Three limitations of this method should be noted. First, administrative review data and sample survey data differ in coverage and collection method and are therefore not substitutes; the study uses both in parallel for cross-checking rather than merging them. Second, the raising of the poverty line from 2027 creates a break in the data series, so the scope of time-series comparison is confined to the period in which the 2022-2025 standard applied. Third, because of the dual screening mechanism described in section 2.1, the study cannot compute deprivation intensity or the adjusted headcount ratio from published data; the analysis therefore stops at the incidence of poverty and does not capture its depth.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Legal framework and institutional arrangements for implementation

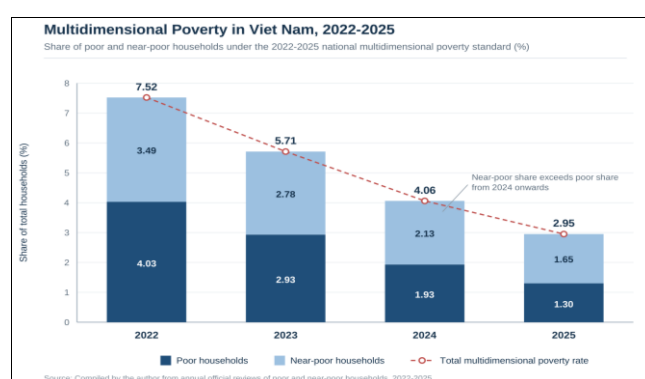
During 2021-2025, multidimensional poverty reduction operated on three legal pillars: Resolution No. 24/2021/QH15 approving the investment policy for the programme; Decision No. 90/QD-TTg approving the programme content with seven component projects; and Decree No. 07/2021/ND-CP setting the measurement standard, as amended and supplemented by Decree No. 30/2025/ND-CP. This arrangement had the advantage of separating the measurement standard from the investment mechanism, but was constrained by the fact that the programme operated alongside two other national target programmes in the same localities, producing overlapping target groups and fragmented resources.

From 2026, the legal framework has been comprehensively restructured. Resolution No. 257/2025/QH15 merged three programmes into one, with state budget resources for 2026-2030 of approximately VND 423,000 billion; Decree No. 358/2025/ND-CP sets out the management mechanism; and Decision No. 417/QD-BNNMT approved phase I of the programme. On 24 August 2026, Resolution No. 46/2026/QH16 further consolidated four national target programmes into a single programme with total resources for 2026-2030 of VND 808,558 billion, of which the central budget accounts for VND 345,000 billion.

With regard to the division of responsibilities, the Ministry of Agriculture and Environment now leads the guidance and supervision of the annual review and recognition of poor households; the Ministry of Finance publishes the multidimensional poverty rate adjusted for the consumer price index and balances the budget for poverty reduction policies; and the Ministry of Ethnic Minorities and Religions delineates the areas of ethnic minority and mountainous regions. This represents a marked change from the previous period, when the focal point was concentrated in the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs.

3.2 Multidimensional poverty reduction outcomes, 2021-2025

The quantitative results are presented in Fig 1. The national multidimensional poverty rate declined continuously from 7.52 per cent in 2022, corresponding to 1,972,767 households, to 5.71 per cent in 2023 with 1,586,336 households, 4.06 per cent in 2024 with 1,258,997 households, and 2.95 per cent in 2025 with 1,089,151 households, comprising 480,278 poor households and 608,873 near-poor households. Over the full cycle, the poor household rate under the multidimensional poverty standard fell by an average of 1.03 percentage points per year; the total number of poor and near-poor households declined from 2.39 million at the beginning of the period to approximately 1.26 million at the end of 2025, a reduction of 52.49 per cent, exceeding by 2.49 percentage points the target of halving the number of poor and near-poor households relative to the baseline.



Source: Compiled by the author from Decision No. 71/QD-LDTBXH (2023), Decision No. 134/QD-BLDTBXH (2024), Decision No. 217/QD-BLDTBXH (2025) and Decision No. 806/QD-BNNMT (2026).

Fig 1: Multidimensional poverty in Viet Nam, 2022-2025

Outcomes in priority localities were also positive. In 2024, the multidimensional poverty rate across the 74 poor districts stood at 39.82 per cent, down 8.12 percentage points from 47.94 per cent in 2023, comprising 24.86 per cent poor households and 14.95 per cent near-poor households. The poverty rate among ethnic minority populations fell by an average of more than 4 percentage points per year.

Cross-checking against an independent survey source indicates a reasonable degree of consistency. According to the preliminary results of the 2025 Viet Nam Household Living Standards Survey, average monthly income per capita reached approximately VND 5.9 million, an increase of 9.3 per cent over 2024, and the poor household rate under the multidimensional poverty standard was approximately 1.3 per cent, coinciding with the administrative review result (Statistics Office, 2026) [24].

Two features of Fig 1 nevertheless warrant careful interpretation. First, the absolute reduction margin narrowed year by year, from 1.81 percentage points between 2022 and 2023 to 1.11 percentage points between 2024 and 2025. This reflects a common regularity in poverty reduction: the remaining population is the hardest to lift out of poverty, and the marginal cost of moving one household above the threshold rises steadily. Second, the internal composition has reversed. In 2022, the poor household rate exceeded the near-poor household rate, at 4.03 per cent against 3.49 per

cent; by 2024 and 2025 this relationship had inverted, with 1.30 per cent poor households against 1.65 per cent near-poor households. The centre of gravity of the problem has shifted from poor households to near-poor households.

3.3 Regional disparity in poverty reduction outcomes

Table 1: Multidimensional poverty rate and number of poor and near-poor households by socio-economic region, 2025

Region	MPR (%)	Poor + near-poor households	Poor rate (%)	Poor households	Near-poor rate (%)	Near-poor households
Northern Midlands and Mountainous Areas	13.27	417,044	7.29	229,032	5.98	188,012
North Central Coast	6.57	203,561	2.42	74,998	4.15	128,563
South Central Coast and Central Highlands	5.17	231,419	2.26	101,070	2.91	130,349
Mekong River Delta	2.74	122,561	0.79	35,174	1.95	87,387
Red River Delta	1.36	98,235	0.48	33,989	0.88	64,246
Southeast	0.29	16,331	0.11	6,015	0.18	10,316
Whole country	2.95	1,089,151	1.30	480,278	1.65	608,873

Note: MPR denotes the multidimensional poverty rate, comprising both poor and near-poor households. Source: Compiled by the author from Decision No. 806/QĐ-BNNMT of 11 March 2026.

The data in Table 1 reveal a pronounced degree of disparity. The gap between the region with the highest rate, the Northern Midlands and Mountainous Areas at 13.27 per cent, and the lowest, the Southeast at 0.29 per cent, exceeds forty-five fold. The Northern Midlands and Mountainous Areas alone account for 38.3 per cent of the national total of poor and near-poor households, a share far larger than the region's share of the national population. Taking the Northern Midlands and Mountainous Areas, the North Central Coast, and the South Central Coast and Central Highlands together, the combined share reaches 78.2 per cent.

The internal composition also differs considerably across regions. In the Northern Midlands and Mountainous Areas, the poor household rate still exceeds the near-poor household rate, indicating that poverty there retains a chronic character. By contrast, in the North Central Coast and the Mekong River Delta, the near-poor household rate is roughly 1.7 to 2.5 times the poor household rate, reflecting a vulnerability-driven form of poverty in which most households have escaped poverty but remain close to the threshold.

The policy implication is that multidimensional poverty in Viet Nam has shifted from a widespread phenomenon to one concentrated in particular localities, exhibiting two distinct forms that require two distinct intervention packages: long-term infrastructure and livelihood investment for chronically poor regions, and risk insurance together with employment support for vulnerability-prone regions.

3.4 Bottlenecks facing the 2026-2030 period

First, the policy focus has not kept pace with the shift in the

target population. Now that near-poor households outnumber poor households, a policy system designed for poor households will overlook the larger group, which also faces the highest risk of falling back into poverty in the face of employment, health and natural disaster shocks.

Second, there is a break in the measurement series. The poverty line will be raised from 2027 to VND 2.2 million per person per month in rural areas and VND 2.8 million in urban areas, while adding a water, sanitation and environment dimension together with an indicator on telecommunications and digital services. The poverty rate will therefore rise again in statistical terms without reflecting any actual decline in welfare. Unless data under both standards are published in parallel during the transition year, the entire assessment series for 2026-2030 will not be comparable with the preceding period.

Third, the targeting unit has changed. The list of poor districts issued under Decision No. 353/QĐ-TTg is no longer compatible with the two-tier organisation of local government. Delineation has shifted to the commune and village level under Decree No. 272/2025/ND-CP, operationalised through Decision No. 60/QĐ-BĐTTG of 29 January 2026; by September 2026, all 34 provinces and centrally governed cities had completed the classification of commune groups. This change of targeting unit requires a redesign of the capital allocation formula, since the previous district-based criteria no longer have a basis for application.

Fourth, disbursement has lagged during the transition year. Directive No. 22/CT-TTg of 22 May 2026 identifies the principal causes as insufficiently resolute direction and administration in some ministries, agencies and localities, uneven enforcement of discipline, and the process of transition from three programmes to a single integrated programme. In practice, as late as 10 September 2026 the Prime Minister still had to issue Decision No. 1757/QĐ-TTg allocating an additional VND 192.251 billion of recurrent expenditure for 2026 to the programme.

Fifth, implementation capacity at the grassroots level is under strain. Under Circular No. 25/2026/TT-BNNMT, from 2027 the review is to be conducted from 1 January to 31 August each year, applying a scoring method with online data updating. The workload is concentrated at commune level at a time when specialised staffing has been reduced following the restructuring of the administrative apparatus, creating a risk to the quality of the input data on which the entire policy system depends.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

4.1 Conclusions

The study yields three findings corresponding to its three research questions. Institutionally, the legal framework for 2021-2025 operated with reasonable coherence owing to the separation of the measurement standard from the investment mechanism; its inherent limitation was the parallel operation of three national target programmes in the same localities, and it is precisely this limitation that prompted consolidation from 2026. In terms of results, all targets assigned by the National Assembly and the Government were met or exceeded, but the reduction margin narrowed year by year and the internal composition reversed, with the near-poor household rate surpassing the poor household rate from 2024. In terms of disparity, multidimensional poverty has shifted from a widespread phenomenon to one concentrated in particular localities, with three regions accounting for

78.2 per cent of the national total of poor and near-poor households, and with two distinct forms of poverty that call for two distinct intervention packages.

4.2 Recommendations

First, ensure the continuity of the measurement series. The Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Agriculture and Environment should publish results under both the 2022-2025 standard and the 2027-2030 standard for at least one transition year, accompanied by a technical conversion factor enabling comparison between the two series. Without this step, the increase in the poverty rate in 2027 will be misread as a policy failure.

Second, extend eligibility to the near-poor group. Health insurance, preferential credit and education support should be maintained for newly escaped households for a minimum of three years. An emergency support mechanism triggered by shocks, rather than by a fixed list drawn up at the start of the year, should be designed. This group will determine the sustainability of poverty reduction outcomes in the coming period.

Third, redesign the capital allocation formula around the commune as the unit. The commune-level multidimensional poverty rate should serve as the principal weight, combined with indices of geographical remoteness and the share of ethnic minority population. Allocation distributed evenly across administrative focal points should be discontinued. The legal basis is already in place following the completion of commune-group classification by all 34 provinces and centrally governed cities.

Fourth, strengthen implementation capacity at commune level. Dedicated civil servants for poverty reduction should be assigned in communes whose multidimensional poverty rate exceeds the regional average. The poor household database should be fully linked with the National Population Database in order to reduce the volume of manual review. Responsibility for verifying data quality should be assigned to the provincial level.

Fifth, introduce a monitoring mechanism for urban poverty and migrant workers. The current review procedure is based on resident households and therefore does not adequately capture this group. Social insurance data and residence data could be used for supplementary identification, with initial piloting in the major cities.

4.3 Limitations and directions for further research

The study has three limitations. First, it relies solely on secondary data at regional level and does not access household-level microdata, so causal relationships cannot be tested. Second, because published data comprise only the multidimensional poverty rate, the study could not compute deprivation intensity or the adjusted headcount ratio and therefore could not measure the depth of poverty. Third, the scope of time-series comparison is confined to the period in which the 2022-2025 standard applied. Further research should use household-level data from the Viet Nam Household Living Standards Survey to model the determinants of return to poverty, and should assess the effect of raising the poverty line on the size of the policy beneficiary population during 2027-2030.

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