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Vocational Training for Agricultural and Rural Workers in Vietnam Today: Current Situation and Solutions

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Abstract

Shifting the economic and labour structure is an inevitable trend in the process of agricultural and rural development in our country towards industrialization, modernization, and increasing the production value of commodity products based on promoting the strengths of each locality, region, and area. This is a major policy of the Party and the State to realize the goal of building new rural areas. Vocational training for workers plays a very important role in shifting the structure of agricultural and rural labour and developing modern agriculture and rural areas. Besides some achievements, vocational training still has many shortcomings: the proportion of labour in agriculture and rural areas is still large, the rate of trained labour is low, and the structure and qualifications of trained labour do not meet the requirements... This article addresses several issues related to the practice of vocational training for agricultural and rural workers, mainly the limitations and solutions based on a new perspective.

Keywords: labour; rural agriculture; economic restructuring of agriculture and rural areas; vocational training, labour structure

Introduction

The transformation of the economic and labour structure is a fundamental aspect of agricultural and rural development in our country, aligned with the broader goals of industrialization and modernization. This evolution is essential for enhancing the production value of commodity products while leveraging the unique strengths of various localities, regions, and areas. The Party and State have recognized this shift as a pivotal policy to achieve the ambitious goal of building new rural areas. Central to this process is vocational training for workers, which plays a crucial role in facilitating the transition of agricultural and rural labour towards more modern practices.

Despite notable achievements in vocational training, significant challenges persist. A substantial portion of the labour force remains in agriculture and rural sectors, with the rate of trained labour being alarmingly low. Furthermore, the existing structure and qualifications of trained labour often fail to meet the evolving demands of modern agricultural practices. This article delves into these issues, focusing on the limitations of current vocational training practices for agricultural and rural workers while proposing solutions that stem from a fresh perspective on the challenges we face.

As we look towards the future, it is clear that our country's agricultural landscape will inevitably evolve towards modern, large-scale production systems that are increasingly integrated into the global economy. This necessitates not only a general shift in economic structures but also a corresponding evolution in labour dynamics. Vocational training emerges as a foundational component in this transformative journey, catalyzing and enhancing the effectiveness of these changes. The urgency and significance of this endeavour cannot be overstated; thus, we must reevaluate our approach to vocational training for agricultural and rural workers.

Rather than merely addressing issues such as surplus labour, job creation, and poverty alleviation, vocational training should be viewed as a strategic initiative aimed at cultivating a skilled workforce capable of supporting modern agriculture and rural development.

This encompasses large-scale production, the adoption of high technology, and active participation in international markets. Achieving this vision requires a shift in mindset regarding vocational training, alongside a coordinated response from government entities, businesses, local communities, and the workers themselves. Through this article, we aim to illuminate the path forward in redefining the role of vocational training in fostering sustainable agricultural and rural development in our nation.

I. Current status of vocational training for agricultural and rural workers

Vietnam's agriculture used to be a small-scale, backward agriculture, mainly dependent on nature. Basic farming was passed down from father to son, passing on the production experience of the previous generation to the next generation. Traditional occupations in rural areas were also taught in the same way. Vocational training for agricultural and rural workers only really began to receive attention since the economic renovation, shifting to a market economy. The development of agricultural production towards large-scale production, applying modern scientific and technological achievements associated with the market economy, and international integration require fundamental changes in the quality and level of rural workers in all aspects.

According to the General Statistics Office, as of 2020, the country's population was 97.576 million people, of which rural areas accounted for 61.645 million people, equivalent to about 63% of the country's population. The average labour force in the country in 2020 was 54.844 million people; the labour force in rural areas was 36.671 million, accounting for 66.9%. Rural workers still account for a high proportion of the social labour force, requiring professional and vocational training [5].

Table 1: Some indicators of rural labour

TT	Target	Year		
		2018	2019	2020
1	Population (thousand people)	94,666	96,484	97,576
	Countryside	60,836	63,014	61,645
2	Labour force (thousand people)	55,354	55,767	54,843
	Countryside	37,282	37,673	36,671
3	Employed labour (thousand people)	54,249	54,659	53,610
	Countryside	36,711	37,094	36,091
4	Percentage of trained workers (%)	22.5	22.8	24.0
5	Working age unemployment rate (%)	1.40	1.27	2.52
	Urban	0.65	0.67	1.69
	Countryside	1.78	1.57	2.94

(Source: 2020 Labour Force Survey Report, General Statistics Office) [6]

Although in the process of industrialization and modernization, the economic and labour structure has changed a lot compared to before, the proportion of agriculture in the total social product and the labour force tends to decrease, but the agricultural sector currently directly feeds nearly 65% of the country's population living in rural areas, at the same time providing food for the whole society, providing raw materials for the processing industry, providing land and labour for other economic sectors to develop and is the sector that produces valuable export products, increasing foreign currency revenue. Vietnam is one of the 15 largest agricultural exporters in the world. In

2018, Vietnam exported agricultural, forestry and fishery products to more than 180 countries and territories in the world, reaching a value of 40.2 billion USD [2].

Rural labour resources are a part of human resources in general, distributed in rural areas and working in socio-economic fields in rural areas, including agricultural, forestry, fishery, industrial, handicraft, trade, services and other non-agricultural activities taking place in rural areas. Training rural labour resources is understood as increasing the value of workers in terms of knowledge, skills, attitudes, spirit, and physical strength... to make workers have the highest working capacity, contributing most effectively to rural socio-economic development. In terms of content, developing rural human resources is developing both the quantity and quality of labour.

Realizing the importance of training labour resources for agriculture and rural areas. The Resolution of the 7th Conference of the 10th Central Executive Committee emphasized: "Farmers are trained to have production levels equal to those of advanced countries in the region and have sufficient political capacity, playing the role of masters of the new countryside;... strengthening research and transfer of advanced science and technology, creating a breakthrough in human resource training;... strengthening training and fostering knowledge of advanced and modern agricultural production science and technology for farmers; vocational training for farmers' children to change jobs and export labour; at the same time, focusing on training to improve knowledge for managers and grassroots cadres". Directive No. 19-CT/TW dated November 5, 2012 of the Central Executive Committee on strengthening the Party's leadership in vocational training for rural workers has determined "Focus on vocational training for rural youth to meet the labour requirements of industrial, handicraft, labour export and job transfer establishments; vocational training for farmers directly involved in agricultural production to practice advanced and modern agricultural production". This policy is further affirmed in Conclusions No. 97-KL/TW dated May 15, 2014, of the Politburo on several policies and solutions to continue implementing Resolution No. 7 of the 10th Central Committee; and Conclusion No. 54-KL/TW dated August 7, 2019, of the Politburo on continuing to implement Resolution No. 7 of the 10th Central Committee on agriculture, farmers and rural areas. The Resolution of the 13th National Congress of the Party also set the goal: "By 2025, the proportion of agricultural labour in the total social labour force will be about 25%; the proportion of trained labourers will be 70%" [1].

Implementing the policies of the Party and the Government, the Prime Minister has issued many mechanisms and policies on vocational training for rural workers. In performing their assigned functions and tasks, relevant ministries and branches such as the Ministry of Education and Training, the Ministry of Labour - Invalids and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Ministry of Industry and Trade... have developed and issued under their authority many legal documents, many programs, projects, and plans related to human resource development, training, and vocational training for rural workers.

Regarding training in the agricultural sector, the country currently has 34 training institutions (01 academies, 03 universities, 02 management schools, and 28 colleges) and 08

scientific research institutes with postgraduate training. As of 2020, excluding training in primary-level occupations, the country has 373 training occupations, including Postgraduate (PhD and Master's): 38; university: 88 (of which 31 are agricultural, accounting for 35.2%); college: 112 (48 are agricultural, accounting for 42.8%); secondary school: 135 (44 are agricultural, accounting for 32.5%)^[2].

On vocational training for rural workers

During the 11 years of implementing the Project on vocational training for agricultural and rural workers (2010 - 2020), nearly 10 million rural workers nationwide received vocational training, reaching 89% of the Project's target (11 million people), of which nearly 4.6 million people were supported for vocational training under Project 1956, reaching 65% of the Project's 11-year plan (7.052 million people), of which, primary level training and training under 3 months were supported for 4.57 million people, reaching 70% of the Project's 11-year plan (6.54 million people), of which: 53.4% of rural workers supported for vocational training were female; 40.2% studied agricultural vocational training, 59.8% studied non-agricultural vocational training; 1.8% were eligible for preferential policies for people with revolutionary contributions; 25.8% were ethnic minorities; 4.9% of poor households; 1.7% of people whose farmland was recovered; 4.7% of people with disabilities; 3% of people from near-poor households, the rest are other rural workers supported to learn a trade; piloting vocational training orders at college and intermediate levels in the period 2010-2015 for 10,534 people from poor households, ethnic minorities, and rural workers whose farmland was recovered and facing economic difficulties. Of the 4.57 million rural workers supported to learn a trade, 1.84 million rural workers learned agricultural trades, accounting for 40.2%; 2.73 million rural workers were supported to learn non-agricultural trades, accounting for 59.8%. After vocational training, nearly 4 million people had jobs, reaching 86.5% (the minimum target is 70% of workers having jobs after vocational training), and the period 2016-2020 reached 89.3%^[2].

The above results have significantly contributed to job creation, labour restructuring, and improving the quality of rural labour. Vocational training has focused on linking local strengths, production development planning, socio-economic development planning, and new rural construction planning; vocational training is shifting to training according to the requirements and needs of businesses and workers, linking training with career counselling and orientation. Vocational training has significantly contributed to labour restructuring. The proportion of agricultural, forestry and fishery workers in the total workforce nationwide decreased from 49.5% in 2010 to 33.5% in 2020. Vocational training has made an important contribution to the development of collective and cooperative economic models through value chain production linkages, creating many jobs, contributing to sustainable poverty reduction, improving people's material and spiritual lives, and actively contributing to the success of new rural construction, contributing significantly to the formation of effective production and business models.

However, from the perspective of the effectiveness of vocational training for agricultural and rural workers, it is necessary to frankly point out the following limitations:

Firstly, the demand for vocational training and job creation in rural areas is currently very large but has not been met. In recent years, although the process of urbanization and

economic integration has promoted the process of labour shifting from rural to urban areas, however, labour is still concentrated in rural areas very high, continuing to put pressure on the demand for training and job creation on the spot for rural workers.

Second, the massive migration of rural workers to urban areas has caused a shortage of labour in rural areas and increased employment pressure. In 2020, the number of migrants aged 15 and over was 877.8 thousand, mainly in urban areas (69.0%). This spontaneous migration makes the unemployment rate of migrants (9.82%) about 4.4 times higher than the general unemployment rate of workers aged 15 and over (2.25%), most of whom are rural workers without professional or technical training^[2].

Third, the rate of trained workers in rural areas is still low. The quality of labour has gradually improved but is still limited, making it impossible for workers' income to increase rapidly, causing the gap between rich and poor in urban and rural areas to widen. In 2020, the rate of trained workers with diplomas and certificates from primary level and above in rural areas was 16%, much lower than the rate in urban areas (39.3%) and lower than the national average (24.6%)^[4].

Fourth, the scale of vocational training in the agricultural sector is decreasing rapidly. The shift of labour structure from agriculture to non-agricultural sectors is appropriate, and the narrowing of occupations in the agricultural sector is inevitable. However, there are many necessary occupations in the agricultural sector (cultivation, animal husbandry, veterinary medicine, high-tech agriculture, agricultural and forestry processing, agricultural services, etc.) to develop modern agriculture, but few people want to study these occupations due to the tendency to leave their hometowns and agriculture to start a career.

Fifth, the vocational training structure is not suitable for the needs, vocational training is not linked to the needs of employment and there are still signs of waste. The formation of a series of vocational training centres, especially at the district level, but they do not have enough training capacity, so they only revolve around industrial sewing classes, small mechanical repair, driving with a small number of students, causing waste of facilities. These facilities are almost incapable of training high-tech occupations. Therefore, compared to the speed of labour demand and labour market development, the quality of labour supply, especially labour in rural areas, has not met and supported the shift in employment structure. This is the reason why rural labour continues to be compressed in the agricultural sector, in traditional industries, when migrating to urban areas, they mainly work in traditional industries or the informal sector. In particular, in the structure of training professions, attention has not been paid to agricultural service sectors and fields, knowledge of business and management in agriculture and rural areas, new and potential professions such as growing flowers, ornamental plants, rural tourism, etc.

Sixth, the quality of vocational training is still too low compared to the actual requirements and qualifications of countries in the region. The majority of the workforce still lacks the skills and knowledge to meet market demands. Compared to some countries in the region, the rate of trained workers in Vietnam has made progress, but in reality, the quality and qualifications of workers when entering the workforce are still a concern. Most of the recruited workers still have to be retrained, and many workers even have to

work in the wrong profession because the training is not close to the needs of the market.

Seventh, the professionalism and labour discipline of workers have not received due attention in vocational training. Most workers have not been trained in industrial labour discipline. Because most of the workers come from rural areas, they carry the style of small-scale agricultural production. This is one of the difficulties when workers move from the agricultural sector to the non-agricultural sector, especially to occupations that require high standards.

Eighth, the technical facilities for vocational training are still very poor, and investment in vocational training is still too little. Programs, projects, and plans for vocational training for rural workers do not have adequate resources, leading to ineffective training of human resources for agriculture and rural areas.

Ninth, vocational training for rural workers is not linked to job creation, development of production and service forms to attract workers. Trained workers, especially high-quality workers, almost do not want to work in rural areas. Rural areas do not have the material and technical facilities to employ highly skilled workers, and there is no need to employ highly skilled and complex workers.

Tenth, vocational training for rural workers is currently still a movement. Localities implement vocational training as a way to enjoy preferential policies of the state.

2. Solutions to improve the effectiveness of vocational training for agricultural and rural workers today

In the next 10 years, rural areas will continue to be a source of labour for non-agricultural sectors and urban areas through labour restructuring. It is forecasted that by 2025, the proportion of labour in agriculture will be below 30% and continue to decrease to below 15% by 2035.

By 2025, approximately 500,000 rural workers will change jobs each year. This requires ensuring adequate human, material and rural infrastructure resources, effectively implementing policies and programs for agricultural, farmer and rural development, flexible labour market policies and better support for agricultural to non-agricultural workers.

The rate of trained rural labour needs to have a breakthrough and rapid development, especially the group with technical expertise (needs to account for 30% by 2025 and 50% by 2035) [3].

In vocational training for agricultural and rural workers in our country today, we believe that it is necessary to adhere to the following viewpoints:

Firstly, vocational training for rural agricultural workers must create a workforce that meets the requirements of industrialization and modernization of agriculture and rural areas and adapts to the market economy and international integration. This means that it is necessary to combine vocational skills training, and technical expertise with the ability to survive in a competitive market economy. The training process not only aims to create a team of skilled workers in production but also can calculate costs, grasp market needs and have the ability to become bosses when conditions permit.

Second, attaching importance to vocational training and developing agricultural and rural human resources is not to make agriculture compete with the industrial and service sectors, but to make it continue to exist in competition with agricultural products from other places, even though the

agricultural sector may only account for a very small proportion of GDP. In terms of the country, especially Asian countries, agriculture is the way to create and preserve the economic and cultural identity of each country, ethnic group and territory. Agriculture is organically linked to farmers and rural culture. Therefore, many countries have policies to support farmers and subsidize agriculture, and this principle has been recognized in the general rules of international trade. Typical countries such as Japan, Korea, China or developing countries such as Thailand and India are still effectively implementing this strategy [3].

Third, vocational training for rural agricultural workers is a long-term development strategy, not a purely supportive social policy aimed at immediate employment goals or poverty reduction. Therefore, it needs to be planned, calculated reasonably, and prioritized in terms of policy. There are specific goals and guaranteed resources, gradually approaching international vocational training standards, and having the ability to work creatively.

Fourth, link vocational training with job creation to make good use of trained labour resources.

So what is the solution to improve the effectiveness of vocational training for agricultural and rural workers today?

Firstly, it is necessary to develop and adjust the planning for training agricultural and rural labour resources to suit practical requirements. The goal of vocational training needs to gradually shift from only specializing in training labour skills. Vocational training is a new concept that has been changed from providing workers with the ability to do a certain job (sewing, driving, embroidering, etc.) to provide a series of other comprehensive skills (creating products, finding markets, inventing product designs, marketing, etc.). We need to change our concept of vocational training. If we only stop at vocational training as before, at most we will only achieve the result of solving employment problems, it will be difficult to create creative and adaptable workers and they will have to be satisfied with working for hire for life. It is necessary to understand that vocational training must train both technical expertise, professional skills and other skills to be able to survive and develop oneself in a certain working environment and conditions with one's profession. Current vocational training planning work needs to:

Identify the need for trained labour and the need for the labour market to determine the list of training occupations, that is, planning must be linked to the market, linked to employment, not training according to trends, racing for achievements.

Identify the occupations that need priority training, reduce the situation of scattered training, training for the sake of it, and training based only on local capacity. Vocational training must be proactive, closely follow economic developments, and be flexible according to changes in economic structure and market structure.

Determining the appropriate scale of vocational training associated with each level and training profession. Vocational training planning needs to be associated with the agricultural advantages of each region, to best exploit the local labour force after the training process.

Expand training in new occupations, including non-agricultural occupations such as raw material processing, agricultural services, rural tourism, craft villages, and community tourism based on tourism products from agriculture, rural areas, and indigenous culture.

Second, innovative vocational training content, in which in addition to focusing on forming proficient technical expertise, it is necessary to supplement other knowledge on product preservation, preliminary processing, product introduction, customer search, buying and selling, job search skills, encourage creativity in work, especially professional awareness, labour discipline according to industrial labour style. The goal of the farmer training strategy is to help them have strong confidence in themselves in the face of material and spiritual difficulties so that they become positive, dynamic, and creative in their work, especially farming, which is often considered lower than other occupations.

Third, training methods need to change towards increasing practice. To do so, training facilities need to have good technical facilities. Currently, this is difficult to meet in training facilities. To improve, it is necessary to rely on the technical facilities of enterprises. This is the reason why in vocational training, it is necessary to have a link between vocational training facilities and enterprises, handicraft workshops or farms, and even farming households.

Fourth, improve the qualifications of the vocational teaching staff. This is currently a very weak point, especially at the district level. Attracting good and highly skilled teachers is still very difficult due to low salaries and unstable jobs. Those with good expertise often do not choose to work at schools and vocational training facilities. Preferential salary policies are often difficult to implement because vocational training for rural workers is currently being encouraged with low tuition fees, making it difficult to increase revenue for training facilities to attract teachers. This is also an issue that the government needs to consider to have support policies. One solution to solve this difficulty is to strengthen links with businesses and cooperatives, and encourage the participation of professional organizations, socio-professional organizations, artisans, experienced farmers and gardeners, and good farmers... to participate in vocational training.

Fifth, it is necessary to pay attention to vocational training for the second generation of workers because the shift of agricultural labour is closely related to labour migration. Migrating labour from rural to urban areas is necessary for economic growth, but in reality, this group is always disadvantaged in many policies, including training and development policies, and this group needs to be trained to integrate into urban society, to have a career, and to participate in the labour market with productivity and labour efficiency.

Sixth, vocational training for agricultural and rural workers must focus on linking with employment opportunities for workers after training. Currently, we have not resolved the link between urbanization and rural modernization. Rural workers are still limited in their ability to access basic services and have difficulty finding good job opportunities in rural areas. Urban economic sectors develop without links to rural areas, while rural areas do not have enough conditions to develop processing and service industries to serve agricultural development. For rural workers, the road to urban areas is both easy and difficult. It is easy to go but difficult to integrate into the destination. According to the experience of many countries, they all implement policies to promote industry in rural areas. For example, Japan attaches special importance to industrial development in rural areas; there are policies, plans, and planning to promote industry in big cities and then spread to rural areas. Thailand has many

preferential policies for businesses investing in rural areas. Korea has also implemented many solutions to promote the development of rural industry, promulgating the "Law on Local Industrial Development", promoting the development of industry in urban areas to rural areas. In addition, our country can apply a comprehensive national strategy on job development, non-agricultural job development in rural areas and support rural workers to learn new skills when agricultural land is increasingly narrowing; promote the shift of labour from agriculture to industry and from the informal economic sector to the formal sector. The government needs to study and invest in developing several social enterprises in rural areas, create conditions to expand employment for young people and encourage young people to start businesses with support programs and preferential loans.

Seventh, review and complete the system of support policies on vocational training for rural workers. Research and develop support levels and forms in the direction of supporting according to the norms of each occupational group by reality.

Eighth, promote international cooperation in vocational training for agricultural and rural workers. Coordinate with international organizations to assess the quality of agricultural workers; develop advanced agricultural vocational training materials, digital transformation, meeting international standards and regulations. Organize international forums, and share experiences in training to improve the quality and skills of agricultural workers. Cooperate in sending agricultural workers to study and work under fixed-term contracts abroad.

Ninth, mobilize resources for vocational training for agricultural and rural workers. Integrate with national target programs in allocating medium-term and annual funding for components of vocational training for rural workers. Mobilize resources from enterprises, cooperatives, organizations and individuals to participate in agricultural vocational training. Take advantage of support capital from international organizations for vocational training for agricultural and rural workers.

Conclusion

Sooner or later, our country's agriculture will move towards modern large-scale production and increasingly deep international integration. The change in the general economic structure and the structure of the agricultural and rural economy is inevitable, requiring a corresponding shift in labour. Vocational training for agricultural and rural workers is the process of creating the premise and playing a decisive role in the effectiveness of this transformation. This is no longer a matter of debate about its urgency, importance or significance. What we want to say to conclude this article is: Let's change the concept of vocational training for agricultural and rural workers. Vocational training for agricultural and rural workers is not only aimed at solving surplus labour in agriculture, creating jobs, eliminating hunger and reducing poverty, and implementing social policies, but this is also the process of creating human resources for modern agriculture and rural areas, large-scale production, high technology and international integration. It requires a change in mindset in vocational training and positive, synchronous solutions from the government, businesses, localities and the efforts of the workers themselves.

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