Promoting Civic Participation in Vietnam: the Case of the New Rural Program in a District of Ho Chi Minh City*

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I. Introduction

Agriculture is a fundamental economic sector in the Vietnamese economy, contributing a significant proportion of the Vietnamese national gross domestic product (GDP). Vietnam’s rural population was 79.7 percent of the total population in 1990, but it had declined to 71.2 percent in 2010.¹ The increase in the proportion of people living in urban areas in Vietnam is growing gradually over the years. Due to the increasing urbanization, the rural population is declining over the years, but the agriculture sector still plays a vital role in food security, job creation, and income for rural population. Agriculture has a decisive role in poverty reduction and national development. However, the employment rate in

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agriculture is considerably high at 70.3%. This figure indicates the low rate of modernization and industrialization in Vietnamese agriculture. Additionally, although there is around 70% of the population living in rural areas, the living conditions and standards of this large part of population are significantly low, and underdeveloped in relation to the average development rate of the nation. The low development of the rural area has been a cause of concern for the whole political and administrative system of Vietnam. This is the reason for the emergence of the New Rural Development Program, which is a program that aims to push the development of the rural area and living standards of people in this area, thus contributing to the development of the whole country.

The New Rural Development Program launched in 2008 focuses on the development of the rural area in several dimensions (i.e. rural planning; infrastructure development, economic structure transition, economic development and income increase, poverty reduction and social welfare promotion, innovating and developing efficient socio-economic models, education and training in rural areas and heath care, clean water, etc.). This is one of the nation-wide programs and receives the effort of the whole political and administrative system in Vietnam.

According to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, the capital available to meet the requirement of the Program is limited and hence it could affect the success of the Program. One of the main reasons is that there is a lack of resources as well as effective ways to mobilize the internal resources, especially community involvement for the Program, as well as civic participation. In other words, in the process of program

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