

RESEARCH AND PROPOSE SPECIFIC POLICIES TO SERVE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT IN BINH DUONG PROVINCE

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Abstract

Implementing specific mechanisms and policies to develop the economy and society in certain localities is an innovative step in the legislative process in Vietnam. This initiative has timely addressed practical issues, helping localities overcome many difficulties and obstacles in legal documents, harnessing advantages, mobilizing resources, accelerating economic and social development, and achieving significant results. Binh Duong Province has recently experienced a period of strong industrial growth but faces some sustainability challenges. In the planning for economic and social development, Binh Duong needs to research specific mechanisms and policies in several areas, such as developing industry linked with innovation, transforming the workforce, investing in high-quality education, and managing and synchronizing urban planning and development. The specific mechanisms and policies for Binh Duong should aim to address national issues by overcoming the middle-income trap, making it the first locality in Vietnam to achieve high income.

Keywords: Binh Duong province, economy, society, specific policies

1. Introduction

In recent years, Vietnam has made significant efforts to promote specific policies for economic and social development. According to the 2013 Constitution, The National Assembly (TNA), the Government, and The Prime Minister (TPM) have issued several specific policies to resolve difficulties and obstacles, accelerating the implementation of national target programs and specific mechanisms for local economic and social development. So far, nine provinces and cities have had resolutions issued by the National Assembly to define specific mechanisms for their economic and social development, including the capital Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, the cities of Hai Phong, Da Nang, Can Tho, and the provinces of Thanh Hoa, Nghe An, Ha Tinh, and Lam Dong. With specific mechanisms and policies, these provinces and cities have been empowered with greater decentralization and autonomy, allowing them to make flexible decisions on issues related to land, finance, human resources, and more to leverage local strengths and develop their economy and society. After a period of implementation, these specific mechanisms and policies have generally shown positive effects, laying the foundation for local development and contributing to increased state budget revenue.

Binh Duong is a typical example of industrialization and modernization in Vietnam. After 25 years of development, the economy and society in Binh Duong have reached a threshold, encountering significant challenges regarding the industrial development model, the skill level of the workforce, and urban planning and development management. These bottlenecks are not only challenges for

Binh Duong but also for the nation. Therefore, researching and finding specific, superior mechanisms and policies to address Binh Duong's issues is of profound scientific and practical significance, contributing to the renewal process of both Binh Duong Province and the country as a whole.

2. Documents and Research Methods

Since the 2013 Constitution (TNA, 2013) came into effect, the Party and the State have paid great attention to establishing specific mechanisms and policies to exploit the advantages and potential of various sectors, fields, and localities to serve the country's economic and social development. The initial step was the Prime Minister's decision issued in 2015 regarding several specific mechanisms and policies for the development of Da Lat City in Lam Dong Province (Prime Minister, 2015). This decision served as a pilot for developing specific mechanisms and policies for localities. Subsequently, at its 9th session (June 2020), the 14th National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam passed resolutions on specific mechanisms and policies for three localities: the capital Hanoi, Da Nang City, and Can Tho City. Among them, Hanoi was piloted with several specific financial and budgetary mechanisms and policies (TNA, 2020a); Da Nang City piloted the urban government model and some specific mechanisms and policies for economic and social development (TNA, 2020b); Can Tho City piloted several specific mechanisms and policies for economic and social development (TNA, 2020c). In 2021, the National Assembly approved resolutions piloting specific mechanisms and policies for three provinces and cities: Hai Phong City (TNA, 2021a), Nghe An Province (TNA, 2021b), Thanh Hoa Province (TNA, 2021c), and Thua Thien Hue Province (TNA, 2021d). In 2023, the National Assembly approved a resolution piloting specific mechanisms and policies for Ho Chi Minh City (TNA, 2023). These resolutions serve as both scientific and practical bases for researching and proposing specific mechanisms and policies for Binh Duong Province.

To establish specific mechanisms and policies for Binh Duong Province, this study reviews and evaluates the context and current state of Binh Duong's economy and society, assesses achievements and limitations, and identifies current challenges facing Binh Duong. For this assessment, the study relies on statistical data and several arguments from previous research. Regarding the current state of Binh Duong's economy and society, this article references data from the Binh Duong Statistical Yearbooks. The statistical materials used in the article include the Binh Duong Statistical Yearbooks from 1999, 2008, 2018, 2021, and 2022 (BDSO, 1999; BDSO, 2008; BDSO, 2018; BDSO, 2021; BDSO, 2022). In addition to the data from the Binh Duong Statistical Yearbooks, the article also utilizes results from three General Population and Housing Censuses conducted by the General Statistics Office (GSO, 1999; GSO, 2009; GSO, 2019).

For previous research materials, the article references and uses several published works, including the History of the Binh Duong Provincial Party Committee (CPVBD, 2002; CPVBD, 2022), the History of the Binh Duong People's Government (PC BD, 2014), the History of Binh Duong's Population (Phan Xuan Bien, 2012; Nguyen Van Hiep, 2022); and several publications on industrialization and modernization in Binh Duong over the years (Nguyen Van Hiep, 2015; Nguyen Van Hiep, 2021).

Regarding research methods, the article uses the interdisciplinary historical political economy (HPE) method. This approach allows for studying how political and economic subjects and institutions interact over time. One of the prominent features of the HPE method is that when describing history, it encompasses deep insights into politics and economics while delving into the political history of the issues under study. Additionally, HPE research is concerned with historical context, explaining causes, developments, outcomes, and historical significance based on the historical context.

Besides the interdisciplinary historical political economy method, the article also applies the development science method. This is a specialized method in social science, examining issues related to economic and social development. Applying development science provides a perspective on the issues applied in the real world, as well as the policies, programs, and practices behind these issues.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Assessing Binh Duong Province's Development Achievements

Over nearly 40 years of implementing the renovation policy following the 6th National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam (1986) and 26 years since its establishment, Binh Duong Province is one of the few provinces and cities in Vietnam to successfully transition from an agricultural, rural economy to an industrial and urban economy (PCBD, 2014). To date, Binh Duong has achieved remarkable development with economic indicators many times higher than those at its establishment. The Gross Regional Domestic Product (GRDP) in 2022 reached approximately 500,000 billion VND, a 125-fold increase from 1997 (in 1997, the province's total product was only 3,919 billion VND). The value of industrial production in 2022 increased 150 times compared to 1997, from 2,000 billion VND to nearly 300,000 billion VND. The total service output increased from 1,000 billion VND (1997) to 90,000 billion VND (2022). State budget revenue increased from 800 billion VND (1997) to 88,000 billion VND (2022) (BDSO, 2008; BDSO, 2022)). Binh Duong has been a pioneer in transforming the economic structure towards industrialization and modernization. Dozens of industrial parks have been established, promoting the development of various service sectors. By 2022, Binh Duong's economic structure has shifted according to the correct orientation, with the proportions of agriculture, industry, and services being 3.1%, 67.8%, and 21.3%, respectively (BDSO, 2022).

The economic structure, with industry and services playing a dominant role, has driven Binh Duong's entire economy. Particularly, the industrial development model has motivated urban development and vice versa, building and developing urban areas to provide jobs, increase income, and foster long-term commitment among residents, thus laying a solid foundation for Binh Duong to become a civilized, modern urban area in the future. Economic development has also brought about many social changes. The material and spiritual lives of the people have continuously improved. Binh Duong has attracted a large workforce from various provinces and foreign experts to live and work. Education and healthcare services have developed strongly, meeting the learning and healthcare needs of the people. National defense and security are well maintained. Foreign relations and integration are increasingly deep and effective.

Binh Duong has invested significantly in industrial infrastructure, becoming a model of development in Vietnam. In 1997, Binh Duong had only 6 industrial parks, but by 2023, the province had 29 industrial parks with a total area of over 12,000 hectares, the largest in Vietnam. The province's infrastructure is increasingly complete and of high quality, with industrial parks built in a synchronized manner. In urban development planning, Binh Duong always focuses on maximizing the potential and advantages of localities in line with the overall planning of the southern key economic region. In 2010, the Binh Duong Provincial Party Committee developed a breakthrough program for Binh Duong's urban development by 2020. Accordingly, during the 2010-2015 period, Thu Dau Mot was upgraded to a second-class urban area and became a city under the province. Thuan An and Di An were upgraded to third-class urban areas. Ben Cat and Tan Uyen towns were developed into fourth-class urban areas. To date, the urbanization rate in Binh Duong has reached over 70%. With industrialization and modernization, Binh Duong is rapidly urbanizing, and the image of a centrally-governed city in the future is becoming increasingly clear (BDSO, 2008; BDSO, 2022).

Parallel to unlocking capital for basic construction investment, Binh Duong has consistently been a shining point, holding the number one position in attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) for many years. From 1997 to 2000, Binh Duong attracted more than 300 foreign investment projects with a capital of nearly USD 2,400 million. From 2001 to 2005, FDI in Binh Duong amounted to over USD 2.3 billion. By 2013, the total number of FDI projects in Binh Duong reached over 2,000, with a total capital of USD 17 billion. In 2014, amid the country's economic difficulties and a decline in FDI into Vietnam, Binh Duong still attracted over USD 1 billion (BDSO, 2021).

The Party and government levels have also focused on unlocking resources within the population for development investment. Residential capital has been mobilized into production and business in various economic sectors. A notable example is the mobilization of residential capital for the development of smallholder rubber with hundreds of billions of VND. As of 2010, Binh Duong

Province had more than 85,000 hectares of smallholder rubber, with the largest areas in Dau Tieng (22,000 hectares), Ben Cat (16,000 hectares), Tan Uyen (25 hectares), and Phu Giao (22,000 hectares). In Dau Tieng District, all communes and towns have smallholder rubber, with the largest commune having 6,236 hectares and the smallest around 600 hectares. Many households have developed their economies through large-scale livestock and poultry farming. The mobilization of residential capital for development investment has fundamentally transformed social life. Many families have high incomes, not only changing their lives but also investing in their children's education both domestically and abroad (Phan Xuan Bien, 2014).

3.2. Current Challenges for Binh Duong

Industrial Development with Labor-Intensive, Low Productivity Production

To date, the industry in Binh Duong is still primarily labor-intensive with low productivity. According to statistical data, the industrial production index of Binh Duong by sector shows that the processing industry accounts for 80-90% of the value. Major production sectors in Binh Duong currently include textiles, garments, wood processing, and food processing. These sectors not only employ a large labor force but also heavily depend on export demand.

In addition to requiring a large labor force, Binh Duong's industrial sectors have business models that demand capital for the production of goods or services, with a high labor cost ratio. Businesses are increasingly labor-intensive. Currently, Binh Duong's industries are still heavily engaged in processing and assembly, utilizing cheap labor for manufacturing textiles, footwear, food processing, and wood processing for export, resulting in products with low added value.

Overall, Binh Duong's industrial economy still involves capital-intensive production, requiring significant investment in capital, equipment, machinery, and fixed assets to produce goods. Financial investment requirements are high, and the labor input needed for production activities is also greater than the necessary capital.

Human resources have not met the demand in both quantity and quality

Binh Duong currently has over 1.5 million workers and boasts the most favorable "golden" demographic structure in the Southeast region. The proportion of workers aged 15 and above actively employed relative to the population consistently remains between 60.9% to 66.1%, the highest in the region since 2010. However, the percentage of workers in the economy who have received training remains low in the region. According to the General Statistics Office of Vietnam, the proportion of trained workers in Binh Duong in recent years has only maintained at 17-20%, ranking fourth among provinces in the Southeast region (higher than Tay Ninh, Binh Phuoc, and Dong Nai, but lower than Ba Ria - Vung Tau and Ho Chi Minh City) (Nguyen Van Hiep, 2022).

The rate of trained workers (with diplomas or certificates) in Binh Duong is quite low. This means that over 80% of workers aged 15 and above have not received vocational and technical training. This reality contributes significantly to the difficulty many workers face in adapting to jobs and their low capacity for knowledge application and creativity. The level of professional skills has not met practical requirements, and workers' competencies are limited, which is a common observation among employing units and organizations. Notably, while Dong Nai's proportion of trained workers has surpassed Binh Duong's and maintains a stable annual increase of over 2%, Binh Duong has shown a marked decline since 2015.

In terms of structure, the proportion of workers trained by occupation and job position in Binh Duong still shows many unreasonable points. Overall, by employment structure, the group of leaders and high-level technical professionals accounts for a relatively low percentage. According to statistical data from 2015-2020, the group of leaders accounts for 0.77%, and the group of high-level technical professionals accounts for 4.5%. The labor force in the personal services, security, craftsman, assembly, and machine operation groups consistently exceeds 90%. By job position, the wage-earning group holds the highest percentage (over 74%). The group of business owners holds the lowest percentage (over 2%) (Nguyen Van Hiep, 2021).

Development and social management still have many shortcomings

Binh Duong has been very successful in its industrialization strategy linked to urbanization; developing industry to drive urban development, and building industrial infrastructure in parallel with urban infrastructure. Some of Binh Duong's urbanization policies, such as constructing housing for workers, housing for low-income people, and developing integrated industrial-service-urban complexes, have become highlights of the province's far-reaching vision in economic-social development planning. However, Binh Duong's urbanization strategy in recent years has not fully encompassed all resident classes; particularly, current urbanization solutions are still based on the old urbanization model, lacking effective solutions to prevent urban poverty issues, unemployment, ecological crises, dilapidated rental housing, and the shrinking of public spaces, which reduce urban aesthetics; the budget continually increases to address social welfare issues resulting from spontaneous urbanization.

According to Nguyen Van Hiep (2022), although significant progress has been made, planning and managing the population in Binh Duong still reveal significant limitations. Resident information and data are incomplete and not regularly updated; some areas have a population density exceeding the limits of technical and social infrastructure, causing many difficulties in management, especially in social welfare and public order and safety management. Binh Duong has a very high mechanical population increase, but views and policies on immigrants have not been clearly reflected in socio-economic development plans, especially those related to leveraging the advantages of immigrants for labor and employment policies, as well as adapting to the economic and social conditions of each area when accessing basic social services (education, healthcare) for immigrants. Rapid urban development has attracted residents from other areas to urbanize, increasing the mechanical population, but planning and managing urban planning still have many shortcomings; spontaneous and fragmented residential areas have formed; population fluctuation forecasts have not kept pace with economic, social development, and the needs of the people.

3.3. Specific Mechanisms and Policy Recommendations for the Development of Binh Duong Province

Industrial Development Linked with Innovation

Developing industry linked with innovation will strongly promote the transition of economic growth models from extensive to intensive. Scientific and technological advancements need to be widely applied in industries where there are strengths and comparative and competitive advantages to effectively utilize resources, optimize scale and productivity, and eliminate the diminishing marginal productivity phenomenon, aiming for increasing marginal productivity. Binh Duong needs to identify key industries and sectors for focused investment. Appropriate policies and mechanisms should be developed to motivate and encourage businesses in areas where the province has strengths, including tax incentives, interest rates, land policies, and more, while also focusing on attracting various economic sectors, especially the private sector.

Industry linked with innovation has the potential to bring the locality opportunities to produce a wider range of products. Vertical industrial development linked with innovation will activate new production energy. When developing vertically, new capabilities will combine with existing capabilities, thus increasing both the diversity of products (number of products) and the complexity of products (number of capabilities used in each product) in the economy. Vertical policies can be considered as any policies aimed at achieving specific capabilities. In the current context, vertical industrial policies will help Binh Duong focus resources on: fuel-efficient production industries, sustainable fuel use; developing environmentally friendly technologies; green economy, circular economy; organic food production; environmental and water resource protection. Once new capabilities are achieved, they can also be used in recombining other inputs, allowing further diversification into new products. The practical challenge for any vertical policy is to target a capability that can be effectively recombined with existing capabilities to increase the diversity and complexity of the economy (e.g., targeted investment policies, new curricula, selective foreign direct investment).

Industrial development policies linked with innovation allow public investment to lead and activate all social resources. Over 20 years ago, Binh Duong rolled out the red carpet to invite investment, activating all resources to participate in economic development. That is a valuable experience. In the current context, public investment policies leading the development of innovation in Binh Duong can activate all social resources to participate in innovation activities. Vertical industrial development policies linked with innovation will be a breakthrough factor to improve the locality's image, while also being a source of inspiration stimulating overall innovation in the economy.

Transitioning Human Resources and Investing in High-Quality Education

Develop a comprehensive strategy for the development of high-quality human resources in the province in the new era. Until now, most provinces and cities in Vietnam, including Binh Duong, have not had an overall strategy for human resource development. Numerous programs, projects, and plans for human resource development in Binh Duong have been issued but remain scattered, mainly focusing on training cadres, civil servants, and public employees. The training of high-level technical professionals, talent development, and entrepreneurial skills in the digital economy era has not been prioritized. To develop high-level human resources, a comprehensive strategy must be established to address shortages in quantity, limitations in quality, and irrationalities in the occupational structure. This is also the basis for clearly defining responsibilities and a specific roadmap for the development of high-quality human resources, serving as a legal foundation to leverage the shared responsibility of the entire society in improving human resource quality.

The comprehensive strategy for developing high-quality human resources needs to be thoroughly researched with a scientific approach, breakthrough thinking, a long-term vision, and suitability to the province's realities. Clear objectives, scale, roadmap, and specific policies must be identified. The strategic objective should aim to make high-level human resources the most crucial foundation and advantage for sustainable development; consider human resources as a competitive edge in integration, elevating the province's human resource competitiveness to a level comparable to ASEAN countries, with some aspects approaching the level of developed countries globally. The strategy should also propose a reasonable and highly predictable implementation roadmap, building and completing specific mechanisms and policies for the development of high-quality human resources.

Breakthroughs in the training, fostering, and utilization of high-quality human resources are essential. Based on the comprehensive strategy for high-quality human resource development, bold steps must be taken to identify breakthroughs in training, fostering, and utilization to activate the entire system of government, training institutions, and businesses to participate in human resource development. In terms of awareness, high-quality human resources are essential for the entire economy, not just for cadres, civil servants, and public employees. Therefore, the provincial Party committee and government need to focus investment on professions necessary for the province's development. Based on forecasts of human resource development needs in various sectors, especially for university and postgraduate levels, the province can link with national universities for local human resource training and concentrate resources to build world-class training institutions within the province. Regarding remuneration and honor, to "retain" talent, flexible attraction policies based on talent and contribution effectiveness are needed; create favorable working environments and advancement opportunities; encourage high-level technical workers to work creatively and effectively; ensure adequate working and research conditions for scientists and young talents; honor talents with mechanisms to encourage material benefits and working environments for those bringing significant societal benefits. High-quality human resource training and fostering should not solely depend on the budget but also recognize the role of businesses in the area; policies should incentivize businesses when they collaborate with training institutions for human resource development; establish mechanisms and policies to link business responsibility in training high-quality human resources, binding businesses with training institutions not only to connect "supply" and "demand" but also to see it as an intrinsic need of businesses.

Planning, Managing Planning, and Developing the Population

Binh Duong has been very successful in its strategy of industrialization linked with urbanization; developing industry to drive urban development, building industrial infrastructure in parallel with urban infrastructure. Some key policies of Binh Duong on urbanization, such as housing for workers, housing for low-income people, and developing industrial-service-urban complexes, have become highlights of the province's long-term vision in socio-economic development planning. However, Binh Duong's urbanization strategy has not covered all population segments; especially, the current urbanization solutions are still based on old urbanization models, lacking effective solutions to prevent urban poverty, unemployment, ecological crises, rundown boarding houses, shrinking public spaces reducing urban aesthetics; the continuously increasing budget to address social welfare issues resulting from spontaneous urbanization, etc. In the future, Binh Duong's urbanization strategy needs to answer the question: Who will be the residents of Binh Duong when it becomes a centrally managed city? To answer this question, the province needs to plan an outstanding urbanization strategy that meets all future resident needs. Binh Duong needs to create the most favorable conditions to attract entrepreneurs, technicians, scientists, cultural activists, etc., and provide them with diverse physical infrastructure for living and working. Binh Duong needs new, luxurious, and prestigious urban areas to attract international organizations, commercial and cultural institutions, high-income classes, and job opportunities in the creative sector to bring in significant financial resources. Binh Duong also needs civilized, decent urban areas that are affordable for the population, suitable for the terrain, cultural space, and social space, allowing various population segments to enjoy the living environment and make the area more prosperous and comprehensive. Binh Duong should continue housing and urban area policies for low- and middle-income people to prevent spontaneous urbanization issues and disrupt planning. Binh Duong has the potential to develop and establish unique urban areas that meet both diverse and specific needs of the population segments. For instance, the potential to develop a chain of urban projects along the Saigon River towards eco-urban areas, preserving green spaces and the traditional cultural space of the eastern Saigon River; or a chain of urban projects along the Dong Nai River towards port-industrial-high-tech urban areas, with a network of road and waterway traffic, well adapted to climate change response scenarios.

Regarding the population, in recent years, Binh Duong has also focused on implementing economic and social development planning, including population planning. For example, comprehensive economic and social development plans for Binh Duong until 2020, supplemented until 2025 (2014); the project for the economic and social development of Binh Duong implementing the three-house cooperation model towards a smart city (2021), along with many city, town, and district-level economic and social development plans. These plans all have goals related to social issues and social policies such as population size, labor, employment, and social welfare issues. Although there has been significant progress, the planning and management of the population in Binh Duong still have some limitations. Binh Duong needs to strengthen population policies as follows:

Integrate population policies into the province's economic and social development strategies and programs. The population, especially immigrants, should be seen as a significant resource for socio-economic development. For immigrants, policies should ensure access to social welfare and benefits related to sustainable employment, security, safety, environmental hygiene, business opportunities, and improved living standards. Taking care of immigrants should be seen as the province's advantage rather than a "burden" on social welfare. In-depth research on immigrants and planning for immigration policies with clear strategies and plans should be conducted, considering globalization and labor market integration.

Determine population size for each area and manage population size scientifically. When formulating policies, plans, and socio-economic development strategies for each city, district, and town, the population size should be determined to ensure the exploitation of population advantages for development, adapting to the technical and social infrastructure of the area, and ensuring equal access to basic social services (housing, education, healthcare) for the people. Population management for each area must be stringent. Strategic directions and plans for population and labor redistribution

must align with the technical and social infrastructure of each locality and each business sector in specific periods.

Population policies must be linked with urbanization. Urbanization and rural-urban population transition is not only an inevitable trend in Binh Duong but also a rapidly occurring trend, sometimes beyond forecast expectations in previous policy plans. Therefore, in the future, the province's urbanization must proceed based on population data. Based on the planning of population numbers, density, and composition, thorough and synchronized implementation plans must be developed to ensure stable and developing living conditions for the population. First, review data on spontaneous residential areas, and planning of each locality to ensure population size aligns with the technical infrastructure of residential areas, ensuring consistency and accuracy. Develop plans and strategies to address and improve the technical infrastructure of residential areas, strictly implementing and managing planning.

Link population management with improving population quality. Population management must be based on the perspective of developing high-quality human resources to serve industrialization, modernization, and international integration. Policies to increase mechanical population growth must be linked with developing high-quality human resources by increasing the proportion of the middle management class, specialized and technical workforce, and skilled workers. Implement selective population attraction policies based on occupational structures, while focusing on training and fostering capacities and professional skills according to population policy shifts, addressing population issues in terms of size, structure, distribution, and quality.

4. Conclusion

Special and exceptional mechanisms and policies present an opportunity for localities to make breakthroughs. This is a correct and sustainable development approach, ensuring these policies are based on specific characteristics and thorough local analysis. For Binh Duong Province, a pioneer in transitioning from an agricultural economy to an industrial and urban one, there is a need for special and exceptional mechanisms and policies to address pressing issues that hinder its development. The three most significant challenges Binh Duong faces are: a labor-intensive, low-productivity industrial base; a high-skilled workforce that does not meet requirements; and unscientific planning, management, and development of the population to transform it into a development resource. Binh Duong's special and exceptional policies should focus resources on addressing these challenges, transforming them into leverage for the new development phase.

The highlight of Binh Duong's special and exceptional mechanisms and policies should target the national issue of overcoming the middle-income trap. Binh Duong needs to pioneer in surpassing the middle-income trap as it once did in innovating industrial development over 25 years ago. To achieve this, Binh Duong needs to boldly pilot vertical industrial restructuring linked with innovation, human resource transformation, and substantial investment in education to sustain growth; and scientifically plan, manage planning, and develop the population. These solutions will unlock resources, just as Binh Duong unlocked resources for industrialization over a quarter of a century ago.

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