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THE SOCIAL PROTECTION AND SUSTAINABLE POVERTY REDUCTION MODEL OF THE BAC TAN UYEN AREA SOCIAL INSURANCE OFFICE: A CASE STUDY

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Abstract: Social protection is a central pillar of sustainable development, yet its implementation in Vietnam continues to face delayed or evaded contributions, low participation in voluntary social insurance, and limited policy access for informal-sector workers. This article examines the social protection governance model of the Bac Tan Uyen Area Social Insurance Office in Binh Duong province through a qualitative case study grounded in collaborative-governance theory and the Capability Approach. Data were drawn from secondary documents covering 2024–2026, field observation, and twelve semi-structured interviews with social insurance staff, local government representatives, socio-political organisations, and policy beneficiaries, and were analysed using qualitative content analysis. The findings show that, first, coordination among the social insurance office, grassroots authorities, the commune police, and the People's Procuracy has strengthened legal compliance and broadened insurance coverage, with arrears recovery rising 28.6% in the first quarter of 2026 compared with the fourth quarter of 2025. Second, linking the formal insurance system with community-based initiatives, exemplified by the "Recycled Waste, Shared Social Protection" model, extends the safety net to vulnerable groups. Third, wider access to social and health insurance reduces financial risk and supports the resilience of the local protection system. On this basis, the article proposes a Multi-level Social Protection Governance Model that combines formal insurance, cross-sector coordination, and community participation. As a single case study based on a short data period, the findings should be generalised with caution; they nonetheless offer a frame of reference for localities pursuing sustainable poverty reduction and inclusive development.

Keywords: social protection; sustainable poverty reduction; collaborative governance; social insurance; health insurance; cross-sector coordination; community-based initiatives; case study.

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نموذج الحماية الاجتماعية والحد المستدام من الفقر المطبق في مكتب التأمين الاجتماعي بمنطقة "باك تان أويين": دراسة حالة

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ملخص: تُعدّ الحماية الاجتماعية ركيزة أساسية للتنمية المستدامة، غير أن تنفيذها في فيتنام لا يزال يواجه تأخر المساهمات أو التهرب منها، وانخفاض المشاركة في التأمين الاجتماعي الطوعي، ومحدودية استفادة العاملين في القطاع غير الرسمي من السياسات. تتناول هذه المقالة نموذج حوكمة الحماية الاجتماعية لدى مكتب التأمين الاجتماعي لمنطقة باك تان أويين في مقاطعة بينه دونغ، من خلال دراسة حالة نوعية تستند إلى نظرية الحوكمة التشاركية ونهج القدرات. وقد استُمدّت البيانات من وثائق ثانوية تغطي الفترة 2024–2026، وملاحظة ميدانية، واثنتي عشرة مقابلة شبه منظمة مع موظفي التأمين الاجتماعي وممثلي الحكومة المحلية والمنظمات الاجتماعية–السياسية والمستفيدين من السياسات، وجرى تحليلها باستخدام تحليل المحتوى النوعي. وتُظهر النتائج، أولاً، أن التنسيق بين مكتب التأمين الاجتماعي والسلطات القاعدية وشرطة البلدية ونيابة الشعب قد عزّز الامتثال القانوني ووسّع نطاق التغطية التأمينية، مع ارتفاع تحصيل المتأخرات بنسبة 28.6% في الربع الأول من عام 2026 مقارنةً بالربع الرابع من عام 2025. وثانياً، أن ربط نظام التأمين الرسمي بالمبادرات المجتمعية، كما يتجلى في نموذج «نفايات معاد تدويرها، حماية اجتماعية مشتركة»، يوسّع شبكة الأمان لتشمل الفئات الضعيفة. وثالثاً، أن اتساع فرص الحصول على التأمين الاجتماعي والصحي يقلل المخاطر المالية ويدعم صمود منظومة الحماية الاجتماعية المحلية. وعلى هذا الأساس، تقترح المقالة نموذجاً متعدد المستويات لحوكمة الحماية الاجتماعية يجمع بين التأمين الرسمي والتنسيق بين القطاعات والمشاركة المجتمعية. ونظراً لأن الدراسة تقوم على حالة واحدة وفترة بيانات قصيرة، ينبغي تعميم نتائجها بحذر، ومع ذلك فهي توفر إطاراً مرجعياً للمناطق الساعية إلى الحد من الفقر بصورة مستدامة وإلى التنمية الشاملة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الحماية الاجتماعية؛ الحد من الفقر المستدام؛ الحوكمة التشاركية؛ التأمين الاجتماعي؛ التأمين الصحي؛ التنسيق بين القطاعات؛ المبادرات المجتمعية؛ دراسة حالة.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Against a backdrop of population ageing, a shifting labour market, and mounting socio-economic risks, social protection has become a central pillar of sustainable development. In Vietnam, although Resolution No. 28-NQ/TW set out a roadmap for building a multi-tier social insurance system aimed at universal coverage, implementation continues to face considerable obstacles, including delayed or evaded contributions, low participation in voluntary social insurance, and limited policy access for workers in the informal sector. These realities suggest that policy effectiveness depends not only on institutional design but also on the quality of coordination among state agencies, socio-political organisations, and local communities.

This article adopts a case-study approach to examine the social protection governance model in Bac Tan Uyen district, Binh Duong province. Data were drawn from policy documents, reports issued by social insurance authorities, and official local records, with the aim of assessing inter-agency coordination mechanisms, the effectiveness of expanding social and health insurance coverage, and the role of community initiatives in supporting vulnerable groups.

The findings point to three main conclusions. First, coordination among the social insurance office, grassroots authorities, the commune police, and the People's Procuracy has strengthened legal compliance, improved debt-recovery outcomes, and broadened insurance coverage. Second, linking the formal insurance system with community-based initiatives — exemplified by the “Recycled Waste, Shared Social Protection” model — has helped extend the safety net to vulnerable groups. Third, wider access to social and health insurance has reduced financial risk, curbed the recurrence of poverty, and strengthened the resilience of the local social protection system. Building on these findings, the study proposes an integrated model of social protection governance that combines formal insurance, cross-sector coordination, and community participation — an approach that other localities pursuing sustainable poverty reduction and inclusive development may find instructive.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Social protection and sustainable poverty reduction

Social protection (an sinh xã hội) is widely regarded as a core institution of sustainable development, shielding individuals from income, health, and employment risks across the life course. According to the ILO (2012), social protection comprises the public policies and programmes that guarantee access to essential health care and a minimum income in the face of contingencies such as unemployment, illness, occupational injury, disability, maternity, or old age. The World Bank (2022), by contrast, frames social protection through the lens of social risk management, emphasising the role of preventive, mitigating, and coping mechanisms in response to shocks that can erode individual and household livelihoods.

Over recent decades, the conception of social protection has shifted from a relief-oriented model toward one grounded in social investment, whereby social insurance, health insurance, and social assistance not only offset income loss but also help people sustain their capacity to work, accumulate resources, and adapt to a changing labour market. Barr (2012) argues that an effective protection system must simultaneously perform three functions: redistributing resources to reduce inequality, insuring against social risks, and fostering economic development by enhancing the quality of human capital.

Sustainable poverty reduction, therefore, cannot be understood merely as a decline in poverty rates or a short-term rise in income. Drawing on the Capability Approach, Sen (1999) contends that poverty is fundamentally a deprivation of the capabilities people need to pursue lives they have reason to value. Poverty-reduction policy should accordingly focus on expanding access to education, health care, employment, and social protection mechanisms, thereby strengthening people's capacity for self-reliance and lowering the risk of falling back into poverty. This perspective has since underpinned many multidimensional poverty-reduction programmes across developing countries.

For Vietnam, social insurance and health insurance constitute the two principal pillars of the social protection system. Expanding coverage not only shields workers from income and health risks but also supports inclusive development, reduces inequality, and improves the quality of human capital. Even so, the effectiveness of the system depends not only on policy design but also on the institutional capacity for implementation at the local level.

Figure 1: A comprehensive social protection ecosystem

2.2. Collaborative governance in the implementation of social protection policy

Research on contemporary public governance suggests that the implementation of social policy increasingly extends beyond the remit of any single state agency. Ansell and Gash (2008) define collaborative governance as a process in which public authorities engage civil-society organisations and other stakeholders in decision-making and policy implementation through dialogue and the sharing of resources and responsibility. Emerson and Nabatchi (2015) extend this framework, arguing that the effectiveness of collaborative governance rests on three factors: the motivation for cooperation among actors, the capacity for collective action, and the institutional mechanisms that structure implementation.

In the field of social protection, collaborative governance is especially consequential because social and health insurance policies touch multiple population groups, levels of administration, and areas of professional expertise. Expanding insurance coverage, managing participants, and addressing contribution arrears or evasion all require cooperation among the social insurance office, local government, labour authorities, socio-political organisations, and, in many instances, law-enforcement bodies. The quality of cross-sector coordination can therefore have a direct bearing on policy outcomes.

Nevertheless, most existing studies have concentrated on the relationship between social insurance agencies and either local government or mass organisations, while the role of judicial bodies in securing compliance with social insurance law remains under-examined. This is a notable gap, particularly as many localities continue to grapple with delayed or evaded employer contributions.

2.3. Literature review and research gap

Internationally, research on social protection has largely followed three lines of inquiry: the impact of social protection programmes on poverty, inequality, and human-capital development; institutional reforms aimed at broadening social insurance coverage amid population ageing and structural labour-market change; and the governance of social policy from the standpoint of cross-sector coordination and multi-actor participation in implementation.

In Vietnam, prior studies have illuminated various dimensions of social insurance policy, including legal reform, the expansion of voluntary social insurance, the effect of health insurance on poor households, and the effectiveness of social-assistance programmes. Most of this work, however, has approached the subject from a policy or outcome-evaluation perspective, leaving the operational dynamics of coordination networks among frontline implementing actors largely unexamined. In particular, empirical evidence remains scarce on how judicial agencies are integrated into the implementation of social insurance policy, and on how the formal protection system interacts with community-based initiatives to support sustainable poverty reduction.

Addressing this gap, the present study takes Bac Tan Uyen as its case in order to examine the coordination mechanisms among the actors involved in social protection governance, assess the contribution of the cross-sector model to policy effectiveness, and propose a multi-tier governance framework that may be relevant to localities with comparable conditions. Unlike prior studies that have largely treated social insurance as a standalone policy instrument, this article approaches it as a component of the broader system of public governance, in which policy effectiveness is shaped by the interaction of institutions, implementing actors, and community participation.

3. ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Analytical framework

The study is grounded in the premise that the effectiveness of social protection policy is shaped not only by policy content but also by the quality of governance during implementation. Drawing on collaborative-governance theory (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015), the article treats the rollout of social insurance policy as a coordinated process among multiple actors with distinct functions, resources, and responsibilities. Within this model, the social insurance office performs a specialised coordinating role; local government is responsible for organising implementation; socio-political organisations engage in outreach and mobilisation; and judicial agencies help reinforce legal compliance and protect workers' rights.

On this basis, the study posits that the effectiveness of the social protection model depends on three mutually reinforcing sets of factors. The first is cross-sector coordination capacity, reflected in the mechanisms for information-sharing, division of responsibility, and joint action among the relevant agencies. The second is policy enforcement effectiveness, reflected in the ability to expand social insurance coverage, reduce contribution arrears, and safeguard participants' entitlements. The third is community participation, expressed through social initiatives capable of mobilising local resources to support vulnerable groups and broaden access to the protection system. The interplay among these three sets of factors provides the basis for assessing the model's contribution to sustainable poverty reduction.

Figure 2: The study's analytical framework

This framework draws on established theories of social protection and collaborative governance while being adapted to the Vietnamese context. It also served as the basis for developing the data-coding scheme and organising the analysis of findings.

3.2. Research design

The study employs a case-study method to examine in depth how the social protection model operates in Bac Tan Uyen. As Yin (2018) notes, case-study research is particularly well suited to contemporary phenomena studied within their real-life context, where the boundary between the phenomenon and its surrounding environment is not clearly evident. This approach makes it possible to explore relationships among institutions, participating actors, and implementation outcomes in ways that quantitative research alone often cannot capture.

Bac Tan Uyen was selected through purposive sampling, as the district is implementing a cross-sector model involving the social insurance office, local government, socio-political organisations, and judicial agencies. It has also developed community-based initiatives in support of social protection, offering favourable conditions for examining the interaction between the formal protection system and informal support mechanisms.

3.3. Data collection

Data were gathered from three sources to ensure diversity of evidence and to strengthen triangulation.

The first source was secondary documentation, including technical reports from the social insurance office, cross-sector coordination regulations, local government reports, and materials related to the implementation of social protection policy over the 2024–2026 period. These documents provided information on institutional arrangements, implementation outcomes, and policy context.

The second source was field observation of outreach activities, transactions with residents, and community-based protection programmes, which allowed direct documentation of how actors coordinated and how activities unfolded locally.

The third source was semi-structured interviews with twelve participants representing different stakeholder groups, including social insurance staff, local government representatives, socio-political organisations, and policy beneficiaries. Drawing on multiple respondent groups helped capture a multidimensional view of implementation and reduce the risk of bias inherent in relying on a single source of information.

3.4. Data analysis

Interview data were transcribed and analysed using qualitative content analysis, carried out in three stages. Documents were first read repeatedly to identify the principal themes relevant to policy implementation. Data were then coded according to thematic categories such as cross-sector coordination, the roles of participating actors, implementation outcomes, community initiatives, and effects on sustainable poverty reduction. Finally, these themes were cross-checked against statistical data and secondary documents to verify the consistency of the findings.

Combining qualitative data with descriptive statistics was not intended to test causal relationships but to strengthen the explanation of how the model operates. This approach is consistent with the study's exploratory and interpretive aim of characterising the local social protection governance model.

3.5. Reliability and research ethics

To ensure the reliability of the findings, the study applied cross-verification across multiple data sources, respondent groups, and collection methods. Claims presented in the article are made only where consistency was observed among interview data, field observation, and secondary documentation.

The research adhered to the ethical principles governing social-science inquiry. Interview participants were informed in advance of the study's purpose, their right to decline to answer, and the fact that the information gathered would be used solely for academic purposes. Direct quotations were used in ways that preserved their authenticity while safeguarding the interests of participants.

4. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Cross-sector governance as the foundation of the social protection model

The findings show that the social protection model in Bac Tan Uyen does not operate through a single-sector management structure but is instead organised on a cross-sector governance basis, in which the social insurance office serves as the coordinating body while local government, socio-political organisations, and judicial agencies perform complementary functions in policy implementation. This arrangement produces an implementation network with a clear division of responsibility while retaining the flexibility to coordinate through information-sharing and joined-up processing of casework.

Field data indicate that the commune-level steering committee acts as the connecting point between social insurance policy and the local governance system. Incorporating targets for social and health insurance participation into local socio-economic development plans has helped translate sectoral objectives into a shared responsibility of the political system as a whole. At the same time, the network of collection agents and mass organisations has broadened public access to policy through outreach, consultation, and support for enrolment.

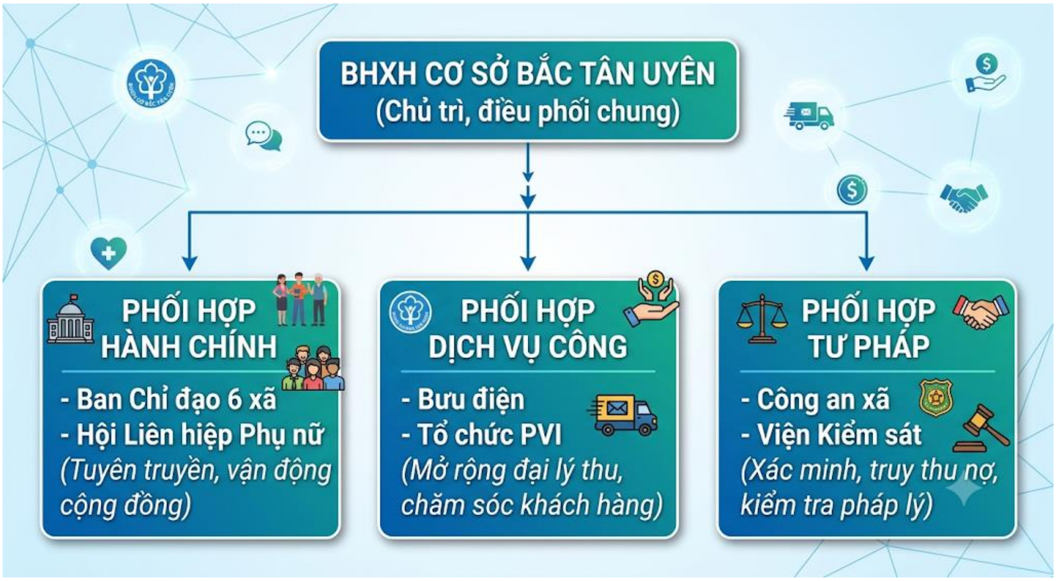
From a collaborative-governance perspective, this model exemplifies network governance, in which implementation effectiveness derives not solely from administrative authority but from the sharing of resources, information, and responsibility among multiple actors — consistent with Ansell and Gash's (2008) observation that cross-sector public policies tend to be more effective when implemented through cooperative rather than purely hierarchical management.

4.2. The involvement of judicial agencies and policy enforcement effectiveness

A notable finding of the study concerns the role of judicial agencies in strengthening the enforcement of social insurance policy. Unlike many conventional management models that rely solely on outreach or administrative inspection, Bac Tan Uyen has established a coordination mechanism linking the social insurance office with the police and the People's Procuracy to improve the detection, handling, and prevention of violations of social insurance law.

Interview evidence indicates that police involvement supports the verification of enterprise information, the review of contribution arrears, and the clarification of suspected evasion cases. The Procuracy, for its part, oversees compliance with legal provisions, helping to safeguard workers' lawful rights and interests. Combining administrative management with legal-enforcement functions has produced a deterrent effect on enterprises that delay or evade contributions, while enhancing the transparency of policy implementation.

Figure 3: The cross-sector coordination model



The effect of this mechanism is reflected in a 28.6% increase in arrears recovery in the first quarter of 2026 compared with the fourth quarter of 2025, alongside a decline in the number of enterprises with prolonged contribution delays. While these figures alone cannot establish a causal relationship, they suggest that expanding the involvement of judicial agencies can strengthen policy enforcement and improve enterprise compliance.

Table 1: Summary of social and health insurance participation

Indicator	Number of participants	Completion rate
Compulsory social insurance	**24,345 people**	**83.26%**
Health insurance	**115,031 people**	**86.51%**

This finding adds to a body of prior research that has generally treated the social insurance office and local government as the two central actors in social protection management. The Bac Tan Uyen case indicates that judicial institutions, too, can play a significant role in upholding the rule of law and supporting the achievement of social protection objectives.

4.3. Community-based initiatives and the emergence of a multi-tier social protection system

Alongside coordination among state agencies, the study finds that community-based initiatives play a complementary role in extending the social safety net. The "Recycled Waste, Shared Social Protection" model is a representative example of how social resources can be mobilised to support vulnerable groups by combining environmental protection with social protection objectives.

Figure 4: A community-based initiative for raising social protection funds

What is noteworthy about this model is not the monetary value of the support it provides but its capacity to generate a voluntary and sustainable mechanism for resource mobilisation. Rather than relying entirely on the state budget, the model draws on community participation to build a fund that purchases health insurance cards and assists sick or disadvantaged households. In doing so, these activities extend beyond financial assistance to strengthen social capital, deepen community cohesion, and raise public awareness of social responsibility.

From a theoretical standpoint, this finding shows that a social protection system can be expanded through the combination of formal institutions and informal support networks — consistent with Sen's (1999) view that sustainable poverty reduction depends not only on subsidies but also on expanding the resources and opportunities that enable people to strengthen their capacity to protect themselves against socio-economic risk.

Figure 5: An integrated social protection ecosystem model

5. CONCLUSION

This study has examined the implementation of social protection policy in Bac Tan Uyen from a public-governance perspective, focusing on the relationship between cross-sector coordination, policy enforcement effectiveness, and the goal of sustainable poverty reduction. The findings show that the effectiveness of the social insurance system depends not only on the legal framework or the resources of the social insurance office but also on the quality of coordination among the actors involved in implementation. The coordination network linking the social insurance office, local government, socio-political organisations, and judicial agencies has strengthened legal compliance, improved the management of participants, and supported the expansion of social and health insurance coverage.

An important contribution of the study is its account of the role played by judicial agencies within local social protection governance. Beyond upholding the rule of law, the involvement of the police and the Procuracy has strengthened policy enforcement by supporting information verification, addressing contribution arrears, and reinforcing the protection of workers' lawful rights. This finding extends the conventional understanding of social protection governance — typically confined to the relationship between the social insurance office and local government — by highlighting the role of judicial institutions in policy implementation.

The study also finds that the effectiveness of the social protection model is enhanced when the formal insurance system is complemented by community-based initiatives. The "Recycled Waste, Shared Social Protection" model illustrates how social resources can be mobilised to support vulnerable groups while linking social protection objectives with environmental protection and community responsibility. The combination of formal institutions and social support networks has contributed to a multi-tier social protection system with a greater capacity to adapt to socio-economic risk.

Building on these findings, the article proposes a Multi-level Social Protection Governance Model comprising three mutually reinforcing components: (i) the social and health insurance system as the foundation of formal social protection; (ii) cross-sector coordination mechanisms that strengthen enforcement and legal compliance; and (iii) community-based initiatives that extend the support network to vulnerable groups. This model not only helps explain the effectiveness of the Bac Tan Uyen case but also offers a frame of reference for research on local social protection governance in countries pursuing inclusive development and sustainable poverty reduction.

6. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The findings suggest several directions for improving the implementation of social protection policy in Vietnam.

First, management should shift from a single-sector to a cross-sector governance model in implementing social insurance policy. Establishing coordination regulations among the social insurance office, local government, labour authorities, socio-political organisations, and judicial agencies would improve information-sharing, strengthen the monitoring of employer obligations, and better protect the entitlements of insurance participants.

Second, the participation of judicial agencies in implementing social insurance policy should be institutionalised. Building on existing legal provisions, establishing a regular coordination mechanism among the social insurance office, the police, and the Procuracy could strengthen legal compliance, reduce delayed or evaded contributions, and better protect workers' lawful rights and interests.

Third, community-based protection initiatives that complement the formal system should be encouraged. Models that mobilise social resources around environmental protection, livelihood development, or voluntary activities could be integrated into sustainable poverty-reduction programmes, broadening access to protection for vulnerable groups without significantly increasing the burden on the state budget.

Fourth, the system for evaluating policy effectiveness should move toward a multidimensional approach. In addition to conventional indicators such as the number of participants or coverage rates, indicators reflecting governance quality, the extent of cross-sector coordination, access for vulnerable groups, and the policy's effect on preventing a return to poverty should be incorporated. Such an approach would provide a more comprehensive basis for future policy formulation and adjustment.

7. LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

As a case study, this research yields conclusions that primarily reflect the characteristics of the Bac Tan Uyen model and should be generalised with caution to localities with different socio-economic conditions. In addition, data were collected over a relatively short period and from a limited number of interviewees, so the study does not fully capture the model's long-term effects on poverty reduction and the expansion of social protection coverage.

Future research could extend this work in three directions. First, comparative studies across multiple localities could assess how well the multi-tier social protection governance model fits different development contexts. Second, combining quantitative methods with case-study research could test the effect of cross-sector coordination mechanisms on indicators of insurance coverage, legal compliance, and multidimensional poverty reduction. Third, research could be extended to examine digital transformation in social protection governance, data-sharing among state agencies, and the role of civil-society organisations in improving access to protection services.

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