

# Factors Influencing Social Work Activities in Livelihood Support for Sustainable Poverty Escape: A Case Study in Ba Ria City, Ba Ria – Vung Tau Province, Vietnam

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## ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the factors influencing social work (SW) activities in supporting livelihoods for the poor in Ba Ria City, Ba Ria – Vung Tau Province, with the aim of contributing to the improvement of sustainable poverty reduction policies. Based on a survey of 113 poor and near-poor households and in-depth interviews with five participants, the findings reveal that the implementation of livelihood support activities is relatively favorable (Mean = 4.03). Notably, the provision of policy information, vocational orientation and training, and resource mobilization are highly appreciated. The study identifies four key factors that influence the effectiveness of livelihood support: policy mechanisms, characteristics of poor households, the quality of social work staff, and inter-sectoral coordination. The research applies the Social Development Theory to emphasize the role of social work in empowering the poor through resource linkage and sustainable access support. Based on the findings, the article proposes solutions focusing on strengthening the social work workforce, enhancing policy communication, expanding credit support, and reinforcing inter-sectoral collaboration to effectively achieve the goals of sustainable poverty reduction.

**Key words:** social work, activities, the poor, poverty escape.

## INTRODUCTION

Poverty reduction has always been identified by the Communist Party and the Government of Vietnam as a strategic mission, playing a particularly important role in ensuring the nation's sustainable development. The overarching goal of this effort is to improve the material and spiritual well-being of the people, especially poor households, in order to narrow the development gap among regions, population groups, between mountainous and lowland areas, and between ethnic minorities and the majority population. However, over recent years, the poverty reduction process has continued to face various challenges. In some localities, the poverty rate remains relatively high, and the gap between the rich and the poor has yet to be significantly narrowed, thereby undermining the sustainability of the results achieved.

Ba Ria City, located in Ba Ria – Vung Tau Province, is one such locality where poverty persists despite notable achievements in socio-economic development. With a natural area of 9,146.5 hectares, comprising 11 administrative units (8 wards and 3 communes), the city has an average population of approximately 113,072 people (30,829 households), including 512 ethnic minority households with 1,279 individuals. As of early 2024, the poverty rate stood at approximately 0.13% (Ba Ria City People's Committee, 2024).

To enhance the effectiveness of poverty reduction efforts, the government has implemented numerous programs with increasingly comprehensive approaches tailored to the country's development context. The 2016–2020 period marked a shift from a uni-dimensional to a multi-dimensional poverty approach, by identifying household deprivations across five basic service dimensions. In the 2021–2025 phase, poverty measurement and monitoring are guided by Decree No. 07/2021/ND-CP dated January 27, 2021, which expands the framework to six

dimensions of basic social services, serving as a foundation for formulating and implementing poverty reduction and social protection policies.

In practice, livelihood-based intervention models for the poor have proven to be an effective approach with the potential for sustainable impact (Michal K., Idit W. & Menachem M., 2009). Programs supporting production development and livelihood diversification not only help create jobs and increase income but also reduce the risk of falling back into poverty, particularly for poor, near-poor, and recently escaped-from-poverty households. In Ba Ria City, according to the Department of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs, by the end of 2022, there were no longer households classified as poor or near-poor under the national poverty standard only those under the provincial standard remained. Livelihood models were assigned by the Provincial People's Committee to the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Department of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs for supervision, with the Provincial Agricultural Extension Center acting as the implementing agency. However, implementation has not followed a community-based development project approach but has instead focused on scaling up models to eligible and willing households. Although this approach is not yet comprehensive, it has initially enabled some households to improve their income and escape poverty.

To achieve sustainable poverty reduction goals, programs and policies must be effectively integrated with livelihood support and job creation activities at the community level. This requires poverty reduction projects to emphasize elements such as vocational training, start-up support, and business development initiatives that are appropriate to the characteristics of each target group and locality. With stable employment, poor individuals not only increase their income but also enhance their quality of life and gain greater self-reliance. Therefore, the study titled *“Factors Influencing Social Work Activities in Livelihood Support for Sustainable Poverty Escape in Ba Ria City, Ba Ria – Vung Tau Province”* is essential not only to evaluate the effectiveness of policy implementation at the local level but also to offer insights for developing sustainable poverty reduction models that integrate social protection policies with livelihood development for the people.

## LITERATURE REVIEW / THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK



### Literature Review

In recent years, in line with the Vietnamese government's policy to promote the development of the social work profession particularly following the issuance of Scheme No. 32 on the development of social work during the period 2010–2020 and the continuation with Decision No. 112/QĐ-TTg in 2021 approving the Social Work Development Program for 2021–2030 many studies have examined the role of social work in poverty reduction. However, there remains a lack of in-depth research specifically on livelihood support activities from the perspective of social work, especially at the local level.

Both international and domestic studies have affirmed that livelihood support for the poor must be approached comprehensively, systematically, and based on the actual needs of each target group. Sally et al. (2012), Nairobi (2010), and Michal et al. (2009) argue that livelihood support policies and programs for the poor, if implemented

in isolation and without integrating social, economic, and environmental dimensions, will not lead to sustainable poverty reduction. Furthermore, these authors emphasize the coordinating role of social workers professionals with expertise and skills in community engagement in mobilizing resources and promoting the participation of the poor in livelihood support models.

A case study by Tine R. (2015) in poor communes of An Giang and Soc Trang provinces revealed that households with little or no land, particularly women, ethnic minorities, and persons with disabilities, are the most vulnerable groups. Traditional livelihood models in these communities are often unable to adapt to climate change without supportive changes in policy and intervention methods. This clearly illustrates that constraints in access to resources and production tools hinder the ability of poor people to benefit from current poverty reduction programs (Tine R., 2015).

UNICEF (2016) has also provided training materials for community workers and social workers, highlighting the core role of social work in developing support plans based on assessments of clients' circumstances, needs, and potential. These materials serve as a foundational theoretical framework enabling social workers to flexibly apply individual, group, and community methods to help the poor build self-reliance and escape poverty.

In Vietnam, although many poverty reduction programs have achieved certain outcomes, sustainability remains a major concern. Some people fall back into poverty after having escaped it, due to unstable livelihoods, lack of financial management skills, or inability to cope with health, environmental, or economic shocks. In this context, livelihood support through social work is increasingly seen as a long-term and human-centered development strategy. At the same time, this study not only identifies the resources the poor can utilize based on the sustainable livelihood framework with five types of capital (human, social, financial, natural, and physical) but also demonstrates the necessity of supportive policies and external interventions to enhance internal capacity (Nguyen Duc Loc et al., 2019).

Empirical evidence shows that both domestic and international studies have highlighted the effectiveness of livelihood-based intervention models while also cautioning that the effectiveness of social work in livelihood support depends on various factors. For instance, Midgley (1995) stresses the need for a social development approach that integrates individual support with structural change. Similarly, Chambers and Conway (1992) argue that sustainable livelihoods depend on the availability and mobilization of five types of capital: human, social, financial, physical, and natural.

Recent research by Nguyen Huu Dung (2023) and Nguyen Thi Hong Van (2021) has helped shed light on the actual state of social work in poverty reduction, while analyzing key factors such as the capacity of social workers, the level of community participation, inter-sectoral coordination, and the relevance of policies all of which are critical for the success of sustainable poverty reduction programs. However, most of these studies remain general in scope or focus on major urban areas such as Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi. Ba Ria City, an important administrative and economic center of Ba Ria – Vung Tau Province, has seen little in-depth research on social work activities in supporting livelihoods for the poor.

The review shows that, while valuable contributions have been made to explaining the role of livelihoods in poverty reduction, there remains a lack of in-depth studies on the specific role of social workers and how livelihood support activities are implemented at the community level. Many studies stop at theoretical analysis or situation assessments without delving into professional practice, where social workers play a central role in coordinating, connecting, and supporting the poor in their journey out of poverty.

Given this context, conducting research on livelihood support from the perspective of social work for the poor not only helps fill current research gaps but also contributes to the theoretical and practical basis for developing multidimensional poverty reduction policies and programs. The research results will further clarify the factors influencing the effectiveness of social work in livelihood support and provide recommendations to enhance the capacity of social workers and strengthen the sustainability of livelihood interventions for the poor. This article also aims to serve as a practical reference for students, professionals, and policymakers in the field of social development.

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## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Multidimensional Poverty**

Multidimensional poverty can be measured using both income-based and non-income-based criteria. Deprivation of opportunities along with malnutrition, lack of education, illness, etc.—are central aspects of the concept of multidimensional poverty. The lack of participation and voice in economic, social, or political life can push individuals into exclusion, denying them access to the benefits of socio-economic development and, thus, their fundamental human rights (UNDP, 2018).

In Vietnam, the current multidimensional poverty standards are defined in Decree No. 07/2021/NĐ-CP dated January 27, 2021, which stipulates the multidimensional poverty line for the 2021–2025 period. The multidimensional poverty measurement consists of two main criteria:

#### **Income criterion**

Deprivation of access to basic social services (6 basic services with 12 indicators). The specific criteria for defining multidimensional poverty are determined by corresponding legal documents issued for each period.

#### **National multidimensional poverty line 2022–2025**

##### **Poor households**

Rural areas: Households with a per capita monthly income of VND 1,500,000 or less and deprived in 3 or more indicators of basic social service access.

Urban areas: Households with a per capita monthly income of VND 2,000,000 or less and deprived in 3 or more indicators.

##### **Near-poor households**

Rural areas: Households with a per capita monthly income of VND 1,500,000 or less and deprived in fewer than 3 indicators.

Urban areas: Households with a per capita monthly income of VND 2,000,000 or less and deprived in fewer than 3 indicators.

#### **Multidimensional poverty line of Ba Ria – Vung Tau Province**

The provincial poverty line is regulated under Article 3 of Decision No. 18/2021/QĐ-UBND dated November 18, 2021, and amended at Point a, Clause 2, Article 3 of Decision No. 46/2023/QĐ-UBND dated October 19, 2023. These decisions set out the multidimensional poverty standards in Ba Ria – Vung Tau Province for the period 2022–2025 (People’s Committee of Ba Ria City, 2023), specifically:

Rural areas (including communes in districts, towns, and cities): Households with a per capita monthly income of VND 2,000,000 or less and deprived in 3 or more indicators.

Urban areas (including wards, towns, and Con Dao district): Households with a per capita monthly income of VND 2,600,000 or less and deprived in 3 or more indicators.

Accordingly, the provincial poverty line in Ba Ria – Vung Tau is higher than the national near-poor threshold. In reality, in Ba Ria City in particular and the province in general, only households classified as poor by provincial standards remain; there are no households classified as poor or near-poor according to the national standard.

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## Concept of Livelihood

The concept of livelihood encompasses various definitions and approaches. The most commonly accepted understanding is: “A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources), and activities required for a means of living” (Carney, D., 1998; DFID, 1999).

Livelihoods represent the means by which people secure the necessities of life, typically considered at the household level. From this concept, it is evident that the key significance of livelihood lies in “capabilities, assets, and activities” rather than merely the goal of “making a living.” This underpins the importance of sustainability in livelihood strategies as a central objective of economic improvement efforts.

## Concept of Social Work

Social work is a professional practice based on a system of theories, skills, and values aimed at promoting social change and addressing problems in the relationship between individuals and their living environment. In the field of poverty reduction, social work focuses on enhancing the capacity of the poor by facilitating access to social services, developing life skills, and building livelihoods tailored to individual and community circumstances (Healy, 2005).

Livelihood support in social work involves helping the poor to obtain or maintain sources of income through activities such as providing livelihood-related information, counseling, resource mobilization, vocational skills training, job creation, small business start-up support, and access to credit and public services. These are long-term efforts that require intersectoral coordination and a client-centered approach to achieve stable and sustainable livelihoods (UNDP, 2014).

## Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF)

The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework developed by DFID (1999) is a widely used analytical model in poverty studies. A livelihood is considered sustainable if it can cope with and recover from shocks while maintaining or enhancing long-term living capabilities without degrading natural resources. The SLF focuses on five core types of capital:

- Human capital: skills, knowledge, and health of the labor force
- Financial capital: income, savings, access to credit
- Physical capital: assets, production tools
- Social capital: social relationships and community support
- Natural capital: land, water, and natural resources

Applying the SLF in social work allows practitioners to assess the overall living conditions of the poor and identify factors requiring intervention to help them achieve sustainable livelihoods (Nguyen Duc Loc et al., 2019).

## Social Development Theory

Midgley’s (1995) social development theory places social work at the core of development strategies. Poverty reduction is not solely the responsibility of economic policies but also requires social interventions to strengthen community capacity, enhance access rights, and promote social justice. This approach highlights the role of social workers as connectors among individuals, communities, and the state, while encouraging active public participation in development processes.



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## **Theoretical Perspectives on Factors Influencing Social Work in Livelihood Support**

Based on theoretical analysis and practical evidence, the following main groups of factors are identified as influencing the effectiveness of social work activities in livelihood support for sustainable poverty reduction:

**Institutional and policy-related factors:** These form the foundational framework guiding the implementation of livelihood support activities. The completeness, clarity, and consistency of poverty reduction policies play a crucial role in ensuring feasibility and effectiveness. However, in practice, challenges remain such as delays in implementation, difficulties in fund disbursement, policy overlaps, and lack of coordination among sectors and levels.

**Human resources in social work:** The professional competence, practical experience, professional skills, and ethical attitudes of social workers directly affect the quality of livelihood support services. A competent workforce with a deep understanding of the local context and a strong commitment to the community can design and implement more effective and sustainable interventions.

**Organizational factors:** The effectiveness of social work in livelihood support is significantly influenced by the coordination mechanisms among relevant agencies and organizations, operational processes, and the level of involvement from stakeholders particularly the local population. Community trust in the programs and implementing agents also plays a vital role in achieving consensus and multiplying positive outcomes.

**Beneficiary-related factors:** The personal characteristics of the poor, such as their awareness of livelihoods, motivation to improve, and ability to absorb and apply supported knowledge and skills, are key determinants of the final outcome. Active participation, a willingness to learn, and openness to experimenting with new livelihood models provide a solid foundation for sustainable poverty alleviation.

Clearly identifying and analyzing these factor groups is essential for designing, adjusting, and enhancing the effectiveness of local livelihood support programs. This also forms the basis for developing evaluation criteria and improving livelihood support policies and models that suit local conditions.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

### **Document Research Method**

Within the scope of this study, the document research method is employed as a primary approach to collect, analyze, and systematize secondary data related to social work (SW) activities supporting livelihoods for the poor. By utilizing official sources such as monographs, academic articles, research reports, and policies from the government and international organizations, the research team is able to comprehensively access both theoretical and practical knowledge relevant to the topic.

This method allows for the clarification of concepts and theoretical models, as well as the identification of factors influencing the effectiveness of social work implementation in livelihood support for the poor in the general Vietnamese context and specifically in Ba Ria City, Ba Ria - Vung Tau Province. On this basis, the research team conducts analysis, synthesis, and systematization of related issues to build a solid theoretical foundation, guiding the subsequent steps of the study.

The use of the document research method not only helps to clarify scientific arguments but also contributes to establishing an analytical framework aligned with the objectives and scope of the study. Simultaneously, the evaluation and comparison of previous research findings enable the identification of academic gaps, thereby suggesting new approaches to sustainably enhance the effectiveness of social work in supporting the livelihoods of the poor.

### **Survey Method Using Questionnaires**

The sociological survey method using questionnaires is applied to collect primary data directly from research subjects. This approach allows the research team to access and gather information from the poor and near-poor,

who have practical experience participating in local livelihood support programs. From this, it is possible to more specifically identify factors affecting the effectiveness of social work in livelihood support.

**Sampling Method:** Based on the list of poor and newly out-of-poverty households provided by local authorities, the research team selected samples using purposive sampling combined with convenience sampling. This approach is appropriate to the practical conditions, as there were only 56 poor households in the surveyed area. A total of 113 questionnaires were distributed, including 56 for poor households and 57 for newly out-of-poverty households.

**Tool Development and Testing:** The questionnaire was designed based on the theoretical foundation of the study, closely following the group of influencing factors established in the analytical framework and ensuring technical standards for designing quantitative research instruments. Before conducting the official survey, a pilot test with 10 questionnaires was carried out to assess clarity, logic, and appropriateness of the questions, leading to revisions and finalization of the questionnaire.

**Data Collection Process:** The survey was implemented according to a specific plan, with careful preparation in terms of personnel, equipment, location, and timing, tailored to the living conditions of the residents in the surveyed area. Data collection was conducted seriously, ensuring objectivity, honesty, and respect for the rights and voluntary cooperation of respondents.

### **In-depth Interview Method**

To supplement qualitative information and clarify issues that could not be fully explored through the questionnaire, in-depth interviews were conducted with five individuals directly or indirectly involved in local livelihood support activities for the poor. The selected interviewees included poor individuals, labor officials, representatives of mass organizations, and individuals who played roles in the implementation of livelihood support programs.

The use of in-depth interviews not only provides more flexible and profound access to information but also helps to uncover subjective aspects such as perceptions, expectations, and difficulties experienced by stakeholders in the implementation of social work activities. These are often difficult to quantify or fully capture through quantitative methods.

The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format, based on an open-ended question framework designed in alignment with the research objectives and the established theoretical factors. During the interview process, the researcher actively adjusted the content and communication style to suit each respondent, ensuring a friendly and respectful atmosphere to encourage natural and honest sharing of information.

The data collected from the in depth interviews were analyzed, compared, and linked with the survey results from the questionnaires, thereby contributing to a more multidimensional and comprehensive understanding of the current situation and the factors influencing the effectiveness of social work in livelihood support for the poor in Ba Ria City.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Social Work Activities Supporting Sustainable Livelihoods for the Poor**

The survey results on the current status of livelihood support activities for the poor in Ba Ria City show that, overall, these support programs have had positive impacts and initially brought certain benefits to beneficiaries. The average scores (Mean) for these activities are relatively high, ranging from 3.88 to 4.10, with a relatively low standard deviation (ranging from 0.72 to 0.81), reflecting a high level of consensus among respondents in evaluating the effectiveness of social work (SW) activities supporting livelihoods in the locality. However, it is necessary to acknowledge that behind these promising figures lie certain limitations that require flexible adjustments, enhanced inter-sectoral coordination, and focused investment in key stages such as career

orientation, vocational training, credit access, and stable job creation to help people avoid falling back into poverty or creating new cases of poverty.

One of the most highly rated SW activities is the provision of information about livelihood support policies, with an average score of 4.10. Specifically, 71.2% of respondents rated this activity as favorable or very favorable, 26.15% rated it as neutral, and only 2.65% found it unfavorable. This indicates that communication efforts and the dissemination of multidimensional poverty reduction policies at the local level have been effective, helping the poor to access information relatively comprehensively. This result aligns with the assessment by Nguyen Huu Dung et al. (2021), which posits that providing information and policy consultation is the “gateway” to social protection programs and plays a key role in guiding actions and increasing people’s access capacity.

Qualitative data also indicate that the communication of policies, programs, and projects related to poverty reduction has been regularly implemented, contributing to raising community awareness particularly among poor, near-poor, and newly out-of-poverty groups. Information on activities under the National Target Program for Poverty Reduction has been disseminated through various channels such as commune-level radio systems, training sessions, community communication events, and periodic household poverty reviews. A non-specialized staff member in the locality (female, 36 years old) shared: "Our commune regularly broadcasts information about poverty reduction on the local radio station. Last year, I attended a training class on poverty communication and also participated in the annual survey and review of poor households. Most people are now aware of the policies, programs, and projects related to the national poverty reduction program."

This indicates that the effectiveness of communication efforts goes beyond simply spreading information it also positively influences policy accessibility and public participation in community-based poverty reduction activities. This view is consistent with previous studies on the role of communication in poverty reduction, which emphasize that ensuring transparent, timely, and accessible information plays a crucial role in enhancing the agency and proactiveness of the poor in accessing policies (Nguyen Huu Dung & Tran Thi Thu, 2021; UNDP, 2022).

The activity of social work in resource mobilization was also positively evaluated, with an average score of 4.09. Notably, 78.73% of respondents rated it from fairly favorable to very favorable, 17.92% rated it as neutral, and only 3.35% reported difficulties in accessing resources. These figures reflect the essential role of resource mobilization in supporting livelihoods for the poor and newly out-of-poverty households in the community.

From both theoretical and practical perspectives, resource mobilization is one of the core functions of social workers. This activity not only helps target beneficiaries access appropriate services and support programs but also contributes to enhancing their self-reliance and gradually addressing the socio-economic challenges they face. Social workers need to base their efforts on a comprehensive needs assessment of each client to select appropriate forms of mobilization and effectively allocate resources in accordance with the local context.

Table 1: Current status of social work activities supporting livelihoods for the poor

No	Content of social work activities supporting livelihoods	Participants' responses					M	S.D
		1. Completely unfavorable, 2. Unfavorable, 3. Neutral / Average, 4. Favorable, 5. Very favorable						
		1	2	3	4	5		
1	Activities supporting information dissemination about livelihood support policies	0,0	2,65	26,15	45,04	26,16	4,10	0,72



2	Activities supporting access to preferential credit loan policies	0,0	18,83	22,1	42,2	16,87	3,88	0,78
3	Activities supporting vocational guidance, vocational training, and job creation	0,0	3,77	18,6	44,9	32,73	4,07	0,81
4	Activities connecting resources to support livelihoods	0,0	3,35	17,92	45,33	33,4	4,09	0,78
<b>Mean Score</b>							<b>4,03</b>	<b>0,77</b>

(Source: Actual survey data).

To achieve high effectiveness in this activity, social workers must be equipped with up-to-date knowledge of social welfare policies, ongoing programs, models, and poverty reduction projects in the locality. Furthermore, social workers serve as two-way communication bridges both delivering policy and support information to the community and conveying training, employment, and livelihood development needs from the people to government agencies and businesses. The ability to establish and maintain a broad social network across the public sector, private sector, and civil society organizations is also a critical factor in the resource mobilization capacity of social workers. Resources for poverty reduction can be broadly understood to include human resources, financial support, material assets, technical tools, information, policy incentives, and even political and social consensus from organizations, individuals, businesses, and community groups (Nguyen Van Hoa & Tran Thi Lan, 2020; World Bank, 2021). Therefore, developing effective strategies for resource mobilization and utilization plays a decisive role in the success of sustainable livelihood support programs at the local level.

Regarding vocational orientation, vocational training, and job creation activities, these received a relatively high evaluation (Mean = 4.07), with nearly 77.6% of respondents finding them convenient or very convenient. This reflects a growing awareness of the importance of enabling the poor to proactively improve their professional skills and integrate into the labor market. However, this group of activities also requires long-term time and resource investment to achieve sustainable outcomes, especially in the context of multidimensional poverty, where regional disparities and inequalities in access to public services still persist (Nguyen Van Chinh, 2020).

Meanwhile, the activity of supporting access to preferential credit policies received the lowest average score (Mean = 3.88), with a relatively higher proportion of respondents rating it as “not convenient” and “neutral” compared to other activities (18.83% and 22.1%, respectively). This result suggests the existence of ongoing challenges in accessing credit, including administrative barriers, collateral requirements, and concerns among some poor individuals about their ability to repay loans. This issue is also discussed in a World Bank (2022) study, which suggests that credit programs should be flexibly adapted to the economic capacity of borrowers and that mechanisms for monitoring and post-loan support should be strengthened to ensure loan efficiency, repayment, and interest collection.

### Factors affecting social work activities in supporting sustainable livelihoods for the poor

Survey results show that the overall average score for factors affecting social work (SW) activities in supporting livelihoods for the poor is relatively high ( $M = 3.95$ ), reflecting the community's positive perception of various aspects related to SW livelihood support activities in Ba Ria City. However, there are notable differences in the influence levels of each factor on the effectiveness of these activities.

Policy mechanisms related to livelihood support are considered the most influential factor ( $M = 4.08$ ;  $SD = 0.76$ ). Therefore, to effectively implement social work activities supporting livelihoods, it is essential to ensure adequate human and material resources. Otherwise, if policy mechanisms are not synchronized and fail to ensure such resources, the activities may be delayed, impossible to implement, or fail to achieve local poverty reduction goals. This finding aligns with previous research showing that policy serves as the foundation for effectively orienting and implementing poverty support programs, especially regarding credit, vocational training, labor

market linkage, and employment generation for the poor (Nguyen Thi Lan, 2021; UNDP, 2022). However, in practice, policies often lack interconnection, are overlapping, or are slow to be concretized at the grassroots level, which affects accessibility and effective use by the poor (Nguyen Van Tai, 2020). Completing the policy system and ensuring effective implementation is a top priority. From the perspective of social development theory, public policies should be designed in an inclusive manner and suitable for the current poverty reduction context to ensure that the poor can access and participate in development processes. Effective policies not only provide resources but also create institutional and enabling environments for sustainable social interventions (Midgley, 2014).

Table 2: Factors affecting social work activities in supporting livelihoods for the poor

No	Factors influencing livelihood support activities for the poor include	M	S.D	Ranking
1	Characteristics of poor households and near-poor households	3,99	0,80	2
2	Coordination among departments and sectors in implementing livelihood support activities	3,77	0,95	4
3	Policy mechanisms related to livelihood support	4,08	0,76	1
4	Social work staff involved in implementing livelihood support activities.	3,95	0,75	3
<b>Mean Score</b>		<b>3,95</b>	<b>0,81</b>	

(Source: Actual survey data).

The second factor is the characteristics of poor and newly non-poor households, which also significantly influence livelihood support activities. With an average score of 3.99, it indicates that characteristics such as low education levels, poor health, inferiority complex, and lack of financial resources make it difficult for the poor to access information and resources related to livelihood support. Social development theory emphasizes the development of personal capacity as part of the development strategy. Therefore, social work interventions should take into account the level of vulnerability, self-reliance, and social capital of poor households when implementing diversified livelihood support models. Newly non-poor households, if not continuously supported, are at high risk of falling back into poverty due to unstable income and insufficient capacity foundations.

In the field of social work (SW), when implementing livelihood support activities for the poor, social workers always adhere to the principle of client-centered intervention. Livelihood support activities not only provide employment for the poor but also aim to enhance their capacity to solve their own problems. Therefore, raising awareness is critically important for the poor. If they become dependent, lack confidence, or are unwilling to cooperate, it will hinder poverty reduction efforts. This factor reflects differences in individuals' receptiveness to support, production capacity, awareness, and proactivity among various poor groups. Studies have shown that the diversity in the needs and conditions of the poor poses a challenge to designing appropriate livelihood support packages (Chambers & Conway, 1992; DFID, 1999). Hence, adopting a personalized approach based on the needs, conditions, circumstances, and capacities of each household is necessary to enhance intervention effectiveness.

The capacity of social workers is also a significantly influential factor, with an average score of 3.95, indicating that a lack of knowledge and skills among social workers can greatly affect livelihood support activities for the poor. This workforce plays a direct role in implementing, connecting resources, and accompanying the poor in the livelihood transformation process. According to Midgley (1996), social workers serve as development facilitators by bridging the gap between service systems and communities while enhancing public participation in decision-making. Therefore, investing in improving the professional competencies, networking, and policy advocacy skills of social workers is essential for increasing the effectiveness of livelihood support. Le Thi Kim Dung (2019) emphasized that counseling, advocacy, service coordination, and personalized livelihood planning are crucial skills for social workers. However, in many localities, this workforce remains insufficient in both

quantity and expertise. In addition, a portion of the poor still exhibit dependency and passivity. Thus, social workers are key agents in livelihood support activities. Accurate problem identification, needs assessment, and planning of assistance for vulnerable groups in general and the poor in particular must be based on action principles, legal frameworks, and scientific theoretical foundations to effectively implement livelihood support and help the poor escape poverty.

A study by Katrien B, Griet R, and Rudi R (2018) pointed out that effective participation of the poor requires a transformative process from Awakening – Thinking – Acting. Therefore, to ensure the engagement of the poor in the intervention process, social workers must possess the knowledge and skills to design interventions that target community perspectives and attitudes, thereby fostering consensus for the participation of the poor in programs, policies, and projects aimed at stabilizing their lives and achieving sustainable poverty reduction.

Finally, coordination among departments and agencies was rated the lowest among the four factors, with a mean score of 3.77 and the highest standard deviation (0.95), reflecting inconsistent perceptions among respondents regarding inter-sectoral collaboration in social work livelihood support for the poor. In practice, livelihood support requires coordination among various departments such as Labor, Women's Unions, Youth Unions, and the Social Policy Bank. However, the lack of clear coordination mechanisms and mutual monitoring leads to fragmented program implementation (World Bank, 2021). Social development theory emphasizes the importance of integration within the service delivery system, encouraging coordination among government agencies, civil society organizations, businesses, and communities to mobilize maximum resources for comprehensive social development (Midgley, 1995). Ineffective coordination leads to dispersed resources, overlapping activities, and reduced support effectiveness.

Feedback from research participants and social workers indicates that the coordination of local authorities and related agencies also impacts the effectiveness of livelihood support for the poor. Organizing inter-agency and mass organization coordination is essential to address policy-related issues and to develop plans and programs that provide labor market information, organize job fairs, and match appropriate jobs for the poor, helping them secure stable incomes. A social worker shared: "Poverty reduction is a major policy of the Party and State. This is a political task for all levels of government. Therefore, to achieve local poverty reduction goals, coordination among departments, mass organizations, and the Fatherland Front is necessary. If coordination is effective, implementing livelihood support activities for the poor will be smooth and effective otherwise, it will not." (In-depth interview with the Head of the Department of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs, age 46, Ba Ria City).

Applying social development theory emphasizes the interactive relationship between economic and social development, in which social work plays a catalytic role in ensuring that vulnerable groups benefit equitably and sustainably from development processes (Midgley, 1995). Using this theory to analyze the factors influencing social work livelihood support activities for the poor allows for a deeper understanding of the interrelationships among components of such activities. This theoretical application helps guide policy and professional solutions to ensure sustainability and inclusiveness in local poverty reduction efforts.

### **Perceptions of Respondents Regarding Factors Influencing Social Work Livelihood Support for the Poor**

Quantitative analysis results show a statistically significant difference between male and female respondents in their perceptions of the factors influencing social work livelihood support for the poor, with a significance level of  $p < 0.05$  across all surveyed factors, specifically:

Policy mechanisms were rated significantly higher by women than by men (Mean = 4.27 compared to Mean = 3.75; Sig = 0.000). This indicates that women tend to perceive the impact of livelihood support policies more positively, possibly because they are often direct beneficiaries of such programs such as microcredit, vocational training, or support for small-scale production. Additionally, women are more likely to participate in community groups where policy information is more effectively disseminated.

Table 3: Respondents' Perceptions of Factors Influencing Social Work Livelihood Support for the Poor by Gender

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Sig
Policy mechanisms	Male	41	3,75	0,177	0,028	0,000
	Female	72	4,27	0,631	0,074	
Staff capacity	Male	41	3,82	0,326	0,051	0,028
	Female	72	4,03	0,592	0,070	
Characteristics of poor households	Male	41	3,70	0,328	0,051	0,002
	Female	72	4,16	0,585	0,069	
Inter-agency coordination	Male	41	3,21	0,776	0,121	0,001
	Female	72	4,09	0,575	0,068	

(Source: Actual survey data).

The social work staff was also rated more highly by women (Mean = 4.03) than by men (Mean = 3.82; Sig = 0.028). This may reflect women's expectations for social workers, who play a role in connecting resources, providing information, and offering counseling in livelihood support activities for the poor. In addition, the characteristics of poor and near-poor households were seen by women as more influential (Mean = 4.16 vs. 3.70; Sig = 0.002). This result reflects the reality that women, especially in poor households, are often directly impacted by the household's economic conditions such as lack of employment, childcare burdens, or limited access to land and capital factors that strongly affect their livelihood capacity.

Inter-agency coordination was also rated significantly higher by women than by men (Mean = 4.09 vs. 3.21; Sig = 0.001). This difference may stem from the fact that women are more actively involved in community activities or more frequently exposed to integrated programs from women's unions, farmers' associations, health, and education sectors, thus perceiving the effectiveness of inter-sectoral coordination. These gender differences indicate that gender is an important variable in evaluating the effectiveness of social work activities supporting livelihoods for the poor. Women tend to rate policies, support resources, and coordination among agencies more positively, reflecting their greater access, expectations, and interactions with the social policy system and social workers compared to men. This underscores the need to mainstream gender into the development, implementation, and evaluation of livelihood support policies. At the same time, more flexible approaches are needed to ensure that men who may participate less in community groups also receive effective and equitable support.

### Correlation between factors affecting social work activities supporting livelihoods for the poor

In the context where sustainable poverty reduction is a strategic goal, enhancing the effectiveness of access to social work services that support the livelihoods of poor households plays a vital role. Factors such as information support, credit access, employment assistance, resource linkage, policy mechanisms, staff capacity, household characteristics, and inter-agency coordination are variables that may influence the effectiveness of access to and utilization of social services.

Table 4: Correlation coefficients among factors affecting livelihood support activities for the poor

		Information	Credit access	Employment	Resource linkage	Policy mechanisms	Staff capacity	Characteristics of poor households	Inter-agency coordinatonh
<b>Information</b>	Pearson Correlation	1	.180	.098	-.080	.166	.272**	.214*	.083
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.056	.301	.401	.079	.004	.023	.379
	N	113	113	113	113	113	113	113	113
<b>Credit access</b>	Pearson Correlation	.180	1	.082	.083	.163	.158	.203*	.118
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.056		.390	.382	.084	.096	.031	.212
	N	113	113	113	113	113	113	113	113
<b>Employment</b>	Pearson Correlation	.098	.082	1	.265**	.148	.045	.042	.184
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.301	.390		.005	.117	.635	.662	.052
	N	113	113	113	113	113	113	113	113
<b>Resource linkage</b>	Pearson Correlation	-.080	.083	.265**	1	.201*	.090	.103	.284**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.401	.382	.005		.033	.342	.276	.002
	N	113	113	113	113	113	113	113	113
Policy mechanisms	Pearson Correlation	.166	.163	.148	.201*	1	.863**	.852**	.622**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.079	.084	.117	.033		.000	.000	.000
	N	113	113	113	113	113	113	113	113
Staff capacity	Pearson Correlation	.272**	.158	.045	.090	.863**	1	.928**	.580**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.004	.096	.635	.342	.000		.000	.000
	N	113	113	113	113	113	113	113	113
Characteristics of poor households	Pearson Correlation	.214*	.203*	.042	.103	.852**	.928**	1	.710**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.023	.031	.662	.276	.000	.000		.000
	N	113	113	113	113	113	113	113	113
Inter-agency coordination	Pearson Correlation	.083	.118	.184	.284**	.622**	.580**	.710**	1



	Sig. (2-tailed)	.379	.212	.052	.002	.000	.000	.000	
	N	113	113	113	113	113	113	113	113
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).									
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).									

To clarify the correlation between factors affecting social work activities supporting livelihoods for the poor, we employed Pearson correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) to statistically measure the strength of relationships between two or more variables. The Pearson correlation test results show that all variables included in the model exhibit a positive linear correlation with each other at a high level of statistical significance (Sig. 2-tailed = 0.000), indicating that these relationships are statistically meaningful in the context of the study in Bà Rịa City.

Policies and mechanisms show a strong correlation with both the social work staff ( $r = 0.863$ ) and the characteristics of poor households ( $r = 0.852$ ), demonstrating that clear, synchronized, and appropriate policies directly support the implementation capacity of staff and the access capacity of poor households. This aligns with the viewpoint of UNDP (2022), which asserts that policies are only effective when implementation capacity and accessibility for beneficiaries are considered.

The very high correlation between social work staff and household characteristics ( $r = 0.928$ ) reflects a two-way relationship: the capacity and attitude of social workers affect the effectiveness of livelihood support for poor households, while the characteristics of those households (e.g., education, awareness, needs) require social workers to adapt and personalize service delivery. This finding reinforces Lê Thị Kim Dung's (2019) conclusion that training in case analysis skills and personalized intervention planning is essential for social workers implementing poverty reduction activities at the local level.

The factor of coordination among departments and sectors showed a moderate correlation with the other factors, ranging from 0.580 to 0.710. Although this correlation is lower compared to other factors, it still demonstrates the important role of inter-agency coordination in facilitating synchronized policy implementation, enabling social work staff to effectively conduct livelihood support activities, and allowing poor households to access support resources conveniently. This indicates a close relationship among the components of the livelihood support system. Improvements or declines in one factor will inevitably affect the others, thereby impacting the overall effectiveness of the livelihood support program.

The above results indicate that all four factors included in the regression model influence social work activities supporting livelihoods for the poor. This means changes in these factors will affect the accessibility of social work livelihood support activities for the poor. However, the degree of influence varies among the factors; interpreting each factor separately does not have as strong an impact as considering the simultaneous effects of all factors. Nevertheless, identifying appropriate intervention measures to enhance the effectiveness of activities and minimize negative influences of these factors is essential and has important implications for developing support networks that empower clients to solve their own problems.

## Discussion and Policy Implications

The quantitative results show four main groups of factors affecting the effectiveness of livelihood support activities for the poor, ranked from highest to lowest impact as follows:

(1) Policies and mechanisms related to livelihood support (Mean = 4.08); (2) Characteristics of poor and near-poor households (Mean = 3.99); (3) The social work staff implementing livelihood support activities (Mean = 3.95); and (4) The level of coordination among departments and sectors (Mean = 3.77).

All factors scored above average, demonstrating a close relationship among the components of the livelihood support system. Improvements or weaknesses in one factor will affect the others, thus impacting the overall

effectiveness of livelihood support programs. This reflects that each factor plays an important role in implementing sustainable poverty reduction programs at the local level.

### **Policy implications from these findings include:**

Policies need to be designed in connection with practical conditions, considering the implementation capacity of staff and the specific conditions of poor households, to avoid “paper policies” that are difficult to implement effectively in practice.

Training and improving the quality of social work staff must be integrated with policy updates and adjustments. Investment should be made in practical training programs that develop the capacity to adapt to specific household situations.

Strengthening inter-sectoral and inter-level coordination mechanisms to avoid fragmented “everyone doing their own work” situations, along with a shared information system to exchange data on poor households, support activities, and implementation progress, to improve coordination and monitoring efficiency.

Developing a comprehensive intervention model that integrates policies, personnel, household characteristics, and inter-sectoral coordination into a well-structured livelihood support process, centered on the people and implemented through inter-sectoral collaboration.

Enhancing policy communication and raising public awareness to encourage the active participation of poor households in support programs.

This study is limited by its cross-sectional design, reliance on self-reported data, and focus on a single locality, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research could address these limitations by employing longitudinal designs, incorporating mixed methods, and expanding the geographical scope to compare different contexts.

## **LIMITATIONS**

### **Conclusion**

Analysis of the current status of social work activities supporting livelihoods for the poor in the surveyed area shows that support activities were generally rated quite favorably, with an average score of 4.03, reflecting consistent evaluations from study participants. Among them, information support on livelihood policies was rated the highest (Mean = 4.10), indicating the positive effectiveness of policy communication at the local level. This is an important foundation helping poor people improve awareness and access to support programs and projects. Resource connection and vocational guidance/training activities also received positive ratings, reflecting the effective intermediary role of social workers. However, support for accessing preferential credit still faced some difficulties (Mean = 3.88), indicating the need to improve access mechanisms and strengthen technical support for the poor.

The study also clarified the key factors influencing the effectiveness of social work activities supporting livelihoods aimed at sustainable poverty reduction. Survey and in-depth interview results show four main significant factors:

- (1) Policies and mechanisms related to livelihood support;
- (2) Characteristics of poor and near-poor households;
- (3) Capacity and role of social work staff; and
- (4) Coordination among departments and sectors in program implementation.

Among these, policies were rated as having the greatest influence, reflecting their guiding role and legal framework enabling effective implementation of poverty reduction livelihood models. Household characteristics such as education, skills, access to information, and proactiveness affect the ability to participate and benefit sustainably from support programs. Social workers play an important intermediary role, connecting resources and accompanying clients in capacity building. Meanwhile, inter-sectoral coordination is a foundational factor enhancing implementation effectiveness and avoiding duplication or gaps in the support chain.

From these findings, it can be affirmed that social work activities supporting livelihoods for the poor cannot be separated from a closely integrated policy – human resource –organizational ecosystem. To improve the effectiveness of sustainable poverty reduction efforts, it is necessary to develop a professional social work workforce, enhance inter-sectoral coordination, and provide practical evidence for policy formulation and adjustment linked to the specific needs of the poor. This also serves as a useful reference for policymakers and teams implementing livelihood support activities for poor communities.

Future research could examine the applicability of these findings in other provinces, investigate the long-term impacts of livelihood support interventions through longitudinal studies, and explore the role of emerging technologies, such as digital platforms and AI tools, in enhancing social work-led livelihood support.

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