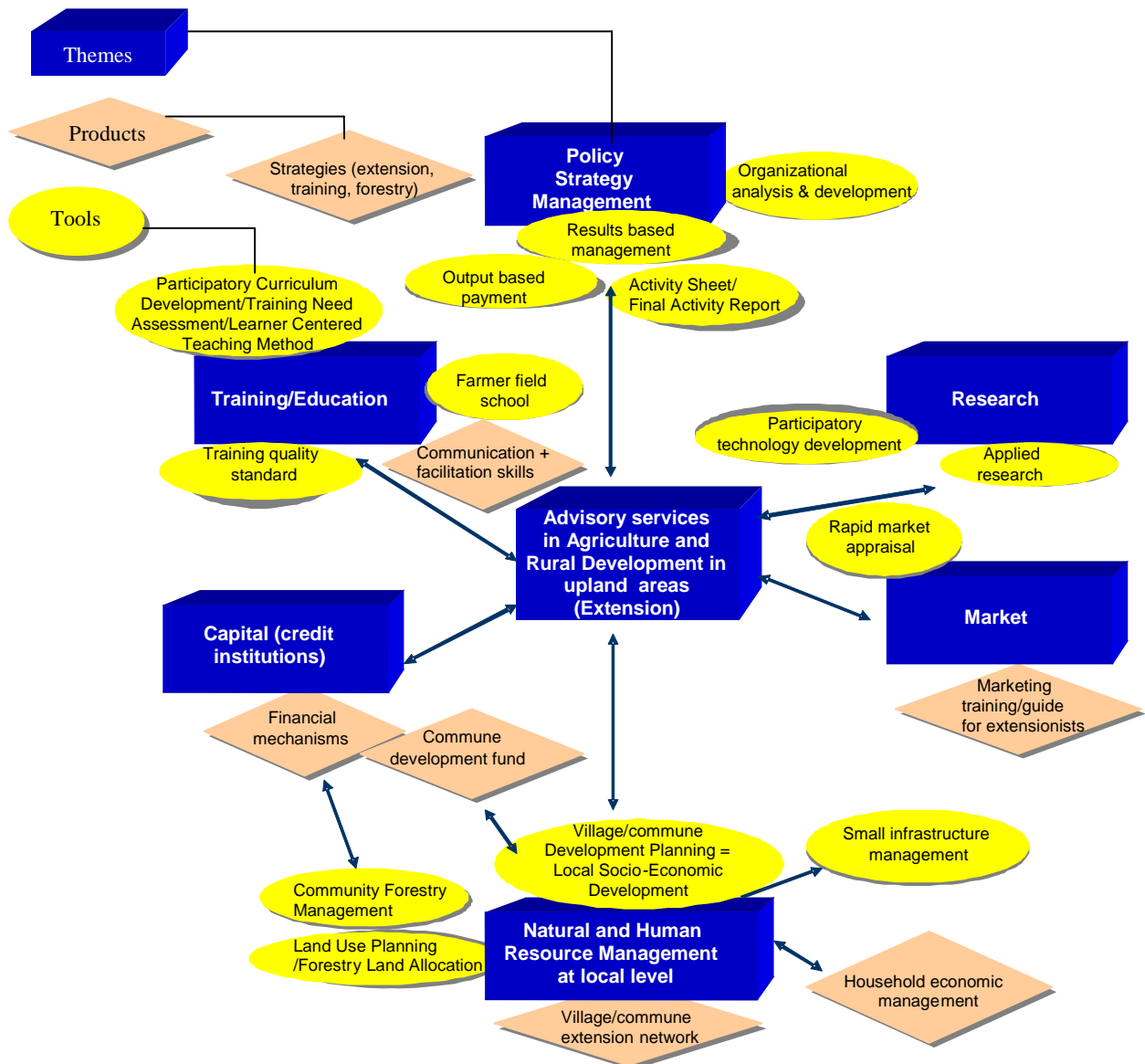


Forestry and Agriculture Extension in Vietnam:

Five years of experiences of the Extension and Training Support Project for Forestry and Agriculture in the Uplands, ETSP, 2003-2007



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ETSP at a glance

The Extension and Training Support Project for Forestry and Agriculture in the Uplands (ETSP, 2003 – 2007) is a follow-up project of the Social Forestry Support Programme (SFSP, 1994 – 2002).

Institutionally, ETSP is linked to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) and jointly implemented with provincial and district authorities and other local partners. The project is working in Dak Nong, Thua Thien Hue and Hoa Binh provinces, covering totally six districts and twenty one communes. The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) has mandated Helvetas, the Swiss Association for International Cooperation, to be the implementing agency.

By end July of 2007, the monitoring data system of ETSP is showing the following numbers of activities implemented at provincial/district/commune/village level:

- ❖ **1048** decentralized, partner based activities in all three provinces of which
- ❖ **306** development activities attended by 11'397 people (3'823 women and 7'574 men);
- ❖ **520** training courses attended 16'300 people (5'632 women and 10'668 men);
- ❖ **204** workshops/meetings of which **132** are sharing/reflection workshops for policy matters;
- ❖ **71** study tours/cross-visits, **36** best practices documented and shared/published.

Note: the ETSP activity data base is allocating some activities to several topics; thus the total is not the sum of the figures.

Key achievements of Objectives 1& 2 (village/commune/district and provincial levels):

- 1) Income improvement: According to the income survey of ETSP 2007, the yields of almost all major crops (rice, maize, cassava) show an increasing trend, thus positive increase in sale value of these key products in the three partner provinces which partly resulted from better extension services and better prices. Diversification of income sources towards commercialized products continues with both short-term and long-term crops.
- 2) Results-based planning and budgeting have been applied by selected provincial and district institutions in the three provinces. Competent government staff is now at place to continue with the participatory results-based planning method to apply this new method within the local government system.
- 3) The project has taken a systematic approach from planning (Village/Commune Development Planning, VDP/CDP) to action (support the establishment of linkage between advisory services in agriculture and rural development to applied research (e.g. Participatory Technology Development), and informal education/training (e.g. Farmer Field School).
- 4) VDP/CDP and its integration into the socio-economic development planning have been tested in the three provinces. A slimmer version of VDP/CDP guideline has been developed, and initial dissemination has been made. It is now ready for approval and up scaling at provincial level.
- 5) Village/Commune Extension Network (V/CEN) established as an essential element of a holistic provincial extension system, which provides services directly to farmers. V/CEN has become part of the provincial extension strategy in Thua Thien Hue and Dak Nong, and part of the provincial extension training strategy in Hoa Binh.
- 6) Community Forestry Management (CFM) is a participatory extension approach, which has been piloted in all three provinces to move towards a sustainable forest management system. CFM guidelines have been further developed and adapted. Good results can be shown in Dak Nong province where each household in a village got almost 4 million VND as benefit sharing income,



Participation at all levels: joint planning and decision making are entry keys for the success of ETSP

while in other areas of Vietnam CFM is challenged by improper allocation of forests to individual households.

- 7) Capacity building: Cascade training approach has been extensively used by ETSP. Competent trainers at provincial/district level are now able to conduct trainings in VDP/CDP, CFM, Farmer Field School, Participatory Technology Development, Facilitation Skills, some also in Learner Centered Teaching Method (LCTM) for local schools.
- 8) Strategic issues at provincial level: Organizational Analysis and Development applied in Hue and Hoa Binh provinces; Output-based Payment System (OPS) tested in Hoa Binh, TT-Hue and Cao Bang with some first promising results, Provincial Extension Strategy in TT-Hue and Dak Nong provinces, and Provincial Extension Training Strategy in Hoa Binh province have all been developed and approved by the Provincial People's Committee.

Key achievements of Objectives 3 (central/policy level)

- 9) 2003/2004 ETSP supported the National Working Group on Community Forestry Management (NWG-CFM) in providing inputs to the new Law on Forest Protection and Development.
- 10) The project contributed to the development of the Community Forestry Management guideline approved by the Minister of MARD for testing in 40 communes.
- 11) Some of the ETSP approaches/methods have been embedded into *Curriculum Standard on Training in Extension* for a nation-wide dissemination by the National Agricultural Extension Center (NAEC) under MARD.
- 12) Research - Education - Training - Education (RETE) became a Support Programme No. IV in the National Forestry Development Strategy (2006-2020).

1. Context of Vietnam

The year 2006 was an important milestone for Vietnam. Accession to World Trade Organization confirmed that the country has made a great progress towards market economy in the last two decades since the *Doi Moi* reforms. The approval of the Social Economic Development Plan (SEDP) affirmed the vision of Vietnam to become a middle income country by the end of the decade.

In the last ten years, there has been a significant reduction in overall levels of poverty. Even so, the uplands remain amongst the poorest regions of the country with the poverty rate of more than 30 percent.

Agriculture remains a main source of income for upland farmers. Even though, MARD has given high priority to strengthening the local area extension organizations, the upland poor's access to extension services including production, information and marketing is limited. This is due to the most pressing constraint: lack of institutional capacity to deliver those services at the local level.

Therefore, ETSP has worked through the governmental institutions to improve local planning and extension methods/approaches, and improve linkage between research, education, training and extension for a better provision of services to address the needs of remote, upland farmers.



Poverty rate in the uplands is still high due to lack of access to different services.

2. Project's background and its objectives

2.1. Background

ETSP's objectives contribute directly to the Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy 2001-2010 (CPRGS) of the Vietnamese Government (now integrated in the Social Economic

Development Plan SEDP, 2006-2010) and Public Administration Reform (PAR) which put high priority on the need to focus agriculture extension services in disadvantaged areas to ensure the poor, and ethnic minority people get benefits from extension services, and to raise the quality and relevance of training and extension services to poor farmers.

The project supports increased participation and self-management by local communities through the development of community based natural resources management systems, strengthening local organizations and the grassroots extension network, as well as finding ways to integrate participatory approaches more systematically into extension and training for wider application on a sustainable basis.

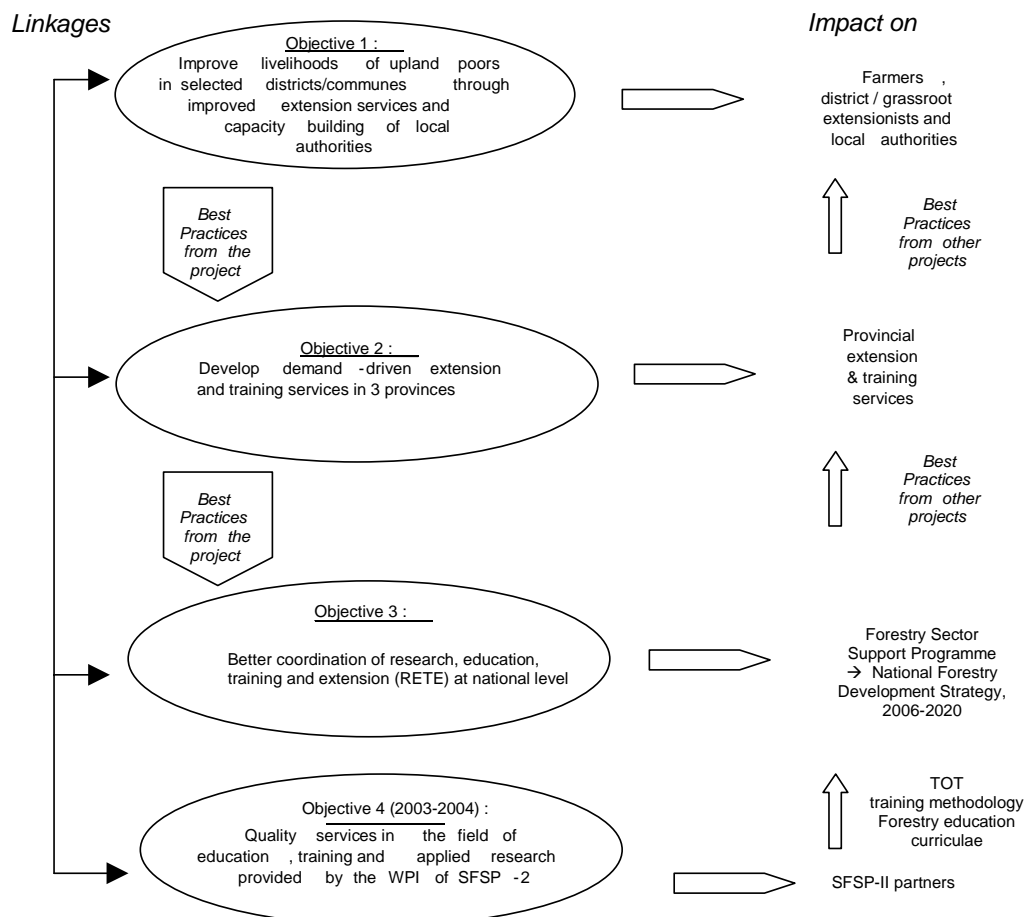
The National Forestry Development Strategy (2006 – 2020) is composed of five programs. One of the programs is Research, Education, Training and Extension (RETE). ETSP is designed to actively support the implementation of the RETE programme, which is to improve the linkage between research, education, training and extension.

Within SDC’s Mekong Region Programme, the project is situated in the thematic areas of Governance, Rural Livelihood and Natural Resource Management.

2.2. Project’s goal, objectives and structure

ETSP’s goal is to *provide cost-effective, demand driven systems of extension and training to upland farmers and service providers for enhanced sustainable natural resource management and improved household livelihoods.*

A set of Project Objectives has been established that link project activities at commune, district, province and national levels:



The “fork” system in place does not only link project activities at village, commune, district, provincial and national levels respectively, it also facilitates feedback of knowledge, experience and practices between these levels, thus links policy with practice and vice versa. This structure proved to be effective and efficient.

2.3. The project strategy and its approach

ETSP project takes a systematic approach (i) to work through the government systems to make the results more sustainable, (ii) to identify and address the needs of upland farmers, from participatory planning to participatory implementation and evaluation activities, (iii) to develop extension and training programs suited to the particular needs of farm households, and service providers working in the uplands (see adapted RETE on cover page).

The project’s set-up is half anchored into the government structure. The project’s activities are planned and implemented directly by the existing governmental agencies. This creates a strong ownership, accountability and transparency. And the project results are directly embedded into the government systems which make them more sustainable.

Training of trainers is extensively used for capacity building. Firstly, a group of core staff at provincial/district level are trained by experts in both subject matters and facilitation/learner centered teaching/training methods skills. Those government employees became now competent in providing quality trainings for other districts and commune staff. In addition, the project also makes use of experience and capacity of the former Social Forestry Support Programme from universities/schools to provide TOT trainings for provincial and district staff. As a result, the trainings are adapted to local needs and conditions.

Participatory planning/review of the provincial and district partners is an important activity of ETSP. The project supported participatory and visualized results-based planning, budgeting and reviewing. In all three provinces and six districts, competent government staff (core group) are now at place to bring this participatory and results-based planning method into the government system. This kind of planning and reviewing at the beginning is more costly than the normal “top planning to down implementing” but its effect in a long run is obvious and in line with new policies of the Vietnamese Government (decentralization, public administrative reform processes).

Standardized Activity Sheet/Final Activity Report (AS/FAR) is the core instrument for activity management and controlling. The project partners propose, justify and plan an activity by completing an AS that is submitted for approval. After the activity has been completed, a standardized FAR has to be handed in that details results obtained, lessons learnt, and expenses. The collected data can then be analyzed for the project steering and management. Even though it was only used by the partners within the project’s activities, the tool is now ready for demonstration to leaders of districts and provinces that need data monitoring for their own SEDP plan (automatised, MS-Access and MS Excel basis).

3. ETSP achievements

Objective 1: To improve livelihoods through i) need-based extension methods and content and ii) strengthened local institutional capacities in selected districts and communes in upland areas

3.1. From innovative planning...

The key to decentralization at local level is participatory local planning. The plan is the basis for the provision of advisory services in agriculture and rural development in the uplands.

In contrast to the long tradition of centralized planning where participation (if any) of all levels is very limited, ETSP has supported Village Development Planning/Commune Development Planning where villagers participate fully in assessing their potentials/opportunities and constraints, and develop the social economic development plan for their own village/commune. The results are used as an entry point to facilitate the link between bottom up planning and demand-driven extension.

The formation of core groups at village and commune level to facilitate the local planning process has enabled inter-sectoral and multi-disciplinary coordination. Commune and village cadres not only help to facilitate the planning process, but take a leading role in advocating the plan and implementation of activities at a later stage.

The Department of Planning and Investment in the three provinces is leading this process. In each of the province, VDP/CDP has been applied in 2 districts as a pilot. The evaluation of ETSP shows that local level planning approach, VDP/CDP (i) contributed to capacity building of local people and strengthened the roles of commune leaders; (ii) local participation, transparency and equity among different community groups increased to effective and efficient use of resources in commune development.

In the process of up scaling to provincial level, a simplified VDP/CDP = local social economic development plan was tested to meet the new government budget and planning requirements of the local SEDP, thus being a prerequisite for successful institutionalization of VDP/CDP in the district and province planning and extension system.

3.2. ...to participatory action

Encouraged by VDP/CDP outcomes, ETSP supported a number of selected activities and best practices which contributed to increase the income of farmers, and improved capacity of local authorities and extension staff.

Decentralized financial management not only contributed to improvement of financial management capacity at local level, but also directly contributed to an increase of income for farmers

In the context of supporting and promoting the decentralization of planning and budgets as stated in the village/commune development plan, ETSP has supported the decentralized budget management in 9 communes in Tan Lac district and 3 communes in Lac Son district of Hoa Binh province to implement some agriculture and forestry related activities from the VDP/CDP. Each commune received 50 million VND (equivalent to 3100 USD), and developed a fund management mechanism. The signing of the tripartite agreements between the communes, districts and ETSP makes the fund more transparent. The fund was used by a selected number of individual farmers in the communes to raise cows, pigs, buffaloes and beef. In addition, it was also used by a group of farmers in farmer field school (see below) to learn about pig raising skills. The evaluation of the fund indicated that it was effectively managed by the commune authorities, at the same time the farmers got benefits from it. The lesson drawn was that if the (administrative) procedure was simple (discussed and decided with participation of village/commune people), and if village/commune people closely monitored the fund, it would be effectively and efficiently utilized. It is evident that commune is able to manage a greater amount of fund. The question is whether the district authorities are willing to further decentralize and allocate their investment budget to the commune level.



“This approach responds to the government Ordinance 34/2007/PL-UBTVQH on the democracy at commune level, which requires participation of local population in the whole cycle of all projects and programmes in the community”.

Is Community Forest Management a better way to protect the forest?

The results of the village development planning showed a strong need for decentralized multi-stakeholder forest management. To support gradually a change from top-down to a bottom-up management system, ETSP introduced the community forest management approach to the three provinces. It started with a TOT training cycle on CFM for key stakeholders from provincial and district authorities. During the three training modules, participants from partner provinces were familiarized with theoretical concepts and procedures necessary for CFM introduction at village level.



It is the first time the farmers could discuss what to do with their forest (picture taken in Dak Nong)

The approved 5 year forest management plans defining objectives and concrete silvicultural operations (forest enrichment, thinning, timber harvesting) for village community forests were the output of the multi-stakeholder CFM planning. The results have been very promising in Dak Nong province where the CFM timber harvesting operations were under the lead of the villagers. The benefits of timber harvesting were shared equally among all the households (total income per village/harvest: 668,122,000 VND = 41,700 USD) in the village (part of the revenue flowing into village development fund, part of it back into the forest), with average income per household of 4 million VND (= 250 USD).

The important aspect to ensure high motivation for community forest management is that investments in time and labour need to be covered by high economic benefits from the forest products to make it worthwhile for people involved. This is possible in Dak Nong province where rich forests have been allocated to communities. In other regions (e.g. Hoa Binh), the majority of forests allocated to communities are relatively poor and degraded, thus short term income is questionable without external financial support. Therefore, it is important to provide the local people with rich production forests, not only the poor protected ones.

Participatory extension methods: field-based participatory learning activities

From the outcome of village/commune development plan, there was a strong need of the farmers for field-based learning processes, which is opposed to the traditional theoretical extension training classes. Participatory technology development (PTD) and farmer field school (FFS) are the approaches that link farmers with extension workers and researchers. The ETSP income survey shows that the attitude of extension workers towards the farmers has changed from 'top down technology transfer' to 'learning together'. They recognized that the farmers have a great deal of local knowledge and experience from which they can learn. At the same time, the farmers acknowledge that they learn from each other more than from the district/commune extensionist.

In **PTD**, farmers, researchers and extensionists cooperate to experiment innovative technologies that suit to farmers' conditions. Farmers play a vital role in PTD, while researchers support the farmers' experiments on technical aspects. The extensionist's role is to facilitate the experiment process and the interaction between farmers and researchers.

PTD has been applied in the three partner provinces. In Hoa Binh, it has been most successful. The Provincial People's Committee has approved it as an official extension method in the province. The province has allocated its own budget for training district/commune extension staff in PTD. In addition, all district extension stations put in their plan PTD activities. This has improved not only income for farmers but also the capacity of the commune/district extension workers.

There are some lessons learned on this. First and most important was the new practices/technologies need to generate income for farming households, in particular short term crops production. Secondly, PTD provided a learning platform where extensionists and farmers were able to apply participatory methods and tools, thus increasing their professional skills and knowledge. Thirdly, farmers and extensionists gained practical experiences with new technologies and together with the data monitoring of experiments, it became relatively easy to disseminate successful experiments to other farmers and communities.

FFS is a learning platform between a group of farmers and an extension worker. The extension worker facilitates the experience sharing between farmers. FFS have been introduced in the three provinces since 2004. Extensionists were trained in FFS through a comprehensive cascade concept from provincial to district to commune/village levels. In each province, a provincial core group of 15 staff from diverse backgrounds and institutions (extension centers, forestry department etc) have been trained and gained competent in FFS methodology, facilitation skills and learner



Learning by doing (FFS) is the best way to share experience among the farmers

centered training methods. This staff is now able to conduct training in FFS for other provincial, district and commune extension staff. More than 30 learning topics (such as pig raising, hat making, beans cultivation, hybrid rice) have been conducted in the two districts of Hoa Binh that contributed to income increase for farmers, while all the district extension staff of Nam Dong and A Luoi districts of TT Hue applied the learner centered training methods when conducting trainings for farmers and commune/village authorities. In Dak Nong, more than 200 district and commune extension staff (extension station, crop protection station, veterinary stations) were trained this year alone on the FFS concept, methods and tools.

FFS field experiences and lessons learnt are fed into the existing FFS guideline for extensionists and support the FFS institutionalization process and official provincial approval of the method in the provinces.

Village/Commune extension network (V/CEN): a need for better extension services and marketing information

VEN concept has been introduced by ETSP in the three provinces since 2005 to (i) respond to the strong need for supporting village extension networks which can provide extension support to develop household farming systems in the mountainous, ethnic minority areas, and (ii) respond to need to link extension with other services at commune and district level (credit, off-farm employment, market access) and bringing different service providers to offer livelihood services to farmers in an integrated manner while targeting poverty reduction.

With ETSP support, V/CEN has become part of the provincial extension strategy in the Hue and Dak Nong provinces approved by the provincial authorities. VEN was tested in the two districts of Hoa Binh and will become part of the provincial extension strategy.

The village extensionist is appointed by the villagers in a general meeting, and therefore accountable to the village and individual households who receive her/his services. She/he will be part of the village development group, and be remunerated either from village funds, or directly by households that receive services. This changes the attitude of extension workers from inputs/training provision towards needs oriented and quality services. In addition, the extensionists at village/commune level are trained in facilitation/communication skills and marketing skills as generalists who are the bridge between the local farmers and service providers.

For assessment, assurance and compensation of quality service delivery, the introduction of performance management systems such as monitoring and evaluation, and output-/result based payment (OPS) is inevitable.

Output based Payment System (OPS): an inevitable for the extension system

With the Decree 56/ND-CP on extension, the decentralization policy, and the PAR processes, the provinces now have power to decide on the extension system all the way down to the village level. ETSP supported OPS to respond to the initiative and demand of the ETSP partners and support the decentralization process as part of public reforms in agricultural extension services, where contracting of delivery of advisory services aim at providing customer-oriented services in a transparent, efficient and effective way.

Output based payment system compensates the results implemented by the extension system, payment is based on the performance (indicators defined by farmers, village and commune staff) instead of traditionally compensating the inputs based on the yearly plan of operation.

Key OPS activities supported in ETSP were: (i) small scale infrastructure constructions, community forestry development fund, commune development funds, winter fodder in Tan Lac and Lac Son districts of Hoa Binh, (ii) the introduction of the ‘farmer to farmer’ extension approach and the promotion of vegetable production for ethnic minorities in A Luoi district of TT Hue, (iii) Farmer field school (SALT and maize) and small infrastructure in Cao Bang.

The ETSP experience shows that OPS is supportive to improved quality of extension service delivery. The extension system implements services in accordance with agreements negotiated with farmers and commune/village authorities. The results are promising in the way that OPS is in line with a general move of the government towards performance and results-based management in the public sector. This approach is also in line with the government policy on PAR.

Other selected activities/practices supported by ETSP

- ❖ Land use planning and forest land allocation (LUP&FLA): supported in TT Hue and Dak Nong where the LUP&FLA guideline has been developed and officially approved by each province respectively. This boosted the forest land allocation to ethnic communities to further promote CFM (see above).
- ❖ Market and marketing awareness: developed materials and handouts, and provided trainings for provincial/district extensionists.
- ❖ Facilitation and learner centered teaching/training (LCTM) trainings: improved training capacity of provincial, district and commune extension staff.
- ❖ Training in LCTM and Participatory Curriculum Development for 37 vocational/technical institutions under MARD/Organization and Personnel Department.
- ❖ Household economic management: improved economic management skills for women in selected districts
- ❖ Gender mainstreaming activities: Various activities (Village/Commune Development Planning, Farmer Field School, Participatory Technology Development) from planning to implementation.
- ❖ Various capacity building activities for farmers, commune and district, extension system.
- ❖ Small scale infrastructure: construction of small irrigation cannels in Tan Lac and Lac Son districts of Hoa Binh province in combination with the establishment and testing of local financial mechanisms (commune development funds).

Objective 2: To develop effective and sustainable extension and training services (and their linkages to applied research) in 3 provinces

Cooperation between core departments: the local RETE network

At the provincial and district levels, the project activities are managed by the Core Group appointed either by Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) or District People's Committee with representatives from key departments (DARD, Extension, Plant Protection Department, School, etc). These Core Groups are formed as a basis for a decentralized Research, Education, Training and Extension (RETE) platform of relevant provincial institutions and other stakeholders. In this collaboration, the Provincial Extension Center under DARD plays an important role in providing advisory services, particularly when partners want to serve remote/upland forest dependent farmers' needs through Applied Research (e.g. PTD) or through Vocational Education or Local Level Training (e.g. FFS). For implementation of many topics/processes (e.g. VDP/CDP, FFS or CFM), representatives from key departments/institutions are formed to facilitate cooperation between these departments/institutions. These increase the linkage between research, education, training and extension.

Strategic visioning – restructuring

The processes initiated by ETSP (such as VDP/CDP, OPS) triggered the need for strategic thinking within extension, with Hoa Binh and TT Hue being the provinces to proactively seek for project assistance in facilitating organizational analysis and development (OA/OD) at provincial and district levels. Six DARD related institutions and the Technical High Schools at provincial Hoa Binh, and four DARD related institutions at provincial level and four institutions at district level in TT Hue province have successfully applied OA/OD processes which resulted in the organizational development plan. The results achieved and the evident satisfaction of partner institutions allow to attribute to the term 'applied PAR'. The experience shows that PAR is most successful when applied in a concrete situation and based on a sound problem analysis by concerned institutions and staff.

In addition, ETSP also supports the development of extension/training strategy in the three provinces. In Hoa Binh, the extension training strategy has been approved by the provincial people's committee. The strategy includes learner centered training/teaching methods/facilitation skills. The provincial extension strategy and forest development strategy have been on-going and will be approved by end of 2007. At the same time, in TT Hue and Dak Nong provinces, the extension strategies have been approved by the PPC. The ETSP's supported participatory approaches (PTD, FFS etc) and village/commune extension network are officially included as part of the extension strategy.

Another strategic direction is to monitor training quality provided by the extension system. Training Quality Standards (TQS) have been developed as a tool among the three provinces with common principles and criteria, along with specific indicators developed by each province. If this is well in place, quality of trainings can be improved.

Objective 3: To assist MARD in the development and coordination of an integrated system of demand-driven and appropriate research, education, training and extension (National Forest Strategy)

“All successfully tested and approved products under ETSP 2003 to 2007 at provincial/district/commune levels are linked to the Forestry Protection and Development laws (2004), and linked directly to the concerned MARD institutions directly, in particular to National Agriculture Extension Center, Organization and Personnel Department, Department of Forestry, and Science and Technology Department”

CFM is approved to be tested nation wide, while concern arises for the forest areas which have been allocated to individual household

ETSP contributed through the National Working Group for CFM to develop an easy-to-understand and apply CFM Guideline, which was officially approved by the Minister of MARD for experimental

application of 40 selected communes. With the experience of ETSP at provincial level contributed to adjustment of this CFM document which is now operational.

However, in many parts of Vietnam, a lot of protected forest areas have been allocated to individual households in the way that many forest owners (with red book) do not know where their forest plots are located. This uncertainty increases the risk that individual forest cultivations hamper the sustainable forest management principles. At the same time, CFM approach is one possibility to lower this risk. However, this would require a special provincial policy which encourages involved individual households with allocated forests to manage their forest resources in a collaborative manner by applying the CFM approach.

Participatory extension methods are incorporated in the curriculum standard of the National Agriculture Extension Center (NAEC)

With support of ETSP, the National Agriculture Extension Center collected all existing extension methods and approaches and formulated the Concept Note on Curriculum Standard for Training Extension which become the reference training frame for all provincial extension centers. In this curriculum standard, methods and approaches supported by ETSP (CFM, FFS, PTD, marketing, etc.) were included. The curriculum standard consists of a 'fixed' part, and a 'soft' part which can be flexibly adapted by the provinces suitable to their conditions. This is in line with the gradual shift of centralized state extension to a bottom-up extension system.



NAEC workshop on the development of extension curriculum standard

RETE at national level

The support by ETSP over the last three years on RETE at central level has been embedded in the National Forestry Development Strategy 2006 to 2020 as the Support Program No IV. The RETE forms a formal programme framework for government, international organizations and other relevant institutions (e.g. research, extension, training and education institutions).

4. Lessons learned and Outlook towards 2008-2010

Central/policy level:

Up scaling: ETSP's activities are in line with main directions and strategies of the government (Decentralization policy, Social Economic Development Plan, National Forestry Development Strategy and PAR processes). Some of its results have been taken up by the government and other projects/programs. However, even though ETSP has made a lot of experience in the pilots from the participatory planning and budgeting to implementation of participatory extension approaches, it needs more time for up-scaling of the pilots between the provinces to also create an impact at national level.

An inter-provincial forum would be useful to share the experience of ETSP with others, vice versa, and scale up the best practices grown out of ETSP supports.

Strategic collaboration: At the central level, the project has been in close collaboration with Departments under MARD such as the Department of Forestry, the National Agricultural Extension Center and the Organizational and Personnel Department. This helped to undertake policy dialogue at national level based on actual field experiences. An even stronger anchorage at central level could help advocate need-based and people-centered approaches for extension service provision.

Local level:

Ownership and transparency: Activities supported by ETSP achieved more sustainable results when partners at provincial, district, commune and village levels do claim and assure their ownership and responsibility vis à vis the higher authority. All the project's activities have been planned and implemented by government staff. This created a strong ownership and accountability. In terms of quality

and transparency aspects, it needs a good and easy-to-apply, practical monitoring set-up installed and used by the government system. By doing this, we can ensure the required quality, timeliness and financial correctness. The ETSP experienced Activity Sheet/Final Activity Report (AS/FAR) output monitoring system showed a practical way to go. It further needs a pro-active facilitation from the project management unit, set up in the responsible partner institution.

Results-based management: In some partner provincial departments, there are now competent staff who are able to apply results-based planning and budgeting. These staff are the nuclei to further expand the results-based planning, budgeting and monitoring process within the government system. Other departments and provincial schools should make use of this experience. However, the spreading of “good lessons” depends on a dynamic, risk-taking and change-willing leadership at various levels. No risk and low dynamism – no spreading.

Local RETE network - The role of core groups: the inter-disciplinary groups composed of different departments and schools have been facilitating the linkages between various government administrations including *Research, Education, Training and Extension*. At the end, the improved RETE linkages trigger a better provision of advisory services for the farmers. In addition, such core groups at provincial and district levels are now mastered in ETSP supported approaches/methods such as VDP/CDP, CFM, FFS, PTD, Facilitation Skills, LCTM for local school improvement. They are competent enough to conduct trainings in these fields. They could now even provide government-internal consulting services to other interested government agencies within their home province or in the region to effectively to spread the approaches and methods within their own internal human resources. But this again needs a firm leadership, otherwise established new competence will lie idle.

‘Applied’ PAR: ETSP focused on governmental partner’s organizational analysis and development (OA/OD). It is essential to link this topic with PAR processes in the province to have a better support and broader impact on organizational reforms, improved public service delivery, and building up an affirmative contingent of cadres and civil servants at all levels. In this context the elaborated OA/OD became a process tool to transfer PAR into action, using mainly internal resources with little coaching from outside.

Institutionalization and scaling up: Some of the best practices of ETSP have been institutionalized at provincial level. In this context, the lesson learnt is that the institutionalization process often takes time more than donors provide funds for testing and consolidation up to getting the ‘stamps’ from the provincial People’s Committee or the Central Government. Regular, face-to-face capitalization of approaches/tools and experiences (not only writing nice reports) is essential to more effectively scale up the best practices. In addition, capacity building through a cascade form of TOT training can be seen as the *strategic key approach*. This intervention would need much more investment in the future, from the donor as well as from the government side if the social dimension of the fast moving SEDP 2006-2010 shall keep track with the impressive economic impact.

Change of attitudes: With the support of ETSP there have been changes in approaches of working in agriculture and rural development institutions (e.g. two-way communication, participatory planning, more decision-making by the people from local level). However, it needs more time and efforts to work on changing staff’s attitudes as these are delicate processes within institutions, not only with individual personnel. An important trigger for that is always a dynamic and supportive leadership. Where this was lacking, the results were minor.

Output-based payment: The first experiences show that the output-based payment is increasing the efficiency and quality of the activity. However, it needs well-defined and clear agreements among contract partners. A restrict application is crucial to promote accountability, clear roles and responsibilities. This will be inevitable for the extension system or any other institution that wants to go towards this direction.

Public Service Improvement Program for Agriculture and Rural Development, PS-ARD, 2008-2010

The experience and success of ETSP have led to a new Public Service Improvement Program for Agriculture and Rural Development, PS-ARD, 2008 – 2010; a unique form of collaboration between SDC, MARD and the Provincial People’s Committees of Hoa Binh and Cao Bang. Helvetas will play the

role of a facilitator cum advisor. This new program will build upon the achievements of ETSP, and consolidate some “unfinished” practices of ETSP which have potentials for a wide-dissemination.

The objective of PS-ARD is *to contribute to building up effective and efficient decentralised public service delivery systems and processes in agriculture and rural development. The main output will be human resource development at the commune level in some selected districts of Cao Bang and Hoa Binh provinces, and PAR and human resource policy support at central level in the Organizational and Personnel Department (OPD) under MARD.*

With this new program, the effectiveness and efficiency of SDC/Helvetas support shall be improved by integrating three current projects (two in Cao Bang and one in Hoa Binh) into one comprehensive program support.

Change of address: In January 2008, the new office for PS-ARD will replace the PMU of ETSP. It will be located in the same office like Helvetas. Address will be: 298F Kim Ma, Van Phuc Diplomatic quarters, Hanoi. Phone: 8 431 750, fax 8 431 744. Interested people can contact Mr. Pham Van Luong, e-mail: pham.luong@helvetas.org , mobile phone: 091 465 69 95.