



HELVETAS
Swiss Intercooperation

VIETNAM

IMPROVED LIVELIHOOD OF ETHNIC MINORITIES
& STRENGTHENED LOCAL NGO IN CAO BANG – LIVE PROJECT

**PROJECT FINAL EVALUATION REPORT
DECEN**

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CARE	International Non-governmental Organization
CB-GEM	Cao Bang Community based Governance, Extension and Market project
CEM	Committee of Ethnic Minority
CPC	Commune People's Committee
DECEN	Cao Bang Community Development Center
EC	European Commission
EIDHR	Enhancing the rights of ethnic minorities in Cao Bang province
FLEGT	Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade Products
IVEN	Improving Voice through Effective Networks
LIVE	Improved Livelihood of Ethnic Minorities Program in Cao Bang
LNGO	Local Non-government organization
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NorthNet	A network of VNGOs in the northern mountainous provinces of Vietnam
NPA	Norwegian People' Aid (INGO)
PARAFF	Public Participation and Accountability Facilitation Fund
PSARD	Public Service Provision Improvement Program in Agriculture and Rural Development
SEDP	Social and Economic Development Plan
VND	Vietnam Dong (Vietnamese Currency)
VNGO	Vietnamese Non-government organization
WATSAN	Water and Sanitation
WB	World Bank



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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The project "Improved Livelihood of Ethnic Minorities Program in Cao Bang - LIVE (from July 2011 to December 2014) is supported by HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation and implemented by DECEN (Cao Bang Community Development Centre). The project's objectives are to improve livelihoods of ethnic minorities living in remote and upland areas in Cao Bang and to strengthen civil society in Cao Bang province. As the project comes to an end, a Final Project Evaluation was conducted in order to systematically analyze the project achievement up to dates. The Evaluation mainly focused on the third component of the original LIVE, which had been split into a separate project in 2011 named the Project "Strengthen the Local NGO - Cao Bang Community Development Center (DECEN). The evaluation for the first two components on WATSAN and HANDICRAFT was presented in a separate report.

Under the three and a half intensively years supported by the project, DECEN has developed a fairly good Internal system with key documents, regulations and manual. With active contribution and participation of every DECEN's member of staff in the formulation of the system, DECEN has acquired and enriched its expertise in good program performance and professional & transparent financial management. During the project time, DECEN appeared to be an organization with enabling working environment, teamwork spirit, staff commitment and strong staff competency profiles.

Regarding fundraising and acquisition, it can be said that capacity of DECEN in the field has been improved dramatically through the practical work, even with little involvement of all members but the management team. Although there was no success in the first year, the second year DECEN had won contract awards for three proposals and one more for the third year. Compare to the set target of two approved proposals, the results were significant, but they only contributed about thirty percent of budget to the operation of DECEN.

As the first LNGO established and working in Cao Bang, DECEN in addition to maintained and further developed working relationship with government authorities from communes to provincial levels also has engaged in broader network of VNGOs and thematic working groups. All the efforts have resulted in the establishment of partnership between DECEN and other organisations and donors, such as CARE International in Viet Nam, Embassy of United States and other donors. Within the obviously limited space, DECEN appears to have developed a good profile and relationship with a range of stakeholders, particularly government institutions at the local level. Although being a young organization at local level, DECEN has proved itself to be a competent NGO, identified as the active and dynamic NGO operating in Cao Bang province, which can provide satisfactory services to the donors, both national and international, through its successful implementation of the assigned projects and services.

However, when the project finished, DECEN lost the main source of funding for its operation. The young organization does not have large core funding to cover the existing personnel structure and administration costs, which would result in the reduction of staff right from beginning 2015. This would be a threat for DECEN to lose its qualified staff after their capacity being enhanced with lots of investment during the project time.

In response to the challenge in limited fundraising opportunities due to the changing in development context of Viet Nam, DECEN has made some updates in its thematic focus, taking into consideration its existing competences and experience as well as potential funding opportunities. The last month of the project seems not enough to implement all the recommendations from the final evaluation, but for the follow up development of the organization. The recommendations mainly focus on strengthening the organization's strategic direction, profile and recognition, as well as prior preparation for seizing any appropriate funding opportunities.

2 BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

2.1 Background

Cao Bang is a mountainous province located in the northeastern region of Vietnam bordering with China. More than 95 percent of around five hundred thousand population belongs to numerous ethnic minority groups, in which Tay and Nung account for about 70 percent. While Tay and Nung ethnic groups reside in the low land areas, Dzao, H'Mong, San Chi, Lo Lo and other ethnic groups live in higher land. Each of these ethnic groups has its own culture and handicraft patterns.

While more than 80 percent of the province covers with forest and rocky mountain, Cao Bang people also have to suffer water scarcity in many areas during dry season. Statistics in 2009 showed that about 81.4% of households had been limitedly accessing to clean water sources, despite a number of efforts to find a solution to help people to save water for dry season. The problem of shortage water usage through generations often comes along with problems of hygiene and sanitation.

In continuation of the HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation support in Cao Bang province after the phasing out of the previous project "Community based Governance, Extension and Market project" (CB-GEM), the project "Improved Livelihood of Ethnic Minorities Program in Cao Bang – LIVE" was designed with three components for the period July 2011-December 2014. The project's overall goal was "Livelihoods of ethnic minorities living in remote and upland areas in Cao Bang are improved and civil society in Cao Bang Province strengthened". The three components were: 1) Access to water and sanitation of local people, especially for poor ethnic minorities, is improved (WATSAN); 2) Value Chains for Ethnic Handicrafts are improved (HANDICRAFT); and 3) Institutional, Organisational and Management capacities of Cao Bang Community Development Centre (DECEN) are improved.

In November 2011, LIVE was decided to be split into two small projects while the total budget as well as the key outputs under the designed components remain unchanged: i) the first two components kept the same name LIVE project: "Improved Lives of Ethnic Minorities in Cao Bang through better access to water and market for their handicraft products"; and ii) the last component became a project named "Strengthened local Non-Governmental Organization in Cao Bang – DECEN" as it was realized that the support component of DECEN is not logically linked to the implementation of LIVE activities but is rather its precondition for the best possible outcome of it. DECEN was supported to fulfill the task of LIVE implementation and other projects later on. Agreements of these projects were then resigned between HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation in Viet Nam and DECEN in July 2012, at which DECEN became the implementing partner for LIVE.

2.2 The DECEN Project

In 2010, the Cao Bang Community Development Centre (DECEN) was established in an effort made by HELVETAS after sixteen years operating in Cao Bang, as the first local non-governmental organization (LNGO) in the province. DECEN's mission is to work for the sustainable development of the disadvantaged people through better implementation of their rights toward a better and fairer society. The activities implemented through a close partnership with the local communities and authorities at commune, district and Provincial level focusing on better livelihood, improved access to drinking water and sanitation, promotion of ethnic handicrafts, education, natural resource management and governance.

In line with the official close of HELVETAS activities in Cao Bang in 2013, DECEN was fully independent in its operation and budgeting since then. However, budget from implementing LIVE

project and support from HELVETAS was still the main source of fund for DECEN to function. In addition to LIVE project, DECEN has implemented some other small projects. Therefore staff have to share the work according to their availability of time and expertise.

In order to create a favorable ground to enable DECEN to step by step stand on its own feet, HELVETAS agreed with the Cao Bang province's authority to delegate the task of implementation of the LIVE project to DECEN since July 2012, while continued to support the organisation intensively in institutional development and staff capacity building to fulfill their mission in sustainable manner, contributing to improvement of the living conditions of the disadvantaged ethnic minority groups in Cao Bang.

The support within the scope of DECEN project includes activities i) to improve Institutional, Organisational and Management Capacities of DECEN as well as ii) to make DECEN well-known among the NGO community, local governments and development donors.

2.3 Objective and Scope of the evaluation

This project final evaluation for DECEN, in order to systematically analyze the project achievements up to date, was conducted by an independent consultant in close coordination and consultation with HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation in Viet Nam and DECEN. Although the Terms of Reference was to cover all three components of the original LIVE project design, it was then decided to split the report on LIVE and DECEN separately.

This report covered the overall picture on the establishment and performance of DECEN, including the verification of the findings at DECEN Mid-term Review (MTR) conducted in November 2013. Many points in the MTR report are still valid up to date, thus the final evaluation referred to the current development context in Cao Bang, the HELVETAS strategic direction and existing opportunities of fundraising that DECEN have been approaching in order to assess the performance of DECEN, opportunities and challenges that the organization is facing upon the completion of H HELVETAS support.

2.4 Evaluation methodology, process and limitation

The final project evaluation was conducted with participatory approach, combination of desk study, in-depth and semi-structure interviews, field observation, photo taking and corresponding to available resources. The assignment was carried out for total sixteen working days over more than three weeks during November and December 2014. The information was collected through three key dimensions: 1) Desk study on LIVE documents provided by HELVETAS, DECEN; 2) In-depth and semi-structured interviews as well as focus group discussions with HELVETAS management and project team, DECEN staff, local authorities, project beneficiaries; and 3) Field visits to five communes in the four districts, those were selected to represent for the two LIVE components, different geo-topographic features and ethnic women handicraft groups.

Key informants for the final evaluation include: i) HELVETAS's Country Director, LIVE Project Manager, PSARD Coordinator and Human Resource (HR) Manager, who have been engaging in market aspect of the handicraft value chain; ii) All DECEN staff: Director, Deputy Director, project officers on WATSAN and HANDICRAFT, Communication, HR and Finance; and iii) Selected Project Communes: authorities, representatives of Commune Women Union, Women Clubs, handicraft groups, household beneficiaries.

An evaluation framework was developed in advance and sent to DECEN to gather data. The field visit to Cao Bang province included one day working with DECEN for collecting information against

outcome and output indicators and three day visits to five communes (in four districts) which selected and planned based on logistic reasons and more importantly the representative characteristics in terms of geo-topography and ethnicity.

Data collected was analysed based on the framework to answer the core evaluation questions. A debriefing meeting with HELVETAS and DECEN management was conducted right after the field trip where all the findings and assessment were discussed and verified. The draft report receiving feedbacks and critical comments from HELVETAS and DECEN has been prepared.

The report findings and assessment might be affected by some limitation of the assignment, firstly the key informants at commune levels might be those who are the most dynamic and active stakeholders thus not well represented for all. Language barrier was also a constraint for the evaluator to communicate effectively with the ethnic minority groups who cannot speak Vietnamese well. Limited time for gathering data in the field also prevented the evaluator to build trust and gain opinions at deeper level.

This report is presented in three key chapters including the introductory one.

- 1. Chapter One presents introduction on the project background, objective and scope, methodology, process and limitation of the evaluation.*
- 2. Chapter Two presents the findings, assessment on the institutional, organizational and management capacities of DECEN as well as the recognition of partners and donors to DECEN's performance.*
- 3. Chapter Three presents the upcoming challenges, DECEN's response and recommendations.*

The evaluation for LIVE project was split into a separate report.

3 INSTITUTIONAL, ORGANIZATIONAL AND MANAGEMENT CAPACITIES

3.1 Human and Institutional capacities

After three years and a half since the establishment, DECEN has developed a fairly good Internal system with key documents, regulations and manuals, guiding by its first so-called strategic business plan for the period 2011-1013 including the initial organizational structure and policies. With active contribution and participation of every DECEN's member of staff in the formulation of the system, DECEN has acquired and enriched its expertise in good program performance and professional & transparent financial management. The MTR in November 2013 has made in-depth assessment regarding the aspect, with the conclusion that "The set-up system with policies and manuals ready in place would basically confirm the improved institutional development". The final evaluation after one year has found no further change in the system, that all DECEN staff confirmed they enjoy the enabling working environment and they are able to explain and describe the organization profile with key organizations' competence. The organizational capacity has been improved so that the staff could confidently say that DECEN is capable to implement any mandates relevant to its expertise.

DECEN Internal system established with:

- ✓ The Regulations on Organizational Development and Operation
- ✓ The Regulations of the Management Committee
- ✓ Human Resources Manual
- ✓ Administrative Management Manual
- ✓ Financial Management Manual
- ✓ Job Descriptions for staff



Capacity of DECEN

The Governance System has been set up for DECEN with 13 member Governance Board, as the MTR pointed out that "the Board needs to be more dynamic and proactive to engage in shaping policies/strategies, facilitating macro-micro linkages to enable DECEN to be ready for cutting-edged issues rather than just service provision as it currently does", the final evaluation did not have evidence on the improvement regarding this aspect. However the evaluator does share the concerns raised by the Board about the rapid changing development context in Viet Nam, and the implication for financial sustainability of DECEN in such scenario.

In terms of capacity building at individual level for DECEN staff, lots of investment and opportunities have been acquired, not only from the project resources but also from the broader engagement and participation in the networks and partnerships. Key staff have attended tailored-made training on policy advocacy; financial management; and proposal writing; and advocacy for Climate Change. Regular sharing of experiences among DECEN staff and close coaching provided to newly recruited staff were common practices within the organisation. As the key implementer of the LIVE project, DECEN staff has been enhanced with monitoring and reporting skills as well as research skills in conducting baselines and assessment within the scope of the project. In order to assess the competencies of DECEN staff, a more in-depth analysis would be needed, but the evaluation found that most of key indicators on improved human and institutional capacities of DECEN have been reached.

3.2 New fundraising and acquisition opportunities

It was the intention that DECEN would actively seek for other funding opportunities during the implementation of LIVE project, with support from HELVETAS in linking with donors and building up relationship. Overall responsibility of fundraising and acquisitions at DECEN was supposed to be taken by a team of key staff, led by the Deputy Director and including technical officers, chief accountant, as fundraise should be a part of each team member' task in order to formulate more comprehensive project proposals that capture most cutting-edge issues as well as to reflect strategic priorities of the organization. In fact, the work was heavily depended on the management team, with little involvement of other members. The results in terms of fundraising and acquisitions during the project period were significant, with four successful project proposals compared to the expected indicator of two approved ones, contributing about thirty percent of budget to the operation of DECEN.

It can be said that capacity of DECEN in relation to fundraising and acquisition has been improved dramatically through the practical work. In the record of DECEN, the first year's effort with four project proposals applied for fund did not bring any success. With experience and lesson learnt, to point out the missing knowledge and skills in fundraising, intensive support drawn from the project resource has helped DECEN staff to build up capacity. This could be considered as attribution to the four successful proposals approved by different donors during the next year of 2013.

Year	Name of project proposals	Donors	Successful	Failed
2012	Ethnic Minority Empowerment in Cao Bang	Irish Aid		x
	Improve the value chain of local H'mong beef in Bao Lac and Bao Lam district of Cao Bang province	SDC - MARP		x
	Technical Assistance toward the developing business with the rural poor in Cao Bang	LUX-DEV		x
	Support the localities in participatory local planning under NTP-SPR 2012-2015 (co-proposed with HELVETAS)	PRPP		x
2013	Improving the voice of ethnic minority through effective network - IVEN (co-proposed with CARE) (3/2013-2/2016)	EU, CARE Denmark	x	
	Improving Livelihood of EM through better Access to Drinking Water & Solar Energy (2013-2015)	Fontana Foundation	x	
	Improving the community based tourism for poverty reduction in Khuoi Khon village – LoLo community (11/2013-10/2014)	Embassy of Luxembourg	x	
	Strengthening Capacity on consultation, supervision and policy responses of ethnic minority in 2 communes in Cao Bang (5/2013- 2/2016)	PARAFF	x	
2014	My culture, my pride (co-proposed with RFI)	EuropeAID		x
	Policy dialogue with ethnic minorities in Cao Bang province (12/2014-11/2015)	Embassy of USA	x	
	Supporting the implementation of Law on Citizen Reception	USAID	On-going	
	Improving Livelihood of ethnic minority through community-based tourism - CRED (2015-2018)	HELVETAS	On-going	
TOTAL			5	5

At the point LIVE project completed in December 2014, DECEN has been implementing other small-scale on-going projects, naming IVEN (up to February 2016), Watsan & Solar lamps in Khanh Xuan commune (up to 2015), and Strengthening Capacity on consultation, supervision and policy responses of ethnic minority in 2 communes in Cao Bang (up to February 2016). The mobilization and implementation of the above-mentioned projects reflected the great efforts made by DECEN in fundraising, with proven improved capacity and recognition by various donors.

3.3 Networking, partnership and visibility

As the first LNGO established and working in Cao Bang, DECEN in addition to maintained and further developed working relationship with government authorities from communes to provincial levels has also engaged in broader network of VNGOs and thematic working groups, such as NorthNet, VNGO-FLEGT and VNGO-Climate Change. All the efforts have resulted in the establishment of partnership between DECEN and other organisations and donors, such as CARE International in Viet Nam, Embassy of United States.

The MTR has confirmed that DECEN has found entry point to participate in local and provincial meetings “to discuss issues concerning poverty, vulnerability and exclusion experienced by local communities, and actively participated in several workshops, meetings, training events for deepening knowledge and advocating changes in policies and strategies that affect lives of poor and excluded people”. The organization had chance to involve in the discussion on the implementation of Program 135 in Cao Bang, exploring a chance to introduce the successful WATSAN modality and approach to the upcoming development initiatives.

NorthNet, the VNGO community in the Northern Viet Nam, has recognized the contribution that DECEN has made in addressing critical issues concerning vulnerability and exclusion faced by ethnic minority communities in the Northern upland region. DECEN has participated actively in the discussion and elaboration of the long-term strategy for NorthNet and was also benefited from capacity building activities within the network, such as training on right-based approach and multi culture, or policy advocacy. The active participation and partnership development within the network has also enabled DECEN to win the bid to implement a part of IVEN project in Cao Bang. DECEN Director was also voted by the network member organizations to be the President of NorthNet for two consecutive terms.

Besides, being aware of the importance to improve the organizational capacity and staff competency, DECEN staff have attended in a number of other related workshops and knowledge sharing events on various topics, such as Fund Raising, Personal Management, Water Resource Management; Forestry Governance, Value Chains & Market Development Approach, Strengthening Access to Funding sources of LNGOs. Knowledge gained from such events contributes to improvement of the DECEN staff capacities for application in the daily work and for writing proposals.

A staff member of DECEN in charge of communication issues also support the management in searching and updating information from the reliable networks, setting up an information system in operating to ensure all staff are equal to access related information. In addition to the organisation’s official website developed in 2011 (www.decen.org), DECEN has its initial coverage on social media (a Facebook page, linking to the Facebook Page of NorthNet and other development organisations) to communicate to wider audiences on its works, progress, events/activities and impacts to local communities in Cao Bang. The practice has contributed to the visibility of DECEN in the development community.

3.4 Donors' recognition of DECEN performance

Although being a young organization at local level, DECEN has proved itself to be a competent local NGO, which can provide satisfactory services to the donors, both national and international, through its successful implementation of the assigned projects and services in Cao Bang. External annual audit reports also confirmed the transparency and accountability of the organization as indicated in the program performance and financial manuals. These audit reports and evaluation of implementation indicators could be conducted on project based only, since there was no substantial resource for doing it at organizational level.

Information provided by DECEN on the on-going fundraising negotiations and acquisitions with different donors showed that the performance of DECEN in delivering the previous services and projects was highly commendable. The truth and reputation that the organization has built among donor community becomes valuable asset of the organization in moving forward, contributing to the good partnership with HELVETAS, Fontana Foundation, CARE, Lux-Embassy, PARAFF, Lux Development that DECEN has successfully developed.

The MTR and interviews with DECEN management has confirmed the full support and satisfaction from the Provincial External Relation Department on the growing of the organization. DECEN has been developing itself and institutionalizing programs/initiatives in a remote province of Cao Bang where Vietnamese NGOs are not recognized until recently. From interviews of local authorities, it is largely confirmed that DECEN has gained recognition both by the local government in general and the civil society in particular. The fact that DECEN is encouraged to start projects and governance initiatives, and also welcome to explore possibilities for fundraise from local government target programs is an evidence of such recognition. In September 2014, DECEN was also invited by provincial government (Department of Foreign Affairs) to a meeting with potential donors, where it presented potential project concepts to the participants.

Within the obviously limited space, DECEN appears to have developed a good profile and relationship with a range of stakeholders, particularly government institutions at the local level. As it was highlighted earlier, the discussions with government agencies, communal-level authorities, mass-organization leaders, and villagers with a majority of them are poor ethnic minority women has revealed that DECEN is identified as one of the active and dynamic NGOs operating in Cao Bang province.

4 UPCOMING CHALLENGES, DECEN'S RESPONSE AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Upcoming challenges and opportunities upon LIVE completion

When LIVE finished, DECEN will face a big gap of funding for its operation, as budget from LIVE was accounted for more than seventy percent of the organization expenditure. The three small-scale on-going projects can only cover for their activities' costs with very limited or even no contribution to the overhead cost of DECEN. The newly established organization does not have large core funding to cover the existing personnel structure and administration costs, which would result in the reduction of staff right from beginning 2015. Staff have expressed their commitment to stay stand-by and continue working to seek for new funding opportunities, while one staff has made his own plan of leaving DECEN to work for the Government. This would be a threat for DECEN to lose its qualified staff after their capacity has been enhanced with lots of investment during the project time.

Although there are few chances that DECEN management has been approaching for funding, the organization is also affected by the change of the development landscape in Viet Nam, that many donors are reducing their Official Development Assistance (ODA) support and phasing out of the country activities after Viet Nam reached the status of a Lower Middle-Income Country four years ago. Access to funding is increasingly competitive among development actors. It is unclear yet about the future direction beyond 2015 of potential grant funding sources such as the Irish Aid supported the Vietnam Civil Society Facility (VCSF) or the Public Participation and Accountability Facilitation Fund (PARAFF). Therefore DECEN is facing great challenge in ensuring its financial sustainability in the coming years.

However, with recognition of the policy makers and development partners on the fact that: i) poverty is now entrenched in pockets across remote and mountainous areas and mostly within ethnic minority regions¹; ii) the struggle of Viet Nam in achievement of health-related Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) such as HIV and water and sanitation; and iii) the shifting trend of bilateral ODA from large central and provincial programs and large budget support commitments for the government's poverty reduction programs and towards more grant based support, especially for INGOs and LNGOs as well as civil society organisations in general, there are obvious opportunities for LNGOs like DECEN to seek for funding and continue their community support.

Although bilateral agencies may no longer present in Viet Nam, they may continue to be interested in working directly with LNGOs, especially ones focusing at grass-root level like DECEN. With the help of communication means and connection supported by technical solutions, LNGOs could find potential opportunities to participate in thematic and evidence based researches in a broader partnership with development partners and academic institutions.

4.2 Updated thematic focus of DECEN

In such a phasing out scenario of donors, which would discourage competent staff to stay, as well as high competition in bidding for new project proposals, DECEN has sharpened its thematic focuses from the broad original "improved livelihood and access to drinking water & sanitation, promotion of ethnic handicrafts, education, natural resource management and governance". The rationale for the updates was driven mainly by the existing competencies and experience within DECEN and the potential fundraising opportunities as well as current engagement but not a long term strategic vision. As explained above, the shortage of funding sources for a longer-term

¹ HELVETAS Country Strategy 2013-2017

programming has prevented DECEN from doing so. At the moment, the updated thematic focuses of DECEN are:

- ✓ Right to access to information of the highland ethnic minority communities in their own languages
- ✓ Good Governance and ethnic minority voice on Laws (rights & gender, participation, accountability) through networking
- ✓ Safe drinking water for remote & dry areas
- ✓ Mini solar energy for remote areas without national electricity
- ✓ Responsible community – based tourism for ethnic minority poverty reduction

In response to the recommendations of the MTR a year ago, that “greater consideration will need to be given on reducing dependency and building the capacity to fundraise from domestic sources, diversify income streams, be more entrepreneurial and have vigorous financial management systems that are suitable for managing a social enterprise”, DECEN registered for a so called “Social Enterprise” named CraftBelt limited company which focuses on promoting tourism in Cao Bang through community tour, historical tour...etc, in the hope to support the handicraft production chain and contribute back to solve social issues.

The sharpened thematic focuses of DECEN have been discussed during the evaluation, and initially grouped into three major areas:

- i. WATSAN: Based on the rich experience and expertise of DECEN technical team in the field, the organization would like to continue to develop and implement projects on safe and drinking water and sanitation to explore new and innovative household water treatment approaches as well as to promote the innovative idea on responsible tourism, where the community-based tourism combined with community development donation to construct WATSAN schemes for the communities.
- ii. Governance: Continue the engagement at the networks like NorthNet, DECEN would stay close to its mission in working for ethnic minority issues and gender equality, participation and accountability through enhancing the voice of ethnic minority in socio-economic and political process.
- iii. Local Economic Growth: A wide range of livelihood interventions to increase income and security of a large number of ethnic minority households in remote areas in Cao Bang, and to promote value chains of local delicacies and community-based tourism.

4.3 Recommendations

The MTR has recommended DECEN to focus more on (i) revisiting the local context, policies and manuals to ensure their relevance and support changes; (ii) developing a workable capacity development plan primarily based on staff’s actual performance, the future strategic orientation and working approaches; (iii) strengthening the fundraise system; (iv) documenting best practices/models, experience, initiatives, good lessons learnt; (v) exploring and making good preparation for engaging in other pieces of work as a social enterprise; and (vi) developing a comprehensive strategy for the next development period 2015 – 2017. As DECEN had followed up on most of the recommendations, some of the points were still valid to dates, especially in relation to strategic planning and knowledge management, including the finalization of the development strategy and the transformation of experience and skills into tacit knowledge, which can be used for learning, sharing and replication of best practices/models.

The failure to implement all the recommendations from MTR has made DECEN more vulnerable to face the challenges and difficulties in sustaining the organisation, especially at this point of time when the project finishes. Therefore it is more critical to follow up on the below recommendations, in

order to sustain DECEN institutionally, organizationally, and financially in intermediate and longer terms:

- ✓ The organization needs to finalise its medium-term strategic development paper to set out a strategic direction, roadmap, priorities, human resource development, and financial resources projection etc. The updated strategic paper needs to be balanced between acting as a project implementer / service provider and undertaking advocacy and policy dialogue with DECEN's own development vision and agenda.
- ✓ Demonstrate the organization's visibility, profile and cost-effectiveness or higher value for money by appropriate communication materials and publications, through various channels like social media, presentation at networks' event to target audiences such as local leaders, private sector and the public at large.
- ✓ Critically engage in policy dialogues, aiming to fundraise from local government target programs and the corporate sector. The Governance Board, the networks that DECEN is a member, and CEM would be the key actors to drive the process.
- ✓ Continuously develop and maintain the list of concept ideas for new projects/programs under the thematic focus so that it can be quickly matched with the emerging opportunities.
- ✓ Conduct a partnership review and develop a partnership strategy, focus on the like-minded NGOs and donors, seek new partnerships and funding opportunities while remaining true to the organisation's objectives and goals.
- ✓ In case the current structure cannot be financially sustained, DECEN management should consider to adjust the organization structure to multi-task positions and / or to offer part-time basis opportunities for the current staff. All the up-coming opportunities of fundraising should be shared to all staff and engaged them in the proposal development process if possible.