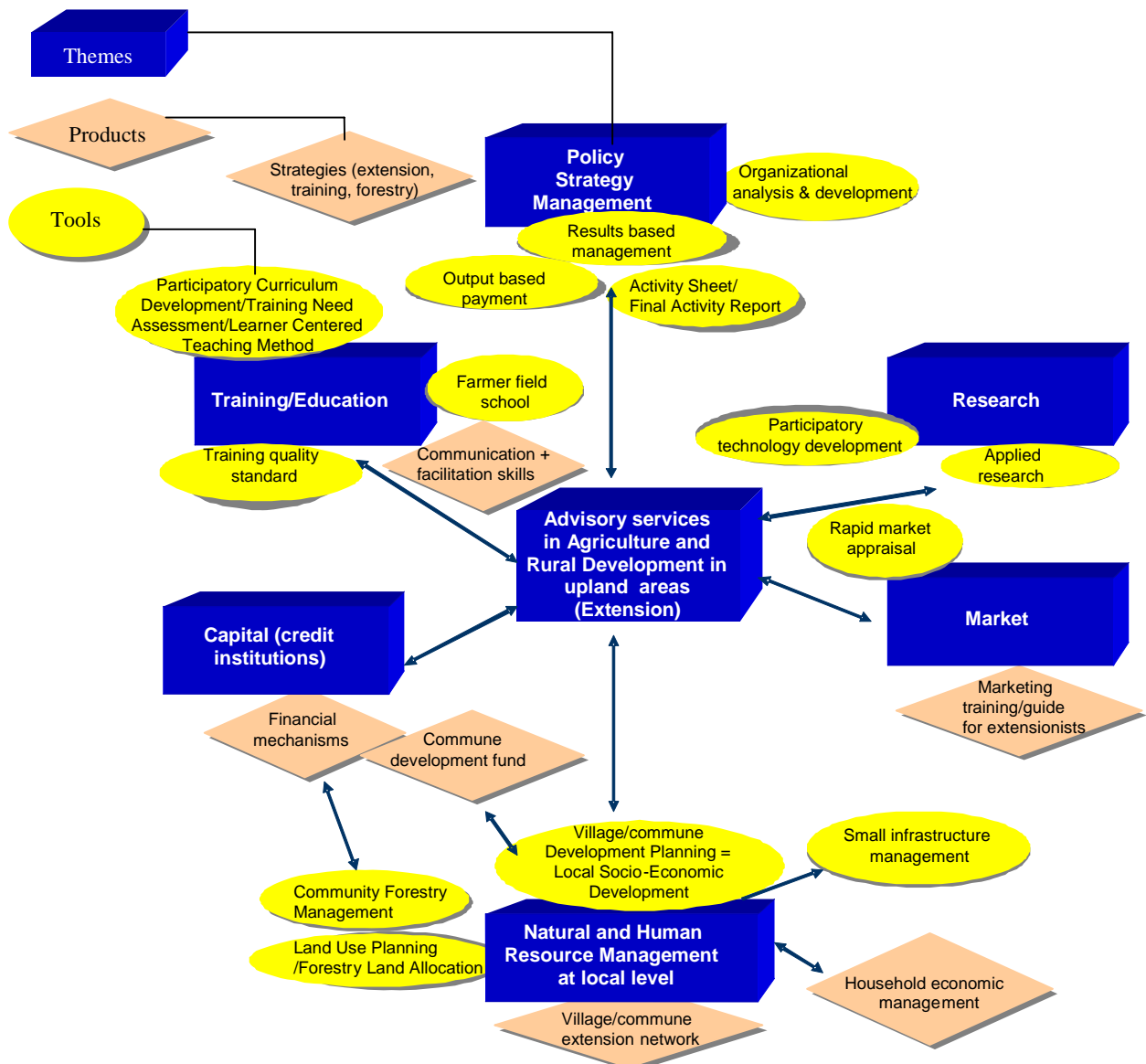


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Five years of experiences of the Extension and Training Support Project for Forestry and Agriculture in the Uplands, ETSP, 2003-2007

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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). 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.*

Institutionally, ETSP is linked to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) and jointly implemented with Dak Nong, Thua Thien Hue and Hoa Binh provinces and their local government agencies in 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 following numbers of activities implemented at provincial/district/commune/village levels:

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 by 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.

At the village, commune, district level the project has taken a systematic approach from planning (**Village/Commune Development Planning, VDP/CDP**) to participatory 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).

In each of the provinces, VDP/CDP results have been used as an entry point to facilitate the link between bottom up planning and demand-driven extension. The evaluation of ETSP shows that the 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 and contributed to effective and efficient use of resources in commune development.

Encouraged by those outcomes, ETSP supported a number of selected activities and best practices to increase the income of farmers and improved capacity of local authorities and extension staff. (1) **Commune Development Fund (CDF)** not only contributed to improvement of financial management capacity at local level, but also directly contributed to an increase of income for farmers. (2) **Community Forestry Management (CFM)** is a participatory extension approach, which has been piloted in all three provinces to move towards a local 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, while in other areas of Vietnam CFM is challenged by improper allocation of forests to individual households. (3) **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. (4) **Participatory extension methods (PTD, FFS)** have been used as field-based learning activities for capacity improvement of both, farmers and local extension staff. These methods have been integrated into provincial extension strategies as good as possible with different results concerning sustainability.

At the provincial level: Organizational analysis and development ('applied PAR' – Public Administrative Reform) has been applied in TT-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.

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 Methodology (LCTM) for local schools.

At the central/policy level: ETSP supported the **National Working Group on Community Forestry Management** in providing inputs to the new Law on Forest Protection and Development. In addition, the project contributed to the development of the Community Forestry Management guideline approved by the Minister of MARD for testing in 40 communes. Besides, some of the ETSP approaches/methods have been embedded into the *Curriculum Standard on Training in Extension* for a nation-wide dissemination by the National Agricultural Extension Center (NAEC) under MARD.

Some lessons learned and outlook towards 2008 to 2010

Central/policy level

Up scaling: ETSP's activities are in line with the 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 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 Department of Forestry, 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 stronger ownership and increased 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 the 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 the 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 improvements. 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 spread the approaches and methods with its own internal human resources. But here again: This needs an affirmative leadership, otherwise established new competence will lie idle.

'Applied' PAR: ETSP focused on government partner's organizational analysis and development (OA/OD). It is essential to link this topic with PAR processes in the provinces to have a better support and broader impact on organizational reforms, improved public service delivery, and on building up an affirmative contingent of cadres and civil servants at all levels. In this context the elaborated OA/OD became a practical 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 main lesson learnt is that the institutionalization process often takes more time than donors can 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 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 to 2010 shall keep track with the impressive economic part.

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 people from the local level). However, it needs more time and efforts to work on changing staff's attitude 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 of the activity and its quality. However, it needs well-defined, clear agreements among contract partners. A strict 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.

Outlook: 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 potential for a wide dissemination.

The objective of PS-ARD is to *contribute to building up effective and efficient decentralized 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 the central level* in the Organizational and Personnel Department (OPD) under MARD.

With this new program approach, the effectiveness and efficiency of SDC/Helvetas support shall be improved by integrating three current projects (two in Cao Bang, 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 Helvetas office. 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.