



HELVETAS
Swiss Intercooperation

VIETNAM

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

**PROJECT FINAL EVALUATION REPORT
WATSAN and HANDICRAFT**

30 November 2014

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CB-GEM	Cao Bang Community based Governance, Extension and Market project
CEMA	Committee of Ethnic Minority Affairs
CIG	Common interest group
DECEN	Cao Bang Community Development Center
LIVE	Improved Livelihood of Ethnic Minorities Program in Cao Bang
LNGO	Local Non-government organization
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PHAST	Participatory Hygiene and Sanitation Transformation
PSARD	Public Service Provision Improvement Program in Agriculture and Rural Development
SEDP	Social and Economic Development Plan
VNGO	Vietnamese Non-government organization
WSHC	Women Sanitation and Hygiene Clubs



TABLE OF CONTENT

1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	5
2 BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION	7
2.1 Cao Bang Province	7
2.2 Project Background	7
2.3 Objective and Scope of the evaluation.....	8
2.4 Evaluation methodology, process and limitation	8
3 WATSAN	10
3.1 Baseline	10
3.2 Findings.....	10
3.3 Effectiveness and efficiency	13
3.4 Impact.....	13
3.5 Sustainability	14
3.6 Recommendations	15
4 HANDICRAFT.....	17
4.1 Baseline	17
4.2 Findings.....	17
4.3 Effectiveness and efficiency	20
4.4 Impact.....	20
4.5 Sustainability	22
4.6 Recommendations	22

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 first local NGO established in Cao Bang province. The project's objectives are to improve livelihoods of ethnic minorities living in remote and upland areas 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 achievements up to date.

This Project Final Evaluation mainly focused on the first two components of the original LIVE, which had been split into a separate project of the same name in 2011. By assessing the effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability of the project, the final evaluation was to identify lessons on supporting model, implementation mechanism and management efficiency and to provide recommendations on potential actions to contribute to the poverty reduction in Cao Bang province. The evaluation for the third component, which was to strengthen the Local NGO - Cao Bang Community Development Center (DECEN) will be presented in a separate report.

The first component – WATSAN – was designed and implemented to provide clean water and sanity as basic needs for human consumption in the 5 selected communes of 4 districts, covering about 10,000 men/women ethnic minority population. The interventions aimed to increase awareness on the right to water and sanitation and to improve access to safe water and sanitation facilities. With the certain knowledge of hygiene & sanitation obtained from the project, combining with the easier access to water, people in project area have made positive changes in hygiene and sanitation practices at home and community. They are benefiting from better access to drinking water and sanitation facilities support by LIVE. The DECEN's approach in providing project supports has promoted the ownership of the community and each household thus they were willing to mobilize maximum local resources/assets to contribute to the project. This made LIVE become very cost-effective project, with high level of beneficiaries' satisfaction, because local people, especially for women and children, have saved great deal of time and effort in fetching water.

With the proven success of WATSAN modality and approach, the results should be documented for the purpose of policy advocacy and fundraising for replication in Cao Bang province. DECEN has good position to find an entry point for engaging with the current development initiatives in the province.

The second component – HANDICRAFT – was designed based on the previous results of the Cao Bang Community based Governance, Extension and Market (CB-GEM) project, aiming to support ethnic minority women to gain additional income through participation and improved positions in the handicraft value chains and at the same time to preserve its traditional culture. Value chain approach is applied in order to identify and understand various actors of different links at different stages of the chain, from material supply to production and trading, where key issues for improvement were analyzed and identified. The original ambitious project design in touching all stages of two value chains on handicraft and traditional paper (Do paper) had been adjusted to focus only on the handicraft one.

Six ethnic minority women handicraft groups have been established and received technical support and capacity building, which was tailored-made for them based on preferences, capacity and resource availability. In addressing the deep-rooted challenges of the handicraft sector, a flexible approach has been applied during project implementation, where the need identified or problems arise, the support will be amended and focused. Although not yet becoming the main source of



income for the ethnic minority women who are the CIGs members, the handicraft work proved to be potential opportunities for them to generate income. The groups have been equipped with skills, knowledge and tools to improve their production and to establish relationships with customers. With several opportunities to learn new skills and to have jobs with income, the women members have become much more confident not only at home but also at community. They do not only contribute better to the family economy but also participate in the decision making process in the village more confidently.

Although with significant achievement and good signals, the six ethnic minority women handicraft groups are still not strong enough in terms of technical, management and financial capacity to sustain the handicraft value chain. They need to be supported for longer term to strengthen the results and investment efforts, especially on accessing market and controlling quality of handicraft products. The handicraft value chain with the clear advantages of the handicraft groups should be linked to the community based tourism and tourism /cultural promotion initiatives at provincial level.

2 BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

2.1 Cao Bang Province

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 save water for dry season. The problem of shortage water usage through generations often comes along with problems of hygiene and sanitation.

2.2 Project Background

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 (EM) in Cao Bang through better access to water and market for their handicraft products"; and ii) the last component became "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. 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.

The WATSAN component has been implemented in five communes - Keo Yen of Ha Quang district, Trieu Nguyen of Nguyen Binh district and Phan Thanh, Kim Cuc, Khanh Xuan of Bao Lac district, targeting men and women of most disadvantaged ethnic minority people of H'mong, Dzao, LoLo, San Chi, Tay and Nung groups. Two communes in Bao Lac were combined with Handicraft components.

The HANDICRAFT component has been implemented in six communes - Phuc Sen, Quoc Dan of Quang Uyen district, Phan Thanh, Kim Cuc of Bao Lac district, Quang Lam of Bao Lam district and Hoa Tham of Nguyen Binh district and 2 district EM boarding school of Bao Lac and Bao Lam, targeting ethnic minority women and school students of H'mong, Dzao Tien, Red Dzao, LoLo, and Nung groups.

2.3 Objective and Scope of the evaluation

This project final evaluation for LIVE, in order to systematically analyze the project achievement up to date, was conducted by an independent consultant in close coordination with HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation in Viet Nam and the LIVE implementing partner - DECEN. By assessing the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability of the project, the exercise was to identify lessons on supporting model, implementation mechanism and management efficiency and to provide recommendations on potential actions to contribute to the poverty reduction and strengthened civil society in Cao Bang province.

The results and achievements of the project to the date of evaluation have been reviewed and assessed, with considerations on: a) local contexts of Cao Bang province, including livelihood of local ethnic minorities regarding access to water and sanitation; market for ethnic handicraft (handicraft value chain); and relevant development projects/programs; b) HELVETAS's core areas of intervention in Cao Bang province in terms of: water and sanitation access (by ethnic minorities in remote areas in five communes of 3 districts); value chain for local ethnic handicrafts (support to 6 communes in 4 districts and two district EM boarding schools); and organizational development of DECEN as the precondition for the success of project implementation; and c) the allocation and management of project's resources.

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 visit to five communes in the four districts, those were selected to represent for the two LIVE components with different geo-topographic features and ethnic women handicraft groups.



Map of field missions

Key informants for the final evaluation include: i) HELVETAS's Country Director, LIVE Project Manager, PSARD Coordinator and Human Resource 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 were selected and planned based on logistic reasons and more importantly, the representative characteristics in terms of geo-topography and ethnicity.

Data collected was analyzed 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 chapters including the introductory one.

- 1. Chapter One presents the Cao Bang basic information as project development context; the project background; objective and scope; methodology, process and limitation of the evaluation.*
- 2. Chapter Two presents the findings, assessment and recommendation for the WATSAN component.*
- 3. Chapter Three presents the findings, assessment and recommendation for the HANDICRAFT component.*

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

3 WATSAN

3.1 Baseline

About 10,000 men/women population of mainly five ethnic minority groups (Tay, Nung, Hmong, Dzao, LoLo) from all 56 upland villages in 5 selected communes of 4 districts had been identified as direct beneficiaries of the WATSAN component. The selected communes represented for geo-topography feature of Cao Bang province: two communes in Bao Lac district are earth-type mountainous, while the other two in Ha Quang and one in Nguyen Binh are rocky mountainous. All the four communes have high percentage of ethnic minorities facing difficulties with access to drinking water and hygienic sanitation while there were very few effective projects in place to address the problems at the time of project commencement.

The baseline survey conducted by DECEN at the beginning of LIVE in 2011 on drinking water and sanitation in the five project communes shows the evidence on:

- Severe lack of water for drinking, especially during dry season, resulted in limited opportunity for livelihood (e.g. livestock raising and cultivation) and hygienic sanitation practice
- Previous support by national programs (Program 135 and Program 134) on WATSAN was not effective and sustained due to the drinking water scheme designs not suitable to the geo-topography condition.
- Awareness of people on water right and hygienic sanitation was very limited or even not existed.
- There were problem with polluted environment in the village caused by livestock waste and weak awareness of villagers on sanitation.



If reflect to the definition¹ of United Nation on clean water and sanity as basic needs for human consumption, all the project communes were extremely far from the criterions.

3.2 Findings

This session was evaluated not only against the project outcome and output indicators, but also looking deeper on the changes created by the project interventions and added on factors contributing to the achievement of project results.

With the overall goal of LIVE that “Livelihoods of ethnic minorities living in remote and upland areas in Cao Bang are improved”, the outcome objective of WATSAN component was “Access to water and sanitation of local people, especially for poor ethnic minorities, is improved”. The interventions aimed to increase awareness on the right to water and sanitation and to improve access to safe water and sanitation facilities.

“Awareness on the right to water and sanitation increased”

¹ ..”every human being have the right to access to sufficient^a water. The usage of water should be satisfied four criterions: safe, acceptable, affordable^b and physically accessible”^c (UN, 2013) (a) 50 liters of water is the minimum amount of water a person should be able to consume per day; (b) the cost of basic water consumption should not exceed 3% of household income; (c) the water source has to be within 1,000 meters and the collection time should not exceed 30 minutes)

The field evaluation has examined wherever possible the knowledge and awareness of local people on water, hygiene and sanitation. All the informants showed certain knowledge of hygiene & sanitation, combining with the easier access to water, thus has led to the change in hygiene and sanitation practices at home and community. The knowledge they obtained comes from various activities conducted by the project, including awareness raising campaigns; the application of PHAST (Participatory Hygiene and Sanitation Transformation - a behavior change communication approach); caravan series on hygiene and sanitation.

LIVE has conducted PHAST communication Training of Trainers to the local facilitators who came from the village and commune level. Then the facilitators from the respective villages/communes spent 4 full days within one month (one day per week) for the discussions with their villagers in their own ethnic languages. Participants came from every family in the village had jointly elaborated and developed an action plan which reflects their priorities on drinking water, hygiene and sanitation; the implementation plans for the prioritized construction and a monitoring plan. In all plans, there was a prioritized need on construction of small-scale drinking water (both group of households and individual household level) and building of household latrines.



Local people still remember well about the caravan series to raise awareness on the right to water and sanitation organized for local people from the surrounding villages, teachers and students of primary & lower secondary schools and commune cadres. All the caravan's activities like singing, poetries and dramas performance by local people and students; or the rewarded questions & answers; and collectively cleaning the villages, were highly participated by audiences. Issues related to drinking water and sanitation like how to keep water tanks, latrines and household/ village environment clean, to protect forests, not to use chemicals, not to leave litters and to wash hands with soap were the key contents to help raising awareness for local people.

Added-on to the project design, the establishment of the Women Sanitation and Hygiene Clubs (WSHC) at village level was encouraged by the project with a modest financial support saved from cost-effective spending at other budget lines. The village and commune Women Union (WU) took up the significant momentum on WATSAN increased awareness of local people to integrate in their national-led program on promoting rural households' "five NO & three CLEAN"² at village level. The WSHCs led by WU have stirred up the movement on sanitation by adapting the slogan into their own villages with more specific criteria, such as clean source of water, clean livestock cages, etc. A competition among households (HH) and among villages was organized every six month with cash awards (equivalent to approximately 25 USD/HH award and 100 USD/village award).

At the time of the evaluation, although WATSAN booklets/handbooks developed and designed, they have not yet been distributed to share good experiences, lessons-learnt and even failures if any to other projects, organisations and other provinces. The publication planned to be done by the end of 2014.

² Five NO: No poverty, no law violation, no domestic violence, no third child, no malnutrition children and school drop-out; three CLEAN: clean house, clean kitchen, clean village road

“Access to safe water and sanitation facilities improved”

The first significant recognition for the project support is the ownership of beneficiaries on the facilities supported. As the PHAST communication trainings went first, came up with prioritized need on construction of small-scale drinking water (both group of households and individual household level) and building of household latrines, the technical surveys followed in a participatory manner where local people and commune staff were facilitated by DECEN staff to come to unanimity of all pipe-lines, location of tanks and contributions by local people. There were HH group and HH individual scales systems on gravity basis, which include intakes, pipeline systems, storage tanks and stand-posts. Unlike other national-wide development project and programs, LIVE did not fix the WATSAN technical options but facilitated the consultation process so that the community made their choice, depending on water scarcity in existed water resources enough for only one or a group of HHs.

The support to access to water sources had covered all HHs in the project communes, attributed by great effort of DECEN technical staff, who enabled the participation and mobilization of local resources. This is even more meaningful in the context that the construction of such schemes was done in remote highland villages with scattered locations, high cost for transportation of construction materials and difficult to access during rainy season while facing scarcity of water for construction during the dry season. Despite the challenges, LIVE has successfully reached its target by taking initiatives such as providing local potential masons with 7-day on-the-job-training (combined drinking water topic with the training on construction of latrines) in order to have a pool of skilled laborers in the locality. The HHs also made contribution in terms of labour and additional materials for the latrines.



During project implementation, the HH latrines have drawn less interest by local stakeholders comparing to other interventions. The reasons included the specific geo-topographic conditions where most of houses scattered in a large area as well as the need for HH latrines had to keep lower than other extreme needs such as food, water and warm clothes. Even though, the target number set in the project log-frame was higher than plan (from 450 to 584 HHs) because DECEN has mobilized more contribution from HHs to build up the wall of the latrines while the project support the construction of the two latrine chambers. The resources saved from the figures planned for HH latrines were reallocated to the drinking water schemes.

The model of eco-sand filters has been dropped for one-fourth of the target number at the later phase of the project due to unavailability of local materials, which led to high-cost of investment. Similarly to the need for HH latrines, the need for safe water existed, but had to keep lower compare to the need for water access, because the extreme scarcity. The supported drinking water schemes is believed to preserve the quality of water sources (mainly from the mountain), which is not yet becoming the issue of water quality at the time of the project. However, in the longer run, when all the water tanks and storage have been in use for longer time and the access to water source sustain, the issue of safe water would need to be revisited.

LIVE also introduce the Pilot biogas plants to the three project communes with the objective to change the cooking stove practice, improving environment and save energy cost for the HHs. However, the model is only suitable for better-off HHs, who should have a certain number of livestock (e.g 3 pigs and 2 cows



at least) and water supply need to be enormous. Therefore, the project only attempted to achieve 30 schemes in the original plan and actually there are 36 schemes in place and functioning at the evaluation time. The self-contribution of 50 percent to build the scheme, which was equivalent to approximately 300 USD / HH scheme at the project time was unaffordable by majority of HHs in the project areas. Apart from affordability, availability of technicians who are able to construct the scheme is another issue. Although receiving on-the-job training from the project, local technicians have still not been confident enough to construct the bio-gas plants, but rely on the technicians from other district because the biogas plant construction technique is quite complicated.

Except the cooperation with Red Cross on using their the PHAST training materials and core facilitators, specific partnership/cooperation not yet established nor strengthened with other players such as District People's Committee, local Health Department, Red Cross, although they collaborated with DECEN whenever possible. The recognition on the WATSAN model promoted by LIVE and the role of DECEN has not been strengthened to the level that the project should have received, especially from the Provincial Water & Sanitation Centre, whose mandate as a state management agency is to improve WATSAN conditions for local people.

3.3 Effectiveness and efficiency

Regarding the above mentioned findings and project data recorded in the monitoring matrix against outcome and output indicators, the WATSAN activities and work plans have led to planned results and reached objectives. DECEN has maximized the project investment by making timely technical adjustments on the WATSAN models based on HHs' geo-conditions and needs as well as applying the "do-together" approach.

The semi-structure interviews and meetings with local authorities and HH beneficiaries showed very high satisfaction to the value created by the project, in terms of quality of the WATSAN schemes as well as the cost-effectiveness of the construction. The way the project implementer (DECEN) providing support has promoted the ownership by the community and each household thus they were willing to mobilize maximum local resources/assets to contribute to the project. This made LIVE become very cost-effective project, when local people after being trained can help each other to build water tanks with much cheaper cost. So the remaining budget can be supported for more HHs.

With high level of expertise and experience in implementing WATSAN projects within DECEN, the planned resources, both human and financial, were appropriate for the project implementation. Very high credit/appraisal was given by local stakeholders to DECEN project team in terms of resource planning, technical support and implementation. The designs of household-level tanks (brick tanks for the places with the gravity source and Ferro-cement tanks for rocky dry areas where there is only one water source, i.e. rain water), small drinking water system, bio-sand filter and latrine were appraised to be suitable to the remote areas of the project locations.

Within the three year time scale of the project, although facing a number of challenges, the WATSAN activities were implemented against the plan. The challenges and difficulties had been identified and addressed, such as applying appropriate method (PHAST) to overcome language barrier/illiteracy, using local trainers to do the communication sessions in their own languages or mobilizing local commune and village staff to coach them during implementation.

3.4 Impact

Both ethnic minority men and women are benefiting from better access to drinking water and

sanitation facilities supported by LIVE. Local people have saved great deal of time and effort in fetching water, especially for women and children, so that they can do other income generation activities or not to drop out from school. From the fact that few years before, a bowl of water could be used to wash their rice, then to clean their vegetables before cooking, then to wash their hands and finally to feed their animals, it can be said that accessing to water system makes lives of people in these locations much easier and healthier. HHs nowadays have been raising more livestock and growing more vegetables around the house. This can be seen obviously at the villages where most of HHs having vegetable gardens and water tanks for human use while the large pan that they used before for this purpose now becomes the water feeding tray for livestock (see photo).



In short, the factors of success for WATSAN component can be highlighted as:

- High ownership of local stakeholders
- Cost-effective technical interventions, using available local resources
- Need-based, participatory and do-together approach
- Effective mobilisation of local resources
- Sustainable technical transfer
- Efficient project management

The supported model of HH latrines has been recognized by local people in addressing the environment pollution around the houses. Villagers were eager to learn the know-how from the construction training and their neighbors to build up their own systems. The local skilled laborers trained by the project are also welcomed by the local communities and authorities. Together with the active participation of community in awareness raising on sanitation and hygiene, firstly initiated by the project and then followed-up by the WHSCs, support from LIVE was the driver for positive changes in hygiene and sanitation practices of local people.

However, although the baseline survey conducted by DECEN at the beginning of the project showed the logical correlation between the poor hygienic sanitation and the diseases recorded at local health clinics, more study needed to find evidence on health improvement by WATSAN practices, to confirm the statement of local villagers on the improvement of their health after they have more water in house to use daily and to practice hygienic sanitation.

3.5 Sustainability

With the ownership of the beneficiaries manifested by their full participation in the project activities, the WATSAN constructions are not only of good quality but also can be used very long as single or a group of HHs involved directly in the construction can easily manage the operation and repair when there is problem. Having local construction capacities in the locality, people do not have to depend to the outside service providers as other government projects. The availability of local technicians with new techniques on WATSAN constructions was confirmed, except building biogas plants that needs more practicing and coaching.

LIVE becomes a good example of local resource mobilization, which built up ownership and confidence not only for the villagers themselves but also local authorities. The villagers have learned the know-how from supported families and built their sanity systems by themselves at the cheapest. The local authorities expressed their confidence in managing cost-effective community schemes

(e.g PSARD constructions or WATSAN) if they were given other chances, especially after they made some analysis and comparison of LIVE's approach and results to other costly schemes by higher authorities/donors. However it is still not clear yet on how to engage in the future donor or government development programs or to scale up/replicate the successful WATSAN models.

With strong participation of women in all villages, the continuation of the "Women Sanitation and Hygiene Clubs" led initiative has been confirmed by the local Women Union leaders as the model helps to strengthen the effect of their nationwide movement on "Five NO and Three CLEAN", as it is to ensure awareness on hygiene and sanitation of local people turning into practices and proper behavior changes in the longer run. This model is also fully supported by local authorities at village and commune level, even the awards would not been sponsored any more by the project.

3.6 Recommendations

The recommendations in this report are for the HELVETAS, DECEN to make use of the project's results as well as to other development actors in Cao Bang and other provinces to refer to:

- Knowledge management: The project results regarding the successful WATSAN models should be documented, both in terms of technical solutions and the implementation approach and process. The lessons learnt should emphasize on the unique and specific achievements brought about by the project, and the factors of success.
- The formats of documentation should be selected and developed for specific audiences and purposes.
- The evidence for success should be communicated for the purpose of policy advocacy and fundraising through the network / forum, such as the current engagement by DECEN in the NorthNet; Climate Change Forum.
- The WATSAN modality and approach should be transferred and expanded to the current development initiatives in Cao Bang to replicate to other districts where applicable and also to introduce to other provinces. There are opportunities to make a linkage to PSARD, the current HELVETAS-run project in Cao Bang, as well as the national Program 135 with the likely trend to decentralize about thirty percent of the budget to local authorities. The Governance Board of DECEN and good relationship of DECEN with the provincial Committee of Ethnic Minority Affairs (CEMA) should be helpful in facilitating the process.
- The use of social media/network should be encouraged to share the lesson learnt, evidence of impact and to initiate follow-up concerns and interest from audience in order to widen opportunity for policy advocacy and fundraising.
- DECEN should develop new concept ideas taking into account the lesson learnt and experience, to sustain the results (as a modality using right-based, anthropology approach). The list of concept ideas should be made available for HELVETAS and DECEN to refer to easily during discussions on new funding opportunities with concerned stakeholders/development partners.
- Partnership / Cooperation with relevant partners should be developed, using the available expertise and experience on WATSAN implementation as strong value of the organization.
- The benefit, demand for as well as the availability of technical expertise and various ways of resource mobilization for construction of micro and small scale WATSAN schemes are clearly favorable conditions for replication. New modality on responsible tourism where tourists can contribute their labor and finance to build WATSAN schemes for communities should be studied and developed into detailed concept notes/projects proposal for DECEN to



explore and negotiate with concerned partners (travel agencies, sponsors, local beneficiaries, the government mandate, etc). A list of possible beneficiaries at selected villages and communes with visualized details and needs assessed should be made available for planning and for tourists/sponsors to consider.

4 HANDICRAFT

4.1 Baseline

By the time of the project design, with the distance of 286km north from Hanoi, it took more than 10 hours by public bus to reach the provincial capital of Cao Bang, which implied for high transportation costs and other burdens on business development, trade and tourism promotion. Although there was a wide range of handicrafts such as hemp and cotton fabrics, embroideries, etc produced especially by women from the different ethnic groups, most of the textiles was processed by women during their spare time for home consumption driven by their specific tradition. With the intensively expansion of Chinese cheap textiles, the traditional handicraft was at threat. There were no major investments planned by neither government nor any development partners of Cao Bang except some initial effort made by the marketing component of the HELVETAS funded CB-GEM project (2006-2011) to screen and identify the potential for different traditional handicrafts development purposely to generate more income for local poor people, especially for ethnic women. The findings showed that income from handicraft can be substantial in a rural household economy and there are niche markets both in Vietnam and abroad for handmade and natural textiles and these markets have a strong potential to increase in the future if the problems related to product development, quality control, production management could be addressed.

HELVETAS had conducted studies on weaving and embroidery by Tay women in Phu Ngoc Commune (Ha Quang District), batik and embroidery by Dao Tien women in Hoa Tham Commune (Nguyen Binh District), indigo dyed cotton textile by Tay and Nung women at Khao Village, Phuc Sen Commune (Quang Uyen District), embroidery and hemp textile by H'Mong women at Phan Thanh Commune (Bao Lac District), cotton textile by Lolo women at Khuoi Khon Village, Hong Tri Commune (Bao Lac District). The study found that the ethnic women's group's production capacity initially was very limited, they made weaving and embroidering items just for their own consumption or for relatives and neighbors. The concept of market driven production was completely new to them, thus the ethnic minority women were not familiar with requirements of production and marketing chain, where they would face pressures by clients in terms of ensuring product quality, quantity and time for products delivery. Although with some potential, handicraft had never been a source of income for the HHs. In addition, since handicraft activities were done by individual women at home, there was little effective exchange and experience sharing to improve their products.

4.2 Findings

With the aim to support ethnic minority women to gain additional income through participation and improved positions in the handicraft value chain and at the same time to preserve its traditional culture, the Handicraft component in LIVE was designed based on previous study results of the CB-GEM project. Value chain approach is applied in order to identify and understand various actors of different links at different stages of the chain, from material supply to production and trading, where key issues for improvement were analyzed and identified.

The original project design was quite ambitious in touching all stages of two value chains on handicraft and traditional paper (Do paper), from material cultivation and production to market access and business registration of the production groups. However after looking deeper on the market potential, it was decided to drop the paper value chain but focus only on the handicraft development. This led to the adjustment of project output indicators, such as expected number of

people in the chains, or expected number of people having handicraft as a permanent job, number of national traders involved, etc.

The initial intervention that tested and decided was the establishment of six ethnic minority women handicraft groups (Nung, two groups of Dzao Tien and Red Dzao, LoLo, two H'mong groups at different locations) with semi-finished and finished products originated from hemp depending on their specific features, preference and capacity. They were called **common interest groups (CIGs)**, the institutional set up that helped them to self-organize toward market orientation and position themselves in the chain more obviously. As a group, the CIGs received and absorbed technical support from the project a lot easier. The different CIGs participated in different stages of the production chain (e.g Lo Lo, Hmong and Nung on embroidery).



Typical embroidery patterns of Nung, LoLo, Dzao and H'Mong ethnic minority groups

The technical support and capacity building were tailored made to each CIGs according to their preferences, capacity and resource availability. The Nung and Dzao CIGs were trained intensively on product development, with 4 new types of products developed and accepted by some clients such as cute hemp animals, accessories (lucky charms, bracelets), small purses in hemp, home decors (beeswax wall hanger). The Nung, Hmong and Dzao CIGs were trained on advanced tailoring while the Dzao and LoLo had chances to visit the end-products selling at big stores in Ha Noi.

Besides, all of the groups were trained and coached on project, financial management and organizational skills. The session of financial and marketing training covered expense versus profit analyses; cost price calculation; product quality; price competition; product promotion; and business means balance. To help the groups maintain knowledge on natural dyeing and to leverage the value of handicraft products to customers, a brochure documenting procedures of natural dyeing in different local materials in Cao Bang (such as indigo, tea, "cham che", "cu nau", qua bang") was developed and printed.



The CIGs on training on dyeing and designing

However with the fact that several CIG members were illiterate, the Reflect class had been designed to help illiterates, especially the ethnic minority women in reading and writing Vietnamese, as a precondition for them to absorb knowledge transferred from the project and become more confident to participate in the chain. The technical materials and marketing guidelines had been adapted to low education & illiterate handicraft producers by making them visualized with real samples catalogues. A catalogue on decorative patterns of textile in Cao Bang has been considered to be developed but not yet available in printed version, to avoid the short life span of the real sample catalogues (easily missing pages / samples over time).

The tools for textile product development have been using jointly by CIGs members. In addition to the individual toolkits (includes weaving tool, iron, scissors, dyeing tool, etc), three CIGs with tailoring capacity were partly supported with sewing machines, that they made self-contribution for a half.

Another intervention to support the ethnic minority women is provision of micro-credit. All CIG group members have accessed the revolving funds or self-help groups to invest on their own HH economic activities and the Revolving fund of CIGs was preserved at the time of evaluation. Revolving fund provides non-interest loan to buy raw materials and to make some advancement for members or internal lending activities, which gained them experience in financial management. Women used the small loans mainly for small economic activities.

As the key products made by the CIGs are semi-finished and finished products from hemp, the CIGs need sustainable supply sources of materials. After more than three years of LIVE support, the volume of handicraft material cultivated has been increased up to sufficient source for the existing production capacity when H'Mong group has recovered hemp planting. With modest investment on the seeding, they produced good quality of seedlings and raw materials accepted by the customers in the chain. The CIGs actually did not need training on cotton/hemp cultivation technique, as the indigenous knowledge of cultivation does exist, therefore the designed activities on either teaching them the technique and making video on it were dropped. The resource had been reallocated to buying more seeds for expanding the volume.

The project also attempted to set up handicraft selling points in Cao Bang (both at sites and in the Cao Bang city) to exhibit products such as table runners, cushion covers, and some accessories such as: small bag, purses... The fact showed that the local shop at sites where many tourists stop had better sale compared to the ones in the city hotels or at the village, where the ethnic people could not explain properly about the product value.

Turnover of handicraft CIGs increased annually, that the average monthly income from handicraft of CIGs members in 2013 and 2014 is about 300.000 VND ~ 15 USD, in comparison to nothing before. However, the ambitious original target indicator that the key members of CIGs consider handicraft as permanent job could not be reached. Handicraft works are still the secondary occupation to farming. Although the CIGs have established good market connection with a number of regular clients and the quality of handicraft products somehow accepted by those clients, orders were often limited in quantity and, in some cases, low prices compared to production costs were not attractive enough for the CIGs to keep the work as the main source of income. As often busy with farming, few CIGs members would feel that the handicraft works, especially when they had to meet deadline of clients' orders, were overload to them personally.

All the six CIGs established have been functioning at different levels of technical and management capacity. None of them by the end of the project is deemed self-sustained or has demand to obtain legal entity. However, the Nung ethnic handicraft who is most competent has been recently offered technical support by Craftlink, a well-established local brand to become its supply. This is evident to demonstrated impacts by the program and could be a solution to help sustain it. On the other hand,

by Vietnamese law the CIG is not recognized as a legal entity and therefore it is not feasible for the CIG to be certified as the member of WFTO as initially targeted.

DECEN staff provided intensive technical and methodological support, coaching and monitoring on marketing and management skills; on fair trade principals; and linking the group to clients etc. The building of Handicraft Houses in Hoa Tham and Na Kieng with the fund raised from Cao Bang Annual Bazaars 2012 and 2013 in Ho Chi Minh City was the most tangible evidence for the efforts of DECEN in facilitating the market access process. In addition, Craftbelt has been chosen to be the trademark for handicraft products made by the CIGs. Craftbelt, as a social enterprise by its call, was established by DECEN firstly to play the role of intermediary to support the CIGs in negotiation with customers and to create a trademark to the products. Towards the new potential market opportunities (such as the approaching by Craftlink or some new customers), the CIGs were encouraged to create their own connection.

4.3 Effectiveness and efficiency

The handicraft activities and work plans have not led to planned results and reached objectives if evaluating the original design and against outcome/output indicators, due to the ambitious and unrealistic objectives set up (e.g to develop 2 value chains - handicraft and Paper). But necessary adjustment had been made timely. The project decided to drop the Paper value chain based on the previous assessment to explain why local paper producers/authorities were not interested.

The planned resources (human and financial) seem inadequate for the ambitious project objectives. However resources have been spent effectively and wisely during project implementation to promote the value chain. More time and effort would be needed to ensure the achievement of objectives, due to deep-rooted challenges relating to handicraft development, such as limited market opportunities, unattractive embroideries; low weaving and tailoring skills, lack of materials, high production cost, etc.

The CIGs proved to be an effective institutional set up to support ethnic minority women of the same ethnicity to participate in production chain as well as enhancing their access to market and negotiation power, especially after the temporary Handicraft houses were built so that they have a place to work together.

The project at design employed clear approach focused on production, processing and market access, yet progress has been slowly observed. In order to tackle emerging difficulties and challenges along the implementation process, the approach has been applied in a flexible and accommodating way, which implies where the need identified or problems arise, the support will be amended and focused. The project works directly with handicraft women groups, with limited involvement of commune Women's Union (WU) and authorities, except for ad-hoc collaboration when required by DECEN. DECEN followed different stages of the value chain, and specific project support and intervention were identified and implemented wherever appropriated. The support sometimes was very intensive for specific stage of the chain, and gradually reduced when the groups became more technically skillful and proactive in ordering inputs, and contact with customers.

4.4 Impact

Although not yet becoming the main source of income for the ethnic minority women who are the CIGs members, the handicraft work proved to be potential opportunities for them to generate income. Comparing the only source of income from farming before, by the time the project finished,

a member of the Nung group can earn about 500.000 VND (equivalent to 24 USD) each month from selling their tailored handcraft products. Other members of H'mong and Dao groups, who mainly produce the handcraft materials, earn less ranging from 300.00- 400.000 VND per month. This makes the target women groups become more financially independent and improve their voice in the family. Some of them have invested their income from handcraft, combining with the obtained revolving funds, into livestock, pig and chicken raising.

The women handcraft groups have been equipped with skills, knowledge and tools to improve their production, to establish relationships with customers. In terms of design and colour matching technique, the professional support for handcraft products' development to the groups from time to time has improved the skills to produce more eye-catching layouts, better colour combinations to suit customers' preference. Based on the traditional skills and cultural traits of each group, various products have been developed to meet the need of contemporary life in different targeted markets. With new skills and knowledge and embroidery design that was taught to the groups, the members to some extent have successfully applied them on different products and orders. The products with new embroidery patterns and design were sold out with significant revenue ever, up to nearly one thousand USD for one order in the last spring. Although they could complete the order only with support from the project, now they have the contact from a number of regular customers for direct communication.



The CIGs with new techniques

In addition, participation in the CIGs, with several opportunities to learn new skills, to have jobs with income, to learn read and write at the Reflect classes, to go to big cities for study visit and attend the trade fairs, the women members have become much more confident not only at home but also at community. They do not only contribute better to the family economy but to participate in the decision making process in the village more confidently.

The reputation on Cao Bang handcraft has been recognized through the yearly traditional handcraft Bazaars in Ho Chi Minh City, as well as when the Nung handcraft women group won the first prize in Cao Bang's "Innovation Day" contest for their products and was selected as representative of Cao Bang for attending the National level "Innovation Day" competition supported by World Bank.

The group used embroidery patterns from other ethnicities to tailor the end-used products. Although at the initial stage to create a trademark with competitiveness for Cao Bang handcraft, the ethnic minority women has enhanced their pride of cultural value and confidence in making the skillful products. They wish to continue the job and would teach their younger generation with skills of making the handcraft.

4.5 Sustainability

As presented above, the project has intensively introduced new technologies/knowledge for the ethnic minority women in weaving, embroidery, dying, designing, tailoring to the point they are able to produce handicrafts readily for sale. The support in terms of technologies, tools and skills are appropriate to the needs of beneficiaries, helping them to sustain the activities in longer run and generate income more stably. The support of DECEN to the handicraft groups has been gradually reduced toward the end of the project, only provided coaching and assisting when needed in order to encourage the groups to be more pro-active in their activities throughout the chain.

In the absence of private sector as intermediary of the chain, the establishment of Craftbelt as a social enterprise implied the wish from DECEN to sustain the handicraft value chain by combination with community-based tourism. During the time of evaluation, the official recognition of social enterprise entity by law has been confirmed, so that Craftbelt would have more favourable condition to exercise its roles. The establishment of Craftbelt or the approaching of Craftlink can be considered as a signal of filling the absence of business-minded actor (private sector) in the value chain and to explore more opportunities to sustain the project results.



Cao Bang Craftbelt trademark

The recognition of provincial and local authority in potential to promote local cultural tourism by combining handicraft production with home-stay and sight-seeing packages has encouraged DECEN to engage into a relevant project in Khuoi Khon village as a pilot model of this type. The participation of the ethnic minority women handicraft groups at the tourism promotion events at provincial and national levels has attracted attention of many tourists and interested companies/organizations. There are opportunities to integrate the results in the future donor or government development programs in the fields of community based tourism, culture preservation, tourism promotion, etc that need further exploration.



Handicraft and community based tourism in Khuoi Khon village

The good relationship with a number of regular customers established and strengthened with support from the project has resulted in increased orders. The customers are fashion and interior designers, and handicraft store owners/founders and they are interested not only in the tailored handicraft products but natural dyeing fabrics. If the CIGs are to maintain the stable product quality, the Cao Bang's natural dyeing fabrics and handicraft embroidery patterns would be more demanded products in the long term.

Although with significant achievement and good signals, the beneficiaries (the 6 EM handicraft groups) are not self-sustained in terms of technical, management and financial capacity. Except the LoLo and Nung groups feel confident to continue the handicraft production and link up with traders, a number of CIGs members expressed their concerns about the continuation of Cao Bang handicraft after the project end, since they are facing with challenges in terms of materials sources, production of quality and sophisticated handicraft products and more importantly reaching out to customers while they have language barriers. Overall, the production capacity, the professionalism and the ownership of the handicraft groups are still issues that need to be taken care of. The high production cost, the limitation of production capacity to deal with bigger orders has led to limited opportunities to expand its market share.

4.6 Recommendations

The below recommendations focus on how to sustain the project results and to identify clearer orientation for the handicraft sector of Cao Bang to serve the provincial domestic market in the linkage with tourism.

i) Capitalization of the project technical transfer

- In order to sustain the impact of the project, the CIGs need to be supported for a longer term to strengthen the obtained results and investment, especially on accessing market and controlling quality of handicraft products. This is because the handicraft products have been developed to reach foreign customers who value the natural and cultural features and usually have high tastes of aesthetic and high standards of quality.
- The embroidery / pattern design catalogues as one of the project's key products need to be synthesised and developed professionally and printed out to preserve the technical expertise as well as to serve as a cultural asset. There would be different types of catalogues to serve different audiences: one type for the ethnic minority groups themselves to preserve the techniques and designs, others for the traders/customers to place orders, and also more

marketing materials with brief information about Cao Bang handicraft to reach wider customers.

ii) Strategic approach to expand market access

- The CIGs (especially Nung and Dzao groups) should maintain and enhance trading relationship with the regular customers, who are not only the buyers but also have good knowledge on handicrafts and customer tastes.
- More works to be done to improve the exhibition area at each group location and Craftbelt shop in CB. The CIGs would no longer receive support from the project to participate in the yearly handicraft events or trade fair outside Cao Bang, so that selling at sites for tourists would be a good option for marketing. Therefore more investment should be placed to the exhibition area, as part of the community based tourism chain, to showcase the end products and the different stages of production. This would add to the tourism attractions and leverage the cultural value of Cao Bang handicrafts.
- Product samples should be made available for exhibition at sites, if there is no stock for regular products. The CIGs should consider practice this more seriously, because this would provide them with better chance for marketing.

iii) Finding a niche for development

- In order to seek for opportunity of engaging into similar development projects to support the handicraft value chain in Cao Bang, the handicraft value chain with the clear role of the CIGs should be linked to the community based tourism and tourism /cultural promotion initiatives at provincial level. The CIGs should continue to partner with DECEN or social enterprises like Craftbelt to position them in the tourism value chain.
- The linkages and connection to Craftlink should be explored, in improving visibility of Cao Bang handicraft.
- In addition to reaching the market of foreign customers, the CIGs should be proactive in building relationship with local authorities to engage easier to the local development initiatives, to receive support as well as as to make them potential client in order to promote Cao Bang handicraft as local presents. The CIGs have strong advantages doing this, especially in linking them with tourism.