

ETHNIC MINORITY SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

(The Community Development Approach - A Case Study of ENDA Vietnam in mountainous regions of central Vietnam, June 2000)

Summary:

Under the financial support of Bilance¹, Enda Vietnam (Environmental Development Action in the Third World) has initiated projects to assist the socio-economic development of high poverty communities in the mountainous regions of Central Vietnam. These communities are mainly composed of ethnic minorities. Much of the help provided by the Vietnamese Government to alleviate poverty is directed towards the main ethnic group of Vietnam, the Kinh. Ethnic minorities have little resources to reach and pass beyond the poverty threshold.

The targeted communities are mainly composed of farmers². Inappropriate agriculture practices and techniques are the underlying reasons for poverty in these communities. These practices lead to unproductive crops causing food-insecurity for three to four month periods for many households. The custom agricultural methods of these villages have high impacts on the environment. In some communities, the traditional form of agriculture is “slash and burn”, while in other cases the soils resources have been overexploited. Soil erosion is also a major problem. In these regions, the forest is already in a pitiful state due to the Vietnam war, inappropriate agricultural practices accentuate the burden. In 1994, concerned with the dramatic pace of forest degradation in the mountainous regions of the country, the State government has launched programs to halt deforestation. There are rooms for improvement of the approaches used by the local government in working with environmental issues and poverty reduction. Local government should be considering the interest of *community-based development approach, and reconsider the limits of subsidies-oriented approach.*

Enda Vietnam acts as *a facilitator* to promote community participation. In different regions of Vietnam, it has conducted several projects to improve the quality life of the poor through: saving-credit revolving fund, the improvement of living environment, upgrading of infrastructure, and providing vocational training. Enda Vietnam has *partnered* with local government at each level, mass organizations, other NGOs in implementing and managing the projects that would guide the socio-economic³ development of these community. To the ethnic minorities of Central Vietnam, Enda Vietnam has provided financial and technical support in order to implement a sustainable agro-forestry system that would bring higher incomes to the households and lower environmental impacts. In Enda’s projects, the development fund is usually small and parts of it are used to initiate a fund for the savings-credit process. Communities then have to mobilize their own savings to increase the fund and pursue development activities.

¹ Bilance became Cordaid (Catholic Organization for Relief and Development) in 2000.

² Enda Vietnam has undertaken four projects of ethnic minority development. Three of them (Quang Ngai, Phu Yen and Daklak) are composed of farming communities. The fourth project, Gia Lai, focuses on ethnic minority people working for low wages in a State Rubber Company.

³ The socio-economic development includes here several field of activities such as income generation, self-management, gender, education, environment, etc.

1- Characterization of the Problem

Many ethnic minority communities of Central Vietnam encounter severe life conditions. Life styles are unstable, education levels are low, proper hygienic and sanitation practices are deficient, incomes are precarious and low, year-round food security is a common problem to numerous households. In 1997, the mean annual income per capita was approximately 40 US\$ in these communities as compared to over 300 US\$ for the country's average. Without any significant changes, it seems probable that these communities will encounter a greater state of poverty in the future (as it happened in recent years) as population density and environmental degradation keep increasing.

Figure 1. Villagers of one the ethnic minority villages involved in the project.



The communities of the Phu Yen, the Quang Ngai and the Daklak projects were facing similar difficulties. All of them were below the food self-sufficiency threshold. This was mainly due to inappropriate agricultural practices and to rapid land degradation. While on the other hand communities in the Gia Lai project were confronting a different situation. In this particular case, ethnic minority people were working for the local rubber company. Wages from the rubber company were low. Cutting the farmers' working conditions was often an easy solution to address the company's low productivity or the latex market fluctuations, making the workers' life unsteady.

The government has some ongoing programs to halt deforestation and to reduce poverty in Central Vietnam. Programs such as "the bank for the poor", the "project 120" and a program of money incentives to protect forests were launched in the mid 90's. The two first programs are economic development opportunities for rural people. The heavy procedures to get the loans and the low education of rural people tend to make them reluctant in joining these programs. The third program consists in a grassroots protection scheme initiated by the Central Government to provide incentives

to rural families (about 50, 000 VND, 3.50 US\$, per protected ha) to protect forested land. This program only brings sporadic support to rural people for protecting the forest. These projects, as important they may be, are not providing all the support ethnic minority might need.

Recently, at the World Mountain Forum held in France, the Central Government has restated its will in making its mountainous regions prosperous and stable (Viet Nam News June 14th, 2000). However, the communities of ethnic minority targeted by Enda's projects are located in remote areas and are therefore not necessarily on the priority list of Central Authorities. Furthermore, most of the investments made in the top down approach of the State in the mountainous areas concentrate on infrastructure improvement such as electricity, road, school and health stations. These developments are indeed needed although they only partially address ethnic minority's problems in not assisting the communities' development process. Infrastructure development is an important part of the issue but households' financial capacity and awareness improvement is also crucial to alleviate poverty. Enda's projects were implemented to help ethnic minority communities in their economic and social development. Enda and its partners believe that the diversity of difficulties faced by mountainous villages and the variety of means at their disposal request a more flexible approach than the top down conventional methodology. The community participatory approach allows greater flexibility in demanding a close connection with the indigenous farmers and local authorities thus ensuring local solutions to local problems. The four projects had different specific objectives and priorities, however they have common aims. Enda and its local partners have introduced activities in the ethnic minority communities in order to elaborate solution aiming at:

- a) *Reaching and going beyond food self-sufficiency*: The purpose here is to see that every household in the community has enough food for the entire year. The goal is thus to secure households' incomes in order to stabilize their life style. The mean to do so is to introduce appropriate and sustainable agro-forestry practices that would lead to higher and steadier incomes and to lower impact on the environment.
- b) *Improving hygiene, sanitation, health care and education conditions*: There was a need to valorize education in communities where illiteracy and drop out rates reach high levels. Thus, improving education conditions was an important action to take. The communities had important lack of basic sanitation knowledge. Appropriate practices would be taught and health stations would be installed.
- c) *Building the community's capacity to self-develop*: The communities had no development scheme. Groups of leaders would be formed and shown how to organize and manage community activities.
- d) *Strengthening women's role in the community*: To reinforce the women role in the community through sanitation health and environmental awareness raising activities, family planning promotion and income generation support. To see that women would

get education so they can participate actively in the community development.

2- Actors, Their Roles and Nature of Co-operation

- Balance (is part of the international network of catholic development organizations) - provides the financing support for the project.
- Enda Vietnam (NGO - community development) - to initiate the projects. Enda Vietnam is the general coordinator of the four different ethnic minority projects in Central Vietnam in which distinct local partners were involved. Enda Vietnam also contributes for technical and methodological support to the projects and ensures the follow-up.

Main local partners

- Quang Ngai Department of Science, Technology and Environment (DoSTE) (governmental agency) - DoSTE is the main partner for the implementation of the Quang Ngai project. DoSTE is specialized in environmental issues. The governmental agency provides technical support and is in charge of applying environmental laws for different environmental issues.
- Youth Association Social Work Center of Vietnam (SWC) (CBO - mass organization, active in social works) - The Youth Association is in charge of the execution of the planned activities of participatory and community approach in the socio-economic model of the Phu Yen project.
- The Daklak Provincial Gardening Association (PGA - mass organization, active in farming issues) - The PGA is responsible of launching and supervising the participatory actions in the Daklak project.
- Chu Se Rubber Company (national rubber company) - The company is managing the Gia Lai project. It also added some credits of its own to the project's global budget.

Each of Enda's local partners is in charge of the following for its specific project:

- To conduct the project in the field, coordinating people, providing professional and technical support.
- To manage the credits transferred from the donors by Enda accordingly to the signed agreement.
- To Produce activity, budget and auto-evaluation reports for Enda.

Other local partners

- People's Committees of Ba To, Son Hoa, Son Ha, Song Hinh, Cu M'Gar Dak lak and Chu Se at the District Level (Local Governments of the four Provinces where the projects are taking place). - To authorize the project implementation and to give appropriate support. The agreements of several different levels of authority are needed in Vietnam to implement activities that will induce changes. The People's committees of the different Districts were also involved in formulating the working plans and providing technical support to Enda's local partners. They would take part in holding sharing experience meetings between communities. They would eventually (with the Province and the Commune level) replicate the developed model to other communities. Some District had already specific poverty alleviation programs undertaken,

hence they had no funds available to add to Enda's budget. However, in some cases, as for the Ba To District for example, local capital was adjoined to the global financing.

- People's Committees of Ba Thanh, Ba Cung, Son Thuong, Ba Dinh, Ea Ba, Suoi Trai, Cu Sue and Iarhu at the Commune Level (Local Governments of the different District where the projects are taking place). - To authorize the project implementation and to give appropriate support. Each level of authority in Vietnam has its own jurisdiction. The People's Committees at the Commune level had to give their agreement to the project. It was expected that these Committees would assign officials to technically and professionally support the project. They would organize sharing experiences between villages. They would eventually (with the Province and the District level) replicate the developed model to other communities. They would also produce monthly activity report for the project's local coordinator.



Figure 2. Ede women of the Phu Yen project community at a welcoming reception.

3- Process of Project Implementation and Management

For projects implementation, it is necessary to get an approval from the local government including the People's Committees of the District and the Commune level. In some places, it is difficult to work with local authorities because they are not used or not motivated to work with international organization. In addition, participatory approach promoted by Enda is still unknown or very new in a country where everybody is used to traditional top-down approach. However, after the long process of discussion Enda Vietnam was able to find local partners that would be responsible of coordinating a bottom-up approach in developing ethnic communities.

Discussion with the local authorities to define development priorities, community selection criterion and responsibilities of each partner were held. To define development priorities, minor adjustments to Enda's project proposal were sometimes made to meet requirements of People's Committees of the District and the Commune level. The parameters to be met for a village to be selected were globally similar for all projects. They were formulated as follow:

- The community should be poor.
- The neighboring communities of the selected village should have similar life conditions and life style than the ones prevailing in the village where the socio-economic model will be implemented. This is to be favored in order to optimize subsequent experience sharing meetings between the model village and its neighboring communities. These experience sharing meetings are crucial for later replication of the developed socio-economic model.
- The community leaders and the local authorities should show significant willingness to support the project initiative and promote the participatory approach.

As for partners' responsibilities, they were settled between the different partners as mentioned in section 2.

The main components used, via self-help group, for community development in the four projects were: agriculture and raising diversification and enhancement, infrastructure improvement, health and sanitation education, credit fund implementation, and management training. Bilance, via Enda Vietnam, provided the initial funds of nearly 300 000 US\$ for the first three years of development in the four ethnic minority projects.



Figure 3. School of the Ten village, Quang Ngai, before the project.



Figure 4. The new school of the Ten village in Quang Ngai after the three year project.

4- Strategies Used

- The projects have to get an interest from local government at the initial stage. In this regard, the different People's Committees of District and Commune level have showed a broad range of enthusiasm and involvement. Projects where the local government's officers are intensely involved and local money is granted to complete the global budget are running more easily and more efficiently. Furthermore, the long term viability of the project and its replication after the donor's retreat almost necessarily implies local government's involvement. In consequence, important efforts were made to bring local governments into serious collaboration.



Figure 5. H're farmer implementing agro-forestry (mango tree in his garden), Ten village in Quang Ngai.

- The concept used by Enda Vietnam and its partners was not on money-giving oriented project, but on the community development approach. The next sentence expresses this concept in other words: “ On a long term perspective, it is more beneficial to teach a starving man how to fish rather than feeding him with fish”. Activities are conceptualized to help people taking their community development in hands rather than providing the community with pre-made solutions. These activities include chiefly teaching new practices and techniques. The main fields of



activities were presented in section 3.

Figure 6. Sanitation and family care training in the Ten village in Quang Ngai.

- Once the socio-economic model has been established in one community, the project must be given means for ensuring its sustainability. The savings-credit scheme is an important tool for securing the project viability. The credit fund serves the community development as capital for sustaining present activities and implementing new activities. Households were asked to use their own money for the expenses related to some activities (buying seeds to initiate the culture of new variety of rice for example). A credit fund was implemented to help the poorest families to participate to the development activities when they could not afford the entire costs. A management group formed with local representatives was in charge of managing this fund. The Credit Fund Management Committee's role is to decide and adapt credit regulation; to decide to allocate or not to allocate credit to low-income families. For example, the fund in the Quang Ngai project serves forty people. Loans' duration is approximately 4 months (it actually follows the crop production). The maximum and average credit amounts are 250 000 VND (18 USD). The interest rate is 5% for the entire length of the loan (app. 4 months). In the Phu Yen project, the credit fund now counts 6 groups and totals 30 participants. The duration of the loans varies from 3 months to 12 months. The maximal loans are 4 000 000 VND (275 USD) while the average loan is around 2 500 000 VND (175 USD). The interest rate is 1% and it is used for

the management of the saving-credit fund. The capital of the credit fund sometimes takes other form money. As for example, in the Daklak project cows were bought to serve the community in improving its cattle herd. One farmer would be in charge of the cow until it would give birth to a calf, then the farmer would keep the calf and give the cow to another farmer. After experiencing the benefits of saving-credit funds as a development mean, other funds were subsequently launched and managed by villagers' committees; such as a Food assistance fund, a Social fund and a Purchase fund in the Phu Yen project for instance.

- It is to be hoped that the outcomes of the project will lead to two aftermaths. First, the project will influence the local government to adopt an approach closer to the community participatory approach. This approach has proven in many cases to be better suited than the government's traditional top-down approach for mountainous community development. Second, after 3 years, the developed socio-economic model should be replicated. In the final portion of the 3 year project (and/or during the transition phase⁴) experience sharing meeting and visits were organized to present and introduce the socio-economic model to the neighboring villages. However, promoting the community participatory approach and influencing its adoption is a fairly long and complex task. Therefore, a second phase (2000-2002) of community development for indigenous people of Central Vietnam has been initiated. This phase should permit the reinforcement of the previous achievements in the communities of the first phase. Through the assisted development of new communities, the second phase should further demonstrate to the local authorities the advantages of adopting the bottom-up approach. Finally, the new phase should start the replication of the socio-economic model itself. New villages are being developed under the new phase, but previous developed villages should continue to teach and help their neighboring communities in developing themselves.

5- Key Success

The results obtained after three years in the Quang Ngai, Phu Yen and Daklak projects are very encouraging. Most of the projects' objectives were met and expectations were even exceeded in some cases. To avoid weighting down the text, the outcomes of one singular project will be presented in details (see table I), the other projects' results will only be presented through general comments.

The food security threshold was reached in each project after three year. The crop yields went significantly up (they trippled in Quang Ngai) with the use of proper agricultural techniques and fertilizer. With the implementation of households' gardens vegetables and new varieties of fruits were introduced in the daily diet. The daily diet was also diversified with the introduction of barn-raising activities (pigs and chickens). Veterinarian knowledges were provided and proper sheds were built to help prevent epidemic diseases that used to hit the oxen herds in the period of bad weather during the rainy season. Sanitation principles and measures were taken to improved the

⁴ The projects of community development for ethnic minorities in central Vietnam were extended for a second phase and a six month transition phase was held between both the two phases. The purpose was primarily to strengthen the communities' management capacity (to transfer the project responsibility to the local partners) and to prepare the upcoming phase.

hygienic conditions in the villages. The water system was improved, 3 wells were repaired and a new one built in Quang Ngai. Latrines were constructed in Daklak. In all these projects the education conditions (infrastructures and material) were enhanced (2 new classrooms in Quang Ngai). Appropriate training to the medical personal was given and a medical box was assembled in each community to reduce the traveling distance to medical care. Women's role in the community was strengthen via environmental and sanitation awareness, income generation and management skills, and cultural and traditional activities⁵.



Figure 7. Health station in the Ten vilage, Quang Ngai.

On the other hand, the Gia Lai project undergone some difficulties and the outcomes after the three year period are not as impressive. The project had to be stopped after the first year of implementation because the Chu Se Rubber Company did not accomplish the agreed activities under its responsibility. The company had difficulties to reach agreement in negotiating with the District and getting its involvement in social development. There has been serious personal conflict

⁵ More gender activities are planned for the second phase. Although the gender subject was touched through the introduction of the community participatory approach, Phase I chiefly focused on reaching the food-security threshold year-round.

between the company director and the project coordinator. Communications between the coordinator and the company were difficult. The project almost came to an end when other provinces were considered to host the remaining two years of the project. However, the domestic rubber tree plantation grew with such good results that the selected villages became a bright spot for official visits from high ranking officials from the Central Government. An ultimate negotiation process finally began between the Rubber Company and the other partners to restart the project.

Table I: The Phu Yen development chart for phase I (1997-1999).

Field of activity	Before the project	After the project
Agriculture	1- Crop plants <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land rice: 55.27 ha • Sesame: 44.2 ha • Other crops occupying a small surface (corn, papayes, bananas and cari) 2- Farming techniques <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One crop • Dependant on natural soil conditions 	1- Crop plants <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land rice: 55.27 ha • Sesame: 44.2 ha • Wet rice 3 ha • Red beans: 12 ha • Other crops occupying a small surface (corn, maize, sugar cane, peanut, mango, custard apple, papay) 2- Farming techniques <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intercrops • Fertilizers and soil protection
Raising	1- Domestic animal herd size <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oxen: 315 local animals • Pigs: 26 • Chickens: 226 2- Raising methods <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Without sheds • Without veterinary aid 	1- Domestic animal herd size <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oxen: 354 (including 8 pure Sind Oxen and 18 cross-bred calves) • Pigs: 34 • Chickens: over 300 2- Raising methods <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With roofed shed • Basic veterinary services: 100%
Personnels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Veterinary workers : 0 • Agriculture technicians: 0 • Nurses: 0 • Teachers of primary level: 2 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Veterinary workers : 14 • Agriculture technicians: 7 • Nurses: 1 • Teachers of primary level: 2
Medical care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distance of the medical center from the village: about 20 km 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distance of the medical center from the village: about 1 km

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medical service in the village : none 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medical service in the village : examination, simple disease treatment, vaccin, providing information on nutrition, familial planning, etc.
Purchase		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sind oxen: 8 • Treshing machines: 10 • Harvesting machines: 2 • Arap Set (gongs): 24 • Library: primary school books
Funds and credits		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New project credit fund and food assistance fund • Social fund and Purchase fund

6- Lessons Learnt

Concerning the community participatory approach, after three years of implementation, project officers and participants have expressed numerous lessons they have learnt while applying the bottom-up approach. The fact that officers and applicants are formulating comments is interesting, it shows that the bottom-up approach is being integrating and that the grass-root level is getting involved in the community development. The following lists a couple of key principles that have been exposed through different reports or meetings. Other lessons, nuances and adjustments related to the community participatory approach will eventually surface as the methodology is developed and replicated in the future.

Structure

- The relationship between NGO, community and local government is crucial. Government is responsible for creating and managing the policies towards people community; however, in most cases local government has no capacity to deal with the participatory community approaches and capability to manage financial funds. In contrary, the communities are weak, therefore, the role of NGO here is to bridge between this gap, and to strengthen the capacity of local government by giving them responsibility to manage the operational day-to-day of the project.
- Subsidies should not be too considerable. If the grants are too important, the community tends to be less resourceful when the money transfer stops. In addition, large amounts of money accentuate differences with surrounding communities that may cause tensions.
- Greater results have been seen from a project where experts from different fields work together and share on all the activities. Experts may then get a global view of the community development scheme. A multidisciplinary approach brings coherence to the whole project.

- Formation support to social workers and officers is also crucial. Communication, management capacity reinforcement training should be thought over.

Application

- The bottom-up approach has proven to be a very important tool for sustainable development projects. A key element for a good transition from theory to practice in the bottom-up approach is the patience of the project officers and coordinators. In order to be able to work with them, officers and coordinators must make constant efforts to create a climate where illiterate farmers will be self-confident. If the farmers are not at ease with what they see as talented and educated officers, they will be reluctant to express their precious ideas. The farmers have a long experience of agriculture in their region, their ideas are therefore valuable. To create good working conditions, the officers and coordinators must show patience, they must listen to the farmers and encourage them actively. People tend to only adhere to new ideas if they are proven that it's worth changing habits. Site visit, on-field training, and sharing of experiences prove to be very instrumental to promote high level of participation and readiness to change practices of ethnic people.
- In general, the problematic issues are the same for most of the different communities (poverty, food-insecurity, low agricultural productivity, illiteracy and low education, poor sanitary conditions, unavailability of close health care resources, etc.). However, the priorities and the means of solving the problems are not the same for each community. Therefore, the coordinator and the officers should discuss with the community to agree on their priority and their suggestions to resolve the situation.
- Experience sharing meetings between the different project coordinators and officers should be held on a regular basis. These meetings are good opportunities to analyze and evaluate what has been accomplished. It allows coordinators to point out the strengths and weaknesses of the different projects and activities. They can sometimes observe contradictory outcomes from similar activities. They can benefit from other's experience in the same field.



Figure 8. Sharing experience meeting in Sut M'Rang village in Daklak.

Sustainability

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- The project transfer to the community should be started long before the end of the project. The activities all along the project should be planned in such way that the community will develop its self-management capacity. The last six months of the project should be more intense in preparing the community to maintain on its own the present activities and to be able to initiate new actions for the community development.
- A close partnership with each of the different levels of authority (Province, District, Commune and Community) is particularly consequential for the bottom-up approach. This contributes in modifying the way of working of these administrative bodies that tend to use a top-down approach. This also help indigenous people in gaining confidence in their own capacity and in dealing with government officials. The different levels of authorities and the villagers are the key actors of local development, if the bottom-up approach can bring

them closer, this can only facilitate future developments.

- Integration of awareness of raising activities into self-help group regular activities and meetings is very constructive. This contributes to consolidate the villagers' solidarity and mobilization for subsequent activities. For example, a project of clean water supply that requested the formation of a self-help group opened the way for a greater involvement of the community for later environmental activities. Furthermore, reconstruction and repair of the village educational infrastructures through a self-help group contributed to boost community pride towards the school hence stimulating school attendance.

7- Points that were time consuming and energy demanding

- To convince local government on the project ideas, approach and concept (see first point in section 6).
- The sensitiveness of the topics of ethnic minority development in Central Vietnam. Most of the efforts in community development of conventional projects from official initiatives goes to Kinh people.
- The communications with the main local partner. The four main partners are different entities (state company, mass organization, governmental agency) and personalized communication and partnership are thus bespoke.
- The ability of local partner to respect and achieve the agreed responsibilities. For example, The Chu Se Rubber Company, which is a State company had difficulties to establish partnerships with local authority to promote social development. Such actions were not in its usual mandates and working habits.