REPORT

Building the bridges for village development:
The experience of commune and village cadres in managing local development in the northern mountains
PART TWO: COMMUNE AND VILLAGE CASE STUDIES

Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development
Vietnam Sweden Mountain Rural Development Programme 1996 - 2001
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Vietnam Sweden Mountain Rural Development Programme

2001

Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development
Vietnam Sweden Mountain Rural Development Programme 1996 - 2001
Vietnam Sweden Mountain Rural Development Programme (MRDP)

Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development
2 Ngoc Ha, Hanoi
Brief description of the Mountain Rural Development Programme (MRDP)

The Viet Nam-Sweden Mountain Rural Development Programme (MRDP), under the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) worked with supporting rural development and poverty alleviation in 18 districts in five provinces (Lao Cai, Yen Bai, Ha Giang, Tuyen Quang and Phu Tho) in northern Vietnam between 1996 and 2001. MRDP was a successor of the earlier Forest Cooperation Programme (FCP), 1991-1996. Both programmes have been supported by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida).

The overall vision of MRDP was to:

*In order to alleviate poverty amongst poor households* "the programme should contribute to the re-establishment of green productive uplands that are managed in a sustainable way by healthy farmers having secure land tenure, maintaining the ecological, economical, social and cultural diversity of the area".

Relating to the overall vision the following two End Results for MRDP were defined:

- **End Result 1**: Improved livelihoods and income opportunities for rural people in the programme communes and villages including equitable opportunities for poor people, women and men.

- **End Result 2**: Improved land use practices and natural resources management in the programme communes and villages contributing to environmental stability in the uplands.

The programme had three main objectives:

- **Objective 1**: Institutional development in the whole support structure from central to province, district, commune and village levels of the five provinces, to enable rural households to achieve what they truly want as expressed in their visions and end results.

- **Objective 2**: Development and testing of working methods and production systems to sustainably (from both economic, ecological, social and cultural points of view) convert the barren uplands and mountains in the five provinces to productive land use.

- **Objective 3**: Create policies, recommendations and guidelines for sustainable upland and mountain rural development based on learning from the institutional, methods and systems development in the five provinces.
The programme consisted of a ministry-based project and five independent province-projects, all served by a Programme Board Office (PBO) based within MARD. Activities of the programme included e.g. extension, tree and forest resource management, rural finance, business development & market information, human resources development, and gender balance. Starting year 2000, the earlier component-based planning system was changed to a planning system based on administrative levels and geographical areas. This included the introduction of funds ear-marked for and directly managed by commune and villages, so called Commune & Village Development Budgets.

The consolidation process during 2001 and this study

In 2001, the last year of MRDP, the programme embarked on a wide process of capturing the learning and experiences from the six years of implementation. This so called “consolidation process” included e.g. undertaking a number of special studies, organising workshops on different topics, and production of information & communication material such as reports, videos, training material and a CD-Rom.

This report is the result of one of the key studies undertaken as part of the consolidation process. The objective was to document and reflect the range of experiences relating to capacity building at the local (village and commune) level institutions gained during 10 years of programme support – this being a focal issue of both FCP and MRDP. The study aimed specifically at capturing changes and development over time, in relation to, for instance:

- changing expectations and needs from within the local communities;
- expectations, support and requirements from the MRDP “support structure” (district/province/ministry levels of the programme and MARD);
- wider changes taking place in the rural areas resulting from the economic and administrative reforms and Decree 29 on local democracy; and
- impacts on social and human capital at village and commune level.
Study Locations and Narrators

1) MY BANG COMMUNE, Yen Son District, Tuyen Quang Province

Mr Bui Hung  Commune Chairman  My Bang Commune
Mr Hoang Van Son  Village Head and VMG member  Ngoi village
Mr Do Xuan Hong  VMG leader and Village Party Secretary  Ngoi Village
Mrs Tran Thi Thuy  VMG member, savings and credit officer  Ngoi Village

2) TAN DONG COMMUNE, Tran Yen District, Yen Bai Province

Mr Nguyen Van Tin  Head of VMG  Village One
Mrs Han Thi Lieng  VMG member, cashier and veterinary worker  Village One
Mr Do Van Tien  VMG member, accountant  Village One
Mr Nong Xuan Tham  Village Head and VMG member  Village Eight
Mr Ly Van Pec  VMG member, accountant  Village Eight
Mrs Dang Thi Phuc  VMG member, cashier  Village Eight

3) NAM LANH COMMUNE, Van Chan District, Yen Bai Province

Mr Hoang Phuc Hung  Commune Chairman  Nam Lanh Commune
Mr Ly Kim Vien  VMG leader  Nam Kip Village
Mr Ly Huu Hin  Village Head and VMG member  Nam Kip Village
Mr Trieu Van Kinh  VMG member and veterinary worker  Nam Kip Village
Mr Danh Van Kinh  Village Head  Giang Cai Village
Mr Dang Van Thang  VMG member, cashier and veterinary worker  Giang Cai Village
Mr Ban Thua Chieu  VMG vice leader  Giang Cai Village

4) VIET LAM TOWNSHIP, Vi Xuyen District, Ha Giang Province

Mr Giang Mi Pao  VMG leader and village elder  Suoi Dong Village
Mrs Ma Thi My  VMG member  Suoi Dong Village
Mr Giang Xia Tua  VMG member  Suoi Dong Village

The Interview & Editorial Team

The study was facilitated by a team consisting of: Ms Do Phuong Thao, Mr Bui Dinh Toai, Mr Edwin Shanks, Ms Georgina Houghton and Ms Maria Berlekom. Field interviews were undertaken mainly by Mr Bui Dinh Toai, and Ms Do Phuong Thao. Ms Thao also compiled and edited the village and commune case studies (Part 2). Mr Shanks developed the approach and methodology for the study and was the main author of Part 1 (Synthesis). Ms Houghton co-ordinated the field work and was co-author of Part 1 (Synthesis). Ms Berlekom contributed to the editing as well as the methods development for the study.

The facilitation team would like to thank staff at all levels – village, commune, district, and province, who contributed to the organisation and fieldwork for the study. A particular thanks to all the narrators who willingly and openly shared their stories and experiences.
The Local Organisations

The Commune Level
The Commune represents the lowest tier of formal government administration and consists of a number of elected cadres in leadership positions, as well as mass association representatives, and appointed officers as follows:

Party Secretary
Vice Party Secretary
Peoples Committee Chairman
Peoples Committee Vice Chairman
Fatherland Front Representative
Farmers Association Representative
Women’s Union Representative
Youth Union Representative
Veterans Association Representative
Accountant
Administrative Officer
Peoples militia and police
Cadastral Officer
Head of commune health centre
Head school teacher
Irrigation / roads officer (some communes)
Extension officer (some communes)

Commune Project Management Group
Commune Project Management Groups have been established in the programme area consisting of people from the above commune organisations who are appointed to the groups with responsibility for coordinating programme activities. These commonly include the Commune Chairman, Vice Chairman, Women’s Union Representative and some technical officers.

Village Management Groups
The Village Management Groups have been established in all project villages that are commonly made up of between three to five locally elected people, including a group leader (who is also in some cases the Village Head), a cashier / savings and credit officer, with the other members taking on technical responsibilities such as in extension, village veterinary work, or tree nursery management.

Savings and Credit Groups
In the communes and villages that have this component, Savings and Credit Groups are established at village level. These groups commonly consist of between 10 and 15 households, with a group leader, who work under the supervision of the savings and credit officer on the VMG.
Abbreviations

C&VDB  Commune and Village Development Budgets
MRDP  Vietnam Sweden Mountain Rural Development Programme
VMG  Village Management Group
PRA  Participatory Rural Appraisal

Measurements

VND  Currency: Vietnam Dong (1 USD = 15,000 VND)
Sao  Area: 1 Sao = 360 square metres
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1. Introduction

This study consists of a set of narratives that present the life and work experience and ideas of nineteen commune and village cadres who have been working with the Vietnam Sweden Cooperation Programme during a dynamic period of transition in the rural areas of Vietnam in the 1990s¹. The narrators come from six villages and four communes in three provinces of the Northern Mountain Region (see Figure 1):

- Ngoi Village in My Bang Commune, Yen Son District, in Tuyen Quang Province
- Village One & Village Eight in Tan Dong Commune, Tran Yen District, in Yen Bai
- Nam Kip & Giang Cai Villages in Nam Lanh Commune, Van Chan District, in Yen Bai
- Suoi Dong Village in Viet Lam Township, Vi Xuyen District, in Ha Giang

The narrators include two Commune Chairmans, six Village Heads, and staff of the Commune and Village Project Management Groups including savings and credit officers, cashiers, accountants, and village veterinary and extension workers. In addition to working on programme related activities, all the narrators fill a range of other official positions, and roles and responsibilities within their communes and villages. These are, therefore, all people whom have considerable experience in working at the ‘front line’ of rural development in the mountainous areas. That is – at the interface between district and commune authorities and departmental services on the one hand, and the rural villages, communities and farm households on the other. And the narratives provide a first hand account of their personal experience, and what they have learnt, through managing local development and implementing programme activities in this context.

The interviews and results of the study are presented in two separate documents:

Part one: Introduction & synthesis of experiences
Part two: Commune and village case studies

¹ The main period covered is that of the MRDP. Half of the communes and villages represented here were also involved in the former Forestry Cooperation Programme, FCP, (1991 to 1996) and hence the participants from these locations present a longer-term perspective.
Figure 1:

PROGRAMME AREA AND STUDY LOCATIONS

1. My Bang commune
2. Tan Dong commune
3. Nam Lanh commune
4. Viet Lam township

LEGEND
- Study commune
- Non-project district
- Project district
2. My Bang commune, Ngoi village in Tuyen Quang province

My Bang Commune, in Yen Son District, is situated in a midland area some 20 kilometres from the district and provincial towns, and on the border between Tuyen Quang, Yen Bai and Phu Tho provinces. This is a favourable location that facilitates market access. There is a higher proportion of irrigated rice land in My Bang than in the other communes represented in this study. The population of the commune is approximately 7,000 people, including Kinh (69%), San Chay (19%) and Dao ethnic groups. My Bang also has a fairly stable recent settlement history and many of the households can trace back their residence in the area for several generations. The commune has 24 villages, 17 of which have been involved in the programme. My Bang is also one of the communes with the longest programme history where FCP began working in 1992. Ngoi Village was selected as one of the first pilot villages where PRA was introduced, and as such has long experience with managing many programme activities including agriculture and forestry extension, and savings and credit. In terms of local capacity building My Bang is also interesting from two other perspectives. From 1993 onwards the project in Tuyen Quang began testing a process of ‘lateral spread’ of project activities to new villages in the commune, and the VMG in Ngoi Village was instrumental in providing the local expertise to carry this process forward. More recently, since 1999, project activities also began to be phased out in My Bang, so there is direct experience here with regard to the sustainability of the capacity building that has been undertaken.

At the turn of 1991 and 1992, local people there stopped looking for yam as a source of food, curiously and excitingly received rice as assistance from the project and took part in appraisal exercises. It is accustomed to local people to call the project as forest farm level project, or in a shorter way, a farm project. The active and enthusiasm participation has been shown both by farmers and local staff. Over the last decade, the combination of project assistance support and government's policies have facilitated the considerable improvement of local socio-economic condition. One example of the improvement can be given in rice productivity, a key factor in local people’s economic life. Received rice yielding has increased from 120 kg / sao (one sao equals to 360 m2) in 1992 up to 250 – 300 kg/sao at present. The main project activities include forest planting and protection and rural savings and credit. Since the commune was in phasing out period of 1998 – 2000, commune and Village Development Budget was not applied here. Commune development
should be based on its villages. Let’s start to look at one pilot village of project implementation in the commune: Ngoi Village.

Ngoi village

2.1 Mr Hoang Van Son (VMG member and Village Head when the project started)

“Sometimes, a joke is said that our Ngoi village management group can go to Laos as consultants. Since we have been doing the lateral spread of extension activities to all villages in the commune. Even to the neighboring commune of Phu Lam”.

The sensibility of village management and closed family relationship within the village

Q: According to you, is village management a complicated task?
A: Partly, my village is special in that 90% of households have closed family relationships to each others which is an advantage of not having much competition and envy among villagers. Almost all are relatives. I took the task of an village leader in 1990. My imagination of the task of a villager leaders then was not in full shape because it was the early time of the government’s shift from subsidy to new mechanism. The regulations on rights and duties were not so comprehensive. I had to explained a lot. Sometimes there were disputes over ancestor land when the red books were prepared. Before, there were only some scores of families in the village with vast land. Now, in the same area of land, more than a hundred households co-exist. The late comers were also allocated land after cooperatives. It was difficult to explain and conciliate because it involved my near relatives. Our forefathers had live here for long. I am very grateful to old people here who were Party members. They knew more and facilitated me in quick solving of disputes. However, the advantage is also a disadvantage. It is said that it is more difficult to work with non-relatives than with relatives. Sometimes, one can be very straight forward with the non-relatives but with the near relatives, one needs to be sensible. It might better be solved with affection. If there was disagreement, the relatives gave stronger reaction than the outsiders did. It asks for an art of dealing with people here. If one does not take into account psychological and contextual aspects, the situations might be very difficult.

Q: Are kinship relationships maintained in the village?
A: Yes, it is maintained well by old people and the kinship show relationships show certain effectiveness. For instance, the family line of Nguyen, Hoang, Do, Le... They do so to maintain the respect of others as well as setting examples for children to follow. The fact that this year, one person of the Hoang family line has passed the university entry exams or
been successful is a pride. They have been able to build a temple of forefathers for regular worshipping. Even the local authorities have known it well.

Q: Is that right that the head of the family line has a considerable voice within the family and one can rely on when big things need doing in the village?
A: Yes. When there are problems, the heads of family line are helpful in exerting certain influence. The post has considerable impacts within local people’s relationship and facilitation of solidarity and supporting each others.

Q: Over the time, have you observed any difference in the kinship relation, for example between now and the 60s – 70s?
A: I can see the improvement. In the past, people in the same family line only gathered on their ancestor’s death anniversary day with few discussion was made. But these days, it has been changed. Some practices have been reintroduced, including donations to support their children’s study. It might be that during the war time, it was not feasible to do so.

Holding concurrent posts of village head and VMG member

Q: How can you manage to shoulder both tasks of a village head and those of the project? Do you think that holding concurrent posts makes your work load heavier?
A: Yes, it does. Sometimes, I spent months in helping other villages or involved in training courses. For instance, as assigned by commune authorities, I can work here today, tomorrow in Cay Quyt village, Cay Quan village. I rarely have time for my house’s work. The extension work at early years were a lot. It is less in recent years. In the past, I had to attend monthly technical training courses on transferring of techniques and application of scientific technologies in production... Very often, we were taken as trainers, as one of our responsibilities. If our VMG is given extension materials and asked to explain to other farmers, we feel it is a normal thing, not too big a deal.

Q: With your experience of work, what do you think are advantages and disadvantages of the holding of concurrent posts? Should village head be a member of VMG at the same time?
A: I think it should. Even though more work need doing but the combination of the work of a local official and the work of the project has many advantages. There are some biding conditions that make people follow certain regulations more easily. In this commune, it is 100 % so. If one does project’s work, but is not the village leader, one has to depend on him. If I am the village leader, I can combine project activities with village meetings. But, for example, Mr. Hong needs to call a meeting to inform villagers on project activities, someone may complain “today’s meeting, and tomorrow’s meeting, on and
on”, or they might say “why don’t you combine several meetings into one day so that we can arrange our time more conveniently?” A village head should know how to plan a meeting’s content in a way that villagers can receive many types of information with sufficient amount. It is never good to have too much information or villagers quit the meeting in the middle. If a village head can combine his work with that of the project, the advantages are that at the same time, he can do two things, also improves his knowledge. One disadvantage is time. One has to carefully arrange and plan in details. Other disadvantage is that there countless of things to be done in a rural village. Doing of this might affect the doing of that. For example, when I am attending training course in Department for Agriculture and Rural Development, there is an urgent thing happens at village, I have to come back to village to deal with that. The effectiveness of the work is somewhat limited.

Q: Do you have any solution to overcome that disadvantage?
A: In general, it also depends on contexts. Activities in the village depend on commune schedule. If, for example, a training course for village head is held at commune from day 11 to day 14, at the same time, another training course is held at Department for Agriculture and Rural Development from day 12 to day 15 of the month, then one needs to arrange one’s time relevantly. There are times of overlapping.

The “learning” of a local VMG member

Q: What did you feel when you joined the project’s activities?
A: At the beginning, I did not have a clear perception of project’s work. I only did what I was assigned by the project. I did not then understand what was potential or the long process of project implementation. Only after the first PRA in the village did I realize it. Villagers were also happy. In the beginning, there were only 50 households registered to join the farm level project. After other households saw the effectiveness of the project, they voluntarily registered to join.

Q: Do you find paper keeping difficult?
A: Record books with columns and rows are not difficult to understand. I was trained also, on animal husbandry, agriculture production, etc. In general, all project activities were accompanied with training. The trainers were active and enthusiastic. We were given training materials and taken to study tours. For the training of credit, there were some thing that I did not fully understand but after some discussion, things got clearer. We think that the training sessions were a bit too short. It is more difficult with the understanding capacity of farmer like us. Out trainers said that the training should be in a month long but now was condensed in ten days. The limited knowledge combined with a condensed training course made it more difficult to us. Some of us are more experienced.
with outsiders might be able to catch some things. Others from an ethnic minority could not.

Q: What skills did you gain after the training courses?
A: I was eye-opened to many new thoughts, knowledge, capacity as well as working skills. Especially on organizational skills, and practical skills. I could transfer more expressive and persuasive messages to other people. It helps much in my daily work. After some years of working for the village and project, I feel that I am more mature, gain more knowledge, improve skills in social communications. As a proverb goes “one day of travelling gain you a heap of wisdom”. There are something that we might never know, if not taking part in the project. The rural life is somewhat limited on the path that leads you from home to the field and home again. We do not have many chances of going to district, province. We would never see the provincial Party Secretary, the advisors, etc. Traveling breeds more knowledge. We feel very joyful.

**Poor households and their presence in project’s activities**

Q: The project gave attention to poor households in the villages. Is it difficult to mobilize poor households in this village to take part in the project? What do you think the best way to ensure the poorer households in the village benefit from the project? Does the village have any prioritized activities for poor households?
A: Most poor households participated in project activities, except some special cases of single old people who find it difficult to join. Even some households with many children and lack of labor also took part in. The point is create favorable conditions for them. In fact, it is more easily to mobilize poor households. Because they are “thirsty” and when they were given “water” they became happy to join. However, in the beginning, they still felt ashamed of being poor, so their participation was not so comfortably. The project activities are mainly community based so it is easy and quick for them to integrate. They are given special conditions in borrowing credit loans. Poor households were weak at organizing production and lack of knowledge. With the support from others combined with loans as capital, they could strive to reach the level of average households. There were certainly some households still remain poor, mainly because their way of organizing labor and production within the households, like “to bite off more than one can have” (to live beyond one’s means). For instance, there is one household in this village that has labor and land. We gave them a favorable loan of VND 1,500,000. Before getting the loan, they were trained by the project as well. However, they kept following the same path of production. It led to their failure of repay the loans on due, even project’s staff had come and supported. So the poverty went on. But we took that household as a lesson in our working for more
effective next time. That household then could not voluntarily repay the loans and we had to use coercive measures.

Q: Has the number of poor households decreased in the village?
A: Yes, it has. If the old criteria are used, then in 1991-92, there were around 20 poor households, shortage of food in about 6 months. Now, this village has 5–6 poor households, shortage of food from 3 to 4 months. These households are mainly characterized with many children or woman-headed households.

**How to organize staff and activities**

Q: What support from above do you think that will facilitate your work in a better way?
A: At commune level, the Chairman is the main manager and is very busy. He can respond to crucial things only. The rest is done by other members of commune management board as his assistants… If the members of commune management board are appointed by function, it would be difficult. Because as project requires, the head of commune The Women’s Union should be one member of the board. In fact that person did not perform well. The person in charge of extension helped in a bit. The main work load was on the accountant.

Q: What do you think is the relevant organization?
A: If the project is to be organized at commune level, besides the commune chairman, other selected members should be competent, enthusiastic people who are available for the project activities. If it is fixed at regulation of having members from The Women’s Union, Veteran Union, etc as a must, but if they are not willing and active to do the work, then it is not effective. Leading to low performance. The responsibilities for the villages will be increased. Thus, attention should be paid to selection of staff.

2.2  **Mr. Do Xuan Hong (Leader of VMG)**

“I think that one of the success that the project has created is the new way of thinking and scientific methods. Farmers are more confident in applying scientific technologies”.

**The “activation” of the project**

Q: What changes have you noticed in agriculture practices in the village since the project came?
A: With regards to production and animal husbandry, farmer were not instructed to do intensive cultivation before the extension came. Since we had the project here, our farmers were trained on techniques of rice, fruit trees, etc cultivation at least once a year, some times, three times a year. Our task was to organize village meetings to listen to and understand farmer’s needs to recommend to higher levels. When the
project approved, budget would be allocated for trainer’s fee, materials, etc. It was all funded by project. Farmers had chance to learn, and an allowance of VND 5000 in early time. Or project supported rice to an ethnic minority village when it was hit by flash flood. Farmer were happy. Material support were given in early years to encourage people’s participant. It was withdrawn when farmers get used to the project. I think that one of the success that the project has created is the new way of thinking and scientific methods. Farmers are more confident in applying scientific technologies. In 1990, when I started to hold this post, the phosphorous fertilizers were turned into stone in the cooperative’s warehouse because no one knew how to use. But since 1992, when the project came, the using of phosphorous fertilizers became popular. Even in some year, the demand was more than supply. Thus, if farmers did not know the usage and indication of the phosphorous fertilizers, they would never use that even it was given free of charge.

Even the application of new species was difficult. It might be that farmers did not understand or still suspected the new things. So in the beginning, encouragement was done, first within households of party members and some active households. Only after they saw the high yielding did farmers apply right away. It went easier than the time before the project. That’s why, in the beginning of the 90s, the yielding was only 100 kg or 120 kg of rice per sao. Nowadays, 180 kg per sao is normal. Some households do it well can get 280 kg per sao. This never happened here. Since our forefather’s settlement here, never did we see such a high yielding. The period of subsidies was even less. Even the then yielding was only 80 kg per sao.

Q: What do you think are reasons for these results?
A: Of course, all these results are not only because of the project because our government polices came in at those times as well. However, the impact of the project is that it enhance the effectiveness and performance of government’s policies. For example, without the project’s presence, the performance might be only 60% - 70%. But with the project’s, it could be 90%. Or production management is another success. For instance, the village head takes charge of administration and production, i.e. doing extension work at the same time. Extension activities are also project’s ones. They are more or less the same, only come from different sources of funds. The work is the same. This is a great advantage. It helps the VMG member to improve the skills in administration, management of overall socio-economic development.
What is the “key” for an effective savings and credit activities

Q: When did you started credit activities and how did you do those?
A: At the end of 1993, the credit activities were introduced with a pilot loans for the village was VND 10 million. We discussed among us to assign our accountant and cashier. We selected about 15 – 20 households to disburse loans and the selection was base donor evaluation whether they could use the loan well. After the activities have been don well, the project continued to disburse loans for further lending, and the highest time was in 1999 with VND 200 million. In fact, the loans from project was only 80 million. The rest came from another pilot project of the province. The provincial authorities saw good performance of credit activities in the project and they wanted to try with the province’s own budget. The Province Party Secretary decided that the project villages were given certain amount of credit loans in one year as a trial. The regulation was the same to that of the project and the disbursement was done through the project network. The loans might be seen as project’s activities. The trial was in one year only. After that year, repayment of loans and interest were done well. The province did not leave that with villages as the project did and withdrew all back. However, the interest level was acceptable. The commercial interest level of the bank at that time was 2.0% while the interest here as only 1.0%. Probably, they wanted to try and see how successful their project might be.

Q: is that correct that mainly better-off households got access to credit loans?
A: Often, we based on relative ratio of each category, priority was also given to poor households first. However, giving loans to poor households was also considered in whether they have resources such as land, labor, i.e. production capacity and repayment capacity, etc. There were also poor households but they did not have resources such as old single people, without labor capacity, etc. For instance, out of 10 poor households in the village, we gave loans to 8 households and he loan size of each households was not the same. Households that had higher capacity could get bigger loans than households with less capacity. Some poor households showed a strong will and determination of development then we gave a bigger loans than the rest. Poor households were always the first to get loans. For the better-off households, we gave bigger loan sizes so that they could develop their models. For example, there were models of animal raising, forest plantations, fruit trees, etc. that were built by interested households. If using government’s criteria of poverty assessment, there were only 11 poor households in my village. But using the criteria like the project does, we had 30 – 40 poor households.
Households that fell within these 30 – 40 households were more accessible to loans. Some times they were afraid of borrowing, only applied for VND 500,000 – 700,000. The key thing here was that before the loan was disbursed, we had to examine carefully their production capacity, their determination and their competency. If not, it would be very difficult.

Q: Did that create the envy from others? Did other farmers questions why those households were selected and not my household?
A: We did not select household for model but farmer households themselves did. Since they have capacity, others could not envy on that. Fore example, we did not impose anything. We let households to select what models they liked most in considering their conditions of land, labor and their interests. Within this village, we understood each other. We were born here so we know well each household. If we imposed, then others would surely envy.

Q: Looking back your work, do you think you have gained more working experience? Especially on credit activities?
A: Yes, right from the beginning of introducing credit activities, I had to look for capable and willing households. Before giving credit loans, we should examine their capacity to see whether they were capable, how determined they were. I visited the concerned household and asked them “can you do it if I give you this much a loan?” If they say they can do, then the loans would be given. Every one or tow months, I paid a visit to their home to see how they were doing. For example, one household borrowed VND 1 million. They added some of their own fund to raise two cows. They engaged in forest plantation. Every day, the household head took the cows into forest where he planted trees. After one year, the cows gave births. He sold one of the and prepaid the loan. Now he has more cows. Everybody think that borrowing loans like that is very good.

Forest plantations and related issues

Q: How have you done the forest management and protection?
A: Before the project came, the government launched a movement of forest plantation. The District Forest Protection Station also invested in some nursery gardens. They sold the seedlings to farmers with subsidized prices. At those time, some families with many labors registered to plant eucalyptus. Land was not allocated yet. Some households saw that they have capacity in forest plantation so they did it. When the project came, it was like putting more fuel into the fire. It activated a strong movement of plantation. This is one of the effective project’s impacts.
Q: What are the key points in effective implementation of project’s work?
A: The key thing is farmers are trained carefully. They participated very well. We suggested our needs to build one or two nursery gardens. The project approved right away and supported seeds and tubes. Farmer households that developed the garden were paid for their labor. Households that needs seedlings just came and registered into the log books then the project would pay. Let’s look at those hills over there. They were bare hill in early 1990s. Now, farmers have harvested one cycle of trees already. There were community regulation of forest protection based on government’s papers to protect forests form being cut.

Q: what do you think are the motives for the farmers to actively participate in forest plantation?
A: I think, in my village, not 100% of households engaged in forest plantation, only 10% did. The first reason is that of shortage of land. Households that wanted to plant trees were willing and had labor, too many children or lack of paddy land for example. Some households had a longer view into future were planting trees as well. For example, my household did not have many labor, but I invested in forest plantation. Now it becomes one source of income with VND 3 million yearly. That’s why some households regret not having engaged in planting trees before. Some households started to clear new pieces of land to plan trees. Besides planting trees in the forest land, farmers also planted trees elsewhere in the village, e.g. along the line of fence. Half of households in the villages did so. Because the seedlings were free of charge. They could earn some more money in the future, so farmers were interested in planting. At the same time, there were some households planted trees up in the top of the hills, the watershed areas. It was not easy to plant trees there. The project invested for around ten households to plant in about 10 ha. Farmers were paid for the clearing and planting labor. Now, those areas are growing very well. Farmers, who engaged in planting trees were also very happy. We paid them with the money from project right after they clear certain areas. They received seedling from the nursery and planted. Then we examined and approved. Those areas of forest are now managed, controlled and protected by local authorities. The forests show good impacts. When they were bare hill, they failed to hold water. Now they can hold more water. They look very nice now. The paddy fields below are less dry now.

The criteria for a VMG member

Q: What criteria do you think a local VMG member should have?
A: First of all, you must be trusted by villagers. They should see you with something that they can learn from. You must show
enthusiasm. That’s fundamental. The VMG member himself must have a learning spirit since this project provides you many excellent chances of training. If you are lazy in learning new things, you could not understand much and it would affect your work. I gained experience because my village was the first one to join the project. The scaling up of the project to other ethnic minority villages was done later. Commune authorities asked us to facilitate the lateral spread of activities to other villages. We had chance to use our experience to help others. If we did not have knowledge on that, we could not teach anyone at all. In some other villages, the VMG members have low competency, or they are too poor, or not active and enthusiastic, they are not elected by villagers for the next time. This group was elected and built by villagers. Even if we liked to be in the group but the villagers did not vote for us then it was not possible. So you must be trusted by villagers first. You also have to show your enthusiasm, sensibility with information and gain more knowledge to improve your competency.

The project has created working relationship between levels and social network

Q: Since the time you were engaged in project activities, have you been exposed more to outside people?
A: The project is being implemented in some detracts. Within district are some commune and villages involved in the project. In early time, technical and management training sessions were held at province level. Gradually, they were done at district level, until recently they were done at commune clusters. Through training course, I had chances to know more people in the scope of province and in project district.

Q: What benefit do you have from knowing more people?
A: It is very benefiting. First of all, I can get to know others. Second, I can learn form them. Each areas and region has different characteristics and production. More than that, because of the market economy, they set up exchange relation with us. For instance, people from Ham Yen want to plant tea, they may remember me and say “Well, Mr. Hong may know where to get the seeds…”. I can help them to buy tea seeds, etc. Very good. Or on animal raising, I could visit them to learn how to do better. So it benefit both the group as a whole and myself. Recently, my village was support by the project to grow certain type of grass to feed fish at small scale. My villagers were taken to visit other district where they have grown the grass. By visiting them, we got to know them and it helps us a lot.
Q: Did you organize study tours by yourselves?
A: Yes we did. Some of us used motorbikes to go. It is quite simple. Thanks to our relationships with people from other places, it is easy.

Q: Do you have relationship with higher level?
A: Between village and the province level, the relation is still clearly defined high and low, so if we have any requests, it should be in a program. But compared to the time before having the project here, dealing with province level was slower. After the project was present here, we were paid more attention. For example, if we wanted some support from above, it was more likely they would pay attention to us. In the time before the project, we had no business to go to district, no dealings with anyone, not knowing anyone outside …

Q: What types of work do you need district to help?
A: For example, when there were disease for rice or we need help with rice varieties that the extension could not help, then we went to district agriculture section or even to the province. In the past we did not know what to do and let it be like that.

The skills in “talking” and “doing” after a working process

Q: Do you think that working in the project helps you to improve skills in doing other things more smoothly?
A: Of course it helps. Because, if I focused only in my work as a Party secretary, I would not understand anything on scientific technologies, since in party activities, no one have training courses in growing rice. Besides I am a VMG member at the same time, so I could learn about management as well. If one VMG member just know how to talk only, he would become dogmatic. If I know how to do and how to talk, then I can do both well and they have to listen to me. The project work facilitate the leadership work effectively. If you just call out let’s do it, but when you are asked of how to do it and did not know how to, then it would be very bad. I am a project staff, I should do better than others because I was trained by project to have more knowledge. If they see that I am doing better than other, they will accept what I say. I think it is very valuable if one can have knowledge. Having more knowledge can bring many changes. It is more advantageous for me in a leadership position, and I can contribute more to my community. If I was enthusiastic but did not know anything, it would not help either. Enthusiasm plus ignorance equal destruction, you know.

Q: Over the time of involving with this project, what difficulties have you encountered?
A: The difficult thing is to prove the effectiveness of the new things. For example, no one knew about the good things of growing hybrid rice. It is how to mobilize villagers and
overcome the conservative thoughts. Sometimes, when farmers see a little improvement in living conditions, they think that is enough while they can try harder to improve more.

Q: Being an local extensionist is also a bridge to connect local people and the outsiders from above, how have you met the demands from both farmers and people from higher levels?
A: There are something that just happen naturally. For instance, when villagers have some requests, I can propose it when I have a conversation with concerned people at a meeting's break, something that is not within the meeting content. Provincial staff consider me as friends. It is not always necessary to have official request paper. Every year, there were evaluation and commendation for planning activities. Of course thing cannot be perfect. Sometimes during a break of a meeting, provincial staff might approach and said: “what you said the other day is quite interesting”. We did get along very well with each other. Sometimes, what we proposed in the plans were too big, since we tried to write up as much as we want. However, the higher level can satisfy partly our demands. Some informal talks sometimes were more effective than official papers. I think one good things is the good relationship between village up to commune, to district and province, especially between village and province. Provincial staff can visit villages right away and then meet commune authorities later to feedback. The commune staff were also happy. Mr., Hung in the Commune Project Management Board is happy with the good relationship with province since it also helps him directly in his work.

Q: How is the relationship between village and commune?
A: Between village and commune, commune has the role of monitoring. All investment fund or loans were given on our village request, coming directly to village by district or province decision.

Q: Are there any constraints?
A: No constraints between village and commune. Recently, data on credit and saving was kept in commune, so there were some limitations. After that it was shifted to village level to take care of detailed data. If commune want to balance the demand on credit loans bestrewn villages, a meeting would be held with all concerned villages. “At present, this village has high demands for credits so it should be given more loans which can be taken from other villages where the demand are less.” Things were agreed in that way. Rarely did a problem happen. Commune authority will also come and help when village have difficulties.

Q: What, for example, has commune helped you?
A: for example in collecting outstanding loans. If villages could not do it, commune official would be called on. Sometimes, besides the persuasion, coercive actions might be used such
as temporary seize of buffalo cart or confiscation of field. Villages do not have such a power to do so. Those things never happened in my village but they did in other two villages of the commune.

**What will be “left” in the village after the project is gone**

Q: When the project is finished, will these activities be maintained?
A: There are some activities going on. For example, some models have borrowed credit loans before. They have repaid the loans but will maintain the activities with their own funds since they are established now. Or households that invested in forestry. They have harvested the first cycle and reinvested by their own funds to buy seedlings and replant. Or the growing of fruit trees might be scaled up to wider areas. It is not that when the project is finished then all trees will be cut down.

Q: Could you please indicate whether the credit activities will be maintained?
A: At the present, we have saved a fund of VND 20 million from a part of interest payment. We did a good job and were awarded by the project. If it is to continue the credit activities, then there will be some changes in the regulations to make it suitable with current condition of number of farmer want to borrow and who want to borrow. Or we can think of other alternatives. One way is to open a saving account so that we can borrow a bigger amount of money. As I know, the Bank for the Poor allow people to have two accounts, a savings and a credit ones at the same time. If we put in the saving account VND 30 million, we can borrow VND 60 million from the bank. This amount is bigger can be lent to more people with suitable interest level. If so, we can also have interest and be able to pay interest to the bank. That is in future. But probably, we will limited our potential clients and change the loan size. Right this moment, we have not thought of further activities because we are collecting loans. Until we have collected all the loans, we will reorganizes the regulations. We will bring those regulations to the concerned institutions to certify and issues operational permission for us, so that we can be protected by law. Otherwise, we might do something out of the rule and could be jailed.

Q: What do you think the future of the village extension village will be?
A: in the mean time, we try our best to recollect all the loans. After that we will see whether there might be any new project form above. Otherwise the group might be ended.
2.3 Mrs. Tran Thi Thuy (VMG member)

“Local staff in rural areas should be in close contact with farmers to understand and encourage them. A normal visit might be easy but if it is related to credit, one must be very sensible. That’s the way to manage the money.”

Advantage of having female extensionists

Q: In project activities, are female staffs approaching women groups more easily?
A: Much more easily than male staffs.

Q: Are there any women in the extension groups of the lateral villages? Has women recently involved in project activities or long time ago?
A: Overall, there are women in all groups. Even in the past, women were present in all groups working for the project. When the neighboring villages form their extension groups, women were involved from the beginning. Only in Nghi village is it a new thing. It is a good thing for the project is that the old villages help the new ones with their own experience and people from old villages came directly to the new villages to do so.

Q: What characteristics do female VMG member need to carry out project activities with good results?
A: The key is knowledge. Next thing is their enthusiasm. And they must be trusted by community.

Q: Are women majority in poor households groups?
A: There are men in that groups, but women are majority. They are mainly single women. Other women who have too many children are also lazy, not knowing how to take care of household economy.

Q: From 1991 to 1995, there members of the village extension group were men. Since you joined the group, did you see any difference in the performance of the group?
A: Much difference. First of all, when there were three men in charge of the group, women felt some constraints in discussion with men. At the same time, only 30 – 40% of what women said were taken by men, 60 – 70 % of the rest were what men considered as unimportance and blamed them talked too much. It is more difficult to change one’s perspective. However, when I joined the group, women put more questions in meetings. I could also explained more to them. My voice had certain weight as much as that of men. They could not ignore me. That’s why we had many good opinions. For example, in credit and savings activities in the farm project, I visit the poor households more than male VMG members did. I is right that collecting loans from poor
households’ borrowing was difficult. When one poor households borrowed VND 500,000, I often visited them to know how they were doing and also to monitor whether they used the loan in a right way. When I started the conversation with the wife, it was easier for women to encourage each other. When I asked her what she spent the money for, she was more open to me than to a male VMG member: “Well, I bought two pigs. We have lots of fodder and forages for them. The rest of VND 300,000, I spent on other things. I did not spent it on eating or buying new clothes. I used that to pay school fee for the children. Otherwise I have to sell rice. Or I have to sell the pig to pay school fee for my children.” In other households, it might be said that “I used that money to run a small trading of vegetables in market. They were honest like that.

**Capacity and the overcome of obstacles**

**Q:** What capacity do you think you have to do that type of work in the project?

**A:** I am enthusiastic and honest. I have nothing to hide from other women. I can encourage them at the same time suggest alternatives for them to go. I was told by other women that they listened to me and what they did turned out well, but when they listened to other people, they could not do so well. I am happy when they praised me by saying that. They were poor households. When they came to the bank and wanted to borrow VND 5 million, the bank only gave 3 million despite of their request. That’s why I am happy if I can help anyone.

**Q:** Did you encounter any obstacles in your working relationships and other relationships?

**A:** Quite a lot. Many times I felt self-pity. Things were not simple as I am talking now. A woman who could try her best in anything is the real woman. She should not be let down by some rumor against her. Though she keeps thinking about it within. Overcoming those obstacle involved shedding tear as well. But she must do to show others what she can do. This is where the disadvantage of women lies, a very big disadvantage. At local level, a simple thing is that women are very active in any movement but the recognition of their contribution is much less than that of men.

**Q:** Do you feel a pressure when working with local people and stronger pressure when working with higher level?

**A:** Yes, that’s right. A woman involved in social work has to show that she is perfect and comprehensive, not like men. For instance, men can drink at ease and when they got drunk, it is normal. Women could not do so. It is disgraceful if one get drunk.
Q: How could you overcome those difficult times?
A: I felt self-pity for me. But my family is very important. Only my husband and children could understand me. If it was another woman, she might have quit. The pressure is very strong. It is not simple at all. However, there are some women who can work very well. They show something like men, not being under those pressures. They express their ideas normally, like men do and they are accepted as ordinary. I wish people gave me their frank comment on my work, so that I feel happy. Otherwise, they keep their comments at the end of the year when it is time for discussion of staff’s performance at the end of the year. Women feel lost of motivation, a feeling of being in great disadvantage.

What experience for organization of extension work

Q: How do you think about the organization of project activities? Do you think organization of project activities with management board at each level is too heavy? Should project go directly to village or through a level at commune?
A: With regards to structure, it is not heavy. It seems quite all right. There are 4 levels until commune (central, province, district, and commune), and the local level of village makes it 5. Whatever it is, one cannot ignore the local level. If it is proposed to go directly to village level, not involving commune, it is difficult. Local level cannot go to district and ignoring commune level. It is the lowest level of government. If the local level is not counted, it is not good either. There are several villages in one commune, how can commune alone can management all. Thus, the existing level of management is all right.

Q: How do you assess the relationship between village and commune during your working time for the project?
A: It is very interesting. The commune and village rely on each other to produce good results. Village make plan to submit to commune. Commune knows well the plan from villages. Villages know how to make their own plans.

Q: If the project is to continue or a new project is introduced with the same objectives, will you contribute any comment on VMG organization?
A: From higher level down to the local, there should be necessary members. One of which is women representative, the other is the head of the village. The head of the village is elected every two years, while the member of this group remain more or less the same. The project introduced scientific technologies, they then change the thinking of farmers. While the head of village could not change farmers’ thinking, he was a member but represented the local government to facilitate the work here. He might be changed in the following year. But the extension group would remain.
The Vietnamese prioritize their honor. Once they have been elected to certain posts in the group, they would try their best to do the job whether got paid or not. When there are problems after changes in the members, the late comers are to be blamed for not understand the job and the predecessor’s contributions.

Q: What are the main factors to make the extension group function well?
A: Once I was elected in the group, it is said in the regulation that everyone must be responsible. More than that, the activities in the extension group were very exciting. Joining its movement could make people younger. The group's meeting was not rigid and very comfortable. Everyone had something to contribute. When something wrong was said, no one was blamed. When the right thing was said, others would accept it. When we realized that other farmers were to carry out what we suggested, we were happy and felt motivated to continue.

Understand farmer well to make the credit activities effective

Q: What do you think will make your work effective?
A: I have to go around lot, all the time. If we just follow the fixed regulation of the group’s members work with sub-group leaders, and the sub-group leaders work with household members. That way of working is rigid and one cannot monitor what they are doing with the loans. Also one cannot understand what their situation are. Therefore, even there are sub-group's monitoring, we still have to go directly to the household members. For example, on the day 15 of the month, the sub-groups come to pay the interest, it is only about 50%. We had to go to each household of the other half to see why they could not pay interest in time. It was to find out whether they were in difficulties to pay or the sub-group leaders were lazy in collecting interest payment. We have to closely monitor the loans like that. In credit management, Ngori village has a total credit fund of VND 100 million, including the outstanding loans. It is allocated to 3 sub-groups in a wide area. That's why when loans are coming down to households, we need to keep monitoring them. If we were not creative and enthusiastic, it would become very difficult. Farmers are more disciplined in borrowing from the bank than they borrow loans from the project. They are slower in repay the loans from the project. We have to be very sensible.

Q: What are difficulties in your work?
A: The most difficult task is to monitor the loans. It is to simple as I talk now. For example, this time we have VND 50 million as outstanding loans. When it comes to the due time of repaying the loan so that other farmers can continue to borrow in a rotation, we must be very careful so that no envy among farmers happens. Some sub-group repaid of 80%, other
others could repay only 20%. However, as in one community, farmers will support each other in repaying the loans. They could borrow from other farmers to repay the loans first. The head of the sub-group should be blamed for the late repayment of his or her sub-group. If the head of sub-group are active and competent, the farmer households in his/her sub-group could pay on time. The pint here is to encourage them.

Q: But the village is very large and you have so many things to do, how can you visit them very often to encourage them?
A: I work both in the VMG and women and family planning group, so I combine my work in my visits to member households. Now I am working as accountant for the cooperative as well. When I go the households, I try to go earlier in the morning so that I can combine many work. I meet the head of sub-group first. Through discussion with him/her, if there are any problem with some household, I will visit them my self. So for others, 5 p.m. would be time to go home, but for time, it is usually 7 p.m. I have to combine my work in one day. In the past the allowance from the project was not stable. But farmers trusted e so I have to show my responsibility. I work for public interests.

Q: What do you feel when you do many work at the same time?
A: Even I work as cooperative accountant, project staff, and commune The Women’s Union staff, I feel quite normal. It is said that I work in an organized way. I could arrange my work in order. Working in The Women’s Union and as an accountant, I have to be close to farmer households. I have to use all my time to work, even late at night to do the paper works of record books, reports, etc.

Q: How can you do many work at the same time?
A: I need help first of all from my family. I have a strong base of my family. It needs a organized way of doing ting here. I also have many things to do at home: nearly one ha of tea, and rice field, home garden to take of. When the season comes, other villagers come to help me, then I come to help them in return.

2.4 Mr. Bui Hung (My Bang Commune Chairman)

“What I like most about the effectiveness of the project is that it facilitated the change in thinking and attitudes in working of all my commune and village officials. With regards to village management, the heads of the village improve considerably there management skills. They know how to manage, how to discuss with villager on what to do or not to do. The changes come to farmers as well. We could have a strong groups of staff in village management without having to pay any costs”.

My Bang commune have been in the project for 10 years, a long process of combination between staff’s creativeness and farmers’ actives.

Q: What difficulties did you encounter in early time of the project?
A: We were worried at those time. For the credit, we were worried of how to management and secure the fund. The demand for borrowing was very high, but the fund was not enough for all. Meetings were held to discuss who could borrow first, and who could borrow later. That’s why farmers worked out the regulations. Since we had the regulation, the collection of loans in the early time turned out to be easy. If the group leaders did not remind the due loans, farmers did remind among them so that others can borrow in the next cycle. In the beginning, it was agreed that the poor households were allowed to borrow first, then come the better-off households. But the fund was not enough to meet all demand, so the rotations for loans were resorted to. Thus, Interest Groups were formed. These groups were then called “Groups of neighboring households” so that they can hold meeting among them anytime. For example, there were 5 households in on group. They could discuss among them which household was to get loans first and when that household should pay the loan back so that other four households could borrow. In the beginning, the Interest Groups were on certain similar themes, e.g. cropping or animal raising. They could discuss and exchange ideas among them on their similar interests. When there were credit loans, they also discuss who should get the loans first.

Q: What do you think about the results?
A: Farmer’s livelihoods in the project village have increased much, so has local VMG member’s capacity. It was clear to see so other villages came to commune to request the scaling up project activities to their villages. To join the project became the demand of the whole commune. Each year, we extended project to two new villages. The appraisal work was done with the help of VMG members from Ngoc village because they have been in the project for the 2 – 3 years already. 17 out of 24 villages were involved in project activities. In 1996, the scaling up reached all villages. One advantage here was that farmers were very active. They held meeting and discuss among themselves.

Q: As you said, some villagers become envious to others because they did not selected to join the project earlier. As a commune official, how did you deal with that?
A: Yes, there were envy among villages, because some villages thought that they might not get any support from project when it is going to end. We had to resorted to a strategy of combination two villages in one lateral spread event. For example, when project activities were to be extended to Dong
Nub village, we invited one of their neighboring village to take part in the event and that village will become one sub-group of Dong Nub village. The head of that village was also the head of the sub-group. Only by doing so, we can speed the scaling up.

Q: Was that idea yours or from above?
A: Yes, this was our idea. In the beginning, we dared not to speak of it. But later we reported it openly. The pilot villages were instructed with technical knowledge. Farmers were longed for that. But project support cold not satisfy everybody though they had strong motivation impacts. Farmers were excited to join the project. Because they saw that a village that involved in the project was improved much compare to other villages. That’s why they asked to be able to join the project.

The workload of commune official

Q: When the project came to the commune, was your work increased?
A: Yes, basically, I attended all the meetings. Whenever, there was a village meeting, I came and I understood a lot. Only after at least one year did we see what the village should do and what the commune should do. And especially after commune officials and VMG members carried out the lateral spread to the new villages, we felt we have grown up and not worried. It means we had to practice. When commune officials and VMG members could do the appraisal of the new villages, we feel that we have been more experienced in doing project activities. That’s why there were always two or three VMG members from old villages involved in the lateral spread to a new village. That’s learning by doing. After people from old villages helped the new villages in appraisal exercise, they improved very much. And each new villages involved new creative ways of doing appraisal. For example the mapping and modeling of village have been improved greatly. The skills of participants have reached nearly perfect. The village map looked very real, and it was easier to see when they colored it. In the beginning, the mapping was difficult and looked not correct. The village informants gave opinions and ideas. Some one did not know how to understand a model. It was proposed that the map was easier to see with colors. Models were not done anymore and replaced by mapping. Maps were made in big scale, easy to see.

Q: You are doing commune’s work at the same time with the project’s. How can you mange all those?
A: It means I could do two jobs at the same time. The objective of the project is to eradicate the poverty and hunger. It is the same as what the commune is doing. Besides, the VMG members in the project villages are improved very much on their management skills. It means I do not have to visit them as much as the non-project villages. However, I attend all the
evaluation meetings of project villages at the end of the year. Basically, I could combine the work the commune and that of the project with the common objective of making people’s living conditions better.

Q: Could you please tell us the way you management the relationship between village and commune?
A: The head of the VMG is also the head of village. In the monthly meetings of the commune, they could report both the village and the project situations. If there are meeting on project activities only, I can meet with heads of the groups only. It is not necessary during the administration time of the day. One special thing is that VMG members from Ngoc village are very active. As I mentioned above, the project has created good impression. All VMG members in the village an commune understood this and tried to maintain it. There have been no problem between commune and villages. With regards to collection of credit loans, some times, commune official had to intervene by coercive actions with evidence reports.

Q: Do you think that implementing project’s activities has made commune’s work more effective?
A: Yes, especially, if one looks at the commune as a whole. We have improved in management, in planning for commune or for a certain village. It means that if a new project is introduced right now, we can carry it out in one or two days, not like in the past, it took us many days of wondering what to do.

Q: Do you think that your improvement of skills is the result of your doing it many times or of being trained?
A: one must be trained to do it well. It never comes naturally. The project had many training activities. Sometimes, training was repeated 2 or 3 times a year: training on planning, training of PRA, of credit fund management, of technology transfer. Project staffs were given enough knowledge of those could do well for farmers.

Q: What skills have you gained through the training courses?
A: I know how to approach farmer and communicate with them. I also can communicate with higher official and take advantage of sources of information. The relationships are open wider.

Q: Do you feel you are more established?
A: Yes, I do. Probably I become wiser. So are other people. Local staff can carry work better. For example, Mr. Hong from Ngoc village can do anything now. And Mrs. Oath, the extensionist, has learnt how to talk to others and has many new things to say and say what farmers want to hear. We come to discuss with villagers, everyone discussed and contributed, as the doers not as the talkers.
**Needed support from higher levels**

Q: what support do you need from province and district level?
A: There are something belong to province and district’s functions so we need them on that. For example, in the commune development plans, there are some things related to budget, materials, building meeting house, extension house, commune level cannot decide everything. We need the higher level to approve first.

Q: what lesson have you got from the relationship with higher level so that you can do better in the future?
A: I think for the small scale constructions, once they have been approved by higher levels, the actual building should be done by local people who can do it more effectively than outside builders selected by district. Local people can built story houses. And the canal system here has been built by local people with support from the project. It runs for more than 10,000 km long already. When it is built by local people, they monitor each other well. The outside builder come and go. If the construction has problem, commune will have to pay for the repair. That’s the small constructions that local people can do. For the big and complicated constructions district should do.

Q: If someone is new to project’s work and ask you for experience in carrying out a project, what will you tell him/her?
A: Then she or he should come here to visit one or two times to know more about it. The important things are one have to spend time to think, be flexible and be close to people. Be close to local people is crucial. It is to show that I need local people and they also need me. It is not easy. The project have succeeded in doing so right from the beginning. It was very interesting at those time. Villagers see the outcome from project’s support right away so they liked it and did it better and better.

Q: Could you please tell us the role of commune in the project’s implementation?
A: The commune level is crucial. Commune level knows what is needed and what is not for the commune while district and province level could not do so. Very often, only commune level can compare villages from villages. The district could not do so.
3. Tan Dong commune, in Yen Bai province

Tan Dong Commune is situated in the hills bordering the Red River valley in Tran Yen District of Yen Bai. This is an area of many rolling hills and small rivers and streams that make access to the more remote villages in the commune difficult in wet weather. The area of the commune is 2,551 hectares, of which a majority is classified as forest land (1,232 hectares). People are therefore dependent on forest gardens, plantations and hill crops for their household production, and the area of irrigated rice land is limited. Out a total of 319 hectares agricultural land, only 103 hectares supports two rice crops per year. The population includes 675 households and 3,250 people mainly from the Kinh and Dao ethnic groups. The commune has 8 villages with the Dao communities living in the more remote villages. Six of the eight villages in the commune have been involved in the programme. **Village One**, which is situated at the centre of the commune, began under FCP in 1993 and has been involved in many of the FCP and MRDP activities including forest management, savings and credit, and the Village Development Budgets. The other five villages joined MRDP in 1997 to 1998. **Village Eight** is one of these more recent additions, being one of the Dao villages in a more remote part of the commune. Two of the main activities in Village Eight have been in Community Forest Management and the Village Development Budgets.

**Village one**

3.1 Mr. Nguyen Van Tin (VMG Leader and member of Commune Project Management Group)

‘Talking about commune and village works we usually tell to each other “we are actually government staff already, but our wives at home say that we are more than government staff when it comes to working and being away from home actually”. Perhaps that is true, those who are working for the government all have weekend, we don’t. One work after the other. For example, with commune work, only with The father land front activities, it takes about 10 days, and with culture village I have to give 3 days working with. That is 13 days right? Then working with project at commune level 10 more days, that’s 23 days, 7 more days with village management work… so the whole 30 days of the month is gone. So I am almost never at home, or even if I am home, when villagers come, I have to work with them anyway. Almost never have any holiday. Government staff have vacation, but not local cadre like us here, being home also means we are working”
We usually joke as well: “our project is a “paper-project”, so many paper works, in training as well as in practice when it comes to book-keeping and payment procedures. That is why we called it ‘paper project’, many table and many different kinds of forms. Like for instant in credits and saving training, there are 7-8 different kinds of table, and books.

**Local careers’ work load**

Q: How do you become head of VMG?

A: I have a bit of a better condition of working than many other here in this village. A little more time, which is basically thanks to my family helping me the work at home. I am very enthusiastic of working and I have means of transportation. At that time, I was head of forestry section in this commune having contacts with district level once every week. Some other people here are cable in working like I do, but they did not have motorbike, and it is hard to go to district town with a bicycle. It is far you know, 17 km from here. So I have a better condition to link the work with both commune and village level. Since then, creating a linkage between district project and village has been our duty, being a bridge updating information to villagers here. It is an advantage. That is why villagers voted me to be head of VMG, Tien as accountant cause he has some higher education in compare with villagers. Another thing is that I was working as chairman of credit co-portative from 88 to 91. I had already got some experience being a chairman and working with credits activities. When this project has credits and saving as an activities, I work with it too.

Q: Do you think that there are a heavy load of work? How do you arrange your work in the best way?

A: Sometimes I really think it is heavy, quite tiresome. Actually, those who work at commune level, they told me: “you know, you are good at work”. I have been working with legal matter at commune, registration, certificates and so on. I have to arrange my work. Like last night when I came home after a meeting, I had to stay until 1 am in order to have the report sent this morning. Sometimes, it is easy to find somebody helping you giving speech, but the actual work, you can never hire somebody to do it. If you do not manage to have any work done, no one can help you having a nice report or do the work for you. So basically, one has to do a good work and be enthusiastic.

Q: Do you think it is an advantage to be in charge of different works as well?

A: On my way of thinking, if we manage to do all, and that the people trust what we are doing, we should be very proud. But we really have to arrange the work in the best way, not so easy, cause otherwise, we will end up only doing something
and leaving some others there. Once the work is done, I think I can feel a little proud, like today when your group comes to work, tomorrow I can start working with something else, no one force me: “you have to make this work done instead”. All depend on me myself.

**VMG members have to work closely and equally**

Q: Talking about project works, what do you do?
A: I am a member of the commune management board and head of VMG. My work is basically management work. Of course, when you do management work, you will have to understand a lot of things. Like when we started working with Village Development Budget, the management work became a bit heavier and I have had to take more work. Like for example I had to organize meetings, be the main responsible person for the meetings, discuss with villagers, make the plan with them... Some other detail works were done by Tien being accountant and Lieng with veterinary work. The two of them also have to take responsibilities on many works, so when it is time for reporting to higher level, they can inform me a lot, or we can make report together. Project works at village level are not too many or too complicated, so the three of us in the group can do the reporting without any problem.

Q: What are the difficulties you face while doing so many things at the same time?
A: In general, it is the difficulty for almost all of us here. I mean we are limited with the ability to pick up new knowledge and to really understand new things. There are so many new things which demand good knowledge or skill to put to practice. Many things are hard to do at the beginning, then it takes time to feel that it is easy. We need to sort out how to work gradually. Now when I look back at the whole process of working with project, I can see that there were so many wonders on how to work when we started. But what I learn is that we need to be keen on what we are doing. We are telling each other in a fun way: “we have to be motionless”. Sometimes, there are always somebody who criticize what we are doing, some are correct, some are not. We have to do more good work than bad and think of how people can benefit most from our work. We should be motionless sometimes cause villagers can talk about this or that which we have to explain to them most of the time. “who knows how long the night can be” you know, the most important thing is to look at the result. If we are not really keen on doing the work, and really be confident, may be one can easily stop doing the job just because of being hurt by someone’s comment. In that case, the work is not done, and no one benefits from it.
The role of VMG being “bridge of information”

Q: As you mentioned before, VMG is a “bridge” to link province, district, commune and villagers. Do you think VMG should follow higher level’s opinions or villagers’ opinion?
A: Have to satisfy both I think, higher level or villagers. If we only take villagers into account and do not satisfy the higher level, it is no good, and the other way around. We have to listen to villager and bring up their voice to higher level, then higher level will hear villagers as well. Need to be information both ways, cause we are the bridge you see. Basically we have to listen to villagers and see what they think, also with making the plan. It does not work if there are only orders from higher level.

Q: How do you think you as VMG members can fully this duty?
A: We have a regulation of meeting once in three months with villagers. Like at commune office, we have a regulation of having meeting every 28. The Commune Project Management Group meeting in which chairman of the commune who is at the same time Commune Project Management Group leader to lead the meeting with all VMG leaders about project works. At village, we have 5 credits and saving groups, 10 people in each group. End of each month we meet and discuss how the plan goes. That is the way we do it. One thing is that the project activities have really been connect closely to local activities here. The chairman of the People’s committee is at the same time the head of Commune Project Management Group, so when he goes to the district town for a meeting, he can work with project district co-ordination as well. It is an advantage with flow of information. We at village level can get information about training for instant quickly and go calling villagers to gather at extension house.

Village Development Budget and changes in responsibility of VMG members

Q: Some changes with your work and responsibility since the year 2000 working with Village Development Budget?
A: Of course our work and responsible has increased since money was transferred to village level. So village knew the amount of money of the year and gather villagers for meeting. We will have to guide them, usually villagers want so many things even though the money is not much. We have to make guidelines on what should be done, what should not be done, to do first, what to do some time later. After that we made the plan together. Once money in meant to be for village level to know and carry out activities, VMG members’ responsibilities are higher.

Q: How about villagers’ expectation? Some changes as well? Now when villagers know about the Village Development
Budget, do they want to know clearly about how money has been used? Any wonders or questions or complains from villagers?

A: Yes, some of them wonder and I have to explain. Sometimes, when it was not time for meeting yet, they came and asked me about this issue. Villagers know the amount of money in general, but detail on how money has been spent on, they want to know too, that's why they ask. But when they ask, I have some records and books to show them how money has been spent. We inform villagers about this matter end of the month usually, or after some item of the plan is done. Have to be transparency on this issue, cause that's what villagers want as well. As we understand, our project works the way of promoting more than subsidizing, like when we built the extension house, there was only 15 million dong, some more was contributed by villagers, or in 2000, only 3000 dong was paid by project for rice seed, 16000 dong was paid by villagers cause it cost 19000 for one kg of rice seed.

Training and picking up knowledge

Q: Have you been to training while working with this project? On your opinion, which training value most for you?

A: I have taken many training courses, like Finance management at Agricultural finance management school, new policies for 10 days, etc, which were paid by MRDP. Or a course of forest management in Tuyen Quang, Yen Bai. What I think is most value for me is the course of Rural financial management basically on how to use money in most effective way which create surplus. It is still a big issue now. I don't know how it will work with other villages, but here we will not stop doing the credits and saving activity. Now this village has 30 million dong. This morning, when Mr Toai came to a household, they told that they had 4 hundred thousand dong in the saving account still. Moreover, we have 14-15 million project left with us for being moved to category 2.

Q: What do you learn from all these training’s?

A: Basically the knowledge I have never known before, for example about the credits and saving activity. Lesson learnt on how to call villagers to deposit money to the saving account while letting villagers borrow money; how to make the balance in between the two different flow of money. This skill we need to know. Or in management work, I learn how to understand villagers way of thinking.

Q: How do you actually use these knowledge you got into practice?

A: Yes, for example the way this project has been working here, like when you go fishing, in a very simple language we call “bait money”, or in other word “promoting money”. The project just support to some certain amount, for example it costs 100 dong for a cinnamon tree, project pays 50 dong, and the other
50 dong, villagers have to pay themselves. Villagers are glad and eager to do the planting. If given for free, somebody can just say: “oh, it belongs to the project”. So when both project and villagers pay, they will have to be more responsible, and take good care of the plants. That is a good lesson. I could even use this lesson in daily life for my kids, I only give them support to an certain extent, and they will have to manage on their own to feel value of it. Even our government is trying this way of doing as well.

Q: What more do you learn?
A: Many things. Like when talking about management work, how to do the management is important in carrying out project activities well. How do we talk in a way that villagers listen to. How do I do to make villagers follow finance regulation when it comes to credits and saving activities? Should it be based on regulation or rule or agreement? If regulation is agreed by villagers and everybody benefits from it, it works well, otherwise it does not work. That is management work. Once villagers agree on the regulation, they are more responsible, and leader like me have to be the one who put it into practice well first, I have to be the most responsible person.

Q: Strength and weaknesses of those training?
A: There are many things with strength, for example they have given me knowledge and information that I had never heard or seen. Of course there is a limitation on farmers’ capacity like us here in picking up these knowledge, but the training in general have made us feel really suitable and fit our level of education. Like in order to let us understand, there are some illustration for it and exercise in class, very simple exercises. That is a good way of training farmers like us, so easier for us to understand. Moreover, it is not too serious like some other training, we can be open and discuss in class with teachers. As a small example, we introduced ourselves in class, and when it is time for a break, we can discuss and talk to each other. The only weakness is that it is too much with paper work. We usually joke that “this is a paper project, too much paper work, or perhaps it is because Swedish people have a paper mill factory here, easy with paper supply”.

Plan for credits and saving activities after project’s end

Q: How do you think the credits and saving activities would work after project finishes all its program here?
A: Some time ago, we thought about to making shares for villagers, if villagers want to, they can withdraw the money. So this is going to be villagers’ fund and we are not going to divide it, VMG takes responsibilities in managing this fund.

Q: How are you going to use the fund?
A: It is for letting villagers borrow money and they pay interest. At the moment, I am the chairperson for this cultural village, so I
think this village need to have a fund to carry out activities. At the moment, we have a fund of 14 million dong given by the project together with the knowledge that we have got so far from project training's in Hanoi and Yen Bai. Now villagers do not want to withdraw money they have from the saving budget here. The interest rate is getting lower, bank interest now is only about 0.3 to 0.6% while it is 0.8% with our saving interest here. As soon as villagers do not withdraw the money, we keep working with it.

Q: You mean you keep on working with credits and saving even though project ends its activities this year?
A: That's right. We can not work the way banks are working cause we don’t have the juridical personality. We intended to establish a Peoples credit fund, but according to the bank's regulation, we need to have certain certificate on accountant to run the fund. We can not meet that demand cause I finished 7th grade and Tien (the accountant) finished 10th grade only.

Q: Do you plan to work with credit only in this village or grand it to neighbour villages as well?
A: We are working with two sources by now: one source of villagers deposit the money, some of them even deposit 1 million dong, and another source is from the project letting people borrow the money. We have to pay interest to villagers who deposit the money, and collect interest from those who borrow money. So if we could let neighbor villagers to borrow money, it is fine. The idea is to really enlarge the area for this activities, not only in one village.

Q: Any other credits and saving from some programme here?
A: There was an Unicef credit fund for women here in 1996, but it ended some time ago, cause interest was too high. Otherwise, there is also program of Agricultural Bank. But with the bank, it is a little more complicated in procedure, like with mortgage, or the red book. Only big amount of money that villagers borrow there, cause they mind these procedure a lot. If the amount is only 1 hundred or 2, they prefer choosing credit fund, cause it is simple and easy for them.

Q: Is it a difficult task to get principal and interest back?
A: Yes, at village level, it is a difficult task. But when we work with it, we have to be flexible and open a way for villagers as well. With the project, time to give loan to villagers is 1 year. As what I got from training, the shorter one circulation is, the better, cause the borrower has to think hard on how to use money most effectively. When we give a long term loan, villagers can be leisurely without any pressure to make benefit from the money they borrow. Many villagers do not manage to pay back toward the end of the year, usually we need to do all the payment the latest 31st December. Some face dilemma when they need money to pay the loan and at the same time middleman buy their pigs and chicken with very low price, or
even some unfortunate happens... Cases like that VMG members have to handle, and prolong the paying time. If we force them too much, they might not have anything to rely on. One lives in a community, and when community members face problem, we should not force them. Like close by, there’s a woman-headed household who got a loan of 500,000 dong and hasn’t managed to pay back in 4 years. VMG member has to be flexible. There are some cases here in this village, they do not say that they are not going to pay, but they try.

Role of replying questions of villagers

Q: Any case that villagers come to ask you questions when they wonder, or when they face problem?
A: Yes, of course. It happens, cause there is no work without problem. My way of thinking is that there is always good thing and bad things about the work we do, and it doesn’t mean that it is perfect when everybody is please with everything you do. We know how to grow up when we learn how to handle problems, learn how to figure out for ourselves: “so, this is where I have not done it right”. I can take a story of last year about cinnamon seed. Working as head of forestry section, and VMG, I receive two sources one from Forestry department and one from MRDP. Every year, I receive some cinnamon seeds from our project to do some seedlings for villagers. Last year, there was no cinnamon seeds from the project, I only received cinnamon seeds from forestry department. So villagers came to me questioning: “how come you do not deliver some cinnamon plants to me?”. So when I had not yet inform villagers, they came and questioned me about that project provided seeds and I did not deliver to villagers. I had to explain to them. But the thing is that villagers do not accept my answer right away, have to be somebody else from commune who come and explain this to them. One person explain only they do not trust, have to be two or three.

How to aim at supporting the poor

Q: Doing this job, how do you make sure that the poor benefit from and take part in project activities? Anything particularly for the very poor households or woman-headed-household?
A: Yes, we do the wealth ranking every year. There are two categories. Households category 4th has priority when it comes to receiving rice seeds or fertilizer. All households get support, but better off households receive less. Some other villages, poor households do not manage with mortgage. Anyway, there are different households being poor for different reason, some cases are because the man is lazy, some others because “do little, spend too much”. In this village, there is not much gap in between households, none of them are too poor. Like a household close by, there are only the mother and 2 kids, belonging to the poor in this village, but
they have TV, enough food to eat, wooden house with palm roof. The household receives support from the project like other poor households. The only thing is that the poor they do not dare to get a loan, cause they worry that they may not manage to pay back.

Q: When there were meetings to discuss on Village Development Budget issue, were there some opinions from the poor?
A: In meetings, those who have outside contacts or know more usually speak out more, those who are poor usually do not express themselves so much. Basically if they agree with something or not, they do not say much. They see that other ideas are reasonable then they keep quiet. Often some people tell their opinion, difficult to find meetings where everybody comes to speak all.

3.2 Mrs. Han Thi Lieng (VMG cashier and Village Veterinary Worker)

“Both helping villagers and spreading out knowledge. Many people like me, so I do this veterinary work basically for having such a good feeling being with villagers, not aiming at having payment. Once, when one buffalo had problem delivering a calf, took long time and till they inform me to come, I tried and managed to keep the buffalo survive. They was so thankful and that made me happy. Or in the Dao community, they usually make some ceremonial offering for the buffalo when it gets sick, how would that work? I came by chance and tried to help, so the buffalo was fine again. Then when one woman came to me and thanked me, I suddenly realized that I was doing some treatment to a buffalo which I have no idea to whom it belongings…Villagers have kept coming calling me to cure disease for their animals. I actually have improved my skill a lot, and experienced a lot, hope for me training. It is so nice to be back to the training I had before and meet old classmate. Now there are only 2 of my classmates who still do this job like I do, it is a hard job and many have given up. I myself think that I would like to keep on doing it together with my enthusiastic. People from Bao Dap communes call me to work for them as well, even though there are veterinarian closer by. They said they only trust those who are so committed to the job like I do. I like this job, and only because I like it that I could go even in the middle of the night, you can ask my husband, he knows. One night, when it was very cold, there were one buffalo with a server problem of breathing. I had to cross stream while water was so cold, something like 9-10 degree. After I got my job done, coming home it was morning already. Villagers told me :“you would always stay thin if you keep this way of working”
**Being a working woman in the village**

Q: What brought you to this project work?
A: In 1994, villagers voted me to be one of the VMG members, and I have worked since then. At that time, the criteria for this work was that the person need to have capacity and enthusiastic. Villagers trust those we were elected, so we were voted. In 1995-96, the time when credits and saving started here, villagers decided not to re-elect the VMG again, cause VMG members have got training and it is difficult for somebody who is new.

Q: Can you think of some reason why villagers chose you?
A: I don't know, the only thing I know is that villagers wanted to have a VMG member who is a woman, cause women can easily talk to each other, having contact and work together. After seeing that I have done a good work with VMG, women here have voted me to be The Women’s Union’s board.

Q: Some more work that you have been doing?
A: Commune people committee has given me some more work too. From 96 to 98, I was working with. More work to do so it was hard, I was busy with many things. Commune officers told me to try and support me, cause without working for this Mother and kids health care and protection programme, I did not have any salary for activities of the The Womens Union. The commune chairman told me that he gave me this job so I could get some little salary. I got 100 000 dong per month at that time. In 2000, this programme joined with health section, so I stopped working with it, which meant that there were no more 100 000 dong for me, but also relief of many works. Honestly I was trying do the work, money was so little in compare with having all these work to be done.

**Stories of village veterinarian working as an informant of a VMG member**

Q: What keeps you working with so different things? You work as an veterinarian as well, don’t you?
A: I can’t explain, but I like the work. Working makes me happy and I like meeting people and having good contacts with them. In 94-95, husbandry activities started to develop, project co-ordinator informed to VMG to select one person who is enthusiasm to join a training on veterinary. The course was short, only 25 days, you can see my classmates and teacher in the photo up there. After taking that course, I had to learn a lot more. Many experience veterinarians have keep on studying and learn even small detail, not talking about me. When I was in Tran Yen for one training, I had to spend much money on books. So after coming back here working, commune officers saw that I was doing pretty well, then the chairman sent a decision pointing me as Commune
veterinarian. Big job and higher responsibility, I have been working since then, not only with curing disease but also with disease prevent for the whole commune.

Q: Is it hard to work with so many thing at the same time?
A: It is hard when it is long way to go to household, sometimes when it is crowed and I had to go to the other side of the stream, if I could not go and help them curing the cattle, I would feel bad. Coming to household this way makes me almost be a informant on vet issue. Like for example I have to answer many questions, they asked: "what should I do when my pig got some pain in the leg?", or "what's wrong when the pig got white shit? and so on…

Q: Do you think working that way makes you like the job and improve your skill as well?
A: It is so fun, especially at the beginning when I compared what I learnt and what I saw in reality. Things are not the same way as in books, like in the book, it is red color for the spot to diagnose some disease, but in face, not all cattle have these spots with red, some are even a black blue or purple blue, or sometimes not so clear as we can read in books to diagnose. If we cure disease for human being, we can ask question to diagnose, but cattle do not speak. One case like when the cow which had stomach pain started to run and jumped around, people had no idea what happened, they said the cow got mad cow disease.

Q: How do you manage with so many works at the same time?
A: Luckily I have my husband supporting me. Without him being so helpful, giving me time, there would be no way I could do these work. I myself also have to arrange the time. One of the difficulty is that there is no time table for a veterinarian, cause villagers can come and call you at any time. Like while I was doing some book keeping work, somebody came and asked me to help with the pig's sickness, then I had to stop the book keeping there and went to help them. I have some great support from my kids who can do lots of house work as well.

Q: Do you think when project ends its activities here, villagers will still remember these knowledge they have got so far? Will you still be working when this project ends?
A: As soon as villagers trust me, I will still keep working. I was just a normal villager, and thanks to working with this project, I have improved my knowledge, and have opportunities to be out visiting different places, get a new job to help villagers with their animals, and help villagers with some investment money on agriculture. I also have chances to meet many VMG members of neighbor villages and visitors here like you, Georgina and Thao. There are so many things I have gained since project started here. I would like to work more and to have more training and do more things like I do. Project activities have benefit people here.
Q: What are left here when project ends its activities?
A: Many things stay here when project ends. We still keep working with those knowledge we have got, and try to improve the skill and may be know more. But we hope this project keeps working more with this village. Those who have capacity should have more training to help them improve their skill. Some short courses for a few days or few weeks can not be enough, there are so many more things which are helpful for life, and that will help villagers a lot. When project ends, everything we have got so far will sustain.

Q: After project ends, if somebody from neighbor village comes and asks you to teach them some skill or knowledge, will you find some way to help them? Can you do that on your own?
A: If somebody who wants to work with vet and wants me to transfer some experience, I can help them. I have taught some women in neighbor villages to do some simple veterinary work, like giving injection to chicken and pigs, and how to do it in a good way. I do the injection work today, and leave some medicine to them so they could do it themselves tomorrow. I never keep my job as a secret. Many people even wants to know this job to earn money, but not me. I think this is really a large area, only me can not do all the job for all villagers, and I can not stay young forever, so I want as many people to know about veterinary as possible. Many people have got training and knowledge, but because they are afraid, or they do not like the job, or they had some bad experience… they do not manage to work with this. Some of them after the training coming home, giving injection to pig and that pig died right away for some reason. He said: “I swear on 3 generation of my family that I will never work with veterinary anymore”. He gave up the job since then.

3.3 Mr Do Van Tien (VMG member and accountant)

“The impression villagers here have for this project is that project has given them so much support. Knowledge to villagers and make this knowledge really works for them is the most success this project has given. Beside there is extension house and credit fund…”

Some lines about working and being a VMG member

Q: What are the difficulties working with project activities?
A: First of all it is about payment for VMG member, it was 50 000 dong before and since 2000 with the Village Development Budget, we get 200 000, that is a bit low in compare with the amount of work we are doing here. Another thing is about how to encourage villagers. There is a limit in our level of education here and it is hard to make communication works smoothly. There are always somebody who is so hard to convince or to make them understand. Sometimes, I have to
come and explain 3-4 times until they understand the issue. Some of them even turn to be quibble and annoy with us. It is not that people can understand things in the right way, we need to be a little patient.

Q: Do different works overlap?
A: Project work is not daily work for the whole year. Sometimes there are a lot to do, sometimes I don’t have to do anything. It is difficult to control these works and making a time table.

Q: During the time 2001-2001 when Village Development Budget is carried out, are there some changes in your work?
A: It is a better way of working when money is transferred to village level. Easier to take control. For instance when we wanted to make the road, we had to keep on waiting for money to come, when money came, it was harvest time and we couldn’t do it. Now we can control the plan and the road is made during the proper time.

Q: Any demand from district and commune project staff?
A: No demand on issue of finance, but they keep asking us to work effective and keep trying, learning, finishing plan to check up on these issues.

Q: What support do you have from higher level?
A: Giving us some guidelines and helping us with some book keeping work and payment procedure. District co-ordinators come here sometimes too, to check up our work, or to give some training.

Q: What do you think will happen when project ends?
A: When project ends, the sustainability basically depend on village, but VMG should keep working, and credits and saving should be sustained. We have already got a fund of some 30 million dong and it is good to keep working with it. When project ends, there will be no working fee for us, or it is going to be low, so we VMG member might have to combine with some more work.

Village eight

Starting MRDP activities in 1998, village Eight belongs to the list of a “newcomer”. The Dao ethnic minority here still face lots of difficulties. They are working hard to improve life. Village Development Budget has been applied here as a new way of working. However, the most remarkable change here for villagers after some time being together with project activities is agricultural output. Worries of food shortage has decreased, creating a better condition for villagers to go planting forest. Cinnamon has become villagers’ favorite tree. Villagers here still hope for having more project activities.
3.4 Mr Nong Xuan Tham (VMG Leader and former Village Head)

“What we have done well is that we could call villagers to contribute work to build the extension house, and 31 electricity poles, and money which is transferred to village level. What we can be proud of most is to have many hectare of cinnamon trees. Once we got a budget, I will together with villagers build a nursery garden here to do the seedlings. Since 1997, there have been certain changes. Even villagers are poor and shortage of food still exit, but now they do not have to go to forest digging cassavas anymore, they can sell cinnamon, and then buy rice. I’m proud of that. There should be more training for cadres here, and for villagers on agriculture. It doesn’t matter if the content is repeated cause villagers here can not write, so they like to hear”

Village eight with changes in working, doing and proving life

Q: Since land was allocated to household, what are the changes in the village?
A: End of the 80s, land was allocated, no more dispute, because household with more land had to hand over to other households. But we used local rice seed only, the new cross breed rice was so expensive, how could villagers afford that? Changes started since 1998 when project started here, transferring knowledge and supplying new rice seed. First we had to go to villagers and encourage them to use cross breed rice. They thought that this new rice seed was so expensive and no one knew if it would work well. Gradually they trust this new techniques.

Q: Is it new that villagers cultivate 2 crops? How does it work?
A: We have been having two crops for a long time. It was only before 1960 that we cultivated one crop, after 1960 when we had collective farm, we have two crops. Village 7 and village 8 were gathered in one collective farm from 1960 to 1978, then the whole commune became one collective farm. But we were all very poor at that time. People worked for labor point and each point got 100/200gr rice when harvested. Normally one person got about 200 points per one crop, he/she had 7-8kg rice/month. During that time, only after division leader had come to the field that villagers showed up. If cadres were not in the field, villagers would have stayed home. Even though it was the hunger time, but villagers did not positively work themselves. It is only when land is allocated to household that they are working hard and are in control of farm work. They are working for their own land. At first, they spent money on agricultural input, but without knowledge, the harvest was only from 80-90kg/sao, or even 60-70kg/sao. Now the harvest can
get to 180-200kg/sao, not that high as neighbor villages out there, because of the quality of land here.

Q: Do villagers cultivate swidden rice still? Is it a source to provide them some more food?
A: Swidden rice doesn't give good harvest. In that past, the harvest was only 30-40kg/sao, depending on the weather. Some time ago, land up there was not good for swidden rice anymore, so they stop. Now villagers do not cultivate this kind of rice anymore because forest land is allocated also. So forest belong to household to take care of, if they cultivate swidden rice, it means that they cut their own forest. Nowadays, there are only two important kinds: wet-rice and cinnamon.

Project in related to changes of the village

Q: How has it changed here since project started? Some changes in both village and commune?
A: When this project started, villagers started to try new rice seed as well, cause they got 50% subside on the price. They knew that new rice seeds can be very good for better crop, but without money, they could not try. Since they tried cross breed rice, the harvest has increased. They do not have to go to forest digging cassava some months before harvesting like they did before. Talking about changes in this is area, in the past, it was central mechanism that our government worked, and also because of the war, we lived in a very poor condition, we had to even go far to carry water. Now villagers have motorbike, bigger road… Project provided us with money to build the extension house, only with 30 million dong, our children now have a place to study thanks to that. Now we have electricity poles using Village Development Budget, 30 cement poles you know.

Q: Being a cadre for a long time, do you feel the changes in working with villagers here?
A: In compare with the collective time I worked before, there is change that I do not know how to find a reason for. It is that villagers were easier to call upon or to convince. Villagers trusted cadres more, and they lacked of information at that time, so most information came from division leaders or team work leaders, they had to listen to. Nowadays, there are so many different source of information, and they hear about honest people and dishonest people…They do not listen to everything cadres say and do not have high expect on cadres like they had before. Cadres who do not have enough capacity or knowledge face difficulties in convincing them or let them listen to.
From a village leader to a VMG leader

Q: How did you start working with VMG?

A: At the beginning, I did not know what was going on, and what would happen, whatever they delivered here, we receive for the village. I was village leader at that time, and heard commune People committee informed that village eight was selected to join the project. Then I had to inform villagers to go for meeting, in which we figured out issue of land assessment, household wealth ranking, and discussed if villagers needed new rice seeds, or loan...There were 25 households registered to join project activities, some other households they did not know what project would do, so they did not join. After that the VMG was elected, and we VMG member had no idea what we would do, so we were sent for training. Training took place here for villagers as well. In 1998 when credits and saving started, I was villager leader so I was sent to training. Then we VMG have had to manage the fund, organizing different groups of household to give loans, withdraw the principle and interest...I had to receive information to inform villagers, and see what were needed at village level to recommend to higher level.

Q: Can you tell about why villagers elected you? What skill or capacity you think you have?

A: I was village leader so I knew the job and had already got some little allowance. Ms Phuc was a teacher so they voted for. I have got some skill working in police force and then commune work. I can still call villagers, go out for work trip, have experience, belong to older generation, and my voice still value to villagers. I do not have bad reputation or any case with money, so when villagers trust me, I can work. Some other people here could as well do the job, but they do not have much experience. My family’s economy is quite stable with few hectare cinnamon trees. The only disadvantage is that I am getting older, so be a little slow in picking up knowledge.

Q: Compare village leader’s work and VMG leader’s work, which one is more difficult?

A: It is more complex to be village leader, cause one of the duty he has is to collect tax. Sometimes, villagers drink liqueur and start nagging at the village leader. With this project, head of VMG does not have to deal with money himself, only on plan, so he can not take advantage of his position. Last year, I did not get any cinnamon from the project and I had to do the seedling myself, villagers know that. 5 million dong was spent for electricity cement poles, and villagers saw those poles in this village, so they knew money was spent right. Only with that can I convince villagers to contribute 20 000 dong each household together with 4 million from Village Development Budget to buy some more electricity poles this year.
Q: Should one person be in charge of both jobs?
A: No, he shouldn't. It is possible to be in charge of a village leader's work and VMG work, but he can not focus on doing the work, so it is not good for the project either.

**Something to discuss on Village Development Budget**

Q: What was new about working with the project the year 2000?
A: Since 2000, budget has been transfer to village. I have had to see what is new to inform villagers, and then base on villagers opinion to make the plan, the submit plan to higher level. But there was no money in reality, only on records and things to receive. Toward end of the year, we do payment procedure with red receipts. So we just did the work according to the plan which had been made. It is difficult but easy as well.

Q: How do VMG get information about money has been transferred or not?
A: District inform commune, commune inform village, VMG gather meeting to inform villagers. VMG leader like me have to make a plan before hand, then gather village meeting to have agreement, then submit plan to commune, when district level sends money, we carry it out.

Q: Who came up with the ideas of how to use the budget? Like for example the electricity pole?
A: When Commune Project Management Group at commune level received information that there was a budget for village, they gave some recommendations. VMG saw something not suitable for village can inform Commune Project Management Group, and when Commune Project Management Group accept, we had to have meeting and get agreement from villagers, then take that plan back to Commune Project Management Group. VMG do not hold any money. About the electricity poles, it was actually our idea, we saw what was needed in the village. Like the electricity poles, one can see right away that wooden pole got into a bad shape. I prepare plan before hand, higher level approve, villagers agree, easy to put into practice.

**Support from commune level**

Q: Do you need support from Commune Project Management Group?
A: There are times when we need them, they show us the way to work. Even though I have been to training, but some moments, I could not figure out how to work with this activity or the other. Like I do not have knowledge on calculating on how many cement we could buy, how much contributed by villagers and these practical issue, so VMG had to ask Commune Project Management Group to buy these poles for us. When electricity poles were brought to village, I called
villagers to pick them up. Or rice seeds, VMG had to ask District Extension Station officers to buy for us.

Q: Now when villagers know about money being sent to village level, do they have higher expectation on VMG? Do VMG members have higher responsibilities?
A: Villagers do not push us, they know that there are some support from the project and some parts they have to contribute. There is no problem. Sometimes, villagers registered for cinnamon plant, but changed their mind, but it was fine. Of course VMG have more responsible since Village Development Budget started here, a big amount of money so higher responsibility. But Village Development Budget do not ‘see’ money, only plan. Most of the time, we discussed with Commune Project Management Group when we faced some problem while handling Village Development Budget issue.

VMG with higher levels and villagers

Q: Do you feel more accountable to villagers or to higher level?
A: Whatever we do, we have to do right. If one does not do things right, the higher level will ‘cut’ the program off from my village, so I have responsible for that. To villagers, if I do not do things right, I lose my face with them. Working with Village Development Budget can be easy but can be difficult at the same time, VMG have to follow the right items to make the plan, otherwise higher levels do not approve. It is not like to give someone some money which he can use that money for whatever he likes. In the plan, there is item of electricity poles, if money is not spend on this item, no approve. There was one example of a village out there which was cut off from project program, so we have take that example and do things right here.

Q: Working with Village Development Budget, which skill do you think VMG need to do the work well?
A: Not too demanding, just VMG members need to get along well, sharing the work together, and create a good relation with village leader and other mass-organizations in the village to use the money. If VMG do it wrong, causing problems, no benefit for ourselves but being bearded the guiltiness.

3.5 Mr Ly Van Pec (VMG member and accountant)

“Whatever we do, we have to be transparent and three members of VMG working together. In the past, villagers did not have education, so it was hard. Nowadays it is easier, everything needs to be clear to them. What I don’t know, I ask those who know, or ask higher level, I do not hide my weakness in my working capacity, otherwise I can never improve my skill”
Q: How does it change with your work since project started here compare with before?
A: Many changes, change in the method. VMG members are trained to do the work, especially books and records are made in a better way with guidelines. Whatever you don’t understand they explain to you in training. In the past when I worked with the collective farm book keeping, it was not so clear, and we did not have so clear form to fill like now. Even when we received money, we did not have to make it detail with the books and records. Now everything with books and records are printed and easy to see, for example, I just received 2 million dong, there is one column for receiving, one column for spending. Before, there was no number for any item.

Q: How comes you are a VMG member?
A: Villagers voted for me in a meeting. They chose me cause project activities include money issue, so there should be one person to be leader of VMG, one accountant, one cashier. I worked as an accountant and division leader before during the collective time, so I got some experience. That is why villagers elected me. They think I can work, can call villagers, have good relation with them, and that I have an amiable attitude with the old, the young and everybody. They liked to choose me, so they did.

Q: How you do find yourself after some time working with this project?
A: In compare with the time when the project was so new here, I have got used to VMG work, like book keeping, make plan... now it is easier. After working for one, two years, I find it easier, whatever I don’t know, I ask somebody who knows. In village meetings, I could combine different contents including planting or protecting forest, insects prevention...One content after the other, I can inform about the part of project activities and other mass organizations can inform about their activities. We also need support from these unions to do our work well.

Q: Are there often many villagers in meetings?
A: Yes, when it is project meeting. There are 65 households in this village and they are there. I had to inform them about the content of the meeting before. Villagers do not come to meeting if they do not know what it is about.

Q: Which language do you use in meetings?
A: Vietnamese. When somebody like old people who can not understand ask me, I speak Dao language to them
Are VMG eager to work with Village Development Budget

Q: On your opinion, what is needed to make Village Development Budget work most effectively? Do you think VMG manage with the budget sent to village?
A: Budget send to village should be money to be transferred. With money we can manage. VMG can invite village leader and find out what needed to be done first and come to some agreement. That can be arranged. Money matter of one village should be done by village staff, and we can responsible for that, the district and commune and supervise and check up.

Q: Do you think VMG will manage? Will villagers trust all you do?
A: We can manage. The whole village with 65 households we can manage. Villagers trust us, that is why they elected us. VMG prepare a plan, then let villagers know and discuss the content and everything is transparent. Villagers need to know, to discuss, to do and to check up as well.

Q: How do you prove that VMG at village level can manage with Village Development Budget and money matter?
A: With budget of 30-40 million dong transferred to village for instance, we can manage. Let's say this village would like to build a dam, we can calculate and know how to have it done, or the health care house, or with electricity…If 50 million or 100 million is transferred here, we can make a detail report on how much things cost and put it into practice when money comes. But money should be to village, not to commune. When money is transferred through commune, village do not receive total amount, cause money sent to commune means that it is commune money, they have the right to take control. It is like holding a knife on the handle, village do not have money and then can not manage to work with it.

Q: How does communication work between different levels?
A: Commune level receives information. Commune is higher level to the village, but they should be very closer to village. Commune thinks that village do not manage. I think they should create good opportunities for villages, especially ethnic mountainous village like ours to develop. It is right that commune level worry, but we should work it out together, village do the work themselves with supports and supervises from district and commune. Commune level should help village, and should supervise us, but it does not mean that they should take control of money and use our money for something else, it is mean to be for villagers, for village level.
3.6 Mrs. Dang This Phuc (VMG member and cashier)

“Like these following days, I have been away from home all day, everything with feeding pigs and house work, I have ask my son at home to take care of. We are making a road here in this village, and when I am working with you here I have to ask other women to take my work. This work with the road starts 5 o’clock in the morning and I only come home when it is evening. At first, my husband complained a bit. Sometimes I had to take part in a 2-3 days meeting and could not do anything at home. He was angry because the kids keep crying, then forced me to stop all the jobs. I had to explain to him. Now when visitors who work with me with the family planning program come, he really welcomes them. Somebody even told him: “you let your wife works that way, never me”. One woman was about to become party member in 1993, but just because of the family-in-law that she had to stop working. Like in my family in law as well, they wanted me to have 2 sons, one more son, even though I had already got 2 daughters and one son. My husband kept asking me to stop working and having one more son. After explaining to him all the time that “with four kids, how can I work?” without success, I had to have one more kid, a son. In general, family and work have to go together.”

Woman as a VMG member and the progress that women in the village make

Q: Can you say something about how you became a VMG member?
A: I don’t know. First, men can not be close to women in the village like I do. When I work, I can do a lot of things together with women here. Whatever I see or learn, I tell them, and that benefits women in our village.

Q: Are there many Dao women working like you do? How have you helped women in this village since you started working?
A: Not so many women work, basically because of shortage of knowledge. I have a little bit higher education than others, so I am given more duties. For me, I have learnt a lot. For other women, they now can take part in different activities in the village more than before when it was always men to socialize. Mr. Cuong from province who just came and visit this village told us that women here are now more active. There was a village meeting 2 weeks ago with 20% men and 80% women. There are many things to learn with project activities and the knowledge are so useful. Now it seems that woman and man are more equal. Now the husband has to talk to wife when he wants to buy or sell something and wife can do the same thing, not like in the past when woman did not dare to sell one single package of rice.
Work load for a woman being in charge of different duties

Q: What have you done so far since you worked with this project?
A: When money for credits and saving was not transferred to village yet, I was trained by two district co-ordinators, learnt how to work with book keeping for 2 days, and worked with wealth ranking as well, then they asked me to join some work with mass-organization. I was like a secretary, writing a lot of thing, and then learnt how to check up with some agriculture techniques. Then when credits and saving started, I had to work with book keeping and had to go explain to villagers what loan was for, how it should work… and then check up if they used money according to the plan. If somebody gets a loan for buying pigs, I have to go and visit them to see if the pig is growing well, any sign of disease, you know, things like that.

Q: Beside being a teacher in this village, do you work for The Womens Union or do some other works as well?
A: Yes, I am member of The Womens Union board in the commune, and responsible for activities of this union in the village. I also have been working as health care facilitator, and doing some work with nutrition for mothers and kids. I have been in the Womans Union since I was young, my grandmother was leader of The Womens Union and my grandfather was general secretary in this commune.

Q: Should one do both project work and union works at the same time? Is it because you work with The Womens Union that your work with the project go more smoothly?
A: I don’t know. At the moment, this is what I am doing. With The Womens Union and project I can combine work, for example, in meeting, when we have already finished informing about project activities, I can ask women to stay for another 30 minutes to talk about the Womens Union activities. Women have understood a lot more now. When we are working together, I can tell them something I have learnt.

Q: Is there any alleviating poverty program specifically for women?
A: There was one program in 1993, and credits program from UNICEF. Some women who had got the loan has not managed to pay back. Some of them have too many kids, and when they got the loan to raise pigs or chicken, they did not manage. So they waited to borrow some more money, but the program ended some time ago.

Q: Any activities for very poor women?
A: Yes, this project has. Poor households were given 3 kg rice seed while other household got less than that, only 1-2 kg.
**Difficulties that a woman face being a VMG member**

**Q:** While working with the project activities, what difficulties have you got? Like for example when you do the book keeping, or when you work with credits and saving?

**A:** There are difficulties, but I have to try to overcome. For I have low education, so I have to both do and learn at the same time. With credits and saving, the important thing is if villagers can pay both interest and principles. But villagers are good here, they inform us if you are late with the payment, in general they all pay in time. It is also difficult with book keeping. When I find it difficult, I ask other member of VMG, or somebody from commune or even district. There are 8-9 different kinds of books and report, so when I don’t understand anything, I ask them. There are times when I even had to take all these books with me to their house and wait for them until they go home.

**Q:** How do you manage to do so many works at the same time, like working with the Womens Union, with project, with house work, ect? How do you arrange your work? And what difficulties you face?

**A:** With work, one has to know how to arrange the time, and know what to do first, and what to do later. Sometimes, there are training’s taken place during the farm work season. I have to go and take part in the training even though I am the main labor, then I have to arrange the house work and ask some relative or neighbor to help me, then I could work for them when I come back. If I do not ask for help, I might have had to leave some project work, that’s not good. The most important thing is still to have husband and family support. If they do not support me, I can never just leave the house work there and go for any other work. Having a family who are so understanding, I can do both outside work and house work.

**Q:** Anything that is too hard for you to handle?

**A:** Only keep trying. Villagers trust me and I got this duty. I don’t feel good if I do not do the work proper. But my education is low, so I have to both work and pick up knowledge at the same time, gradually, it is getting better. There are times when I had to go even during the night, cause they were not home during day time.

**About how to support women and improving skill**

**Q:** What support do you need to do your work better?

**A:** Support one needs most of all is from family. Only with arrange work proper can one manage, otherwise she would always be worried. Family first before you manage with any other work. I would like to take part in more training.
Q: Do you find those training easy to understand?
A: Sometimes it is a little difficult for me to understand, cause it is so fast. You know I'm an ethnic minority person, so sometimes I can’t catch up. When we have break, I go and ask some other classmates. The teacher may speak a little too fast, I can’t write down fast, so I leave it blank and borrow my classmate's notebook.

Q: How do you apply knowledge from these training?
A: In agriculture work at home. Before the project came, there was one training a year on women activities of The Womens Union. Now not only my kids learn at school but also me and my parents who get more knowledge.

Q: Do you find yourself having more responsibilities?
A: Yes, now everybody comes to ask me about all kinds of different things. Things like the electricity network in this village, about insect preventing work and so on, even these are not my work, I still have to inform them. When women wants to know some issue with family planning, they come to ask me instead of the person who responsible for this work. When some material are taken here by car, I have to go and call villagers to carry. I had to carry that too. If I do not, I can not convince anyone to carry it. The other day when Mr. Cuong came here with a big heavy electricity generator, many villagers had already left for some labor work, no men was home, so I had to call some women to carry this generator. 8 of us to carry those machines, 2-3 times.

Q: Do you see yourself growing up? How is it with different relations in general?
A: I have improved a lot. First of all, I know more about book keeping work. I did not know anything about it before. Each year when there is training, I find my skill being improved. And without being a VMG member, I would never be able to travel to Nghe An province, and having more relations with district staff, communes as well. I have now got to know those women at agricultural and extension sections. When I need some knowledge about husbandry, I could come and ask them, and invite them to come and teach us.

Q: After this project ends, if villagers have wonders or want to learn more, do you think you can still go to district yourself and invite them to come and teach villagers?
A: May be I still can. In order to have a teacher for the training, we need to find some source of money to pay them. When project ends, we will try to sustain some activities, even though we have a little fund left for credits and savings. Very small activity.
Something about Village Development Budget in villagers’ way of thinking

Q: What difficulties are there in working with Village Development Budget?
A: At first, villagers did not understand about this fund, they wanted money to be divided to households, then they can do whatever they want to. When the money for loudspeaker was only 8.4 million, and the rest was left for the Commune Project Management Group, villagers they complained a lot, they thought money should be given back here to villagers.

Q: Did villagers come up with some ideas which are not in the plan?
A: Only that they want more money, even with contributing money to pay the cross breed rice which were sold with project price support already, they can not pay. They want more. 30 thousand dong for cinnamon, many households they can not pay either.

Q: Did you inform villagers about what you got after meeting about Village Development Budget?
A: Yes, what should be informed I do, otherwise I don’t. For example, the commune is going to transfer 20 million dong to village, but if it is not for sure, I will not inform that. Anything which is not clear, or certain, I do not inform anybody.

Q: What do you benefit from this project?
A: In that past, I did not have so many relations with neighbor villages or communes, now I have more relation, so I can see more and have a better view. I can also exchange experience with many other people who are not Dao like me.

Q: Is there any project activities that did not work here? Should anything be taken as a lesson or experience?
A: Villagers voice should be heard better, there should not be any pressure from higher level. It is better that things are built up from village level to work in a more effective way.
4. Nam Lanh commune, in Yen Bai province

Nam Lanh Commune is a remote upland commune in Van Chan District of Yen Bai. The total area of the commune is some 7,752 hectares, with a wide altitudinal range over 2,000 metres from 300 metres a.s.l. where the commune office is located, to 2,500 metres at the top of the commune at the summit of Ngon Lanh Mountain. The land area includes 2,995 hectares of classified forest land, and 4,430 hectares unclassified land a majority of which is steeply sloping forest or rocky mountain. The area of agricultural land is only around 301 hectares. Villagers are therefore highly dependent on forest and hill crop (maize) production. And the lack of agricultural land for new households in the future, or the reduction in the quantity of high quality land per household, is a major driving force in the villager’s determination to manage their forest land productively. The population of the commune is around 400 households and 2,500 people, including Dao (88%), Hmong (7%), Thai and Kinh ethnic groups. There are 7 villages in the commune, including Giang Cai and Nam Kip that began working with MRDP from 1996 and 1997 respectively. There have been a wide range of MRDP activities in these villages including Community Forest Management, supporting market analysis and development, and the Commune and Village Development Budgets.

4.1 Mr. Hoang Phuc Hung (Chairman of Nam Lanh Commune Peoples Committee)

“There have been changes here these following years, villagers are glad that they can take part in discussing and working. The activities like planting forest, making plans were carried out by villagers. Villagers’ awareness has been increased a lot. Now there is no more forest being cut down to make swidden field, raising animals are improving as well. Basically these are results in Nam Lanh commune since after project started here”.

Organizing project at commune level

Q: Can you tell something about how MRDP has been working here in Nam Lanh commune?
A: Thanks to our Government and Party’s concern about our mountainous commune, in 1996-1997, Nam Lanh was chosen to join the Vietnam Sweden mountain rural development programme. The first step started with gathering villagers in meeting and let them discuss. This keep working every year. For example, forest management, training, seedlings… are activities which villagers have taken part in. First of all, talking about institutional issue, this project set up a village
management group of 3 to 5 people: one leader, one vice leader and 1-3 members, each member responsible for a certain activities. VMG leader take management work, other members work as veterinary, or accountant, or cashier or secretary.

Q: How activities have been carried out?
A: The result is that project have supported villagers here a lot. First with knowledge to them on cultivating wet rice, doing seedlings of cinnamon and tea, raising animals...Especially two villages Giang Cai and Nam Kip have carried out forest management activities.

Q: What are strength and weakness of project activities in this commune?
A: There are many good things about this project. First of all, thanks to project supplying expenditure on rice seed, fertilizer, plants... especially since 2000, villagers’ life have improved. Then the activities of forest management and protection have been carried out successfully here. So people’s awareness have increased and villagers set up group and choose those who are young and strong to protect the forest. They made an agreement on forest management and protection, every month and year these groups keep checking and oversee important part of the forest...The only bad thing is that when villagers carried out this forest management work, they thought they would have some payment for that, but there was not any payment, so villagers complained a bit.

Q: So what did villagers receive for doing this forest management activities?
A: Only some sign boards bought by province or district project. They sent these boards to us. Last year, we received longan trees. Villagers want it differently. They want payment in cash to buy some rice, or in rice, so they could have some more food in return to time and labor they have spent on doing this forest management. On the plan, it was money, but when higher level province and district staff put it into practice they said it was not money, protecting forest means that villagers need to plant more trees, so they sent us longan trees (which is not suppose to be forest tree). Like for Giang Cai, they sent 5 sign board and 100 longan plants which was 6 million dong on the plan, while in fact it should be a little more than 4 million dong only, the rest was moved to some other activities. For us at commune level, they sent us 100 longan plants anyway, even though it was not in the plan.

Management and direct different programs in one commune

Q: Beside MRDP and 135, are there more programs here in this commune? When there is a new program here, how do
commune select village to join this program? Base on which criteria that a village is select not the other one?

A: Yes, there are some more programs, but small scale only, like malaria control project, or nutrition for Mothers and kids, health care. Ah, yes, 661 also. Last year, it was a program of 88 ha forest in this commune. Now we have done 50% of that. Basically with protecting old forest and protect the planting forest. In the whole commune, we have 1086 ha forest for protection. About choosing villages we have to work together with district to select, and at the same time need to have agreement with village level. Anyway the plan is made by village level, like plan for the year 2002 with 135 is made by villagers. To make it more clear, villages gather these information and send to commune level. Commune will look through and see which village should have 135 program this year, and which one can wait until next year. Those issues which are most important from village level will be given priority. If the program focus on irrigation system, we will see which village is shortage of water for the field, and discuss with village level to have them done first. We build up plan from village level, so if villages want to make a road, or bridge… we can discuss in the commune and make the decision. Which one is most in need will be select first.

Commune Project Management Group and the way of working at commune level

Q: How come there are 5 members of Commune Project Management Group here instead of 3? Who came up with this idea?

A: We thought there should be 3 members, but then many people said it would be better if we had more, and this did not matter so much with allowance for the members. More people have more ideas and can contribute more to the success of the work. So we have chairman of PC, general secretary, chairman of People council, vice general secretary, chairman of the Father land front. So whatever the plan is, it is agreed by both Party and government staff, so we could just go ahead.

Q: The Commune Project Management Group was established in 2000. How did project work with Nam Lanh at commune level from 1996 to 2000?

A: The chairman was the only person who took part in project work at that time. Basically to be representative and to give some guidelines and support to village level. It was province and district co-ordinate working directly with village level. Commune level only deal with stamp and signed papers.
Commune – Village Development Budget from commune’s view

Q: How does it work with Commune Development Budget?
A: Budget has been transferred to commune and village since 2000. The three VMG member included one leader who do the management work, one accountant, and one cashier manage the Village Development Budget. Commune plays role of supervising and monitoring, for example, when it is farming season and villagers need fertilizer, we tell VMG to go and buy it and then get the payment procedure done. This year it has been carried out well. The whole commune and villages got 143 million in which 15 million was for the commune. In 2000, all 7 villages in this commune had 197 million and in 2001, it is 128 million.

Q: What difficulties do you find while working with Commune and Village Development Budget since 2000?
A: The Commune and Village Development Budget is good, whatever villagers want to, they can use the budget for. At first we found it difficult cause our skill did not meet the demand of working with Village Development Budget, no one had professional work with procedures for payment. This year it is better. Commune and Village Development Budget for the year 2000 is more simple.

Q: Do you think you will manage if there is some program working the same way with the budget?
A: Yes, we can. There is a little difficult for us cause the level of education for commune officers is still low, and they got worry, cause some of the items did not fit as it was in the plan. These things did not fit so well. In 2001, the working capacity of commune staff has increased. Even though we could use the budget these two years, there are still some problems, for example: villagers wanted to use money for fertilizer, but it turned out that money was spent on buying desks and benches. I mean it was not carried out as villagers expected to.. Another problem is that villagers have had to contribute some money to the Village Development Budget activities. It was hard to do payment procedure in this case, cause villagers did not manage to pay. The question is if people here manage to pay anything? Even food they do not manage to buy themselves, not talking about paying some money (even it is so little), they prefer not to buy anything instead. So with some construction work, it was delayed and difficult because of this issue. We Commune Project Management Group members have had to spend lots of time to convince villagers.
Q: Can you give some certain figure?
A: Like when we spent money for those items in the plan, according to our project guidelines, villagers contributed 30% and project supplied 70%. Some villagers could pay, but some could not, especially Hmong people here who can be considered as the poorest in the whole country, not in only this commune. The only thing they can contribute is labor, not money. Take a case: buying desks and benches for the extension house, in the plan, they got 3 million from the project and villagers had to pay 30% meant 1.7 million, so totally 4.7 million for this item. Now all these desks and benches have been bought, but to get 1.7 million dong from villagers, we have got 2 meeting without success. At first, the idea of villagers paid in cash was not mentioned in the plan, last year, there was no payment from the villagers side, cause this is zone 3, or even 4. We have no idea how it was changed at district project that now villagers have to pay. Now we have calculated labor work that villagers had, and it cost only 300 000 dong, so more than 1 million dong still. It is easy to say but difficult to do. Villagers do not mind if they have to work and use labor on cutting wood, or making the road… but if ask them to pay in cash the exact amount of money it is so difficult for them. The labor can not cost up to 30% of all the money for desks and benches. Project guidelines was that household wealth ranking 3-4 do not have to pay, here, there are villages with wealth ranking of 3-4-5 up to seven…

Q: On your opinions, why did this happened?
A: On my own way of thinking, this is because we did not have any experience about this. District, commune and villages made plan without thinking carefully, so when it comes to payment issue it is certainly complex. Like this case in Ngon Lanh village, how can villagers pay?

Q: Who came up with the idea of buying desks and benches?
A: Villagers discussed this. There was this item in the plan, cause the extension house was built already, but no desks or benches there at all, it is needed. But then came the issue of villagers pay as well. We have not found any solution for this. Last year, it was only labor that villagers had to contribute.

**Good and bad thing about Commune and Village Development Budget**

Q: What experience do you think value most to you after working with Commune and Village Development Budget?
A: The communication in between different levels on working with Commune and Village Development Budget, carrying out plans and procedures for payment. Last year, the district staff
did not fulfilled the duty. We commune and village management members went to district so many times to get some guidance from district staff. But they did not explain so clearly for us, one person told us this, we followed him, then next time, the other person said something different, so confusing. I think we should take this as a lesson in order to do it better in the future. We should make procedure to be a little more simple as well. What we can make it simple, we should do that, cause it would not demand us to do too many complex works which were not necessary.

Q: Any support you need from district level?
A: Should be closer to villagers, help village level to develop. For example, when commune plan to make an irrigation system which cost 1 million (just an example), district staff can advice us how to do it best, what should do first and what should do later. Not like in last yearn with Nam Kip village, when they needed fertilizer, nothing came, when they did not need it anymore, fertilizer was sent to village. Or Giang Cai village, money on forest management item was spent on longan trees, plan kept changing.

Q: Through this lesson, what do you think we should do it in the future?
A: Province and district project staff should work on detail of every items in the plan and see that there are activities where villagers can contribute labors, or material, so they can make guideline that villagers contribute that. But those with villagers paying the money, they should not force villagers to. We want to suggest to higher level, to MRDP that villagers here are so poor, no way they can contribute anything on cash. Doing Village Development Budget this way will both make villagers happy and easier for us to handle issue of receipts and payment. If our government and project are still have some concern on the poor here, please let them get some payment on the work they do with forest management and protection. One more thing is that there should be more training for accountants and VMG members, and villagers as well in order to help them develop their life better.

Commune staff with their ‘self-assessment’

Q: How do you see the work you have done yourself? Anything you can withdraw as lesson for you all?
A: I think we have contribute the work in making people life here improve a little. Even though our capacity is still low with limited education, in our between commune management group members, there are good relation. We can have good discussion and be frank and work according to the regulation. The difficulties we face is that there have been some changes in the group, some stopped working, and it takes time for the new person to catch up. This effected the process of carrying out activities. We would like to have more training for staff at
both commune and village level so everybody can learn more and get more knowledge in order to do the work well.

Q: Do you think we will manage to keep the training activities for villagers work even after project ends?
A: That might be a little difficult, cause we do not have any budget to pay for training. Whatever we know, we will inform or teach others. We still have to do the work at commune according to the commitment of our job.

Nam Kip village

“In the past, our Dao people here in Nam Kip village were migrating a lot from one place to the other. We were very poor. Since 1998, the project came here and do different activities with agriculture, training… villagers knowledge has improved a lot. Now we know how to use new rice seed, how to cultivate different crops with much better harvest. Before 1998, we cultivated wet rice here but only with local rice seed, the kind of rice which was high low quality. We did not know about intensive cultivation, or insect prevention, so the harvest was not good. After being trained with new knowledge, 90% of households now apply new techniques. The new rice seeds help us have better harvest, we get 200-300 kg/1000 square meters, about 1.2 to 1.5 tons per crop. But it needs lots of payment for input. Those who invest a lot of money for input and take good care can get up to 800kg/1000 square meter. In average, we got about 450kg/1000square meter. We have more fruit tress. In the past, we planted fruit trees the old way, dig a hole and put the plant there. We did not know that the hole should be large and how to keep the fruit tree in a good shape to help it grow quickly”. (Mr. Kinh interview, VMG member and veterinarian, Nam Kip village)

4.2 Mr Ly Kim Vien (VMG Leader)

“There should be more training to VMG members and leaders like us. This will always be needed. The more we learn and the more we work, the better we do. There will be more experience as well. Like I myself was so new to all activities done here in 1998 when project started, so some activities I did not manage to call villagers working with us or to support them, now things are much easier. One year after working with it, I understood a lot, and could be frank to villagers, and know how to do the work better. Same with Mr. Kinh and Mr. Hin”.

The different in working with Village Development Budget

Q: What is the different in working with Village Development Budget since 2000? What difficulties do you face while working with it?
A: Since 2000, there’re receipts to deal with after each activities were done. At first, working with these receipts and paper work was difficult, cause the district staff changed the
information about how they should be all the time, like today they told us to do this, but when we got to the district to submit the papers, they said those were not OK. Not only our village, but also others. Last year, many VMG members couldn’t handle this issue. But now after getting to know how to do it, it’s quite simple, not too difficult.

Q:  Who made the plan?
A:  Villagers. First, we invited villagers to take part in making the plan finding out what needed to be done first, what benefit the whole community…, then we had the plan.

Q:  When the plan was carried out, were there some changes?
A:  Yes, there were. For example, after villagers had made the plan, we went to the district project, but didn’t get approval: as villagers wanted to buy seed or agricultural stuff, and some construction work… but district project changed the items.

Q:  Why did they change the items?
A:  I don’t know. There were no explanation. There were signature for the plan to be done. Therefore, there were some works that villagers did not agree when they were carried out, like the construction work. We planed to make two cement drains here, villagers thought we could use the Village Development Budget for, so the kids could go to school during the rainy season, but it was not approved. Another case was about fixing the school, and also paying villagers for protecting forest activities; not approved either. Fund for protecting the forest was used by the district to force villagers to buy longan plants this small even longan trees doesn’t have anything to do with forest protection.

Q:  Did villagers receive these longan?
A:  Yes! No way to refuse, they had already pay for longan from our Village Development Budget. The cashier could receive Village Development Budget in papers and book keeping only, no cash at all.

Q:  How come? Money was supposed to be transferred to commune and villages only?
A:  Villages received from commune, but cash was only at district level.

Q:  so who received money to buy rice seeds?
A:  VMG this year, but last year, after receiving the money, we had to give money to district project right after that, and district bought all.

Q:  Anything VMG bought yourself?
A:  The District Extension Station bought fertilizers for this village and two other villages. The Station did not allow us to buy fertilizers in Van Chan for some strange reason, and we had no idea where they bought fertilizers. Same with rice seed.
Q: How about this year?
A: We bought these things ourselves.

Q: Any change in the plan this year?
A: Yes, still changes. Like the item of buying pig seedling. We have pigs already and do not need pig, but district project ordered us to buy pigs.

Q: Why didn’t you informed them that villagers did not need pig here?
A: When I told them, the plan had already been fixed. Village made the plan, send to district. When we saw our plan there, it had already been erased here or there, for example the item of pig seedlings, how much it costs, and how much villagers pay, and then district staff asked VMG to sit there copied into a new form of the plan. What could we do in that case? Due to the order you see.

Q: So if village has a fund this much, and made the plan on how villagers should benefit from it, once district change this plan, you all have to follow, is that right?
A: Last year, there were two activities that I mentioned above, villagers had complains and they didn’t agree… VMG like us had to explain all the time. Same with commune level. Sometimes we had nothing to do than just leave it as it is. Like last year, WE planed to fix school, 6,5 million dong in the plan for fixing 7 rooms. VMG discussed, measured, calculated carefully and this amount is really enough for the school to have new roof. But head of extension department in district didn’t approve, he sent construction workers here to do all. Now the result is that it is still leaking when it’s raining, and there’re holes and the roof was not in a good order. 6,5 million together with paying for the designer… in the end couldn’t do as well as villagers here actually could. The school is ours, so we will do it the best we can. But district once said that we could not, sending those workers.. and they did not even finish 7 rooms. If we did that, we could have covered 7 rooms with new roof.

Q: Is there anyway you think we can take control of the budget?
A: According to experience, yes there is, but just because we had consideration of higher lever, so we didn’t say anything. But there is some way of course. Last year, we had to concede the result that villagers lost trust in us, thinking that we had received the money cause the plan was so clear about 6,5 million. The plan was for 7 rooms to be fixed and result was that there’re only 5 rooms fixed and the rooms are still leaking. They misunderstood us. Money was withdraw at district level and commune received everything in book keeping.
Q: How comes district could withdraw the money while account holder is the chairman of the commune?
A: I don’t know. It’s right that the account is at commune to take care of. The bad thing was that villagers did believed that we had received money 6.5 million and they could easily calculate that this amount of money could cover cost for all the rooms. In the end, we had to invite chairman of the commune to come and explained all that to villagers.

Q: Why didn’t you show villagers the receipts and stuff?
A: Of course we did. WE did not receive any money and told villagers that.

**How could we make Village Development Budget to be really villagers?**

Q: Do you think there anyway to make Village Development Budget works for villagers?
A: The only way is that province project or even higher level should make it clear to district level on the main purpose of the programme and check up the work they’re doing. VMG like us have to receive all complains from villagers and they do not trust us anymore.

Q: Anyway village level get money straight?
A: We do not need money straight to us, it can be transferred to as many level as they want to, but only one thing is that let us do the plan ourselves and let us buy items as we plan to.

Q: Will VMG manage in that case?
A: We are ready to do that, and last year we had already asked all levels to let us to

**Lesson learnt on how to work with VDB**

Q: Are there some lessons you can pass on to VMG who have never worked with Village Development Budget?
A: I will pass my experience of these following years working with project, for example once villagers have made the plan, we really have to make it work without higher level changing it. Only that way can visitors trust us. I’ll tell new VMG leader that if district or commune level change our plan, we will have to ask them, or find some way to let them except our idea and discuss with us.

Q: If there’re project working more, what will be the best way to work?
A: Should always listen to villagers, whatever you do, you have to see what villagers want. Only with that you will get villagers working with you and support you.
Q: Anything you suggest about your work?
A: We hope there will be more activities to support our village, to alleviate poverty and hunger, and protect the environment, the forest. There should be more training to VMG members and leaders like us. This will always be needed. The more we learn and the more we work, the better we do. There will be more experience as well. Like I myself was so new with all activities done here in 1998 when project started, so some activities I did not manage to call villagers to do or to support, now things are much easier. One year after working with it, I understood a lot, and could be frank to villagers, and know how to work better. Same with Mr. Kin and Mr. Hin.

Village work and project work, same same but different

Q: What are criteria of a VMG leader?
A: Not less than a village leader, cause it involves with economic issue. If you do not know about households economy or understand each household situation in the village, you can not work with villagers. Another thing is that you need to be capable doing the work, must have knowledge, and really enthusiastic is working for villagers. Need villagers to trust you. Also leader is suppose to be example and be active. Leader of VMG and of the village need to work well together and be really in good contact.

Q: Do you have to prioritize the work you are doing? Commune work, village work and so on?
A: Sometimes works come at the same time at different level, not only me, but also at commune level, we have to arrange the work. For example today we have both project work and commune work to do, we will have to arrange something to be done in the morning, some to be done in the afternoon, or evening, at anytime. Sometimes, I had to stay till midnight or 1am to work.

Q: Do you think one should do one profession work or one should be concurrently in charge of many functions?
A: According to my experience, there’re advantage and disadvantage about one person being in charge of different works. The advantage is that when higher level from province and district come, they could work through this person on different activities, and then can discuss with same group. The disadvantage is that it is hard for the person who hold this position. Here it’s not only me but village leader also is in charge of different works.

Q: How comes one person does not do profession work?
A: Cause it doesn’t worth doing only one kind of work, so they have to combine some others works as well. Sometimes, we have to go to forest to call them. Basically because the paid is so low for local cadres, they work all day but get little paid, so
once they are in charge of different work, they take more responsibility.

Q: Is it good to have a village leader being in charge of village management group’s work?
A: Once villagers choose you, you have to work. I think village leaders and VMG leader should not be one person, because there are a lot to do with project while village leader work is really complicated. If one doing both, he can not have the work done properly. You see experience of Nam Toc and Nam Cai, many of them couldn’t do their work well, if the work is done for project, the village work is not completed, and the other way around.

4.3 Mr. Ly Huu Hin (Village Head and VMG member)

“The only one way to work well is do as villagers would like it to be, sending money straight to village level, let villagers discuss and do it themselves. Should not be like last year, after villagers discussed, plan was changed all the time, no money showed up, just plan kept changing. We sometimes feel that we have lost faith villagers have for us. We VMG can do the management, we do not mind working hard with Village Development Budget, but it should really be transparency when it comes to money issue between different level, otherwise, no one would accept the changes.

Villagers made the plan and then submitted to commune and district level, but then this plan was changed, and it was so difficult to handle receipt issue. One more difficulty was that it was so difficult to explain to villagers that we received material instead of money while money was in the plan. If we bought things ourselves, it was not a big issue. It was easier to let the village level buying these material, but the fact is that even the plan and money belonged to villagers, somebody else came and put it into practice instead, we could not have anything under control. Then villagers got to be suspicious. We would like to carry out the plan ourselves, so anything villagers wonder, we can answer very clearly about. Here I never hide anything away from villagers, that’s the only way to win villagers’ faith.

Once we have informed money issue to villagers, money should be transferred to village level. We will do the book keeping according to the regulation clearly. But it should be noticed that there are things which villagers can never have receipt for, like for instant buying buffalo, or some local rice seed from the neighbor villages…As soon as it is clear that VMG does not take the money and spend it all for ourselves. Any changes we will discuss with villagers.”
Any way to help poor households

Q: What were villagers’ hope when project first started?
A: People are poor here, so when they could see project to invest money on agriculture input, they were really happy.

Q: How about the very poor household and those who faced difficulties, any project activities target them?
A: These poor, we can only help. District and commune can not come here to help them. In this village, I have asked each party member to take responsibility in helping one very poor household. With this project, they do not have to pay for rice seed, fertilizer, transportation... We have been supporting them, informing as well, but these poor people, they do not really say much or contribute opinions.

Q: Do they take part in meeting usually?
A: Usually they do. But when they think they do not have to take part, they don’t come.

Q: When they do not say much in the meeting, is there any way we can encourage them to?
A: They are not so good at that. We have been encouraged them, supported them, informed them about new techniques, or policy...we need to let villagers know to contribute their idea. But not all of them come up with idea, can not be 100 villagers with 100 ideas.

Q: Do you as village leader have any way to support the poorest?
A: Here we have training for the poor, many other households which are not too poor come as well. We organized meeting or working time to fit. So we could work together.

Q: When this village made plan for Village Development Budget, did they know about it, did they take part?
A: Yes, but those poor people did not contribute so many ideas, cause they do not have innovation in this issue, and do not know how to improve life like some other households. Usually poor household do not say much in meeting.

Q: any case about conflict, like the poor benefit a bit more and some other household do not agree?
A: Yes, like the wealth ranking, some villagers complain that two households being in the same situation, one belonged to poorer category, one does not. Hard to be local cadre in that sense, villagers know each other’s situation, we have to make it fair for them.
**Village Development Budget, is it a new way of managing finance at village level?**

Q: Finance management always goes with handling money, can you see the different on this issue the way you work with it before 2000 and now when you are working with Village Development Budget? What are the advantages and disadvantages? Which way is better?

A: The year 2000 and 2001, there are changes in how to manage the budget. After villagers have made the plan, giving priority for each item in the plan, we need to use the budget according to the time when it is needed. For example, in May we have to buy fertilizer, if we hold the money, we need to discuss with villagers on buying and receiving. I think working this new way is better. The only disadvantage is that it is complicated with handling the receipt and book keeping. Like for example how do you get receipt when villagers contribute their labor for building the extension house? The district project staff did not approve it, kept on asking red receipt. In the end we had to go and buy the red receipt from outsider and count villagers labor on village construction work, just to have the procedure done.

Q: Is it difficult working as a VMG member? Is it overload with work?

A: I just got the job as accountant for Commune management group. In 2000, it did not work well with book keeping there, cause it was somebody else to handle it. So now when I hand over it, it is a little hard for me. Otherwise, the difficulty is basically collecting money from villagers who are so poor and could not pay the part of contributing 500 dong for one kg of rice seed. 50% of villagers have not managed with that.

Q: What do you do when you meet difficulties with book keeping work?

A: Go to the district to ask district staff at Extension department, they will tell me which item belongs to which column and so on. Going back and forth so many time between village and district. Last year, I had to go about some ten times, cause they did not explain carefully to us.

4.4 Mr. Trieu Van Kinh (VMG member and Village Veterinary Worker)

“In the past there were many pigs died all in some households. In Nam Bung commune, Xa Luong village, also Dao people like us here, there was time when all cattle died, quite scary. One Kinh man came up here knew about veterinary and cure the disease for these animals. Villagers promised to pay him half the value of one cattle of he could cure disease for their animals. He got something like more..."
than ten million dong at that time. It was *aplasmodiumaemostasia*. Just in between morning and afternoon time only, the cattle died. Now even though working with veterinary is hard, but cattle do not died that many at the same time. Cattle epidemic is not gone, but so much less.”

**Being a veterinarian**

Q: Was there any veterinarian in this village before? How is it with husbandry in your village?
A: There was no veterinarian in this village before. Villagers like raising animals, but there is not much land left for grazing. Most households here have from 1-2 cattle, even 8 in Mr. Nghien’s house. In the past, it was not that every household has cattle this way, some had many, some did not have any cattle at all. Cattle are good not only for plough the fields but also for income. One cattle cost about 1-3 million dong, and that is high value for villagers here. Animals died a lot 7-8 years ago, not now when we learnt lesson from Ngoc Phat commune.

Q: Did you work with veterinary before project started here? Do you like this job?
A: Not until project came. I also like this job. I did not what that was before. I was sent to district town for a training. It was half month with veterinary. The teacher came from province and we kept studying and did not have any weekend these two weeks. It was quick, and many people could not manage to catch up. There are some people from Mu Cang Chai as well. From Nam Lanh, we are all together 7 people. But until now, they can not do much of veterinary more than just giving injection.

Q: Was it so difficult with training at that time?
A: Yes, it was. Program was long, while time was short. The language we could understand, but when doing actual work with veterinary was so hard. During exam, so many participant could not do the test.

Q: Did you manage to apply some of the knowledge from that course when you come back? What are the difficulties for you?
A: Giving injection to animals twice every year is my duty. One in during the time from February-March, and one in autumn. The most difficult thing to handle now is that villagers buy meat from different places which can easily spread out the disease, especially with pigs. The responsibility for this job is high and it is hard job. But because there is nobody else than me who could do it. There is no payment for veterinary, I could only get some certain percentage from the injection work. Villagers have to pay medicine for animals.
Q: Do you get payment when you are called to cure disease for cattle?
A: Yes, because I have to go and buy some medicine, so they pay for that, and then sometimes, I got a little payment, depending on the person who pays me. He could pay anything he likes. I have to go to district town 20 km away and take the whole morning, somebody pays for me to buy petrol, some other are so poor so they do not pay that. I consider that as helping villagers. Sometimes, they even call me during the night, and I have to go myself. Work at home and I can ask my wife and kids to help, this kind of job, no one can help me.

Q: Any time you did not manage?
A: No, these works are simple for me by now: giving injection, curing disease for sick animals, castrating, etc, many works to do. By the way, I am working as a health care facilitator in this village. There is nobody who could work with that here, so they pointed me to. So taking care of both animals and human being. So many things to do: program VIE 97 on anti-malnutrition, and also vaccinating, and medicine for villagers. Sometimes, I do not have any meal with my family for 3-4 days. Being away all the time.

Q: Anything that you are afraid of when you work?
A: Yes, sometimes. Like when giving injection, it hurts a lot to cattle, so they knew when they could smell the medicine that I am going to give injection to them. There was a case which the veterinary was sent to hospital cause the buffalo started to butt. It is dangerous if we are not careful or not quick enough. This doesn’t happen with pigs or chicken, with cattle only.

Q: What are the good things that you find while doing this job?
A: The sentiment of villagers. The payment is not much but villagers like me. I could tell them some simple treatment for animals, so they could even do the injection themselves. In meetings, I inform them about disease of cattle and how to prevent disease. There are many disease that animals get, the symptoms and how to deal with them. So now many villagers know about these issue too.

Q: Any difficulties you face with VMG work?
A: Not so much with difficulties I think. But only that there are lots to do, and a little in return for payment.

Q: Do you find your skill being improved?
A: First when it was new, it was difficult. Now I have learnt a lot from college so it is not so difficult anymore. The only thing is that I have too many different tasks at the same time, so I have to do this job and leave the others.
Q: You mean too many works are difficult to handle?
A: That’s right, too much. I have to have contact with other member of VMG. We gather and discuss when there are things coming up. We also have meeting and make agreement and then gather villagers to inform them. When village leader is away, he ask me to do some of his job. End of the year is the busiest time of the year. But now I have got use to working. I also like that I can work, cause there are people who lives without knowing what they do, and what its value is.

Q: How about the relations with commune, or outsiders?
A: I have more relation now. I got to training, and when I need to know something I could ask people. Thanks to this project I come to know so many more people and create more relation, especially those people who I could ask about medicine.

**Cadre in villagers’ eyes**

Q: Why do you think they elected you to VMG? Do you see the different in between being village cadre and villager?
A: There’s a different. Like for example, being a cadre, whatever we do or say, we have to be honest with villagers and be faithful to them. One can never do anything if he is not honest to his villagers. And cadre suffer the loss as well. Tell villagers the truth is the key. AT the same time, one has to work first in order to let villagers follow. Perhaps villagers thought that I can be one of these three VMG members, be able to do, to understand, to have social experience…I actually have done a lot of different work to earn for living and going forth and back between district center and commune.

Q: Did you work with some position in the past when you were at the enterprise, or was there somebody who was your manager?
A: No, I was simply a worker for that enterprise. There was a group leader.

Q: How did you look at cadre at that time? Did you trust them?
A: Yes, I trusted them. A bit afraid even. I thought I was at lower position, so whatever cadre said, I was supposed to follow, and then had to do things well, whatever they told us to do, we did without any wonder, question or complain. I never thought I would ever be a cadre at that time.

Q: What do you see the different then?
A: Now villagers are more clever, have more knowledge... just with short introduction, they could easily get the point. Villagers now they can be very frank and do not have to be afraid.
Some highlights about Village Development Budget at village level

Q: So what was new about the year 2000 and 2001? Some changes? Some difficulties?
A: The project let us have a budget, 31 million dong in the year 2000, no cash actually came to village, material came, villagers complained that there should be more to come with that amount of money. When we explained they did not think we were right. So we had to lose face with the fact that the budget did not work as it was planned. That was the difficulty.

Q: How should we do it effectively if we still continue working with Village Development Budget?
A: This is mountain village, project should make it easier for villagers to understand, and to put it into practice. For example let us know how much we have for this year will be transfer to us the exact amount, doesn’t matter it has to be transferred through District Extension Station department. If project still keep working with Village Development Budget, it should be clear, not like last year, even us couldn’t understand, how can we expect villagers to do that? Nowadays, villagers knowledge has increased, if we are not clear on how it should work, VMG really face difficulties explaining to villagers. It is a burden for VMG to go explaining to villagers.

Giang cai village

4.5 Mr. Dang Van Kinh (Village Head)

“In the past, forests were exploited, and burnt. There were no non-timber products. In recent years, the project was introduced and forests have been managed better. Villagers can collect non-timber projects such as giong leaves, chest nuts, to sell for some sideline income. It is effective and local people can earn money. In the past, villagers could not get any income from non-timber products, life was much harder.”

Village Development Budget and related issues

Q: How is Village Development Budget managed?
A: Village meeting, planning for each activities: fund for forest protection, for training.

Q: So money was transferred to commune and village came to commune to get it?
A: Yes, that’s the way. Commune accountant and Head of Commune Project Management Board went to the district to get money and VMGs from villages came to commune to get the money. It followed the plan from the beginning of the year: how much for fertilizers, how much for rice seeds, how much for training. In 2000, we received VND 24 million.
Q: How did you use the Village Development Budget? Did you receive full amount of your Village Development Budget?
A: Basically, we received all. But an small amount for community forest management fund was not used for the right purpose. We did plan for a community forest management fund but that amount of money was shifted to buy longan seedlings, not relevant with what villagers want it.

Q: When the money was spent to buy longan seedlings, did VMG know about it?
A: No, it was not discussed. It was District Extension Station who used the money to buy the longan seedlings. There was no item of longan seedlings in the plan that village had developed.

Q: How about this year? What activities have you done?
A: This year we received VND 16 million, for training, buying fertilizers, rice seeds, buying an speaker system for village meetings. At this moment, we have bought the speaker system, rice seeds, fertilizers and done 2 training sessions. There will be one more training session. This year there is no fund for forest protection. It is because last year, villagers questioned about the fund for forest management and we could not do anything so we do not like to plan for that anymore. Now everybody in this village would like the project to provide extra support to the community forest management fund so that it will be a strong component and forest will be better protected. Villagers want to received cash. A writing board was bought but it did not mean much. Villagers want to receive cash directly to pay the labor day of those who involved in the forest patrolling. Forests will be protected better then.

Q: Who decided to buy the writing board instead of spending on community forest management activities?
A: This was decided by higher level. I do not know. It was decided already so we have to take it. The money paid for the writing board is from the fund for joint forest management. Villagers thought that they would receive cash or rice. In the end, they said: “Oh, joint forest management is paid with a writing board!” This is not decided by commune or village but by district level. Village would like to propose to higher levels to make another plan. If the district accept than then our village will make it but it is not suitable yet.

The responsibility of the VMG in the relationship of “low-high”

Q: Which is more difficult between reporting to district level and explaining to local people?
A: Frankly speaking, proposing things with the district is more difficult. Because we are lower level, so speaking to the higher
level is more difficult. Telling them the truth is even more difficult but I think we have to tell them so that they understand people's thinking.

Q: Do you think you should satisfy local people's demands more or that of district level more? Which level is more important?
A: Overall, they should be equally satisfied. If we can satisfy both higher and lower levels then we are also more comfortable. The district is clearly more important.

Q: Do you think that when you carry out activities with support form higher level, it is more easily done?
A: We long for government's support. When there is project's support, there will have investment of scientific technologies and capital for more effective activities.

Q: When you are a member in VMG, do you feel that your responsibility is more than you think? What is your role in the VMG?
A: It is normal. Being a member of VMG has nothing heavy at all. First thing is to organize village meetings, planning, receiving money, informing villagers, dividing the money into parts to buy rice seeds, parts to buy fertilizers. We can buy these items ourselves so we do not need help from district or commune.

Q: Is this difficult to buy those things? When you go to outside market to buy materials, are you afraid of being cheated?
A: No, I am not. When I joined the VMG, the Village Development Budget was first introduced. Nowadays, there are a lot of available services around. The important thing is to know that they have receipts and we have money.

Q: Besides, do you have anything else to do?
A: Training activities also. I am involved in strengthening the forest protection movement, animal raising, some paper works, and reports to District Extension Station. For example, when I did the report and accounted for expenditures in the first period, I made a list of households, who received rice, who received fertilizers. Into the second period, I did the same.

Experience of Village Development Budget management

Q: How do you think to manage a project most effectively when it is introduced to the village?
A: The first thing is to have a village meeting to let villagers know what the project is all about. And the villagers should agree on how the project is managed and activities will be easier. Resources are needed. Project should invest 100%.
Q: Do you have any opinion to the Village Development Budget implemented in 2000 – 2001?
A: If there is the next part of this project, we would like to have more support to the fund for forest development, more training on technologies so that we can do the intensive cultivation to improve our economies. A strong fund for forest development will protect the forest better.

Q: During the project's implementation, who speak more in the village meetings, the better-off households or the poor households?
A: The village meetings is for everybody. Agreement is reach by all, better-off and poor households. The better-off households often speak more in the meetings. But benefits are shared equally. Everything must be shared per capita.

Q: Do villagers agree with that equal division?
A: It is discussed and agreed in the village meetings. The project's intention is to give more to the poor, but in the village meetings, they all wanted to divide equally.

**Will the forest protection activities be continued after the project is out**

Q: Since 1990s, who has been managing the forests?
A: Commune has been managing the forests. In the dry seasons, they came to each households requesting each household’s commitment of not setting fire in the forests or cutting forests. Since then, forests are better managed. No one cuts trees or burns them.

Q: How do you organize your forest management activities?
A: We manage the forests by group of houses. Since 1997, the Van Chan Forest Enterprise intended to form three groups. The project came and we formed 5 groups since 1998. Then we have 5 groups with 20 households in each groups, the smallest group has 10 households. Each groups has the head and the vice head. Every month, village calls a meeting of all groups and other mass organizations. The village head assigns each group to make a list of households in their groups. The heads of groups make plan for the forest patrolling. In the past only the head of the village was responsible for everything.

Q: In the implementation of project’s activities, did you receive support from district’s staff and programme’s officials?
A: Yes, we did. The project is from government to our village. There are many advantages. We got support in terms of knowledge, techniques and budget.
Q: Will the village maintain the forest management after the project is out?
A: Certainly, villagers still protect forest like we are now because we have experience. People here understand that we are living in the forest so we have to rely on the forest. They will surely protect forests well. Before, forests were cleared a lot. Recently, the Party and Government have launched the forest protection, no one will clear the forest. Villagers focus on forest protection and intensive rice cultivation.

The supporting roles of mass organizations in the village

Q: How do you see the role so mass organizations in the village in project’s implementation? Do you have linkage with them in carrying out any activities?
A: They have assistance roles. There are linkages in project’s activities. We have meetings, once or twice a month and all mass organizations in the village are invited to attend our regular meetings whatever the content is about.

Q: Do they have any benefit in attending the meetings?
A: The content of the meetings is mainly about announcing the activities need doing. For example, this month, this groups is in charge of forest patrolling. Some one will supervise the group’s activities and report in the next meeting about things need to be improved, what should be maintained. We expect very much the support from other mass organizations.

Q: Do they contribute any ideas?
A: Yes, they do. For example, they observe and comment that someone still cut trees in the forests or group A should send more persons to group B in the patrolling or to consolidate the protection. If there are hot spots of forests, more person will be sent to those places.

Q: Are there any groups other than the civil defense force in the village?
A: We have local people besides the civil defense force. If something urgent happens, all villagers join into help, especially in difficult situations such as forest fires.

The head of the village and combination with project’s work

Q: What are your advantages when you are both head of the village and a VMG member? If the head of the village were not a member of VMG, would it be any difficulty?
A: We could cooperate then, so it would not be a problem. The VMG have to engage the village head all the time, because if you want to distribute anything, you should do it together with the head of the village. Being village head and VMG member at the same time will facilitate the work because doing
extension is partly to develop economic and the head of the village also promotes economic development in the village. It makes the work easy and the head of the village can also easily discuss work with the vice head of the village at night.

Q: Do you have yearly meeting to reflect on activities?
A: Yes, we do. In such meetings, villagers tell us what have been done well and they are happy about that. Also so they tell us what have not been done well and given us suggestions on how to improve. We really want villagers give us more suggestions and comments.

Q: Are all villagers attend the meeting?
A: Yes, around 80% - 90%. Before, they did not attend all, but for the last two years, villagers supported us more, and more have come to the meetings. We show our enthusiasm and bring scientific technologies to them, not using heavy words with them, then they support us.

Q: Do you feel you have too much work when you hold two jobs at the same time?
A: It is normal. I finish all the work. Nothing have been left undone.

Q: How do you manage your time and your work?
A: I work on village’s work on weekends. If village meeting are on weekdays, then it is held at night.

Q: How many time has the VMG been changed since the project came?
A: Twice. Probably to follow the structure of having 2-3 persons in the VMG. In 200, we had 4 members. In 2001, we have 3. If we follow the suggested structure from above then the number of member will be less, but the VMG is elected by villagers. We depend on their discussion and desire. The more important point is to have competent, enthusiastic and literate persons.

Q: Which group will work more easily between a 5-member VMG and a 3-member VMG?
A: A 5-member VMG will work better. A 3-member VMG will have more work to do but they can cooperate more effectively. The main thing is the quality of the work done.

4.6 Mr. Dang Van Thang (VMG cashier and Village Veterinary Worker)

Some reflections from a village vet.

Q: When did you start to be village vet?
A: Since 1997, I was sent to training course on animal healthcare by the project in Yen Bai. The training session was in 2 days. There were many participants, 60 – 70 people.
They came only from villages in project areas. There were 3 person from this commune. In the beginning, Mr. Tho was assigned to go but he was busy.

Q: Before going to that training course, did you know anything about animal healthcare? Do you like that kind of work?
A: Before going there, I know something on poultry because I have learnt a bit already. I have been accustomed to inject chicken and pigs. I do not know how to castrate the pigs. They taught the techniques but I have not been very good at that. I have been to the training course so I should do my task. That is the responsibility given by villagers. I do not really like it. I am old already. Next year, I will give it to someone else. I should do it because it benefits everybody. My village is quite remote, with 97 households and scattered in 5 small groups of houses from the commune center to the other side of the mountain. Giang Cai has more households than any other villages in Nam Lanh Commune. We learnt and practiced at the same time. There were only two days and there were so many topics of buffalo, cattle, chicken. I had to look at my notebook all the time. Since then, I have been able to cured 2 or 3 buffaloes but pigs were more difficult. I could not cured pigs from dying of diseases. Chicken which had been stricken by epidemic were impossible to cure. Even the vet from district level came but failed to cure them. I do the service of injection to villagers’ animals but did not charge them anything. I have no salary. Only when I inject the vaccine did I collect VND 1,000 – 2,000 for the commune once a year.

Q: Do you know why villagers elected you as VMG member? What capacity did villagers find in you?
A: I do not know. Probably they trusted me. I never embezzle and villagers thought I could do the work then they elected me. That’s all.

4.7 Mr. Ban Thua Chieu (Vice leader of the VMG)

“VMG member should hold one post at one time. If there are too many work to do, one cannot concentrate to do it well. When we can concentrate we can do a good job, not being under pressure. Holding concurrent jobs is very heavy. In the past, that’s popular. If there are some project work, one should focus on that only, otherwise villagers would complain. In the project I have been able to learn and exchange ideas with other people. My knowledge on fruit trees and forest tress have been improved.”

Formal and informal organizations in the village

Q: What are mass organizations in the village?
A: The Womens Union, Youth Union. They cooperate with us to mobilize villagers in carrying activities, e.g. in collection of rice to pay tax. We have a meeting with the organizations and
inform villagers. The we decide the date to do it together at all groups of houses.

Q: Are there any other groups from those, e.g. the Interest Group
A: For instance there are extended family and the young people with kinship relationship are often have chats together. In my extended family, everything is agreed upon. It also affect other families in the village. Before, we could not do so.

Q: Do you have village elder here?
A: Yes, we have villager elder since long time ago. At the beginning and ending of each year, the village need to worship the forefathers to thank them for good things in the years, so the village elder takes care of that. He assigns who do what in such events.

Q: Does village elder know about project's activities? Is he influential to village’s activities and events? Do you discuss with him?
A: We inform him on what is going on. If he could not go to a meeting, his family member would go for him. We also come to visit and discuss work with him, and we ask for his ideas in village or VMG meetings also.

Q: Is village elder respected? What are criteria for a village elder?
A: Yes, he is. He is not elected. It is an old tradition form a long history in the past. One person after the other to be village elder. It is not based on family but on prestige.

Q: When there are conflicts in the village, does the village elder gets in to solve?
A: Yes. For example, there are conflict over inherited land from the past. The head of the cooperative does not know but the villager elder knows.
5. Viet Lam township in Ha Giang province

Situated in the midlands in the Lo River valley, Viet Lam Township is favourably located near to the main road between Ha Giang town and Hanoi some 300km away. This means that households in Viet Lam are well placed to market their produce in the district and provincial towns and the area is noted for its orange orchards, and mixed forest garden, home garden and crop production. This is a traditional settlement area of the Tay people (forming approximately 80% of the commune population) although in recent decades there have been new arrivals including Kinh people from the delta provinces, and Hmong people who were relocated from the high mountain border district of Dong Van during the period of war with China in 1979 to 1980. Suoi Dong Village is one such Hmong community that has relocated to Viet Lam. As the narratives show moving from a high mountain area to this new location in the midlands posed many challenges for the village, but in general they have adapted well to the new situation. Suoi Dong joined the FCP in 1993 and has been involved in many activities including forest planting and management, savings and credit, agricultural extension and horticulture.

Suoi dong village

5.1 Mr Giang Mi Pao (VMG leader and village elder)

“Like for example in this Suoi Dong village, we had to use two languages in training. Villagers did not know Vietnamese before, so we had to translate into Hmong for them. There are words which did not exit in Hmong language, so I had to explain to them. For instant, NPK, how do you say it in Hmong? there’s no word similar to that in Hmong. As far as I understood, NPK means chemical fertilizer, so I told them this meaning. Or say GDP, villagers had no idea what it was…”

“Actually this VMG has to work really hard, and committed to the job they are doing. It is not that villager elected you, then you could just go and tell them: “keep planting, that will benefit you in the future, so go and do it” that there would be forest around. We really have to work with them, check up the work they do, and help them when they face difficulties. Some of the leader of the forest planting groups here are not so good at calling villagers, so we ask them to do the work in order to let villagers follow. If the leaders do not do the work proper, no one will do anything”.

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At first when there were PRA meeting, villagers could contribute different ideas on what kind of trees we should plant here. They came up with so many different ideas, as you know, one with ananas, one with banana, one with jack tree… all kinds of tree. I found it so confusing, so I ask the district and province staff: “so what is the aim of this project’s activities?” and they answered: “the aim of having activities here is in order to support villagers, help villagers with a “fishing rod” in order to get some good ‘catch’. Before you could only catch small fish, now we help you catching bigger fish”

Q: So how did it change with institution in this village when you moved down here?
A: Because villagers were so new here, so there was no official institution, and no collective farm, only in the village, we organized some mutual help groups or “work-exchanged-group”, helping each other in farm work and in daily life with building house and many other things. Here we have 5 groups this way giving help to each other. We have kept working in groups this way since then.

Q: Who was the leader?
A: Not officially like in the collective farm. In 78-79 there was a plan to create a collective farm here, but then it was not put into practice, so just organize the work ourselves.

Q: Is there anybody who stands as a village elder, who has prestige to villagers?
A: There are three of us that you can call village elders: Ma Chi Lam, Giang Mi Sinh and me. We three have called villagers, informed them, organized the work for them, and explained to them when they do not understand. This is to help this community to develop and create solidarity, supporting each other when we face difficulties. And when there is conflict, three of us have to handle problems.

Q: Who can be the person to stand out as a village elder?
A: First of all, that person needs to have capacity to manage leading the village issues. Secondly, that has to be a person who is really devoted to village work, who is serious with working and not being drunk. That should also be a kind person with good reputation.

To be a project village

Q: Do you know why this village was chosen to join the project?
A: In 93, when the project was about to start here, I ask the province staff: “Why do you bring this project here to our village?” they said: “First, households in this village are close to each other, and are the same ethnic group. Second it is good condition for forest activities. Third is because you here
have good leaders who are very enthusiastic in working for the village”. At that time, villagers here were in hunger, 29 households were shortage of food for 5-6 months. In average, it was only 22 kg/person in a year. There were only 5 better off households at that time with enough food and having cattle. 19 households at middle level, 3 months food shortage.

**VMG being active in village activities**

**Q:** Do you arrange different activities in a year?

**A:** There are always things to do here in Suoi Dong. Not so many labors, but a lot to do: managing farm work, planting forest, raising animals, planting fruit trees, planting and harvesting tea. You can see the hills over there, the upper parts is for planting forest, and lower parts are for fruit trees. No time to lay back and take it easy. Villagers here have to work very hard. And more for VMG member. We have to arrange the time, like with planting forest activities: in January, February, it is time for seedlings, and July when it is rainy season, we need to plant these small plants. We have to arrange it the right time in July, otherwise plants do not grow well in September, October. With farm work, we have to do the same with cultivating maize and rice. We need to understand the crop time and land condition here in order to be success.

**Q:** So the VMG have to responsible for monitoring villagers’ activities all the year?

**A:** VMG really have to work hard. We have 5 group leaders in the village who deal with forest management, and VMG have to supervise them. VMG members need to see what difficulties villagers face and which group need support in order to do the work better.

**Q:** How do VMG manage to run the activities well?

**A:** We have to make a plan for the year, then divide to 3 months work, 6 months work and 9 months work, you know, to quarters. For example, the plan is that to August and September the village have to plant 2-3 ha forest, then in February and March, the VMG have to send a member to province to contact DEPARTMENT FOR AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT project co-ordinator to receive seeds. Then we have to calculate how much seeds each group should receive according to how large the land is, and deliver seeds to them for doing the seedlings. Then we need to check up if these works meet the demand before planting into the forest.

**Duty of calling villagers**

**Q:** What are difficulties you met at first when project activities were carried out here?

**A:** There were difficulties at the beginning because villagers did not understand about forest planting and its value. The only
thing they knew was that they received 450,000 dong for one hectare of forest they planted. Many people thought about working hard to get that money to buy food, not many thought about that we would have a forest and that benefits us in the future. You know, many people can think very simple that way. But now the awareness has increased a lot. Many villagers take good care of the forest, and do the planting work very well. Those who have liked planting trees, they take very good care, not like some villagers here still who do not care so much. They saw cattle being wandered in the forest without informing us. But for me, these forest value a lot, after planting trees in the forest, coming home I was dreaming about trees. It is true.

Q: What do you do with those who do not care so much about protecting the forest?
A: Basically I have to tell them, for example talking about cinnamon trees. It cost 5000 dong for one kg, so villagers here can get some income. But first of all the value of planting trees is to cover the bare land, which gives us more water for the field, and creates a better environment. We can use the branches as firewood at home. Project supply this for free, why don't you plant this? Even if we have to pay for it, we should do it still.

Q: Do you tell villagers these things in meetings?
A: Some households with wife taking part in the meeting, they did not understand well, or did not manage to explain that the their husband, I had to go to their houses and talked to them. But not so many cases like that. Most villagers here understand this. There are only cases villagers are a little slow in doing these works, or not be so responsible. For example, we have planted forest trees for 3 years, but have to do the weeding regularly, otherwise the trees we planted could not grow well. So I had to go and call them for this work. Even though some villagers were a little delay in doing this, 85% of households do it well.

Q: Is it poor households who do not catch up with the process of planting forest and be delayed?
A: Actually it is not the poor, it is middle level households. Some of them thought:” I have already planted, the trees grow themselves. I am busy with so many other work”. But this is with only some few households. When the group leaders do not manage to convince them, VMG have to go and talk to them. And if other VMG members do not manage even, I have to go talking to them myself. I told them: “if you don’t go and do this and have it done next week, you will have to explain that to me”. I have to be tough to them sometimes. There were two households that I had to talk to, and they did some work actually.
**When seeds do not become plants**

Q: Are there times when you and villagers here fail in doing this forest planting activities?

A: Sometimes it did not work out well, like after sowing seed for seedling, it was raining hard. Of course it is not really failure, but it effected the quality of the plants. There are failure with bad quality seeds actually. For instant there was one time when we received cinnamon seeds bought from Yen Bai, only 70-80% was doing all right, no even 50% only. The district coordinators bought the seeds. Then we had to informed to province project. Villagers complained to us, and we had to explain: "province and district staff want it good too, but because of the seeds that was bad". The District Extension Station had to send us some other seeds to compensate, it was a little late for the season but we could manage to have it done. Usually, we report to higher level once a month about how we have carried out the work at village, but in case like this one, we had to go straight to them and informed them right away. I told province and district co-ordinator: "if you do not send the seeds, villagers will come to me to complain and blame us". They got a little worry too, and sent us seeds.

Q: Do villagers only come to you or VMG to complain, or do you complain to higher level as well?

A: When province and district co-ordinators come, villagers asked them too: "how come you sent you bad seeds?", then they had to answered: "when we bought these seeds, we did not know that the seeds were not good quality ourselves, could be because when it was so damp, seeds got mold, and became bad quality". They had to apology villagers in that case.

**Regulation on community forest management and protection**

Q: After planting, how do you protect these small plants?

A: After joining this project, we built up a regulation on community forest management and protection, discussed with villagers about the content. Villagers contributed opinions, agreed and signed on that regulation papers. In this regulation, we pointed out very clearly about rights and duties of villagers and the fine that one would get if he did not follow. VMG and villagers arranged the content for this regulation, approved by commune PC, and agreement with villagers.

Q: So is this regulation only works in this village or does it work with neighbor community?

A: To the communities around, especially the neighbor commune just close by, these ten following years, they have damaged the forest and our forest as well, even fire happened. We decided to go these communities around here and had a
meetings with them in which we informed them: “now Suoi dong village has joined the project and we both plant forest and protect the forest, who go to the forest and damage trees, or fire our trees will have to responsible for that. That person will get a fine together with payment for all the damage he makes. Anyone who cut down trees that we have planted and protected will have to be judge according to the law and regulation”. Then it has been all right here so far.

**VMG’s roles and changes in management work**

Q: What do you think is the key issue for the village to make these improvements?
A: I think the most important factor is the VMG. If all these members do not work hard and be example for villagers, it would be very hard to arrange all the work and have them done well.

Q: Do you find changes in the way of working over time?
A: The management work is a little more complex in compare with the time when we lived in Dong Van. It was more simple to work up there, villagers could use the land themselves and the management was basically something to do with administration work. Cadres at that time did not have to take care so much of villagers life and in come and everything like nowadays. It is more demanding now when it comes to the work that village leaders and VMG are doing. First, these people have to be devoted to the job, and be very creative. And then you have to work hard, and check up on the works which have been done. Lastly you have to know the situation and how to find good solutions for villagers when they face problems.

Q: Is it more difficult to convince villagers now then before?
A: Villagers awareness has increased. After ten years of “doi moi” (renovation), everybody wants to have economic development, everybody wants to be rich and have enough food and many other things for the households. But the question is how to do it? We have to ‘clear the path’, one step after the other. In Dong Van before, it was too much with drinking and big ceremony with weddings and funeral that put people in debt. Now it is more like we help each other, everything is more simple even though we care for each other. Spending time and money for drinking is reduced now. Every year, a household knows how to save money to buy furniture, for instant a cupboard, or a table, or making a cement ground…In the past, no one saved money for anything like that, and houses were in a bad shape, most of which were straw-roof. Now more than 80% of all houses are tile-roof house, villagers have color TV, black and white TV, video…I think the young now they are trying hard and they have better knowledge.
Impression of a person who is “rich” of functions

Q: You are a general secretary and VMG leaders and there are works to do at home too, how do you manage with all?
A: Actually, to be very honest to you I have so many functions at the same time. I am a standing member of Province veteran association, member of District fatherland front, member of party executive committee for Viet Lam town, vice-chairman of town People’s council, standing person for veteran association Vietlam town, head of town credit fund, general secretary of village level, head of VMG... The other day, I counted to 12 different positions all together. I am in meetings most of the time, work at home I have to leave for my children to handle. I really have to arrange the time. I have to ask from help from villagers around with some farm work, basically mutual help as I told you before.

Q: Can you tell some impressions and feeling being in charge of many different functions at the same time?
A: It is very hard, and very tiresome. I have ask for retired, but that has not been approved. Many meetings and elections I have suggested that I would like to retire, but they kept saying Mr Pao, Mr. Pao for one position after the other. Here I am also working as investor of town party committee. They even wanted me to be a responsible person in 4 highland districts. I said: “Staying here how do I manage with many places? I cannot go that far”.

Q: Did you work with so many different positions before 93?
A: No, not before 93, I was simply the member of province veteran association, and general secretary and member of people’s council.

Q: How comes you have so many functions now?
A: Since after the project started here, the activities have been carried out well, and everybody said it was good work we did here, then they gave me more work to do. In addition to that, the Province Veteran Association knew me already and they wanted me to work more. They intended to choose me in one election to be vice chairman of Province Veteran Association at that time, but I refused cause I lived too far away to manage that work.

Advantage and disadvantage of being in charge of different functions

Q: According to your experience, what is good and bad being a person who is in charge of many different functions?
A: Doing many things at the same time, I feel that I can not concentrate in one professional work. For example, if I only worked with the party general secretary job here, I could have taken care of the village issues better. But because I have had
to many different things to do, so I have to leave some work and do the other. I think that a general secretary and a chairman should do one function only. For me, village issue, town issue. Going to the forest, checking up forest is my duty as well. From small duties to big duties I have them all. Not talking about meetings, meetings all the time. It is really tough.

Q: Anything that could be seen as advantage then?
A: No advantage. Almost no payment for these jobs I have been doing. It is just when there are meetings they send a car to pick me up and arrange accommodation for me. Only with the town’s job have I got some little allowance.

Q: Why do they keep electing you to different functions?
A: I don’t know really. Even though I did not want to, they have elected me. They said: “You are a party member, you have to be an example...”, so what can I do? I wanted to withdraw, but it was high vote for me all the time. They ask me to work, if I don’t do it, they are disappointed. I also think that it is irresponsible to refuse, but at the same time, it is tough to work that way. I am telling myself that there is two more years until I am over the age of retirement, then they can really let me retired.

Q: In 93 when the VMG was set up, how did you become VMG? What qualifications you think you have to be elected to be VMG leader?
A: The vice general secretary of Vi Xuyen district, Mr. Quyen was here in that meeting with villagers here and saw villagers’ election. There were three criteria for being VMG member: first is to have capacity, second to be devoted to the work, third to have prestige. Then villagers said the only person for this position is Mr. Pao. Then I started working as head of VMG since then. Only with the position of general secretary I have ask for resigning for some years now, but party members here did not approve. They wanted me to work for 1-2 more years. Party at higher level told me: “in this village, party members are still so young. This village is being seen as a good village of the province to be example for others, so many visitors and delegation are coming. To let other member be general secretary it is fine, but they can not express so well as you do, so please try for one-two more years”.

**Capacity improvements**

Q: How do you feel the changes in your way of thinking and working since you started working with this project?
A: I think since I started to work with this project I have improved a lot. I have made progress in social knowledge and responsibility. I am happy to see that project activities have been carried out successful. The result is that all households in this village have develop one way or the other. There are changes for all the villagers, not 2-3 households only. If there
were only 2-3 household which get better off, and other stay so poor, I would not have been so please. For me myself, since 1993, even though I get older but there has been great happiness feeling here that both villagers and higher levels are please with what me and VMG have done here so far. The only thing I am not so please with myself is that I have all too much to do that I could not fulfill my duty as I wanted to. If I did one or two functions only, the results could have been even better than this. Some works I had to leave for other VMG members to do, and they could not do it 100%, 80% actually, I think if I had done it myself, it would have been 90%. Take an example, when I went to visit the field, I found out some of the sign for insect, if I were home, I could gather villagers for meeting and informed them about how to prevent insect. But it was my thought only, I couldn’t put it to practice. I was away and one week after that, when I came home, the damage was made already.

Q: You could hand over the work to other VMG members right?
A: Yes, of course. But when I was in a hurry and prepare for trip or to meetings, I could not explain clearly to other members so clearly. So when they carry out the work, they couldn’t know how to handle the issue, or find a quick solution, they told each other: “let’s wait until the leader comes home and he’s gonna handles this”. Most of the time they manage very well, but perhaps it could be a little delay, or something like that.

Q: In which field do you feel that your capacities have improved?
A: My capacity in managing agricultural issue has improved. In the past I was in the army, and I knew about farm work in general only. But after working, being trained and having tour trips, I feel that my capacity to work with agriculture and forest have improved a lot. Especially with planting and protecting the forest. Some year before the project came, it was said that we should call villagers to protect the forest? How to do that? We never managed before, they even almost burn our forest. Now we know how to do the forest management and protection. Another important thing is that since project started here, I have gained many social relations.

**What is good about having more social relations**

Q: You mean you have set up more relations since project started? Including relation with province, district levels also?
A: Yes, that's right. In the past I had some relations with the province and district levels as well, but not so much. Since project started, I have got more contacts with not only one department but more than that, as an example: Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, Province People Committee, The Womens Union, Veteran association, etc. Experience from Suoi Dong is even taken to many other places, and we have got relations with different districts coming to visit our village. In Ha Giang, there is only Yen Minh
district left with no group coming here. From Dong Van, there have been 3 groups visiting us already. They all come and learn experience on economic development and forest management.

Q: Are there more relations?
A: Yes, economic relations. These relations help us with market information first of all. If we don’t know this information, and the price for different things we sell or buy, we will be the one who suffer a loss. For example, in Ha Giang, it cost 3000 dong for one kg of orange, villagers here do not know about this information sell 1 kg with 2000 dong only.

Q: What more do you benefit from having more relations with outsiders?
A: Having relations with different levels, it is good when we would like to present some suggestions (not demands) from village level to district, province levels. We have got some good care from them. In fact, having good care is one thing, but it is very important that VMG have to work hard as well. One of the benefit is that villagers have got a lot of knowledge, we need to base on that and develop more. When there are visiting groups to our village, I inform villagers as well, and sometimes the visiting group could come and talk to villagers, like the group from Meo Vac.

**Training and improvement of capacity**

Q: Did you take part in any training about management work? How do training value for VMG?
A: Yes, especially about management. Without being trained, we would never know about it. Now after studying about management work, we know about how to monitor, supervise, and how to find solutions when there are problem, and combining to our experience, we could use this knowledge with both village work, commune work and even household issue. I think they have gathered different ideas and knowledge from different areas to gather in the training, very suitable.

Q: Do you find training difficult as well?
A: Only with training on credits and saving, I have taken part in 3 times now, but still find it hard with too many different kinds of papers. Many of VMG actually could not catch up. It was tough. I think that we should find a way which fit with level of education and make it simple for VMG in general. To VMG with better condition, being close to district town or province, it is not a big issue, but to village a bit remote and low education, this is a big problem. I was in one training in Thanh Tri, Hanoi for one week, but I found it too complex with so many different columns and rows. I don’t think it is necessary. I would like to suggest to higher level to change this in order to make it not too hard on village level.
Q: Can you find any reason for the case that there are people who take the same training, but some can do better than the other in reality?
A: It depends on the personal ability I think. But the fact is that there are people who are very good at class, and have high mark at exam, but coming home and doing the job in reality, he does not manage. Sometimes, one can not do the work well without being realistic.

Q: You mean the local knowledge one has in life is more complex to handle?
A: Local knowledge is complex, each area has it own situation, being a leader or cadre at villager level, you need to know this very well, and you have to depend on each case to handle the issue. In circumstance where villagers’ level of education is higher, leader works one way, but in another area with another circumstance, he has to work in a different way.

What should the young do to be cadre, and where to find young cadre

Q: Do you find some good feeling working with this project?
A: I myself feel that it has been great. I only think that I need to keep good health so I can still do something to help villagers more. But if I can not do that much anymore, I can let the younger people do the job, keep supporting them. Now there are younger cadre here in this village. Nowadays, the young generation manages to work 80-90% well.

Q: Talking about the young generation, how do you think about them? Is it more important with an experience cadre than a young but devoted cadre who eager to do lots of thing?
A: I think both are important. Only with enthusiastic and devoted are not enough. It is very important with experience. On my way of thinking, the young generation now are devoted to the work, but they need to have good knowledge and experience to combine with. Another thing is that he has to be modest and have prestige. I do not say that I have done so perfect, but only this year with 24 visiting groups to Sufi Dong I think it is not only because of Mr. Pao, but because of everybody working together.

Q: You mean the young need to prove themselves? How do they get prestige from villagers?
A: One has to dare to have something done well. Once you decide to do something, it needs to be good result, or at least you do your best. The young has to prove themselves through working with different associations. For example the Youth Union and after that if he keen on the work and do it well, he can be picked to prepare for Party. Gradually he or she can grow up a lot after doing one work after the other. It depends so much on the person himself. It is very difficult to find the
young that way, some can be good at something, but bad with some other thing. Here in Suoi Dong village, I can feel quite proud of the young here, they have manage to do things very well here, so we older people can start seeing them grow up.

5.2 Mrs. Ma Thi My (VMG member)

"Until 1993, Mr. Pao and Mr. Lam went to meet the province authority and Mr. Quan and Mr. Quyen from province came to visit us. Then Mr. Pao informed we the villagers that “we came to the province, they allow us to do plant trees in the forests” we were so happy after long time of request. Other women and I were so happy also because we could develop the forest then. In June 1993, the project was introduced. After a long time of waiting, project official from province and district came to do extension. then villagers here start planting trees. In the beginning, our women did not know the techniques of planting the trees, just planting them as we thought”.

The leader of community

Q: Since the time of our village was moved down to this place, who was the leader of the village?
A: They were Mr. Pao and Mr. Lam. Mr. Lam led our village down here. He took all he family and relatives together. He looked for land first then he took his family down to settle. He and Mr. Pao led everything. They led our village to settle here. They found out this area of land.

Q: Are they not village leaders? Why are they not village leader when they were so responsible for the village?
A: Because they did not want to take the posts. They said they were old. At that time, they were working at the province. They just supported people here. Having settled, villagers started to elected the head and vice head of the village. Oh, villagers did not know much about those posts at that time, because they were illiterate then. They did not know the language, you know. When they want to go to other places, they need to ask opinion of old people in the village. Then, it was arranged that Mr. Chao was the village head, Mr. Xing was the vice head, and my husband and I were in charge of household registration.

Why were women present in the VMG, what did they do and how did they do it

Q: How could you be elected in the VMG? Why do you think villager selected you?
A: At those time, other women were still illiterate. That’s why they elected me. Other women did not know the national language, if I did not take the post, others could not take it either. The
Swedish advisor said that, there were men in the project, there should have women also. Then they elected me.

Q: What were your main tasks? Did you have to go and talk with villagers?
A: I was in charge of the village The Womens Union and family planning work. For the project, I took care of forest plantation activities. My task was to monitor whether villagers planted trees in the right way. So I usually went out to help other women clear the site for planting and encourage them practice family planning. For households that had many children, I visited them and talked with them. I did the mobilization at the same time to check whether they did it right. I attended project meetings and informed villagers about what I heard in the meetings. In 1995, I went to a training session in Bac Quang, and I promised that: “I will transfer all that I learn to villagers.” What I learnt from meetings in the province and district on cropping techniques and animal raising I told all to other villagers so that they could learn as well. I tell you more that before the project came, people here were so poor that they could not buy new seeds, fertilizers. We did not know how to plant the trees in the forest, not knowing what a tube was. After involving the project and since 1994, we were supported with fertilizers, materials and hybrid rice. Our living conditions were improved. The VMG received seedling and fertilizer, then distributed to households. Now, women in this village know how to do many things, like putting seedlings in tubes, planting trees, prepare seeds, even grafting of orange and mandarin.

Q: How did the VMG divide the material support?
A: we had a meeting of VMG and calculate each household with how much land they had and how much fertilizer for one ha of land, how many kilograms of seeds, etc. after calculating, we held a village meeting and informed them clearly that this was the support from the project in terms of seeds, fertilizers and that was how villagers should plant the trees. For instance, my family had one mau (1 mau equals 10 sao and equals 3600 m²), so we were given 1 ton of fertilizer and 20 kg of seed maize. If your family had less land, you could be given 500 kg of fertilizer and 10 kg of seed maize. We had a list of households and called their names to get their tokens. It was all enough for everybody. Because project knew well this village with how many households. They had calculated first before distributed to us. The materials came in trucks. Five member of the VMG were in charge of dividing for villagers.

Q: What else did you do in the project activities?
A: yes, I was cashier in credit activities. In the first time, we were allocated VND 12,500,000, each household could borrow VND 500,000. That was the first cycle. In the following year, we were informed that December would be the due time for repaying the c loans. We informed villagers. In two hours later,
they came to pay back all the loans. Mr. Thai and other two people from Department for Agriculture and Rural Development came and took the money back. In the second cycle, we were allocated VND 29.5 million. After one year, it was collected back again. On the day of deadline, it took us one day to collect all the loans. It continued with the following year. That’s why people from province came and said that: “This VMG did a very good job with credit activities. You are the best in the province.” And they left all the loans and interest to our VMG. If the VMG did a good job then villagers would follow to do so. Otherwise, they would not do it so well.

Q: Were you worried to be cashier?
A: Only if there were much money, then I was worried. If there was little money, then I was not. Because, when there was much money, I was afraid of getting it lost or forgetting something. If so, I had to get my own money to compensate. One time in 1998, I collected VND 7 million and found out that I lost VND 10,000. But that was my mistake in the paper work. After checking, it was all right.

Q: Do you think that joining the VMG has increased your responsibility?
A: Yes, there are more responsibility. Before I joined the farm project, I had less work. But with the project activities, there were more work involved and a bit harder. I had to get up earlier and go to bed later. I used to take care of all housework.

Q: Are villagers’ demands higher than before?
A: Local people here expect that VMG members pay more attention to them. Only by doing so we could gain trust from people. Compare to earlier time, we have to work harder.

Women’s participation in the village and constraints

Q: Has women contributed many ideas?
A: Frankly speaking, women here want to say much but they cannot do so.

Q: Why is it so? If they cannot speak national language, they can speak H’Mong language.
A: Even in H’Mong, they could not speak. They were afraid of speaking in the meetings. They felt very shy. They dared not to criticize. Then I told them that: “In meeting, if you have any problems, please speak out so that we can draw experience and learn from them. If you do not say then things will not change and you continue to keep that unhappiness. You should be strong now to speak. You can give your opinion about this one or that one. You have to tell us so that we can understand you. Only from that we can have experience.” Meetings were usually quiet. In this village, even the The Womens Union’s meeting or village meeting, only me as a
woman to speak. Other women were too shy to speaking meetings. Or they were afraid of making someone lose face so they kept silent.

**The advantage and disadvantage of a female extensionist**

Q: What difficulties do you usually encounter?
A: There are many difficulties. There is only me as woman in the VMG. Sometimes, when I spoke to other women, they did not understand, and they complained and said that: “why do you make me do this or that?” then I thought I would quit the post. Because what I said they did not listen and they hated me. But I also thought that other said so because they did not understand. I had to try harder so that they could understand me. If I saw the difficulties and withdrew from the post then who would continue to do the extension. I was in charge of women group. For hr men group, the other four men could take care of. Men found it difficult in speaking with women also. I have been to many VMGs, out of 32 villages, there was only in this Suoi Dong village, we had a female member in the VMG. In VMGs in Chang village, Village 23, Bac Quang, Quan Ba, all are men.

Q: Do you have any advantages in your working?
A: One good thing was that what I said was accepted by other women. When I talked to them, I expressed my care to them. They saw me as a family member. And I combined to talk about something formal and rational. The advantage was that I lived here, so I knew them w as well as they knew me. There were emotional links. I have to treat them softly with my care first, not something rational. That could come later.

Q: How did you divide your time to work with other women?
A: I used my noon time to visit their households instead of taking a short nap. In the morning, I stayed at home to prepare meals, washing, feeding pig and chickens, went to the field. Only the noon time was free to go around to visit other women. If there were urgent event, I called them by hitting the drum. For instance I informed them the trees were in danger, everyone should give a hand to save them. I called them to joined me to rescue the trees. My husband and my children also took part.

Q: Do you feel your work hard?
A: It depends. Sometimes there are so much work, then I feel hard. Sometimes, there are less work. So it is all right. The busy time is when sites are to be cleared to plant the trees, planting, season of rive and maize, weeding. We sometimes have free time. But usually we are busy because the season are overlapped. In June or July, it is time for both planting trees in the forest and transplant rice. Or in October, it is time both for planting trees and for harvesting rice and maize. But we could exchange labor so we could do it in one or two days.
The up and down of the VMG member

Q: During the time involved in the project, do you have any memorable story? Or any bad experience?
A: Yes, I have. One day, I called other women to go to plant trees. And they said: “well, you are calling us all day. We are busy to plant maize now.” Their saying so implied their anger. I could only smile and I tried to make some jokes. Then they laughed. We knew that they were joking also. For some women, they understood right away. For others, it took me 2 or 3 days later to talk to them. I had to draw great deal of experience in the way I talked to them. To speak softly is best. If I used heavy words, they would not understand and would not do anything.

Q: Are you happy when you do the project’s work?
A: My happiness was when I came to villagers and encourage them to do new things, I learnt a lot. Since I joined the project, I have learnt may new things on forest plantation, techniques in maize cultivation, in animal husbandry. And I learnt how to speak to there people. What I have learnt I transferred to them so both they and me understood.

Q: Do you see any difference in your relation with villagers compared to the time before the project? Do you feel that it is easier to work with people?
A: It is twice easier than the time before the project. Because, at those time, something I spoke of were not understood by people. I did not know much either. Now they got to know more and they understand me more. There is clear difference of the time before and after the project’s introduction. Before the project, I had few chances of contacting other people. People in this village did not understand all about each other. It was difficult to understand them as well to make them understand me. But since the project’s introduction, I understood them more and they also understood me more. They listened to what I said. For instance when they did something wrong. They recognized it when I told them. Or there were couples that were not getting along well. I came to talk to them. Then they understood. It is social interaction. That’s what I think. I was not trained on that. Because I was elected to VMG so I just did it.

For the poor households

Q: You probably know poor households in the village. Do you have any way to support those difficult households?
A: Yes, there were households with difficult conditions. Our VMG had a meeting and agreed that we needed to help these four households. We supported them in seeds, seedlings, fertilizers, even money so that they could buy fertilizers. We extracted some money from the fund and gave them some
land to work with. Out of 4 households, there were two households of old people. They could not do much, and they did not have labor. The other two households were young but they cared not of working. They just collected wood, bamboo shoots from the forest and sold them in market. Even they sold all of what they collected, the had shortage of food.

Q: How did you help them then?
A: It took time for our VMG to talk with them. Mr. Pao analyzed their situation with them. So did we. After that they understood and start to work seriously. But there were hard-headed households. They sold what they had to eat and start looking for something else to sell. They still live like that until now. It has been a long time. Even official from district and province came to talk to them but when they liked they worked, when they did not like, they were lazy. But in fact they have improved quite a lot. We call them poor households but not really like that. It is only they did not do the savings.

Q: How could households from all categories join the project and benefit from doing so?
A: We informed all households about project and its activities. We came to their houses to do so. For example, if some news from province or district came today, the other four VMG members and I called a meeting and informed them all. All were equal and to share the same information. The VMG was important in mobilize people.

Training and transfer of techniques to villagers

Q: How did you feel when you attended training courses? How would you like training course be adjusted so that learning would be more effective?
A: I liked the training because I could learn new things. I learnt what I did not know and I transferred what I knew to other people. I hit the drum to signal the meeting and informed them. For those who could not go to meetings, I came to their houses to tell them.

Q: Do you think the training content is close to reality? What experience should be drawn to make training more effective?
A: The training content was close to reality because it went with practice exercises. That was good. Training session was 1 –2 days. Then I came back to village and held a meeting to inform villagers. One thing is that the trainer should not speak too long. Trainers that spoke of main ideas and gave concrete examples made it easy for us to understand. Trainers who spoke too long did not make us understand the lessons.

Q: What will the fate of VMG be after the project is gone?
A: Even when the project has gone, we still are responsible to villagers. We will have to say to villagers that now the project has gone, but the forests should be maintained and taken
care of so that we can benefit in the future. It is not that when
the project has gone we can all quit.

5.3 Mr. Giang Xia Tua (VMG member)

“I think that when I reflected on myself, I do not know how to
speak well but I can go ahead to do something new. I can set
the example so that other may follow. Even my competency is
lower than others but when they see what I have done, then
they accepted it. I have worked harder to try the new things.
And I have been quick at new thing also. Villager liked me
because of that characteristic. It is my habit from childhood. I
could not say much but I could do to show what I need to say.
It is a balance.”

“Nowadays, the young people can do better than old people,
especially the economic development. I can gained
experience since 1990s, from the project’s introduction since I
could learn little by little. The forest have been planted but not
yet harvested so I do not know yet.”

Q: When did you settle here? Did you move here with Mr. Pao?
Is that right that everybody listened to Mr. Pao?
A: He is like a village elder. He is trusted by higher level also. We
are all brothers. It is easy to talk to each other. He understand
more than other so they listen to him. Mr. Pao moved to this
place in 1979. I moved in 1980. My father was an official also.
He followed Mr. Pao and Mr. So’s father. They worked
together. We evacuated together. They found this place as
good one and decided to settle here, not being bothered of
going back and forth. So all relatives were moved here. At
those time, we just exploited the forests and id shifting
cultivation. We were upland people, not knowing how to
cultivate the wet fields. We had no experience so nothing
succeeded. Nowadays, the young people can do better than
old people, especially the economic development. I can
gained experience since 1990s, from the project’s introduction
since I could learn little by little. But recently, the orange also
died. We did not know what to do. The forest have been
planted but not yet harvested so I do not know yet.

Local extensionist and criteria for a VMG member

Q: when the project was introduced here, how was the VMG
formed?
A: It was in 1993. In the beginning, we were instructed little by
little in planting, putting seedling in tubes, etc because we did
not know much then. Technical staff from Department for
Agriculture and Rural Development and Forest Inspection
came to teach us. People from Programme Board and some
advisors also came to us. It was said that if villagers agreed,
the VMG should have 5 – 7 persons or 3 - 5 persons. Villagers
said 3 was enough. But the project told us to select 5 persons.
That’s why we had 5 in VMG. There could have been only 3. Mr. Binh was vice head of the group. Mr. Pao was the head. Mrs. My and Mr. So were VMG members.

Q: Do you know why people elected you in the VMG? Objectively speaking, what characteristics do you have so that people would select you for the VMG?

A: I think I was normal person like others but villagers elected me then I accepted. The first meeting was attended by all villagers. We did not know what from what. It was poor then. There were two TVs in the provincial towns. And in remote areas, like our places, there was no radio at all. The project showed us a film on sloping land cultivation with green contour in the Philippines and we were told that forest trees, and fruits should be planted like that. Someone explained the film to us and told us to do the same. Only some people among us could understand a little from the film and know how to do. After that, we were instructed to form the VMG.

Q: What type of person do you think will be selected as VMG members?

A: I think that when I reflected on myself, I do not know how to speak well but I can go ahead to do something new. I can set the example so that other may follow. Even my competency is lower than others but when they see what I have done, then they accepted it. I have worked harder to try the new things. And I have been quick at news thing also. Villager liked me because of that characteristic. It is my habit from childhood. I could not say much but I could do to show what I need to say. It is a balance.

Q: Did you do any village work in 1993?

A: I was vice head of the village. It was small village then. In the cooperative period, there were not much work to do. In general, we were to organize people to carry out production plans. We also organized people to make road an bridges. But the society was different from present. The difference is mainly in the amount of work. In recent years, the work of the village leaders are much more than that in the past.

Q: More work in what aspect?

A: They are in social and cultural activities. We did not have those in the past. And sports activities are new. Women and youth union are much stronger compared to the past. Basically, mass organizations were present but only at commune level, not in the villages. Cultural activities were not available either. Only when Mr. To came then there were something new. They said that there were policies on cultural activities for us, but they were not carried out. In recent years, all social activities are available. The head of the village is busier but he can have allowance. In the past, he did the collection of the tax only. The constructions of roads or
irrigation canals are new events. In the past, only conscripted laborers did those work.

Q: What did you do when you were selected to the VMG?
A: Mr. Pao, as Head of the group at that time, assigned certain tasks for each one of us. The credit fund where we could borrow and save was given to Mr. Binh. Mr. So was in charge of encouraging villagers to borrow credit loans for productions. I was sent to training courses about tree grafting. But recently, trees are dying a lot. The orange have died a lot. If you came at that time, orange and coffee were everywhere. In Ha Giang province, there are some orange left in the areas of the kilometer 32. All the rest have died. I also had one orange garden. And Mr. Pao had an established coffee.

The difficulties in forest plantation and production of seedlings

Q: Did you have any difficulties? Did you need to mobilize other villagers?
A: Not much. It was easy. In the beginning, there were some people who were lazy of planting trees because there was no movement. When there was movement, they all took part. It was the same everywhere. Never could one have 100% of people participating. There are always small number of people did not involved actively. For instance, they planted the trees but never weeding. Or they did not plant in time for the season. Then I visited their households and talked with them. When they understood, they went to work. Overall, they were all good. In this village almost all households have forests. Only some new comers have not. Those who came to settle in 1993 all have forests. For me only the paper work is difficult. Planting trees is no problem. I just do it one or two time then I get used to it.

Q: In disseminating knowledge to other villagers, do you feel difficult with your capacity? Did you have any difficulties with that?
A: For the people who were ready to work with, there were no problem. But for others who did not want to work, then it was difficult.

Q: How did you do after training courses?
A: I went to a training course on cropping and plantings. If someone needed me I could go and help. In fact I had only a little learning on planting trees, making tubes, etc. in a training course in Phong Chau, together with Mr. Binh. At that time, there were 13 – 14 project villages in Ha Giang. Each villages sent two persons. Mr. Pao said that two of us were in charge of crops, including the coffee. The village was divided into 5 small groups, each with 7 households. Each group set up a nursery garden for several species, such as: cinnamon, manglietia, eucalyptus, etc. when they have set up the garden,
we instructed them to make tubes and how to put the seed into the tubes, and how to water.

Q: When doing instructions to villagers, do you think it was difficult for them?
A: In the beginning, it was difficult. But after doing it some times, it became easier. in the past, only the Forest Inspection did the planting of trees in the forest. They came to us to instruct of how to do it. It was difficult then. But now, everybody in the village can do it.

Q: Did you have yearly plans?
A: From the year the project came here. What to do in early of the year, which month to plant which tree, which month to weed, etc were all planned. Recently when the project is phrasing out, we do not have much budget, but the VMG still functions thought we have fewer activities. Fewer trees are planted.

Q: what do you think you have contributed to the project’s implementation?
A: I think I did not contribute much. The VMG was responsible to encourage villagers and they did the work themselves. I was trained by the project so maybe I know something more or I am a bit more experienced, then I told them all of what I knew. When they understood, they worked actively. There were some who did not understood and they did not participate. It was a mall percentage. It was already good if 70% of them got it.

Who did the work, province or village

Q: Did farmer get payments when they engaged in planting trees?
A: In the first three years, villagers were paid some tens thousand dong per ha. it as small but it was incentives. Villagers got paid directly from higher levels. They called the name and villagers came to receive it. the VMG only kept the list of villagers involved. The money did not go through VMG.

Q: According to you, was it better for province to give money to villagers to for village to do so?
A: VMG members said that it was better done that way. Villagers did not complained then. if it went through the VMG, there might have some one who understood then there was no problem. But there might be someone who did not, and they might say that the group took some money from us.

Q: If you are given choices between one way of province would manage the project from above and the other way of province is given province budget, and village is given a village budget to take care of village work. Which way do you think would be more relevant to village’s context?
A: I think if budget is given directly to village level, the good thing is that we do not have to travel much. But the disadvantage is that if the budget is not managed by the higher level, the enforcement of making households to repay the loans will be more difficult. If the budget is with us, then when it is time to collect loans, the ones who understand that if they repay, they can re-borrow. But there will be some pone who do not see things like that and they can tell us that they have no money to pay. We cannot do anything. If the budget is managed by higher level, we have good reasons to enforce them to repay the loans in time.

Q: During the project time since 1993, did province still provide seeds and fertilizers to the village?
A: Only in he first year. it started in 1993. In 1994, they provided for one season. There were 5 ha in this village. In 1995, the province provided seeds but of bad kinds. They told us that the rice would flower in 75 days, but it flowered in only 30 days. We lost a harvest that year. They compensated for villagers in some places. The seeds were not of the same kind. Some were long cycle and some were short. It was all mixed. Then we failed to harvest anything. They promised to pay us but they did not. Then it was all cancelled.

Q: Did villager complain?
A: Complaining did not help. The seeds were given to us for free.

Q: After that event, did our villagers buy the seeds ourselves?
A: There were some year, the village organized to buy for everybody. But there were some years, each individual household took care of that. When we could not organize to buy seeds for the whole villages, then households buy seeds themselves. When the farm project came they also provided seeds but not very effective either. In recent two years, the village head has taken care of buying seeds for the whole village.

**What will the VMG be after the project**

Q: what do you think about the fate of the VMG when the project is finished?
A: Even when the project is out, we will keep the VMG. Mr. Pao said that VMG was elected by villagers so we will keep it function. Basically, we will operate as usual. Though the activities are not like project’s but we are still responsible to each other. It is like Mr. So is still the head of the village. Mr. Pao is a Party secretary. Even when he stops being secretary, he is still responsible to mobilize villagers as a party member who should go ahead in activities.

Q: If the VMG continue to encourage people in developing agriculture and forest plantations, do you think the group will be maintained?
A: In recent years, the VMG has been working stably. Before there were much work, we had meeting every quarter. Now, the work is less, but we still meet once or twice a year. there are still organizations here. For the local administration, Mr. So is in charge of. For the project’s management, Mr. Pao is responsible because there are funds and outstanding loans in the village. He will remind the borrowers to repay so that other households might borrow next.

**Experience and the maturation of individual**

Q: Strictly and frankly speaking, what have you learnt yourself or how have your capacity been improved since you involved in the project in 1993.
A: Since I joined the farm project, I was able to attend some training and felt that I have learnt something. Compared to the time before then I improve a bit. Even I did not go to any professional school, but by gradual leaning, I am wiser than I was. That's why I work more effectively. I know what is benefiting to invest. In the past, I costed me a lot but I could not benefit anything. I invested in planting but failed to have any income. So did that happen with the rice. It is because I did not invest properly. Now I learn by doing. There are some kinds of trees that are more and more marketable. For other kinds of trees that are not benefiting, I have to draw experience to shift to something else.

Q: About your relation with other villagers, have you seen any change in the past years?
A: Yes there are changes. Those who had been to school and are determined to develop their household economies have been better and understood much. Sometimes when we have free time to chat, those who do not know about something can ask those who know in the village and they can from each other a bit.

Q: Do you see your working capacity have been improved or it is the same?
A: If it is about capacity in household economy management, it is better. But if it is about capacity in local government, I cannot say anything about that because that's other people’s work. I have been able to travel more outside is may be I have a bit more experience.

**How to run a project relevantly to local people’s expectations**

Q: What do you think would be the best way for a project to run well at local level?
A: If it is to organize well, agreements should be reached and fairness and equality should be maintained. So that villagers will not complain. Every thing must be shared equally among
people. If there are small amount then everybody should be given equal parts. If there are large amounts, then it is up to households capacity to get what they want. For example, if there are a lot of seedling then households that can plant more can get more, households that can plant less can get less. Any future project will be done the same so no one will complain at all.

Q: If the support is only prioritized to the poorest households in the village, while other households get nothing, do you think it is possible?
A: I think everybody should agree to that, otherwise it is impossible. When any event or a new project is introduced into the village, it should be brought to village meeting. Villagers will discuss and agree upon. It is their rights to do so. Only by doing so we will be trusted and respected by people. If we try to get something for our own households, then they will lose trust upon us. That will be very difficult. I hope that there are funds to support the poor because they need capital to improve their lives. They are poor in term of shortage of capital. They cannot do anything without the capital. I hope that in the future if there are some funds for the poor, then the loans size can be larger and the interest payment is less a bit so that they can develop their economies. Otherwise they are poorer and poorer.