STATUS QUO ON AGRICULTURAL/FORESTRY EXTENSION

AND SFDP PLAN FOR 1999 TO 2001

(3RD PHASE)

Working Paper 4

by

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0. INTRODUCTION

The following paper is designed to give an overview of SFDP activities in agricultural/forestry extension in the current project phase. It is expanding and updating on the report of KAISER (1997). Furthermore this paper provides an outline for the future strategy on extension issues within the project for the next phase.
Following a short general description on extension in the project region, Chapter 2 outlines the situation of the extension service in the two project provinces of Son La and Lai Chau and describes SFDP interventions. Chapter 3 then details the vision for extension in the future and SFDPs contribution to reach this vision.

The hurried reader familiar with extension issues may want to concentrate on the summary of the second chapter (2.9) and proceed to selected topics in the third chapter.

1. BACKGROUND: EXTENSION IN VIET NAM

The Extension system in Vietnam was established in 1993 (Decree 13-CP), in Son La and Lai Chau it became operational in 1995/96 on provincial level and 1997 in selected districts. General discussions, allocation of tasks, and to some extent budget allocations reflect the growing recognition of extension as a tool for agricultural development. This political importance of extension could well increase following a generally favourable national review in mid 1998 and in light of the national Decree 26 on village democratisation. Impact on field level can be expected as a result of Decree 661/QT-TTg from July 98 (5 mio ha- Programme) which might open up tasks for forestry extension. Specifically for Lai Chau and Son La, the EU project is expected to bring additional funds to the region that will also increase capacities of extension. One third of the EU contribution of 20 Mill ECU is allocated to agriculture (roughly 1 Mill USD/Year).

2. STATUS QUO OF EXTENSION AND PROJECT ACTIVITIES IN THE PROVINCES OF SON LA AND LAI CHAU

The following summary on the status quo of extension in Son La and Lai Chau briefly covers all aspects of extension in the current mix of national and project activities, namely:

1. Extension structure and staffing capacities
2. Extension programme planning
3. Extension Contents
4. Extension Methodology and Teaching style
5. Extension materials
6. Information sources
7. Management and Task Division
8. Monitoring and Evaluation
9. Human Resource Development of Extensionists
10. Extension Financing

In the third chapter the same structure is chosen to highlight future development potentials and derive tasks for the project. A summary overview is provided in Table 1.

2.1 Current structure of AFE and its relationship to DARD

In both provinces the Center for Agriculture and Forestry Extension (CAFE) are operating under the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) as a ‘Sub-Department’ and report monthly to the Director of DARD. Their budget is submitted through DARD to the Peoples Committee of the Province (PPC), however within their budget they have considerable budgetary autonomy (own account and seal).

DARD Son La consists of around 45 staff on provincial level, and around 150 people in the 10 Districts, albeit they claim (access to) a total of 3000 staff throughout the province (mainly from input supply companies and mass organisations). Out of this CAFE comprises of 15 people on province level, and 120 in 10 Districts, and a plan to assign around 200 persons to commune level (1 per commune).

DARD Lai Chau consists of around 90 staff and a total of 2500 staff throughout the province. CAFE Lai Chau has 17 staff on provincial level, but is only operating in 2 districts with around 5 staff each.

At district level the Agriculture and Forestry Extension Stations (AES) again are operating under the Agriculture and Rural Development Stations (ARDS) with financial autonomy and are in some cases the biggest, financially strongest and thus most influential part of ARDS.

In Lai Chau, Tua Chua District, ARDS had around 20 staff and from 1999 plans to transfer 5 to AES which then
has around 10 persons. So far AES staff is working 'directly' with the farmers, without involving a lower organisational level. In effect they are working with Commune PC and with village leaders or - in the 'project villages' - with the Commune Agriculture and Forestry Board (CAF) and the Village Management Board (VMB). Expansion of below-district structure is discussed (Workshop 10/98) but financing is extremely unlikely in the short run.

The district structure in Son La (Yen Chau) has become more complex following project recommendations in 9/97: A District Extension Management Board (DEMB) consisting of all organisations with agricultural and forestry service functions (i.e. Plant Protection Unit, Veterinary unit, Forest Protection Unit, Material Supply Station etc.) under the leadership of the Dir. of ARDS is set up for coordinating activities. Standing body of the DEMB is the extension station.

SFDP has encouraged Son La province to provide further structures below district level. Since 1/98 commune extensionists are selected in Yen Chau. Payment for commune extensionists however is not yet realised. In 4 communes where Debt Swap Project is working, financing for these extensionists is available since 9/98. As in Tua Chua, district extensionists are now working 'directly on the ground', i.e. in 'project villages' through Village Management Boards.

Division of tasks between AFE levels is not clear: while provincial staff are mandated to oversee planning and coordination of plans and implementation, they may also act as implementers in the field rather than sharing scarce 'field-day-allowances'. Usually there is also no budget for a different approach, i.e. for teaming up to learn together.

Division of tasks is not clear between AFE and DARD. DARD-District in Tua Chua is still implementing extension activities, as field work is an important part of staff remuneration.

### 2.2 Planning extension activities: VDP and State Management Function

Based on the national and provincial development plan for agriculture (including rural industries on 'industrial crops'), the extension service is assigned with a number of 'extension programmes' for implementation. These programmes are designed to achieve production targets and are thus seen as 'state management function'.

This system becomes more clear when we look at a concrete example: In 1998, e.g. CAFE in Son La is implementing 9 activities: 3 x 10 ha of hybrid rice, upland rice and paddy rice, 3 ha of grafted fruit trees, 8 hybrid pigs, promotion of hybrid cattle, and training for 300 staff and 800 farmers. These activities are then assigned to district level. Out of these programmes the allocation to Yen Chau comprises 3 ha of upland rice, 2 pigs, and training for 23 staff and 50 farmers. In addition CAFE is financed by foreign donors (Action Aid Vietnam (AAV), CARE, SFDP) and by other national funds (e.g. through Dep. of Education and Technology, through the silk-worm programme of the Dep. of Industries) to various degrees.

Allocation from district to commune and village level do not necessarily reflect their respective preferences and comparative advantages. However, they may have to accept the activity as it is part of the 'state management function'. Thus an activity may be allocated to a villages not interested in that activity and may prove largely unsuccessful.

As an alternative, from 1995 SFDP has introduced Village Development Planning (VDP) as the basis for planning extension activities. Based on an initial PRA villages determine their long-term (5 Yr) and annual plans. The VDP comprises activities in the sector of agriculture, forestry and infrastructure. Agricultural activities are planned the village based on priorities they can implement by themself (e.g. increasing the area coverage of a favourable variety), and activities where they need technical assistance from extension (e.g. for setting up a fertilizer trial). Availability of extension assistance is discussed between the district in line with available capacities (national 'extension programmes' and other funds). Feedback is provided to the village before the beginning of the planning year. The implementation of the plan is put under the guidance of the Village Management Board.

The advantages of the VDP planning methodology are seen in better targeting of available service functions (demand-driven extension service), higher efficiency in implementation as the village itself feels responsible (ownership of plans is with the beneficiaries), as well as village capacity building for self-help.

The process is now implemented in 57 villages, in some for the 3rd year. Fine-tuning the balance between quality of plans and required planning costs, and between open demand-driven planning and pre-determined service capacities are the challenges faced.
2.3 Extension Contents and tasks of extension service

The main task of extension is the promotion of new technologies. Around 25 national budget lines ('extension programmes') specify the working areas in agriculture (variety improvement for food crops, promotion of 'industrial' crops, promotion of hybrid livestock, plant protection, veterinary issues) and in forestry. These national 'extension programmes' provide task outlines and financing for extension activities. Out of these national programmes the province (AES through CAFE proposes, DARD approves contents, PPC allocates funds according to capacity) selects those appropriate for fulfilling their production targets. Programmes are then implemented by CAFE in the predetermined districts in accordance with provincial production targets as part of their 'state management function'.

'Extension programmes' include mainly provision of inputs (e.g. for 10 ha rice) with only a small technical training component. Thus the success rate is often low. Furthermore, programmes are not specifically designed for mountainous areas and are often not suitable within the existing farming systems (i.e. heavy fertilizer input in highly variable production conditions is extremely risky).

Based on the discussions in the villages during VDP, SFDP has used small trials to identify the suitability of new technical options in 5 areas: (1) upland intensification, (2) upland soil recuperation (hedgerows, micro-terraces, legume inter cropping), (3) paddy intensification, (4) fruit production, and (5) veterinary issues. The technical contents are explained in detail in the SFDP working paper 5 on agricultural technology options.

Emphasis is put on developing technical options together between farmer and extensionist (participatory technology development, PTD). Thus options are tested that can later be applied by the farmer (e.g in YC farmers buy seed themselves after successful tests). Field trials are the basis for joint learning (Farmer Field School Approach) under farm conditions. This is especially useful when new improved seeds have not been successfully tested in the vicinity and when crop management of these new varieties is still poor (i.e. inefficient fertilizer and pesticide application) and input options are steadily expanding.

In forestry, forest protection, and forest management issues are tackled in the context of a community forestry approach, e.g. the development of viable forest protection regulations (including enforcement structures), identification of new varieties of local interest, and determining the technical and financial impacts of management activities (e.g. thinning in natural regeneration stands).

2.4 Extension Methodology and teaching style

The main method for extension is the creation of 'models'. These models are rather complex maximum-input constructions with high demand on investment, management and technical support. Although some are impressive, extremely high investment levels at best present little chance for neighbours to copy them. Often they are simply not financially viable (i.e. input costs higher than benefits).

Main teaching style were instructional discussions with the village heads or classroom lectures to farmers. The role model of the newly assigned extensionist were the school teacher and the 'propagandist' responsible for implementing central plans. The selected information was often too theoretical and abstract, highly normative rather than practical. Even practical information was provided to densely and with inappropriate timing.

SFDP has abandoned the idea of complex models for small scale trials of a single innovation (with subsidised inputs) which are compared to a control plot. If successful they are subsequently supported as 'on-farm-demonstrations' (multiplication of successful trials with technical assistance, no input subsidies). Trial objectives are suggested by the farmers based on their interests or options recommended from Hanoi. Major focus (and budget) is placed on field training and coaching and dissemination activities (farmer field evaluation meetings). Field days are used to evaluate new varieties and management technologies in the field regarding their technical requirements, impact on yield, and financial benefits. Field days are thus an important tool to disseminate information about new experience. It was found that financially feasible input levels differ markedly from technical optimum.

In order to improve the teaching style, SFDP conducted many courses on extension methodology. Courses stressed the function of the extensionist as facilitator and the importance of two-way communication. Courses demonstrate visualisation of training topics, easy speech levels, and 'hands-on' experiences in the field. Staff also enrolled in local language courses (Hmong, Thai) to improve communications with the target group.

Implementation of field trials provides 'on-the-job' experience with new teaching methodologies. Farmer trainings are organised around concise topics based on the required knowledge for implementing a new technology. Timing of courses is aligned to when the topic is of practical relevance. Women participants are encouraged as most topics are of relevance to them.
2.5 Extension and training materials for farmer training

There are several sources of extension and training materials for extensionists: On central level a number of brochures and manuals on selected topics have been created over the past 5 years both by national funds and by foreign assisted projects. Subjects covered range from hedgerow promotion (manual, brochure, poster) over new food crop varieties (e.g. brochure on bioseed), and industrial crops to issues in intensive animal production (e.g. the economics of feed use in pig fattening). However, most of the material is not appropriate for distribution to farmers as it is not exactly adapted to the local situation and is mostly to theoretical and condensed.

Available information can be used as a basis for developing training modules. However, the extensionists still have to spend considerable time for designing a sound training module for farmers and to organise their resource and training materials.

SFDP has completed manuals for its main 'methodologies', i.e. on LUPLA, VDP and Community Forestry. For these training courses to Government staff standardised training course outlines and course evaluations are available which facilitate these courses to become standardised 'training modules'. A similar standardisation is initiated for farmer trainings and for farmer field days. However, this process is slow. The need for simple brochures is to be met following a training course on 'brochure making'.

2.6 Sources of written information for the extensionist

Material on general topics is available. New varieties are supplied from Hanoi with a fertilizer and management recommendation. Agricultural television programmes, newspapers, and publications from the Agricultural Department in MARD as well as some advertising materials are found on province level and too a smaller extent in the district. However, this information is often designed as 'Public Relations Material' and not detailed enough to enable the extensionist to apply the new technology successfully. Moreover it is mostly not directly applicable to the local conditions.

Region-specific information on technical experiences is scarce, not documented or documentation is not accessible. The few documentations available focus on the 'success yield' and do not detail technical issues, problems experienced and solutions tested. Common planning tools in market economics, such as production cost surveys for horizontal comparison of farm activities, and for estimation of input price elasticities do not yet exist.

The Information available on extension methodology is too abstract and normative (e.g. apply two-way communication!). It is difficult to relate to practical work assignments of the extensionist (e.g. how to facilitate a village meeting on trial design).

SFDP has used a structured monitoring and evaluation system for trial plots to expand the locally relevant technical information base. Technical and financial information on trials is stored in 'fact sheets'. These fact sheets are planned to be expanded into a resource database for continuous development of further required trial topics (see also below under 2.8 Monitoring).

Regarding methodological information SFDP has only tested and documented parts of the extension approach. (It has meanwhile been documented comprehensively in SFDP working paper No. 6 on Extension Methodology).

2.7 Extension Management: Implementation through clear division of tasks and detailed Work Plans

The concurrent implementation of several 'extension programmes' in a coordinated and efficient way requires the utilisation of management tools such as division of tasks and elaboration of detailed activity plans. These tools are known but are often not worked out in operational detail. Changes in staff allocation (e.g. people suddenly sent for training) may leave activities uncompleted. Separate activities implemented in the same village may not be coordinated between different staff.

SFDP has developed clear annual activity work plans for extension staff (based on VDP) that are coordinated on quarterly level and fine-tuned in monthly plans and weekly staff meeting in the presence of all (district) staff involved. For each activity one staff is responsible, in theory a second staff is involved to take over responsibility if necessary.

SFDP has further recommended to assign 'regional responsibility' to staff rather than a subject matter responsibility. However, individual professional specialisation and considerable training needs for each activity has hampered the geographical division of tasks for district level staff.
Implementation of extension service functions requested in the VDP is managed by AES (under contract with SFDP) and implemented by staff of AES, Vet. Station, Plant Protection Station etc. SFDP staff provide counselling and monitoring.

2.8 The central role of Monitoring and Evaluation

The Vietnamese reporting system is well developed and every activity needs to be reported in order to balance accounting. Extension reports however focus on 'plan fulfilment' and positive results, with little detail on technical experiences gained. Experiences are thus not used in feedback loops for adjusting recommendations.

Financial feasibility analysis is completely omitted. Thus farmers' hesitation in applying technologies proven in technically 'successful trials' is often not clearly attributed to their poor financial performance.

Analysis of less successful implementations is recorded in even less sufficient detail. Recording does not facilitate future omittance of the same mistakes. Quite commonly 'backwardness of farmers' is stated as the reason for poor results.

SFDP introduced several monitoring tools for staff management. Activity monitoring in SFDP becomes more important with an increased number of activities and an increased field presence. Detailed activity planning as well as beneficiary monitoring (i.e. monitoring by Village Development Boards) are the tools for effective activity monitoring.

In addition SFDP introduced result monitoring as a tool for learning, i.e. for adjusting the subsequent activity design. This concept requires a detailed analytical reflection on both highly successful and less successful activities. A detailed analytical reflection requires a sound field data analysis, thus introducing an entirely different concept of figures, numbers and statistics. In agriculture, e.g. it needs some adjustment to monitor actual input levels rather than technical recommendations and to measure several repetitions of actual yield data to derive actual average yields and finally to derive the technical as well as the financial feasibility of a new introduction. Successful results have to be as carefully interpreted as less successful ones. Standardised recording and inventorisation of results in 'Fact Sheets' over several years facilitates interpretation of site-specific feasible options.

A series of evening classes in farm economics is set up on province level in Son La to introduce economic concepts, such as the use of Gross Margin and capital productivity as a selection criteria for an investment. This course aims at sensitising staff of CAFE and DARD for the need to establish a field data base on production parameters beyond their 'planning data'. This field monitoring could then provide a sound basis for an extension advice integrating technical and economic matters. (Provincial level training material has meanwhile been tested in the Vocational School Mai Son and adjusted by them to training material for commune extensionists.)

2.9 Staff training

Staff training is regarded as important as extension is a new issue and most staff have only administrative working experience following technical education. However, so far training offers are still unstructured. Regarding extension methodology, several courses on facilitation, PRA and adult learning techniques have been given. However, lack of a clear extension approach hinders the design of job-relevant training modules. No training curriculum with consecutive modules/courses (beginner/refresher, topic sequence) is available.

Technical training has been provided the district AES by SFDP in cooperation with research institutions and university staff. For this reason cooperation contracts have been made with the Bee Research Institute and the Fruit Tree Research Institute. Contracts are terminated at the end of 98 as the technology transfer has reached the teaching capacity. The contract with the Forestry Research Institute has focused on setting-up and monitoring species trials and will also be terminated by the end of the year with activities transferred to local staff.

Training quality suffers from lack of training materials as described for extension material above.

2.10 Extension financing

The extension system has a separate budget on province level with some budget autonomy. Budget allocation to CAFE is authorised by DARD and allocated by the PPC according to the funds provided by national level (in few cases by 'own' provincial funds) for the different 'extension programmes'. In Son La operational funds for 1998 amounted to roughly USD 30,000. Another USD 4,000 were allocated for operating credits to farmers, USD 15,000 were budgeted as farmers contribution to the extension programme (farmers labour, organic
manure and contribution to seeds and fertiliser costs).

Within the ‘extension programmes’ standards are applied for the division of budget items: For technology dissemination, seed costs and fertiliser rates are fixed at rather high rates that may allow for a ‘distribution margin’. Management fees and soft assistance (training, visits, staff per diems) amount to only about 8 % of total budget in each activity.

In addition, the extension service is expected to organise work for itself and thus increase their activity radius and improve their salary. This necessity is important to understand. To some extent all Government bodies are acting as ‘commercial’ service suppliers, mainly for other national organisations and, where available, international donors.

In Son La foreign financed projects are the main additional budget sources that provide financing for extension activities. In 1998 e.g. AAV has invested in extension activities in one district (focusing at hedgerows, some food crops, veterinary issues and some credit activities) and has furthermore financed a province-wide programme for training village based para-veterinarians. The budget for province-wide activities likely reached USD 20,000. In addition, other Government departments may involve extension staff in their activities (e.g. CEMMA, Dep. of Industries).

Staff payment is a central issue in understanding how extension service works and how incentives are set. Basic salary for each staff is very low: e.g. a typical district extensionist may get below USD 30 per month. In addition he is entitled to receiving per diems according to fixed standards when he is in the field. He has to apply for payment of these per diems and they are paid according to the finances available and the number of applications recognised.

Extension staff may derive some financial benefits from using their ‘resources’. Some ‘dissemination margins’ may be derived from the material inputs the extension system is distributing. Budgeted seed costs may be higher than actual, budgeted fertiliser rates may reflect the level at maximum productivity and not at optimum productivity actually used. The extension station in Yen Chau, e.g. is operating a fruit tree nursery with production costs likely considerably below market rates and ‘remuneration standards’.

In provinces with a more homogeneous service profile and better marketing options for high-value added activities, extensionists may engage into benefit-sharing contracts with farmers. Extensionists with access to a new hybrid seed may contract farmers to grow this seed, and may provide technical assistance and even financing for inputs while specifying the percentage of incremental benefits that will have to be paid to them. While these contracts are not formally recognised (ghost contracts) provisions of this benefit sharing (albeit for the institution and not the individual extensionist) are made in the original law on extension. These contracts can constitute a positive step towards commercialisation of highly efficient services. In the worst case they may degenerate into contract farming with farmers being used as labourers. Furthermore they may withdraw government resources from the poor to the most productive activities that could easily be serviced by the private sector without Government subsidies.

Main problem for the extension service is the fact that budgets are usually late. In addition, some of the financing allocated to extension may in fact be channelled through other Sub-Departments (Sub-Department for Material Supply, Vet. Sub-Department) or involve planned or ad-hoc cooperation requirements with mass organisations (WU, FA etc.).

Late and uncertain payment to extensionists for their field days reduces their field presence and motivation to react to demand.

SFDP budget provision puts more emphasis on ‘soft financing’ and much less on input subsidy. Compared to e.g. the roughly 8 % of finances allocated to training and visits within a new rice variety promotion programme, for SFDP roughly 80 % of financing is allocated to training and field support visits and field days, and only 20 % for inputs. In fact, inputs are only financed for small ‘farmer trial plots’, following the ideal that introductions have to be financially viable at current market conditions without continued additional subsidy.

Wherever possible, SFDP is coordinating its support with that provided through national funds. E.g. in case of a request of a village to try out a new rice variety SFDP will refer this request to the district AES to supply the rice variety they are promoting as part of their ‘extension programme’. In addition SFDP may finance a more intensive level of technical assistance (initial trainings, per diems for close monitoring, field day evaluation). Other requests SFDP is covering with project funds, such as in soil recuperation (hedgerows, micro-terraces, legume inter cropping), food crop intensification, fruit production, veterinary issues, forest protection, and forest management.
From 1998 SFDP financing for agricultural activities is channelled to AES as implementation contracts based on VDP results.

SFDP contracts increase the field presence for extensionists thus raising his total remuneration. However success-related rather than performance-related incentive systems will become more important in the future to maintain the extensionists interest in supplying high-quality demand-oriented services.

2.11 Summary: Role of SFDP in the first implementation phase (1995-1998)

SFDP has been in the fortunate position to develop its activities concurrently with the build-up of the extension service in Son La and Lai Chau. A situation analysis and a summary of SFDP achievements is presented in Table 1 at the end of the document. Few issues are highlighted below:

- Staff development through training and coaching was a central prerequisite identified by SFDP and extension in view of the new challenges of ‘family-economics’ or market economics.
- The recommended expansion in the extension structure is slow and is being hampered by severe budgetary constraints. SFDP is preparing to assist in determining low-cost alternatives.
- The elaboration of a methodology for Village Development Planning is the prerequisite for determining a demand-driven service provision by the extension service.
- For implementation of extension services SFDP has stressed the focus on providing technical assistance to farmers flexibly and need-based. Accordingly the contract budgets between SFDP and AES allot a higher percentage to this ‘soft assistance’ then the national budgets. Subsidisation of inputs is reduced to the initial introduction phase to determine the sustainability of a new introduction based on its financial feasibility.
- Financial feasibility calculations have been stressed as selection criteria parallel to technical production parameters. The understanding of a need for reliable actual production data based on field monitoring, and actual information on financial feasibility is being developed through trainings in farm economics on province and district level.

Following the design of the methodologies and the initial outline of basic training requirements for staff, in Yen Chau and Tua Chua SFDP is now focusing on its role of supportive supervision. The consolidation of the design (methodologies for VDP and extension methodology plus training package) and its financing requirements will be facilitated in the transfer to other districts during the next phase in a further close cooperation with province authorities.

3. THE ROLE OF EXTENSION IN THE FUTURE AND TASKS FOR SFDP FROM 1999-2001 (PHASE III)

There is general agreement that extension is and will be an important actor of change in the continuation of market economics. This is currently proven in delta provinces with a more homogeneous production profile and good marketing or even export options. With increasing marketing options similar benefits are expected in the mountainous provinces. However it has to be kept in mind that this development will take place at a much slower pace and requires a much higher complexity due to the heterogeneous production profile.

An important factor are the costs at which extension can be set up. Viet Nam often stresses being fortunate as to learn from the mistakes of other countries. Many countries are faced with having set up a large extension structure that later turned out to be inflexible and inefficient and no longer able to fulfil demand. It is therefore important to integrate commercial performance principles into a ‘lean structure’ and to look at future service demand early-on.

SFDP vision of the future extensionist, as well as of the future farmer is characterised by 4 elements:

- Individual farmers voice their demand, village structures exist to meet or channel this demand
- The extensionist is solely responsible for the village based on a clear determination of regular tasks, special service requests and clear incentives
- Performance checks are enforced and annual/biannual contracts between the village and their extensionist can be terminated or transferred to other staff
- Extensionists work as commercial service providers in a state-financed information network

The vision could be realized in future through an ‘Extension service contract’ between a village and an extensionist. This contract would comprise all 4 elements listed above. In Annex 1 these elements are outlined in a practical ‘story’ context which allows to question the possible hinges and drawbacks in view of the actual
situation.

However, this is a long-term vision. In order to achieve this vision, there are still a number of steps to be taken. The steps anticipated for the next phase are outlined below discussing all relevant issues of extension in the same structure as above for chapter 2. The summary of the analysis and the next steps proposed is provided in Table 1 at the end of the document.

3.1 Future structure and staffing capacities of extension and division of tasks within extension and in contrast to DARD

'Below-district' structures is the main topic in extension these days, even though provinces like Lai Chau are still struggling with the district level. Without commune level staff, the coverage by district level will be low. However, expansion in the extension structure is slow and is being hampered by severe budgetary constraints.

Following the decision of Son La province to establish commune level extensionists, these extensionists have to be adequately integrated into the extension work. In 1999 the district extension station in Yen Chau was reluctant to allocate tasks to them as that meant additional management requirements, sharing funds previously allocated through the district staff, and increasing transparency. Clear task allocation and differentiation of operational procedures is required to integrate commune extensionists successfully. Furthermore, district staff have to be trained in delegating their work and supervisory tasks, while commune level staff also needs to be trained for their tasks (see below).

For remote communes only, group-commune extension centres are useful, and likely operational as funds are being provided. Their establishment in vicinity to the district by requiring district staff to move, decreases staff effectiveness and meets substantial resistance from staff.

For Lai Chau, an increase in district extensionists is discussed by transferring staff from the Agricultural Station. This transfer seems justified as in future DARD's role will change further from planning 'policy push' mechanisms to monitoring and initiating 'market pull mechanisms'. However, the educational background (many irrigation engineers) and work experience will require substantial reorientation of this staff.

In the short term it is important to discuss alternatives to a 'full area coverage' extension system. Currently used alternatives is a 'selective coverage' of extension service, focussing on 'VDP villages'. When organized as a 'limited-time coverage' of one specific village, full coverage can be reached over time. The expansion strategy regarding structure and staff capacities is an important factor in developing the extension system. The strategy is discussed separately in Chapter 4.

Most people agree that on the 'interface level' it is not feasible for a Government structure to work with an individual small farmer without securing that a larger group will benefit. An efficient service requires a village user structure that determines the need for support and disseminates the results. These user structures may have different names. They are generally characterised by a certain degree of structured organisation and being self-financed. SFDP uses the structure of a Village Management Board (for general organisation and coordination of village concerns) and anticipated 'interest groups', i.e. a group of farmers paying special attention to the improvements of all problems around one production activity. On village level, no structure receives Government funding.

However, interest groups require substantial inputs to stay functional. Groups provided only with the first production inputs (e.g. fruit, chicks), were dysfunctional after few meetings. The extensionist coaching the 'user groups' must have technical support and in most cases also organisational support on offer. A functioning well structured support is that provided by the IPM system, as it gives extensionists clear instructions on which contents to cover in which way. From 1999 the project is differentiating the IPM support from commune to village level groups. Farmers who proved most suitable during commune level courses are instituted as village level group leaders in the following season. They receive coaching support by the Plant Protection Station (PPS). Thus the groups become operational (all participants have adjacent fields), the costs per course are reduced (from around 5 Mio. VND/course to around 1 Mio. VND/course), and the coverage of the PPS staff is increased.

Another subject differentiated in SFDP is the support of bee keepers. However, investment in training and coaching of the extension staff is substantial. Thus within SFDP the subject coverage for 'interest groups' will be limited.

DARD role will require changes in future, facilitating a clearer separation from extension. In addition to overseeing quality standards of inputs, DARD would initiate and evaluate production cost surveys, in order to monitor the effect of input price variation on input demand. With strong market pull mechanisms state function
will move away from promoting yield increases to promoting sustainable production. DARD would initiate the analysis of soil mining of the uplands, or fertiliser residues in ground water. With changing tasks staff remuneration must be adapted accordingly.

3.2 Planning extension activities through VDP

VDP is seen by SFDP as an appropriate planning basis for state investments including that in extension. In the development phase 'open planning' was used to determine farmers' implementation needs. In future however, VDP will be based on a detailed 'service offer' of AES and other line agencies. Most important factor is the capacity building for self-help and self-organisation in the village. Second important factor is the 'village ownership' of the planned activities which ensures better targeting of state resources and higher success rates. This 'ownership' can be generated when farmers select options they prioritise instead of getting told what will be done for them.

A service offer promoted by SFDP from 1999 consists of a list of choices. For each choice it is clarified, what input the village is supposed to provide and what will be contributed from the outside. E.g. for a fertilizer trial in rice the village has to select the field, the seed and the labour. The extension system will only supply fertilizer according to agreed level for an area of up to 2000 m² and the coaching in fertilizer application.

While VDP is an important tool, its costs must be seen in relation to its implementation budget. Planning costs have to relate to the final investment. If e.g. only 10 ha of rice trial and 2 pigs are allocated to a district, then there is no sense asking 10 villages about their needs. VDP can thus only be introduced as a planning tool when appropriate budget allocations take place.

3.3 Extension contents evolve over time: Which issues remain important for the extension service?

Extensionists have to be able to provide services according to demand. Two aspects are important with regard to demand for extension contents: (a) the changes of demand within one village (local, short-term view) and (b) changes in regional service demand (regional, long-term view).

Within a village we find that first requests are for testing or confirming the benefits of material inputs (new seeds, subsidies for seed and fertiliser). Farmers also request technical and financial support for soil improvement and for reducing soil erosion. In the following year(s) requests for technical support for crops (regarding planting density, fertilizer timing, pests) and animals (feeding and disease problems) becomes more important. Input tests remain relevant only when new seed varieties are developed. Organisational matters need attention (How to make best use of IPM information provided? How to set up forest protection regulations?). Finally farmers are interested in further minimising investment costs and need support for analysing best investment options. For many problems these steps can easily be foreseen in advance and could possibly be reflected in the annual VDPs.

On regional level the production environment is slowly changing. Inputs for successful production activities are supplied by the commercial sector. Thus the government sector has to refine its function and service provision. Commonly input provision by the private sector is efficient, the Government role being the supervision of quality standards (DARD) and the provision of 'objective' basic information and processed interpreted information. Basic information is e.g. information of protein contents of various processed feeds, fertiliser requirements for a new variety. Feed suppliers may provide some extension to farmers but their 'subjective' approach to promoting their feed may cause unnecessarily high costs to the farmer.

Processed information is the interpretation of a series of yield measurements over 5 years in relation to various fertiliser levels and the recommendations derived from this data. In order to generate this location-specific information, extensionists have to be involved continually in testing technical options. They also have to document them in an accessible form.

Future challenges in the forestry sector are opened up by the new Decree 661 which provides options for forestry management as well as increasing the interest of the farmer in natural regeneration. For agriculture, challenges include policies on resource protection especially of upland soils and focus on the disadvantaged (poor within a village, remote villages) that are not (yet) serviced by the market. New higher-yielding upland varieties and the increasing market pull on upland requires thorough yield monitoring, to develop feasible fertiliser recommendations which alleviate soil mining.

3.4 Standardised package on extension methodology determines the teaching style

The contents the extensionist has to convey are outlined in Chapter 3.3 above. The best way for disseminating
information to the farmer are small trials (adaption trials or on-farm demonstrations) where the farmer at the same time chooses according to his preferences, learns (hands-on trainings) and assesses the validity of new introductions. Field days are used to facilitate discussion in and beyond the village at the onset and for the final evaluation of the trial. However, it has to be kept in mind that it is very difficult to convince the extensionist not to design a models, using maximum input.

Many sources have conducted courses on how to approach the farmer in two-way communication. While the general idea has become clearer, variations in course topics have led to a lot of confusion and often contributed little to implementation. The extensionist has to be provided with detailed guidelines for his practical work elements (e.g. how to structure the first meeting, which questions to ask the farmer) rather than giving broad theoretical basis for two-way communication that cannot be transferred into practical work by the individual. For documentation of the ‘Participatory agriculture extension methodology - PAEM’, see Working Paper 5. This field-based dissemination of new technologies builds on Participatory Trial Design. Its structure builds on the Farmer Field School approach (FFS) used in the IPM methodology, albeit with a more flexible focus and on a slightly less structured level. With only the first and last meeting being standardized, organisational requirements and costs are lower.

The development of extension approaches for animal husbandry, have only been tested for bee keeping. Detailed documentations need to be completed to make them replicable.

3.5 Diversifying extension materials for farmers

In addition to the hands-on experience, visualization and documentation of extension messages for the farmer remains necessary. Simple photocopied brochures seem the most suitable option during the process of determining appropriate technologies and in case of limited coverage. Some of these brochures have been developed in training courses for extensionists. However, extensionists hesitate to use the brochures as they regard information density insufficient and unprofessional. These brochures are furthermore not considered impressive when used as Public relations material. Care has to be taken that money for printing extension material is not spent on glossy brochures with ill-reflected contents.

Posters have been identified as a cheaper and efficient training material for farmers with limited literacy. They seem to receive higher credibility with the extensionists than simple brochures. They are being extensively used in the coaching of bee keeping groups in Tua Chua. It has been found to increase the effectiveness of this service and to reduce the time for preparation of each event. Also visualization material (based on the GRAPP method) have been developed, as a local artist has been found. However, the development and testing of the material is very time consuming and it is yet questionable, how much effort is necessary to train extensionists in using them properly.

It is yet unclear, who will be able to continue making and testing extension materials. In order to develop site-specific tools, testing on district level under coordination of province level seems appropriate. So far, no approach and payment standards for making extension material are agreed upon.

3.6 Information sources and standardising information retrieval

Three sets of resource material for the extensionist have been identified as necessary to increase the quality of his service and reduce the time he needs for preparation of each extension event:

- Material on existing and new technological options (fact-sheets) must be available for all technical options tested (including successes and failures). These fact sheets must include technical and economic information. They must be updated annually based on the new (local, regional) experience gained. They are expanded according to annual village requests and new introductions available from the main sources in Hanoi (coordinated by province level). Prior to each season each extensionist must be able to review information on previous extension events on the same topic in the district. Thus he can advise on confirmed recommendations and necessity for further tests.

A structure for management of this information may be the extension center on province level. However, initially there is little interest in setting up this information base as it is seen to conflict with the 'technical standards' provided in Hanoi.

- Guidelines on methodology approach: standard outlines for all aspects of extensionists work must be made available in folders to each extensionist. Materials must be comprehensive and approved by the province together with payment and monitoring standards. It must furthermore be regularly (annually or biannually) reviewed and updated. A first example is the documentation of the PAEM. For disseminating technical innovations in animal production, material yet remains to be documented.
Village activity histories: when preparing for an extension event on a certain topic in a specific village, the extensionist must be aware of all previous and on-going extension events in the village. It will increase trust if extensionists are well coordinated and well-informed about what is concerning farmers at the moment.

The extensionists require training to be able to use the available technical and methodological information (see 3.9).

3.7 Management and task division between district and commune level

The integration of a new administrative level turns out to be quite challenging. For the district level, extensionists have to approach their work more pre-structured (according to work plans) and have to learn to delegate and supervise. The PAEM facilitates this structured approach.

An initial problem concerns the reallocation of funds. While activity financing for extension is still fluctuating from year to year, district level is hesitant to allocate activities (and funding) to the lower level.

For the commune level staff, integration starts with training. Initially the commune extensionist is 'apprenticing' with the district extensionist. (S)he accompanies the district staff and takes over monitoring tasks between visits, e.g. making sure that the interest groups follow up on their assigned tasks for the next group meeting, that they remember the date of the next gathering.

Differentiation of tasks between the district and commune extensionist evolves further over time. With expanding capacities of the commune extensionist and increasing demand from villages, the commune extensionist can take over more of the 'regular' tasks. Ultimately they becomes the main responsible extensionist. The district extensionist is then only requested as part of the resource information network.

For transfer to other districts, experiences with training and coaching of commune staff and evolvement of task descriptions need to be documented. In the long run, work plans and task descriptions can be the basis for the contract between a village and 'its' extensionist.

3.8 The central role of Monitoring and Evaluation: activity monitoring and beyond

'Extension service contracts' between the project (coached and monitored by SNV) and the district extension station (AES) are a good annual base for activity monitoring. As the PAEM is more complex as delivery of subsidized seeds, quarterly, monthly and weekly work plans are necessary for activity coordination and monitoring. Field presence is confirmed in logbooks of the Village Management Board (VMB) or the contracted farmer. The key district level extension staff (or project staff or province staff) assigned with giving professional backstopping has an additional monitoring plan to facilitate coaching support for crucial times in crucial trials.

In addition to activity monitoring, result monitoring is important. In agriculture the introduction of new technologies requires continuous performance (yield, growth) monitoring in order to derive useful, i.e. financially and technically sound recommendations. The need for a database on all introductions for refining extension topics becomes clear when we look at the development of extension contents, and the role of extension as an information supplier supplemented by commercial input suppliers (see also 3.3 above).

This yield (performance) monitoring goes beyond the interest of the involved individual but is instead useful for the community as a whole, thus being a Government task. Persons involved in this monitoring must be provided with an incentive to do so responsibly. It proves difficult, however, to move extensionists away from measuring extension success in t/ha for trial plots. Only in a more refined and complex system, are these services supplied by regional research centers.

Finally, impact monitoring is in the interest of extension for negotiating its political support. Participatory evaluations at the end of a field trial give a first indication of farmers interest in applying the demonstrated technology. Surveys in the following season - separately or together with VDP - can confirm the actual application within the village and maybe even beyond. Household survey can assess the general satisfaction with extension service and the applicability of individual technologies. Finally a socio-economic household survey or rather a production cost survey could establish the impact of new technologies on the farm income situation.

AES is responsible for field evaluations. It can also follow up dissemination of a methodology. For a new seed variety this is easily done through monitoring seed sales. For other technological innovations, surveys are necessary. DARD with its state management function would be responsible for a number of these monitoring activities, such as Production Cost Surveys. Survey and monitoring results are important policy tools used by
DARD as well as being an essential part of the ‘information network’ that is indispensable for the extensionists work.

3.9 Human Resource Development of Extensionists

Training modules must be carefully designed to introduce main topics in small packages (of not more than 1 day) at the appropriate time. Each unit must include coached practical application and field exposure. Task division between district and commune level requires separation of topics according to target group. An initial set of 6 standardized training units for district extensionists and 12 training units for commune extensionists is planned to be designed. However, it proves time consuming and difficult to focus and standardize them.

Economics training has to be intensified in district and province level to facilitate understanding for how to use financial performance indicators in selecting production activities for individual households. The currently implemented discussion series on economics is the basis for developing practical tools for extensionists and farmers.

Cooperation with Vocational Schools is anticipated for development of training material and for increasing the dissemination coverage.

3.10 Extension financing: a gradual shift of focused support towards private financing

When looking at financing options we should keep in mind the current differentiation of financing mechanisms, i.e. (a) Government funds and their expected coverage and (b) other financial sources for incentive payments to individuals.

Demand-driven extension as proposed by the project requires a completely different budget allocation than is provided so far. Most importantly a budget line for VDP must be introduced. And the VDP exercise itself can only be justified, if the subsequent investment funds are sufficiently high. VDP costs amount to approx. VND 300,000 per village plus training costs of the same amount for the first 3 years. The total of 600,000 VND/village should probably not exceed 10 % of the investment costs to find public and political acceptance. Investments per village - not necessarily covering only agricultural services - should thus amount to a minimum of 60 Mio. VND:

Secondly a higher percentage of the finances for agricultural extension must flow into financing technical assistance (i.e. field days, coaching, farmer training) rather than material input. An indication for future finance allocation is provided by the project budget allocations for Yen Chau and Tua Chua in 1999. Of a total operating budget of around 100 Mio VND per district (roughly USD 7000 per district, distributed to about USD 300/village), less then 10 % is spent on material inputs. Main funds are allocated to village meetings (design, training, evaluation) and per diems for staff.

It must be kept in mind that a shift away from supplying material inputs has serious consequences on the current staff remuneration structures. New incentive structures have to be created. Incentive structures aiming towards a result-oriented service provision is not a new concept in Son La. The sugar company decided to pay incentives to sugar extensionists based on the amount of produce provided to the factory instead of paying them according to the area planted (in which case some of the sugar did not get sold to the factory). A similar result-oriented incentive structure should be put in place in the general extension service.

In the future, service contracts between the extensionist and the village may be the basis for result-oriented incentive payments. A result would be a ‘higher gross margins for the farmer’. The extensionist would get incentive payments e.g. for a technology newly introduced by him based on area coverage and incremental benefits generated. These systems are operational in some delta provinces. However, in diversified farming systems, incentive payments are much more difficult to design, monitor and enforce. Beneficiaries are much more reluctant to socialize extension costs.

Far in the future it can be imagined that during the initial period of a service contract (1. year) this incentive would be paid from the extension budget (‘service introduction offer’). In subsequent years as well as for high value-added technologies it would be paid by the farmer as percentage of his incremental benefits (benefit sharing). Government funds would thus be used to establish the system. Over time government funds would be concentrated more and more towards resource protection issues and the support of disadvantaged persons within a village or disadvantaged areas.

3.11 Summary: Role of the project in the coming phase
Based on the experience in the current phase SFDP sees VDP as an important planning tool for extension that would facilitate demand-driven service provision. It is furthermore a useful tool to introduce commercial performance parameters into extension service that would facilitate a better allocation of state funds.

SFDP tests 'Demand-based Extension' in the 57 project villages in 1999. Results of the documentation and evaluation of the methodology will be available for pilot implementation in other districts in 2000. As for other project methodologies, review by the province and official approval is anticipated. The approved methodology with detailed guidelines can then be used in other districts.

To facilitate pilot implementation in other districts, SFDP proposes to make contracts with the province level to implement VDP in selected districts/communes/villages in the year 1999. Implementation of these plans would then be covered in 2000. SFDP will provide training (class-room and 'in-the field' apprenticeship), supportive supervision for the planning and for the implementation as well as financing. Financing outlines will be designed as discussion basis for future budget allocations.

Integration and training of commune staff will be a crucial prerequisite to improving extension coverage. Definition of tasks, work plans and training needs must be well documented in order to be used by expansion districts.

The future vision would remain for VDPs to be the basis for 'Extension service contracts' between a village and a 'contact extensionist'. These contracts outline activities, performance indicators and incentives for the individual extensionist. Incentives could be increasingly transferred towards private financing. Government financing can thus be focused on providing the 'information network' and on subsidising areas of state concern (resource protection, poverty alleviation, support to disadvantaged regions).

4. HOW TO REACH THE FUTURE OBJECTIVES: STEPWISE APPROACH

4.1 Options for area coverage

While the staff capacities on district level are still low and communal extensionists are not in place or are not yet functional, only a limited area coverage can be achieved. Gradual increase in the number of villages covered by VDP and demand-based extension must take place. Fast increases endangers the quality of planning and implementation and endangers the political support for the methodology.

There are different opinions on what kind of final coverage can be reached over time. In case full coverage of all villages is envisaged, a larger number of staff have to be employed. If in all communes, commune extension staff is operational (approx. 200 persons), each staff still has to look after approx. 10 villages.

Instead a provision of extension services to a limited number of villages over a limited time could be envisaged. Extension coverage could be kept at roughly 30 %, focussing on a mix of 'easy adapters' and disadvantaged remote villages. After a limited time (e.g. 3 years), extensionists could focus their services to new villages, unless the village itself was willing to cover some of the costs.

Villages would thus be classified into:

1. a villages not yet covered by extension service
2. villages covered during 1. service cycle (paid by Gov.)
3. villages covered during 2. or further service cycle (partly or largely self-financed by villages)
4. villages 'graduated' from intensive contract cooperation and working in loose contact with extension services

4.2 Phases of expanding extension structure

As proposed by KAISER, expansion could take place in 3 steps, resulting in the following consecutive set-ups for extension: (1) District to village, (2) District and commune to village (3) District to Group Commune to commune to village.

The phased introduction would facilitate that staff capacities are expanded according to planning capacities and management capacities. In Son La the second step is envisaged for the period 1999-2001. Based on the documented experience from Yen Chau, other districts could expand in using VDP and integrating commune level into their extension services. A further expansion to group commune level only seems to make sense when
staff capacities are added. A mere shift from district to group-commune level will severely decrease district management and coaching capacities.

Lai Chau will likely remain within the first step. The structure would be expanded at best with new district staff. Internships of this staff in Tua Chua, coaching and training is necessary to increase capacities for VDP and PAEM.

In the meantime, the PAEM may be approved, the extension training and information network is improved and operational budget lines are set up to support the ‘knowledgeable and informed’ farming systems extension persons, we are envisioning.

List of abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AAV</td>
<td>Action Aid Vietnam, operating a.o. in Mai Son District, Son La</td>
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<tr>
<td>AES</td>
<td>Agriculture-Forestry Extension Station (District level)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARDS</td>
<td>Agriculture and Rural Development Station (District level)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAFB</td>
<td>Commune Agro-forestry Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAFE</td>
<td>Center for Agriculture and Forestry Extension (Province level, sub-department)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CARE</td>
<td>international Non Government Organisation operating in Phu Tho, Son La</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEMMA</td>
<td>Committee for Ethnic Minorities and Mountainous Areas (ministerial rank)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DARD</td>
<td>Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (Province level)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEMB</td>
<td>District Extension Management Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FFS</td>
<td>Farmer Field Schools (FAO approach for field-based learning)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FP</td>
<td>Forest Protection (Unit on district level or Department on province level)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FD</td>
<td>Forest Development Sub-Department on province level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IPM</td>
<td>Integrated Pest Management, FAO approach applied in YC and TC in rice by Plant Prot. Station</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LUPLA</td>
<td>Land use planning and land allocation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPS</td>
<td>Plant Protection Station on district level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPC</td>
<td>Province People’s Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRA</td>
<td>Participatory Rural Appraisal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PTD</td>
<td>Participatory Technology Development (Extension approach for farmer-led on-farm trial design)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SNV</td>
<td>Dutch Voluntary Organization, working with SFDP from 1/99 through two Development Advisors stationed at Tua Chua and Yen Chau district.</td>
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<tr>
<td>VDP</td>
<td>Village Development Planning</td>
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<td>VMB</td>
<td>Village Management Board</td>
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Annex 1: An extension vision

The prerequisite for determining a suitable structure for extension is a vision of the tasks it will perform. We first have to develop a clear view of the future extensionist, as well as of the future farmer, then we determine ways to get there. The following story illustrates a vision:

Individuals voice their demand, village structures exist to meet or channel this demand

In Ha village there are many farming families on medium-sized mixed farms. Each family is aware of several investment options and reviews regularly within their family and with neighbours or friends in a similar condition how to best use their resources. For example chicken-raising is the main speciality of Ing-Family, so they have joined a ‘chicken interest group’ in the village. Here 8 families discuss each month which problems need to be
solved to improve their operation. For some of their questions they find answers among themselves, other questions they plan to raise during the village meeting, some technical problems they raise directly with the extensionist. Every 2 month they invite ‘their’ extensionist to join them, listen to their ideas and contribute new ideas.

The extensionist is solely responsible for the village based on a clear determination of regular tasks and special service requests and clear incentives

The extensionist in Ha village is a woman. Her name is Ms Ngoc. Villagers know her well and trust that she is concerned with providing best possible support. The extensionist visits this village regularly and is the main service partner for this village, based on her contract with the village. Her visits are based on the agreed annual working schedule. Her busiest season is before and during harvest. She is assisting farmers to determine the best timing for their fertilizer applications and 5 farmers have agreed to participate in these fertilizer trials and now need help with determining the exact yield data. They agreed she will get 50 % of the yield increase over the next 2 years if the trials are successful.

This year the ‘interest group on chicken’ asked her to check out the new preventative medicine available. The village knows that this is her professional specialization. She just got called late at night by the village paraveterinarian to jointly look at a chicken that is going to die. Together they determined the symptoms. After they have jointly managed a reduction in disease incidence in chicken last year they are now working on reducing the costs of disease prevention. They are considering different feed supplements and she is helping them to monitor current feed costs per chicken. They may want to purchase the feed together and she has good market insight and can negotiate a good price for them. The chicken interest group has agreed to pay her 20 percent of their increase in income from improved chicken raising.

The previous month a new fruit disease scared many villagers. The extensionist quickly reacted and involved one of her colleagues specialized in fruit trees. After his field assessment and some phone calls to Hanoi they were able to identify the pest and sell pesticides for a low-cost treatment. Ms Ha also managed to secure 2 places in a training course on ‘Timing and amount of pesticide application against aphids in Lychee’ for two villagers. They each pay Ms Ha a small placement fee.

Performance checks are enforced and annual/biannual contracts can be terminated or transferred to other staff

Ha-village pays the extensionist according to the number of times they are calling her to the village. They also pay her if he has come up with a very successful introduction. Every 3 months the VMB is meeting with her to discuss her performance so far, and outstanding issues for the next quarter.

They know that last year most families in the village managed to reduce their production costs on rice by 10 % as she found a better fertilizer source and had assisted them in their complaint regarding a shipment of poor seeds by a commercial supplier.

The chicken producers are especially happy as she found a regular marketing outlet. Because of her useful services she has provided so far and the ideas they have jointly developed for future tasks, the village has just extended her contract by another 2 years. After that they probably want to contract an extensionist that is specialized in fruit production. But certainly also as dedicated as Ms Ngoc.

Extensionists work as commercial service providers in a state-financed information network

Ha-village is one of 6 villages Ms Ngoc is working in this year. In 3 of these villages this is her second contract term, in 3 villages like in Ha-village she is in her first term ‘at the beginning’. She is happy that Ha-village had opted to continue her contract for next year, because she feels she can still bring many benefits to this village. She knows that two other villages will terminate her contract at the end of the year: One village she has already transferred to her colleague specialized in vegetable production. The other village has implemented so many improvements that they now opted to work alone.

Ms. Ngoc now has to decide whether she wants to start work in two or three new villages next year. Earlier in the year the extension station had invited all village heads of villages that had not yet worked with extension. Each extensionist had given a presentation on what he or she is currently offering in their villages. There were lots of photos and the specialist on vegetable production had even brought a basket full of new varieties of vegetables grown. His services are much in demand and he has contracts with 11 villages at the moment. He is servicing them together with a younger colleague who is ‘apprenticing’ with him.

Ms Ngoc had requests from 4 new villages to start a service contract with her. Two villages especially requested
her because they knew from neighbour villages about her good work. The other two villages want somebody to support them mainly in chicken-raising. However this year Ms Ngoc wants to spend more time in the office. She has discussed with other colleagues specialized on chicken production in the province that it is necessary to develop a new brochure for 'Semi-intensive chicken feeding' and one on 'Preventing Newcastle disease'. Together several provinces also want to design a TV programme about it. Finally she will assist in designing a training course for new extensionists or extensionists with other specializations, so they know which 'chicken problems' to expect in a new village, what solutions they must work out themselves, where support can be found and last but not least how to lay out contracts and incentives. For preparing this work she needs 4 months in the office. The training course she will conduct next year and she will take the participants to look at her villages. Then she will really have expanded the number of 'chicken experts'.

Next year she has also signed up for a course on fish production. The course will involve some class-room training and also field visits to the villages her 'fish-colleague' is working in. Her colleague has developed an excellent working concept and much demand. This is the second specialization she wants to expand.

The farmers do not know whether Ms Ngoc is a district staff or a commune staff. She provides good services and farmers hope that many villages can benefit from similar services.

Table 1: Summary for Status Quo of Agriculture and Forestry Extension in Son La and Lai Chau

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Strong points</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
<th>SFDP Approach 96-98</th>
<th>SFDP Achievements 96-98</th>
<th>SFDP Plans 99-2001</th>
<th>PPM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Extension Structure and Staffing Capacities</td>
<td>Extension structure set up in 1995 on province and (partially) district level</td>
<td>No extension staff below district level; Ratio of above 2000 hh/extension worker Division of tasks remains partly unclear</td>
<td>Propose to provinces an expansion of capacities and assist in staff training</td>
<td>Son La: Following a province workshop (9/97) some Group Commune Extension Centers are set up Commune Extensionists (CE) are appointed (1/98)</td>
<td>Son La: Convince districts to pay CEs Lai Chau: Differentiate and formalize operational procedures for CEs Lai Chau: Province workshop considers strengthening of extension structure (10/98)</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Extension Program Planning</td>
<td>Program approach allows for annual adjustments and priority redefinition</td>
<td>Efficiency of programs is low as they are allocated centrally and are not requested through farmers’ participation in planning</td>
<td>Plan activities on village level. Assist farmers in doing the planning themselves (see VDP methodology)</td>
<td>- VDP prove a good planning basis for implementing extension activities</td>
<td>- Test VDP as planning basis for extension activities in other districts - Adapt and integrate VDP so it becomes official planning routine</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Extension Contents (1)</td>
<td>25 different national programs are defined and comprise a wide range of activities</td>
<td>- Programs are not specifically designed for mountainous areas - Commodity-based programs ignore farm system approach</td>
<td>Test out technical options for agriculture and forestry for SL and LC in farm-system context Increase dissemination efficiency by reducing input supply and</td>
<td>- Technical Options are tested and documented for forestry and agriculture - Stronger focus on training and dissemination</td>
<td>- Transfer to province methodology for defining suitable extension contents (VDP, PTD) - Convince province of a change in</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
- Efficiency of programs is low as they heavily focus on input supply, with little training component (80:20).
- Gender awareness is low focusing on training instead (20:80) in view of future role of extension.
- Small trial plots are useful for determining technical and financial suitability of new technologies.
- Higher budget allocation to dissemination activities is a more efficient way of promoting new technologies.
- Recommended financially feasible input levels differ markedly from technical optimum.

### 4. Extension Methodology
(e.g. speeches, field trainings, classroom trainings, study tours, dissemination of brochures, building of models)

- Model farms prove technical potential of a new option.
- Test technical options in small on-farm trial plots only.
- Allocate a major portion of the budget on technical support and dissemination activities.
- Adjust input requirements to financially feasible levels based on practical experience.
- Establish the use of small trial plots (planned and monitored by farmers, and thoroughly evaluated, PTD) as main extension methodology.
- Establish a higher budget allocation from input supply into dissemination activities (20:80).
- Establish on province level a mechanism for incorporating financial feasibility criteria into technical recommendations.

### 4b. Teaching Methodology
(Extensionists teaching farmers)

- Information is disseminated directly to farmers not only to authorities.
- Teaching methodology and selected information often too theoretical and abstract for farmers.
- Train extensionists in improved teaching methodology.
- Design examples for standard extension modules.
- Provision of several courses on extension and teaching methodology.
- Some extension modules adapted to local requirements.
- Complete the design of standardized extension modules.
- Design training modules and curriculum for commune extensionists and district extensionists to use extension methodology.
- Expand provincial training capacities for transferring teaching and extension methodology to extension service.

### 5. Extension material
(Hand-outs, visualization tools for farmers)

- Material on general topics is available.
- Material is very theoretical. Extension staff are required to adapt information for practical use.
- Develop and test suitable extension material.
- Some extension material available for teaching farmers.
- Develop visualization skills and framework for using them.
- Increase local capacities for making teaching and extension.
### 6. Information Sources (for extensionists)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Material on general topics is available</th>
<th>Get adapted extension modules for varying target groups (e.g. illiterates) authorized as standard modules</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Information of technical experience within the region is not documented or documentation is not easily available</td>
<td>- Expand technical information base by setting up a monitoring and evaluation system for trial plots</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Information on extension methodology is too abstract</td>
<td>- Regarding methodological information see under 3b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Documentation of experience on technical options in agriculture and forestry is available (incl. financial analysis).</td>
<td>- Set up standardized information collection, documentation and retrieval of technical options</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Transfer to province a structure for developing, refining and disseminating technical recommendations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Transfer guidelines on extension methodology (3ab)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 7. Management and Task Division

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Tasks and responsibilities are generally well defined</th>
<th>Material on general topics is available</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Extension staff has usually responsibility for certain program, not for a geographical area. This task division leads to poor coordination of activities from customer point of view (no farm-system approach)</td>
<td>Get adapted extension modules for varying target groups (e.g. illiterates) authorized as standard modules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Weak activity planning</td>
<td>- Expand technical information base by setting up a monitoring and evaluation system for trial plots</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Regarding methodological information see under 3b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Documentation of experience on technical options in agriculture and forestry is available (incl. financial analysis).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td>- Set up standardized information collection, documentation and retrieval of technical options</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### 8. Monitoring and Evaluation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Detailed reporting is practiced</th>
<th>Material on general topics is available</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Feedback loops are weak. Experiences are not fully used for adjusting approaches, recommendations</td>
<td>Get adapted extension modules for varying target groups (e.g. illiterates) authorized as standard modules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Success indicators focus only on technical success, not on financial feasibility. This leads to low dissemination of</td>
<td>- Expand technical information base by setting up a monitoring and evaluation system for trial plots</td>
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</table>

### 4.6

- Transfer system of monitoring and evaluation feedback loops to province level to be used as standard procedure |
- Discuss and change success indicators |
- Transfer mechanisms and...
**9. Staff Training**  
(Extensionists receiving support)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technologies beyond Government subsidies</th>
<th>Responsibilities for updating and expanding 'fact sheets' database and dissemination structure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Staff training** is regarded as important as extension is a new issue and most staff have only administrative background and technical education**  
- No structured training modules are defined  
- No training curriculum is available for extension staff (basic courses/refresher courses)**  
- Assess training needs and develop training modules**  
- Outline and test major components of a training curriculum for various groups**  
- A number of suitable training modules are available**  
- Major components of a training curriculum outlined and tested**  
- Expand number of finished training modules for specific target groups**  
- Develop and transfer standard training curriculum for commune extensionists, district extensionists and province extensionists**  
- Determine responsibilities and mechanism for adjusting training modules and curriculum** | **4.4, 5.2** |