Report on

Evaluation the first results

of Village Land use planning

in Project Afforestation in Ha Tinh, Quang Binh and Quang Tri

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Abbreviations used:

VLUP: Village Land Use Planning
PMU: Project Management Unit
NPMU: National Project Management Unit
DPMU: District Project Management Unit
PPMU: Provincial Project Management Unit
ARD: Agriculture and Rural Development
LTC: Land Tenure Certificate
RBC: Red Book Certificate

I Introduction

Village land use planning officially started on January 1, 1998 in 10 project communes of 10 project districts in 3 provinces Ha Tinh, Quang Binh and Quang Tri.

In order to review results VLUP implementation in project area the appraisal support and evaluation of VLUP has been done at request of National Project Management.

The NPMU itself prepared the evaluation team. One is a project technical co-ordinator and other one is a expert in VLUP. Together with the mission all members in district and provincial project management have been invited. The appraisal support and evaluation of VLUP took place from 5 to 22 April 1998.

The appraisal support and evaluation had the following general objectives:

- to assess the performance of VLUP after 3 months implementation
- to find the strengths and weakness of LUP
- to evaluate the appraisal process of DPMU and PPMU
- to produce recommendations for improvement of both VLUP implementation and project measures

The term of reference for VLUP appraisal support and evaluation were:

- assess the perception and awareness of local authorities and farmers with regard to the aim of the project and the VLUP
- analyse VLUP methodology and approach by VLUP team
- describe perceptions and ideals of farmers forwards VLUP after implementation of the afforestation
- assess the appraisal and approval work of the district people committee and the DPMU and PPMU
- make recommendations to the PMU's at national, provincial and district level to improve the planning, monitoring, appraisal and approval of VLUP proposals
The evaluation report will only focus on Village Land Use Planning evaluation and produce recommendations for VLUP.

The evaluation mission members like to thank staff and officers of the PMU in Ha Tinh, Quang Binh and Quang Tri for their excellent cooperation and valuable contributions during the interviews and discussion at field trip.

II Methodology

The results of the evaluation are mainly based on a field trip and interviews in the project area. The interviews took place with different actors involved in the project area. The evaluating action are described as below:

During the field trip 10 project communes of 10 districts in 3 provinces Ha Tinh, Quang Binh and Quang Tri were visited. In each district interviews took place at district, commune and village level. Appendix 1 show the itinerary of the evaluation mission. Persons met during the evaluation are mentioned in appendix 2.

The main document have been collected and studied by evaluation team during the field check were:

- Commune VLUP proposals for forest land use
- Appraisal report, and
  - Material used in VLUP implementation process

III Results Village Land Use planning Evaluation Objectives, outputs and methodology of VLUP

Forest plantations need a socio-economic acceptance on village and commune level. VLUP is a participatory process aiming at a consensus on land use in a village for a period of 5 years. VLUP focuses on forest land but it nevertheless recognises that planning need to be carried out holistically considering other types of land use in the village.

Direct outputs of the VLUP are commune proposal on the location of afforestation areas approved by district authorities and the village forest protection regulations. One important indirect output is forest land (re) allocation and issuing of LTC as a final stage of VLUP.

Confusion exits on all level about the question for which types of land the plan is made and for which period of time it will be binding. Widespread, opinion is that VLUP is made for all types of land and that is binding for 50 years. This is caused by the fact that most people do not distinct clearly between the steps in the whole process of afforestation planning where VLUP is only the first step.

Hereafter the findings of the mission will be presented following the sequence of the steps of VLUP.

1 Preparation of the VLUP work

Village Selection

Land conflicts were mentioned which were related to either land tenure rights, boundary disputes or encroachment. Problems show itself mostly in a later stage or even after VLUP. To reveal underlying conflicts during the selection process it was proposed by the field staff to investigate land allocation issues border conflicts thoroughly before VLUP starts. As it will mostly be impossible to solve border conflicts in the course of time of afforestation preparation selection of villages having land conflicts should be avoided or as soon as conflicts show up activities in those villages should not be continued.

However, criteria for villages selection have been indicated clearly in the VLUP guidelines. Basing on this
field staff should be careful to chose proper villages for the project and village border must be clarified. In case of Quang Tri, Hai Lang district the villages border was identified for only residential area and agriculture land. For the rest of land especially forest land managed by Commune. It seem that all Forrest land are only allocated to the villages which participated in the afforestation project.

First commune meeting

This first commune meeting is the first encounter for village heads with the project. The field staff understood that this is "preparatory meeting" in the villages before the VLUP team approaches first time. This could initiate reflection among farmers about the afforestation and it would help using limited time for the formulation of the village proposal more effective.

It was practice that in Ky Anh field staff asked chair man of the commune to organise this meeting during their absence.

It is advised that field staff have to help all meeting at district, commune and village level. Attention should be paid intensively on the first commune meeting to prepare their village work with the village heads.

2 Formulation of the VLUP proposal

Active participation of the household in the afforestation activities is derivable from the earliest stages of planning and decision making through to implementation. The level of participation depends very much on the skills of field staff in facilitating a bottom-up planning process. Therefore, continuity of field staff involved and repeated training to improve their skills in participatory approaches are basic requirements on which the project already places great emphasis.

Several time during the mission the question was raised how to increase awareness and understanding farmers towards both the objectives of the project and the VLUP process. We thing that the formulation of the VLUP in the villages provide good opportunities.

For explanations at village level a set of posters is produced by field staff themselves according to the guidelines and to what they have learned in the training in order to collect information for VLUP implementation (village transect, tree species selection, ...)

For the explanations on project objectives and benefits of plantations no posters referred yet.

The quality and the suitability of the posters as far as visualisation of the various issues is concerned again depends on the skills and understanding of the field staff.

As it was practice that in Hai Lang district, Quang Tri province 2 project villages have been visited by evaluation team and some farmers were interviewed about their benefits when they participate in the afforestation project, all answers showed that they did not know very well about their benefit in the project. This Problem not only happened in Hai Lang but also occurred in most project villages.

Based on this problem and to facilitate understanding and awareness raising on village level where the illiteracy rate is often still high the project should consider producing a standard set of posters and pamphlets right now which can repeatedly used by VLUP team and Extension workers.

The most important tool for formulation of the VLUP proposal is sandtable which has been intensively used in discussing with farmers at village about their all types of land use at present and creating the acceptance of land use in the future.

It was answered that when the evaluation team interview farmers sandtable is very valuable to talk over about our land use. So far, all sandtable of all project villages in 10 project communes have been completed. However, the material used for sandtable making are different.

During the evaluation it is indicated that field staff would try to complete sandtable rather than use it in their
work.

It is advisable that field staff should not only try to make sandtable but field staff have to understand and guide farmers in using it for discussion on land use at present to reach agreement on their future land use.

3 Appraisal and Approval of the VLUP proposal

Appraisal and approval of the commune VLUP proposal is a crucial step in the planning process aimed at decreasing the risk of failure of the project plantations.

The main objectives of the appraisal by the DPMU is to assess the feasibility of the commune VLUP proposal, especially commune forest land use.

Although the appraisal guidelines is issued and used. In practice some modifications occur:

- In most case the involvement of the district starts already during the final meeting, Instead of consulting the concerned sectors at district office they take part in the final meeting. Interviews with commune leaders showed that it is common practice though they did not complain about it. However, we still think that it is better to consult the district sectors in the district in order to ensure commune responsibility for the VLUP proposal. To facilitate the consultation an "advisory board" consisting of the concerned sectors on district level could be formed which is consulted during a one-day meeting.

- It is unclear that mostly the DPMU not produces appraisal report meanwhile the commune VLUP proposal have still been approved by district people committee.

- There is no appraisal by the PPMU like fore seen. In some cases a modification quality check of the PPMU take place in the district meeting for approval or even in the final commune meeting. The evaluation team strongly recommends that the final quality check of the commune VLUP proposal is done by the NPMU together with PPMU.

- Obviously, the seven key-criteria are not equally taken into account. Many proposal are approved without meeting the key-criteria (Ha Tinh and Quang Tri). Main problems occur concerning the following criteria:

+ Villagers socio-economic needs for (up)land

There is not enough grazing areas planned. It is common practice that commune proposals are approved where the grazing area is clearly underestimated (e.g. grazing density 16 animals/ ha) and some grazing areas having boundary next to afforestation were still accepted. This issue was explained by DPMU that controlled grazing is common here and it is normal there to graze animal in many other places in the commune by intensively controlled grazing.

The results of commune VLUP proposal have shown that all grazing areas were not considered equally and grazing area is recorded in the commune VLUP proposal is related to the reality in the field or the sandtable.

Reserve bare land for villagers needs (extension of residence area, shifting cultivation, agro-forestry.....) have to be discussed in deep. In some cases reserve bare land is still not investigated carefully (Son Mai commune, Huong Son District).

The evaluation team highly advises that to decide the best afforestation area and sustainable plantations attention should be considerably paid on grazing area and reserve bare land.

+ Village capacity to incorporate afforestation
There is evidence for over-planting. In a commune where VLUP was checked, the afforestation will increase the forest cover of the commune by 58% (in Huong Son). The "rule of the thumb" in the appraisal guidelines forest cover in the commune not higher than 30% with out explanation how villagers needs for land can be accommodated is rarely applied.

Percentage of forest cover of the individual village are very high( e.g. average forest cover of participating villages of Hai Chanh commune, Hai Lang District up to 70 %). This issue due to forest land in the commune have only been distributed to 5 project villages otherwides6 villages out of 11 villages in the commune have not received Forrest land to participate in the project.

The evaluation team therefore proposes the PPMU and DPMU to consider this figure and to set a maximum of 40 % future forest cover in the village and a maximum increase of forest cover by 30 % in the commune.

+ Land (re) distribution and land (re)allocation arrangements

The appraisal of the forest land reallocation arrangements should be further elaborated to avoid the creation of unequity among the villagers, which probably will lead to future conflicts. For example, in Quang Lien commune , Quang Trach District the numbers of households participate in the project less than 40 % and these households are allocated with all forestland in the commune. This issue is related to the above mentioned "over planting". Sufficient forestland should be reserved to ensure that farmers who do not participate in the project still have access(use rights) to forestland.

4 Dissemination and follow - up

(Re)allocation of forestland

Providing long - term security of land and free tenure for the farmers participating in the afforestation project is an important goal of the project. Interviews have shown that secure tenure through the afforestation and that they will own its products. To set the legal basic for it the issuance of red book certificate (RBC) is foreseen. The evaluation team would like to place great emphasis on the accomplishment of this aim and identified the reallocation of forestland (if needed the case of Quang Lien commune) and provision of RBC’s as one of the major issues the project should be concerned with .

In the project commune visited during the evaluation forest land has not been allocated to yet. It is reported that land (re)allocation to farmer households will be executed after approval of the VLUP proposal and issued RBC accordingly.

For the planned afforestation within the project it became necessary to (re)allocate forestland in order to assure the participation of a high percentage of households in the selected villages and fulfill the requirement concerning the size of the afforestation plots.

Permanent 3 -D model (sandtable)

The sandtable were identified as a important tool for planning and for participation of the villages. Attention should be paid to the question whether the data in the commune proposal refer to the sandtable.

In most communes visited during the evaluation, the sandtable have been shaped and coloured under direction of field staff. However, all sandtable have been made from claysoil and covered by gypsum or cement.

In some cases we found no grazing area in the sandtable though it is indicated in the commune proposal

It is strongly recommended that making sandtable to motivate the farmer participation in VLUP but not for exhibition and sandtable will be intensively used during project implementation.
Village Regulations

Disseminating the results of the participatory elaborated VLUP is important. The sandtable should not be the only results that is provided to the villagers. Needs assessment, visualisation of transect walk, etc should go back to the village after data processing. Most important, the village regulations for forest protection should be provided to village heads (may be as a poster) and A4 copies to the households.

In most cases village regulation have been completed and approved by commune authority but they are still in the commune.

5 Field staff and their implementation.

Field staff are the most crucial actors in the extension system of the project. They are the “bridge” between the project and the farmers in the communes and villages. Filed staff are either regular staff of the forest protection stations (case of Quang Tri) and of the agriculture and rural development division of people committee (Ha Tinh, Quang Binh). They most have prior experience in afforestation project through mainly the 327 programme and PAM projects.

The field staff in Ha Tinh and Quang Binh took full responsibility for the project meanwhile in Quang Tri field staff have taken both tasks in the same time assigned to the project and their organisation.

The field staff sometimes tries to reduce their workload by looking for shortcut steps in VLUP, appraisal and approval procedures. If time stress plays a role sometimes participatory character of the planning is reduced.

The job of field staff is not easy. A proper incentive systems needed to keep working motivation good and the quality of the work high. So far the field staff of Ha Tinh and Quang Binh received a basic salary of 260.000 - 350.000 VND per month and field allowance of 10.000 VND per filed day. For the gasoline allowance is unclear now.

In Quang Tri, field staff still receive the salary from their organisation and field allowance of 10.000 VND per day.

It is highly suggested that the assignment of one full time field staff to each project commune and intensive system/policy for field staff should be clarified if not necessary for project success.

IV Recommendations on Village Land Use Planning

1. It is suggested to ask the village heads in the first commune meeting to help a short of “preparatory meeting” in their villages before the VLUP team approaches first time village in order to initiate considerations among the farmers about the afforestation.
2. To facilitate the consultation with district sectors about the VLUP proposals an "advisory board" consisting of the concerned sectors on district level could be formed which is consulted in a one - day meeting.
3. The evaluation team strongly recommends that the quality check of the commune VLUP proposals is done by the NPMU together with the PPMU.
4. The evaluation team proposes to set a maximum of 40 % future forest cover in the villages and a maximum increase of forest cover by 30 % in the commune caused by the afforestation activities.
5. In order to increase awareness and understanding in the objectives and the long - term benefits of the plantations of the project a standard set of posters and pamphlets should be produced by the project now.
6. Attention should be paid to the question whether the data in the commune VLUP proposal refer to the sandtable in the Villages.
7. The village regulations for forest protection should be provided to the village heads (may be as a poster and A4 copies) to the households as soon as the proposal has been approved.
8. One full time field staff should be responsible for each project commune and be the first contact person at any time. Other field staff could be part time workers.
9. The procedure for the project implementation and finance management should be completed and approved because it is really related to the field staff in their implementation.

10. Attention must be paid to the selection of project villages in the commune. It is strongly advised that the PPMU and DPMU follow the criteria for the village selection in the appraisal guidelines.