

PARTICIPATORY POVERTY AND GOVERNANCE ASSESSMENT

Quang Ngai Province

Son Ha district (Son Cao and Son Ba communes)

Tu Nghia district (Nghia Tho and Nghia An communes)

**Prepared in Collaboration with
Vietnam Solutions Company**

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On behalf of the study team

Le Quoc Quan

Abbreviations

| | |
|---------|---|
| ADB | Asian Development Bank |
| CPC | Commune People's Committee |
| DOLISA | Department of Labor, War-invalids and Social Affairs |
| DPC | District People's Committee |
| DPI | Department of Planning and Investment |
| DNRE | Department of Natural Resources and Environment |
| DSO | Department of Statistics Office |
| DPFP | Department of Population and Family Planning |
| DOET | Department of Education and Training |
| DARD | Department of Agricultural and Rural Development |
| DOH | Department of Health |
| FDI | Foreign Direct Investment |
| HCMC | Ho Chi Minh City |
| HEPR | Hunger Elimination and Poverty Reduction |
| HH | Household |
| MOLISA | Ministry of Labor, IWar-invalids and Social Affairs |
| ODA | Official Development Aids |
| PCEMMR | Provincial Committee of Ethnic Minority and Mountainous Regions |
| PFF | Provincial Fatherland Front |
| PPA | Participatory Poverty Assessment |
| PPC, PC | Provincial People's Committee |
| PRA | Participatory Rapid Appraisal |
| REDC | Regulation on the Exercise of Democracy in Communes |
| REDCIST | REDC Implementation Steering Committee |
| RMB | Residential Management Board |
| RRA | Rural Rapid Appraisal |
| VMG | Village Management Group |
| VND | Vietnam Dong |

Current Exchange Rate

US\$ 1 approximately equal to 15,500 VND

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A. BACKGROUND

The Participatory Poverty and Governance Assessment (PPGA) in Quang Ngai province is one of 12 assessments that were conducted in 12 provinces in Vietnam using the same methodologies and procedures. The assessments were undertaken in order to gain an overview of poverty in Vietnam and contribute to the Consultative Group meeting to be held by the end of 2003. The findings of this report also contribute to a real understanding of poverty and poor populations in Vietnam, taking into account the impact of Vietnamese government efforts in carrying out programs that address the issue of poverty in recent years.

The Vietnam Solution Company collaborated on the PPGA in Quang Ngai province, a poor province in the Southern Central Coast Region. A group of researchers was chosen from national institutes and universities, all of whom had experience in RRA, PRA, and PPA. The assessment lasted from July 12 to July 31 2003, taking place in eight villages in selected districts in Quang Ngai province.

1. Expected Outcomes and Objectives

The objective of the PPGA is:

“To better understand the reality and the dynamics of poverty, as well as the factors affecting either directly or indirectly standards of poverty and the livelihood/living conditions of villagers in Quang Ngai province, in particular ethnic minority highland and coastal area people, and to accompany poverty assessments from other provinces to depict a broad picture of poverty in Vietnam, in order to formulate the appropriate policies on raising and improving the standard of living of the poor.”

The research tried to answer the questions according to the following six issues:

- The perception of poverty and its dynamics.
- Participation in local decision-making and empowerment of poor households.
- Delivery services to the poor (education, healthcare and agricultural extension).
- Quality and targeting of social assistance.
- Public administration reform.
- Environmental issues.

2. Methodologies

2.1. Study Type

The purpose of the study was to collect qualitative information that would assist in gaining a better understanding about the situation of real poverty and the living of the poor in selected communes, using the active participation of villagers, in particular the poor and disadvantaged (for example, women). With this purpose in mind, the PPA method was utilized to facilitate the participation of villagers, especially the poor.

2.2. PPA Tools

PPA tools were used to gather information using the participation of the community, especially the poor groups. These tools were simple, but attractive enough to encourage the involvement and participation of villagers.

- Participatory mapping (poverty, education and health, mobilization)
- Trend analysis (poverty, health disease, dropouts, teachers)
- Seasonal calendar (cultivation, disease, epidemic, hunger gaps)
- Cause-effect flow (high rate of dropout, poverty)
- Venn diagram (participation in poverty, reducing dropout)
- Matrix ranking (reasons for poverty, extension activities, information requirements)
- Wealth ranking (the poorest and the most better-off)
- Pair wise ranking (activities for improving access to public services for the poor)
- Semi-structured interviewing (poor households, better-off, return to poverty, women)
- Secondary data collection (poverty ratio, list of poor households)
- Observation (school, health care clinics, road, bridges); and
- Focus group discussion (women, young, and poor men and women) using six topics and arranged in every village (village leaders, poor women's group, mixing better-off and poor women's groups, poor men's group, mixing better-off and poor men's groups, youth group).

3. Schedule

The study was carried out in July and August 2003. It consisted of three phases.

Preparation phase: in Hanoi from 1 July to 10 July 2003:

- The study team attended meetings with donors and knowledge partners, and an orientation meeting, to discuss which information was to be collected, and what possible PPA tools would be used, as well as the organizational details of the PPA process.

Field work phase: from 12 July to 31 July 2003:

- The study team worked with the Province People's Committee (PPC) and the District People's Committee (DPC) to reach an agreement on the approach and objectives of the study, as well as the type of information to be collected. The study team organized PPA training for the local authority at province, district and commune levels.
- The study team undertook the poverty assessment in selected villages in four communes in two districts.
- The team also obtained feedback from some initial results with local authorities (communes and province levels).

Data cleaning, analysis and writing report phase: in Hanoi from 1 August to 30 August 2003.

4. Assessment Team

The PPGA team was a multi-disciplinary team that consisted of 10 members:

- Mr Le Quoc Quan, LL.M, Managing Coordinator, Vietnam Solution Company Ltd
- Mr Nguyen Chi Trung, MSc, Team Leader, National Institute of Agricultural Planning and Projection
- Mr Le Ngu Binh, Institute of Labor and Social Sciences, MOLISA
- Mr Nguyen Anh Phong, MSc, National Institute of Agricultural Planning and Projection

- Ms Pham Thi Huong, Ph.D., Agriculture University, Hanoi
- Mr Pham Viet Thang, Vietnam Solutions Company Ltd
- Mr Pham Tat Dac, MSc, Lecturer, Economic Transportation College
- Mr Nguyen Vuong, MSc, Department of Planning and Investment, Quang Ngai
- Mr Ho Thi Hoa, Department of Planning and Investment, Quang Ngai
- Mr Than Phuc, Department of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs, Quang Ngai

5. Participants

The study team met and interviewed a total of 640 local officials and people, 470 of whom were villagers, in the surveyed area. At provincial and district level, the team interviewed officials and representatives of DOLISA, DPI, PPC, Extension Station, the Farmers' Association, the Ethnic Committee, and the Women's Union, among others, and, at the lowest level, members of the commune, CPC leaders, village heads and villagers. In Son Ba, Son Cao and Nghia Tho communes, the majority of the population were H're ethnic minority people, and in Nghia An commune, the majority were Kinh people. The rate of illiteracy among villagers participating in the discussions was estimated to be 43 percent.

6. Description of Study Sites

6.1. Quang Ngai Province

Quang Ngai, a province located in the Southern Central Coastal Region, has a total area of 5,131 km². The province is divided for administrative purposes into 13 districts and 34 communes, located at the Northern latitude of 14° 32' 40"-15°25'; and the Eastern longitude of 108° 06'-109° 4' 35". The province is bordered by Quang Nam to the north, Binh Dinh to the south, Kon Tum to the west, and the East Sea to the east.

Quang Ngai has a diversified topography, including mountainous, midland and lowland areas. The mountainous area is adjacent to the eastern side of the Truong Son range, and covers two thirds of the total area of the province. Tra Bong, Son Ha, Son Tay, Ba To, Minh Long are all mountainous districts. The midland area is a small portion of the total area (1,770 ha), and is characterized by pebbles, fading and feral soil that is suitable for food and cereal, and permanent crops. The lowland area is formed by weathered midland and alluvial soil from the rivers Tra Khuc, Tra Bong, Tra Cau and Song Ve, and includes coastal sand plots and salted lagoons that are suitable for growing sweet potatoes and manioc, and for farming shrimps.

The province has a population of approximately 1.4 million in 2003, scattered throughout 13 districts and towns, and including four minority groups (Kinh, H're, Kor, and Xodang). The population density varies from 39 persons/km² (in Son Tay district) to 3,016 person/km² (in Quang Ngai town). The rate of illiteracy in every population group is still high, in particular in ethnic minority groups and disadvantaged groups such as women. The rate however varies from ethnic group to ethnic group: Kinh group (20 percent), H're (43 percent), Xodang (55 percent), and Kor (55 percent).

The Quang Ngai economy relies heavily on agriculture and fishing; over 80 percent of the labor force is involved in these industries. In mountainous areas, people use terraced and afforestation farming systems to grow paddy rice and cassava. In the midland and lowland areas farmers operate paddy fields and grow cassava to supply to processing plants. People living near the sea fish for more than six months of the year.

6.2. Son Ha and Tu Nghia Districts

In Quang Ngai province, two districts were chosen in which to conduct the assessment. The first district, Son Ha, was chosen as representative of a *highland area, a population of the dominantly H're ethnic minority group, and an area that has poor road and transportation and a population that has difficulties in accessing public services*. The second district, Tu Nghia, in contrast is a lowland area with *easier access to public services by its population, convenient roads and transport, and a predominantly Kinh ethnic group whose main livelihood source is fishing*.

The study therefore highlights two districts that have differing ethnic minorities, topographical conditions, and possibilities of access to information and public services. For example, the Nghia Tho commune made up predominantly of the H're group is different from the H're group in the highland communes, Son Ba and Son Cao; and the highland communes (Son Ba and Son Cao) are different from the lowland communes (Nghia An commune) in income earnings per capita and accessing public services.

Table A-1. Characteristics of districts and communes

| Son Ha district | | Tu Nghia district | |
|---|---|--|--|
| Son Cao commune | Son Ba commune | Nghia Tho commune | Nghia An commune |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highland commune • H're ethnic minority dominant • 60 km from Quang Ngai town, 29 km from Son Ha sub town • Steep land, difficult to access transportation, health care, and education • Livelihoods: Forestry, cultivation: terraced paddy rice, cassava, raising cattle and buffaloes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Midland commune ▪ Predominantly H're ethnic minority; some Kinh immigrants ▪ 30 km far from Son Ha sub town ▪ Easier to access roads, and health care of through the district health station ▪ Livelihoods: afforestation, cultivation of terraced paddy rice and cassava, raising cattle and buffaloes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lowland commune, easier to access roads, health care, and education services, in particular for secondary schools ▪ Near Quang Ngai town, "urban" H're group, mixed Kinh group ▪ Livelihoods: paddy rice, raising cattle, sugarcane, small trading | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Coastal area near sea, dominated by Kinh group, easiest to access roads, information, education and health services, 12km from Quang Ngai town ▪ High density of population, (3,000 households) ▪ Livelihoods: catching a offshore fish (for men), and raising pig and poultry at home (for women) |
| Poverty ration announced by Department of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs, Quang Ngai | | | |
| Very high (80 percent) | Very high (78 percent) | Medium (56 percent) | Less (17 percent) |
| Lang Tra and Xa Ay villages are poor, far from commune | Lang Bung and Lang Gia villages are very poor, and it | Village 1 and 2 are conveniently situated to access | Pho An and Tan My villages are conveniently |

| | | | |
|---|--|----------------------------|---|
| center, and have poor access to education and health care services. | is difficult to access the road to communal center and health station. | roads and public services. | situated to access roads and public services. |
|---|--|----------------------------|---|

7. Limitations of the Research

In addition to overcoming the difficulties originating from bias by the commune, and a perception of the research as a foundation for future investment or funding, the research team also identified several issues that had the potential to limit the credibility of the assessment and affect the results.

- In reality, the research time was too short to find sufficient problems and causes of and to fully explore adequate solutions for the existing poverty situation.
- In Son Ba commune, it was hard for us to overcome the difficulties caused by the preparations of the commune leaders. They tried to plant someone in the focus discussion groups who would drive the meetings and influence the free talk of the poor people.
- There was a slight difficulty in the early days of the project in finding a common language and accurate translations.
- Although the purpose of this study is very broad in its attempt to contribute to an overview of all poverty in Vietnam, it is important to acknowledge that there are limitations in both conducting in-depth research on all aspects of poverty and in developing complete solutions for poverty reduction.

B. PERCEPTIONS OF POVERTY

1. The Poverty Situation and Its Dynamics

The perception of poverty by villagers has changed very little over time. In many cases, the PPA team realized that poor people have no idea about recent social changes, they are ignorant about the possibilities for change, have no aspirations, and seem to have no idea about events that have taken place in the past or future.

In Son Ba, Son Cao and Nghia Tho communes, poverty is perceived as meaning that a household is not able to provide sufficient meals for a “long time”, eating rice that is often stuffed with cassava, and having to live in temporary shelters. In Nghia An commune, poverty is perceived as meaning those people who often borrow money to make ends meet, and hardly possess any valuable assets, though they may live in a brick-built house and own a bike. However, in this commune, some families have improved their standard of living because their daughters are married to foreigners.

Differing local groups and areas perceive poverty differently. Villagers have a relatively accurate comparison of the living standards of households (HH) in the villages; they do not assess poverty using the State poverty standards. Poverty has a more comprehensive meaning to them beyond being poor in income or food.

Table B-1: Perception of poverty by better-off and poor groups

| Perception of better-off group | Perception of poor group |
|---|--|
| Lang Gia, Lang Bung village, Son Ba commune, Son Ha district | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Live in a temporarily-built house (no tile roofs, no wooden walls) • Often have sick people • Have less than two cattle • Have no capital to run a business • Lack of business experience • Have to search in the wood for fruits to sell • Have no valuable assets (TV, motorbike) • Are old and lonely | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Live in a temporarily-built house (no tile roofs, no wooden walls) • Often have sick people • Have no cattle • Have no capital to run a business • Lack experience to run a business • Have no valuable assets (no bike) • Are old and lonely |
| Xa Ay, Lang Tra villages, Son Cao commune, Son Ha district | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Live in a temporarily-built house (no tile roofs, no wooden walls) • Often get sick • Have less than three cattle • Have no capital to run a business • Have little land or unproductive land • Have no capacity for calculation • Lack business experience • Do not have enough food for over two months and have to collect firewood to sell • Have no valuable assets (TV, motorbike, not many bronze pots) • Are old and lonely (no labor) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Live in a temporarily-built house (no tile roofs, no wooden walls) • Have little land or unproductive land • Have sick people • Have less than two cattle • Have no capital to run a business • Lack business experience • Do not have enough food for over four months and have to go to the wood to collect firewood to sell or work as wage earners • Have no valuable assets (bike, bronze pot) • Are old and lonely |

| Village No 1, No 2, Nghia Tho commune, Tu Nghia district | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mostly have no brick-built houses • Have less than two cattle • Have many children or are just separated from HH • Have no capacity to generate income • Have no capital to run a business • Have little land or unproductive land • Not enough food for over two to three months • Have little valuable assets • Are old and lonely (no labor) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have small cottages • Have many children or are just separated from HH • Have little land or unproductive land • Have one or no cattle • Have not enough food for over three months (collect firewood, work as wage earners) • Have no assets • Are old and lonely |
| Pho An, Tan My villages, Nghia An commune, Tu Nghia district | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have lost the main breadwinner • Are old and lonely • Have few income earners (one or two laborers) • Have many young children • Work for wages for an unlucky fishing boat (crop failure) • Crop failure in shrimp breeding (two or three years effect upon the economic capacity of HH) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have lost the main breadwinner • Have sick people • Are old and lonely • Have few income earners (one laborer) • Have many young children • Work for wages for an unlucky fishing boat (crop failure) • Borrow to make ends meet (refunded when the main laborer returns from fishing) |

There is a big difference in the definition of poor HHs by local authorities and villagers. The study team conducted a wealth ranking and asked villagers to compare and analyze the list of poor HHs currently managed by the State. The findings revealed a big difference in opinions and posed questions about the composition of the list of poor HHs and the rates of poverty. Especially in the Nghia Tho communes, the CPC has not conducted direct surveys about poverty for the last two years, despite the fact they still retain a list of poor households.

Box B-1: Listing poor households in the surveyed communes

| |
|--|
| <p>Son Ba and Son Cao communes, Son Ha district (survey on poor HHs in 2001)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many poor HHs were not named in the list. • Many 'non poor' HHs were listed, most of which were local authorities; especially in Lang Gia and Son Cao communes in Son Ha district, where some HHs even had seven to eight water buffalos and were obviously rather better-off but were still listed as poor HHs. • Some people did not reside in the location any more (they had died or migrated to other locations) but were still listed as poor HHs. |
| <p>Nghia Tho commune, Tu Nghia district (no survey of the poor in 2001-2002)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some HHs were poor but were not on the list. • Some HHs were separated from family members for a long time and were very poor but were not listed. • Some 'non poor' HHs were listed. • Some people did not reside in the location any more (they had died or migrated to other locations) but were still listed as poor HHs. • By early 2003, the total HHs numbered 227; meanwhile the province had an out-of-date record of 218 HHs (the reported rate of poor HHs was increased by 2 percent to reflect the reality of the situation). |

2. Small Rate of Better-off: Who Are They?

In general, more physical infrastructure has been built and officials' lives are getting better. Local people know more about the society in which they live, but their lives have not greatly improved.

Box B-2: Characteristics of better-off households

Son Ba commune, Son Ha district

Not notably more prosperous, yet much "richer" than other poor HHs, they are officials who have government salaries and the power of their position (including teachers who have benefited from the State preferential policy), and businessmen who are purchasing young paddy fields and exchanging daily provisions, who are subject to a forest protection contract, and who have been in a better economic position for a long time (having many cattle). Since Son Ba was a battlefield in the past, many people are war invalids or have spent a long time serving in the army. These people can get support from the government, and their lives are better.

Lang Tra village, Son Cao commune

Mr Tro, teacher, and head of the primary school in Son Cao, has a salary and other subsidies amounting to a total of nearly 2 million VND per month, besides doing farming work.

Mr Vang, one of the officials in the commune, Kinh race, 54 years old, completed his ninth grade education, nine family members and Chairman of the People's Committee of Son Cao: "He has a monthly wage of 480,000 VND; 4 perches of rice field; 2 ha of cassava; 1.5 ha of keo; 1 ha of cultivate land; one sow, four pigs for meat, three water buffalos, one ox, one rice grinder, one child working as a teacher, one child working as an electric contractor in the commune and one child working as a tailor."

Nghia An commune

HHs who have high-capacity powerboats for offshore fishing are better-off, and some officials' HHs have been getting rich quickly over the past years. About 50 families have escaped poverty by allowing their young daughters to marry Taiwanese men.

A local official: "We 10 people jointly invested 1.7 billion VND to construct Nghia An bridge. The state allowed us to recover our investment within 30 years; at the moment we receive 60 million VND of revenue at least from the bridge every month."

Mr. Chon, 71 years old, Kinh race, five family members of which three sons are seafarers: "For off-shore fishing, each time (around 22 to 25 days) I can gain about 130 million VND, of which 75 to 80 million I spend on costs. However this kind of profession is very risky and dangerous, as many times we did not recognize that our vessels had entered into Taiwanese waters. For that reason over the last 12 months, my two ships valued at more than 700 million VND each have been confiscated. Now I have a ship and a joint share with two other ships (to avoid risk) worth 850 million VND. I think my HH is the only true better-off one."

3. Many Villagers Remain Poor, Some Having a Harder Life: Why?

At the moment, many villagers remain poor and very poor, and a fraction of the villagers perceives life to be getting harder: why so?

The study concludes that they are poor because they are forgotten. They are ignored. The poor have not had many opportunities to access resources equally, especially the

Hunger Eradication and Poverty Reduction (HEPR) fund. Poor bureaucratic performance for the provision of loans still exists, and places restraints against the poor developing a healthier household economy (the rate of poor HHs that have accessed the HEPR fund is low, about 15 to 20 percent).

Box B-3: Assessing credit for the poor

Son Ba commune

“We not dare to borrow money from the State because we do not know where to invest it [little land, unfavorable cultivation conditions, underdeveloped husbandry due to the custom and educational level of H’re ethnic minority people]. If our cattle died or did not give birth, we do not know how to refund to the State at the end of the three year term”.

Son Cao commune

Mrs Xi, Kinh race, 38 years old, four family members (one child, two grandchildren): “My family did not anyone to be responsible for the repayment of the loan if I die (my husband died and my children were young. We do not think we can eradicate the hunger”. Ms Re, H’re ethnic, 22 years old, illiterate, three family members: “They said we were so poor that we could not refund the loan.”

Nghia An

A villager: “I would rather borrow money from lenders and not from the State even though that would mean a higher interest rate i.e. the interest rate is between 4 and 10 percent per month. It is because if I want to borrow 5 million VND from the State, I have to hand over 500,000 VND to the bank officer and a “present” of 100,000 VND to local officials. In spite of these things, the procedure is very complicated. At present, there is an official in the commune, and three people from his family borrowed from the bank and then re-lent to the poor with a higher interest rate.”

Mrs Thay, 36 years old, Kinh race, educated to fifth grade, her husband died in 2002, she takes care of four young children and is very poor. “I have applied five times to get a loan from the Women’s Union and the HEPR fund, I just want to get 1 million VND to raise a pig but I can not. Such poor HHs like ours find it difficult to access the HEPR fund.”

A villager: “It is important to note that people, especially poor people, in the coastal commune of Nghia An do not like officials and are afraid of the officials. They dare not utter all things and they always ask to hide their name because they are afraid of revenge, like not certifying their documents.”

Investment in infrastructure in poor communes has not been satisfied. The foremost concern in the effort to prevent villagers from being poorer and hungrier is to invest in an irrigation system in selected locations, except Nghia An commune.

Box B-4: Infrastructure and public properties

Villagers in Son Cao commune

At the moment, we are supported to dig wells, but the wells do not have water. We therefore have to use water from streams. Because we don’t have an irrigation system, we have only one rice crop per year.”

Villagers in Son Ba commune

“At the moment, we are supported to dig wells, however we still have to use water from streams because the wells have no water. Because we don’t have an irrigation

system, we have only one rice crop per year.”
School classrooms do not have walls, the tile roof of the schoolhouse is more than half broken, and desks and chairs are not sufficient.

Nghia Tho commune

“Because we don’t have an irrigation system, we have almost no harvest.”
“Because of the weather, sugarcane cannot grow. It is very likely we will have nothing to harvest.”

Underdeveloped market economy. The model of self-provision economy is popular as a matter of course in Son Ba and Son Cao. Villagers hardly have anything to sell, and they mainly exchange some ‘goods’ like pigs, chickens and fruit in exchange for rice and other daily provisions. The currency usage for commodity exchanges is restrained; some even feel ‘embarrassed’ when they see money.

Villagers in Son Ba commune and Son Cao commune

“The State does not organize to buy cassava; we exchange to traders and suffer a loss.”
“Every year I only go to the market two or three times (if I have money) to buy clothes for my children”.

The cultivation area is narrow, while crop productivity has slightly increased. Located in mountainous areas, households acquire land on the mountainous sides to plant cassava and corn. However, according to a new recent policy, the State will take over land (including mountain foot areas) to use for a 5 million hectare forest program. While the cultivation area is on average 500 m²/person (with the exception of some HHs holding land to plant cassava and excluding some patches of land that collapsed during the 1999 flood) and productivity is 150-300kg rice/perch/crop, the matter of food security for HHs is pressing.

Local authorities at all levels are not responsive to the needs of villagers and do not have close relationships with the villagers. Based on the viewpoint of the villagers, local government at all levels and the mass organizations are not considered to be supportive of the villagers. Villagers only come to commune offices when they are invited to attend meetings or to receive ‘aid’; some have never even been there. In turn, the local officials rarely visit the poor to find out about their living conditions.

Box B-5: Opinions of villagers in the discussions

“We are very poor, but we do not know who can help us.”
“Sometimes we find it unfair, but we do not dare complain, because we are afraid of being scolded.”
A member of the women’s focus group in Lang Tra-Son Cao village, Son Ba commune: “All the villagers know that my family is the poorest, but why isn’t my family defined as poor in the list?”
Mixed women’s group in Tan My village, Nghia An commune: “We are worried to carry out administrative procedures at local offices, because we have to contribute money; for example, if I want to get a birth certificate for my child, I have to contribute other compulsory items listed by the commune that I have not contributed yet, otherwise we can not complete our work”.
“It took me half a day to ask for an exemption of the school contribution for my child.”

The implementation of the social support system is not fair and not inclusive of all vulnerable persons. The State support to vulnerable groups are not satisfied with the basic and minimum needs for lives.

Box B-6: Access of social assistance by villagers

Son Ha district

Every year, the province allocates a budget for social support based on the district reviews and updates the list subject to the budget. At present, 70 percent of villagers satisfying the criteria access the social support.

Tu Nghia district

The DPC has offered 350 regular supports to targeted households since 1999. Only when the beneficiary dies, then the district will add a new person. At present, only 50 to 60 percent of eligible persons access the allowance. The allowance level of 45,000 VND per month is insufficient in helping them reach a minimum living standard. As a consequence, these households are still the poorest in this district.

Son Ba, Son Cao and Nghia Tho communes

"We have submitted applications for the regular social allowance for three to four years, but we have not yet received this allowance because the local officials said there is no money for the support."

"Although it is known as regular social assistance, we sometimes have to wait three months to have it. It therefore causes a lot of difficulties for us."

"We are very poor, but we are not given emergency supports."

The HHs that have experienced increased hardship are those that have lost the main working member, have sick members or have no capacity for labor. This group struggles against severe environmental and social conditions and has no capacity to make use of development opportunities, including the State support.

Box B-7: Characteristics of some poor households in the surveyed communes

Pho An, Nghia An communes in Tu Nghia district

"I am very miserable. I do not want to live but I have to live for my children."

Ms Thay, 36 years old, Kinh race, and her husband died in 2002 in a sea accident. She alone now takes care of four young children. "In the past, my husband went fishing to feed the whole family. After his death, I have to trade fish and work as a hired laborer (8 to 10,000 VND per day). In addition, the situation of my family is really lamentable without any support from the State."

Lang Gia commune and Son Ba commune, Son Cao district

"I am so miserable. I do not know who I should expect help from."

Mrs Nghiep, 66 years old, H're race, single, illiterate, has poor shelter of 8m², cultivating 600m² of paddy and yearly gets four to six packs of rice. In 2002, she raised a pig and exchanged it to get a bronze pot of 200,000 VND, her only valuable asset. In harvest season, she is hired to gather corn and rice: how much they give is how much she has. When she gets sick she does not dare go to the health station because once in 2000 she had to pay 10,000 VND for treatment, but she had no money to pay. She rarely goes to the market and uses cash notes, and she does not benefit from State regular supports, except some emergency supports such as *Do lua* (lighting up) support which applied to 100 percent of the ethnic minority people. She was awarded the Third Level Medal of War Resistance in 1998, but so far she has not received any money from that: "I am so miserable, I do not know to whom I should look forward. I am getting older and older, and life is becoming harder and harder."

How are the poor people supported? At the moment, there are different views offered by district and communal officials, and by villagers, on the assessment of and assistance to the poor. These are expressed in the following table.

Table B-2: Different views on providing assistance to the poor

| According to district and commune officials | According to villagers |
|---|--|
| 1. <i>Do lua</i> (New Year) support: all poor HHs are supported. | Only ethnic minority HHs in difficult areas (Son Ba, Son Cao) are supported by <i>Do lua</i> support. Kinh people are not assisted though they are poor; only half of the total poor ethnic people in Nghia Tho commune access this sort of support. |
| 2. Rice support for saving hunger: about 70 to 80 percent of poor HHs access this support. | This kind of support is only targeted to very poor groups (and some are not given, including to some Kinh HHs) |
| 3. Capital support: <i>Son Ha district</i> : 80 to 85 percent of the poor are supported. <i>Tu Nghia district</i> : 75 to 80 percent of the poor are supported. <i>Son Ha district</i> : Very poor HHs are provided with animals to raise. | As many as 15 to –20 percent of the poor access this support, of which only 3 to –5 percent are very poor HHs. In some cases, people dare not borrow money. Meanwhile, HHs having no or only one main laborer do not have access to this support. . Very poor HHs are almost always not helped but poor HHs with labor are (including some that appear to be not poor at all). |
| 4. Exemption and reduction of hospital fees: 100 percent of ethnic people are exempted from hospital fees; so are 30 percent of Kinh poor HHs. | Son Ha district: Some ethnic HHs as well as 100 percent of the Kinh poor still have to pay for medical treatment at hospitals. |
| 5. Exemption and reduction of educational fee: 100 percent of poor HHs and ethnic HHs are eligible for this. | In Nghia Tho commune, ethnic households do not get this remission at the upper secondary level. Neither do some pupils in Nghia An commune. |

Villagers think that the poor will receive support from the State, and that the State can hardly take anyone off the list of poor HHs. That is why they do not want to escape from poverty. However, both non-poor and poor HHs do not fully know what they are entitled to receive and how to access these benefits.

Box B-8: Villagers’ opinions on the poverty criteria and its benefits

Son Ha district (two communes surveyed – H're race)
 “We do not know the rights and benefits of the poor. When the local officials inform us there will be a meeting on poverty, we attend and there is no point asking for benefits because officials make and ‘approve’ the list.” When asked why they want to be classified as poor HHs they said “because we are supported with rice and cattle.”
 “I know that the poor are supported with *Do lua* support, rice for saving hunger and cows.”

Tu Nghia district

Nghia Tho commune (H're): "We do not know the criteria for poor HHs. However we see 'some' poor HHs who are given rice." The local officials make the list of beneficiaries. "I know that the poor are given *Do lua* support and rice in case of starvation."

Nghia An commune (Kinh): "We know what benefits there are for the poor as well as the difficulties to apply for being poor." The list of households receiving rice assistance is made by the commune authority; the provision is not given to the poor for many reasons and it takes a long time to process procedures for exemption and reduction of school fees and contributions.

4. Procedures to List Poor Households

The system for compiling the list of poor HHs – a combined product of many organizations – needs to be improved and amended. The following tables illustrate the project, organization responsible, activities, existing problems and positive points of defining a poor household. Although the government has promulgated the unity procedures, two districts still have two different ways of defining the poor.

Table B-3: Listing poor households in Son Ha district

| ACTIVITY | WHO? | STEPS | EXISTING PROBLEMS | POSITIVE POINTS |
|---|---|--|---|---|
| Survey 100 percent permanently registered HHs | Officials of commune, and villages and residence area | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organize training Assign district official to direct the survey Survey income, assets and land Calculate income and interim assessments | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low skill of surveyors Complexity of the questionnaire and ways to calculate income Low remuneration so it is difficult to encourage officials to conduct carefully Inaccurate information Psychology for villagers (want to be the poor) HHs non-permanent residents were not surveyed and classified | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Form important basis to assess the poor HHs; Implement survey quickly Low cost for the survey |
| Classify poor HHs at village level | Residence area | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Synthesize the list Meet all residents to select poor HHs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The meeting is to inform only, villagers 'dare not' comment. Some were not invited though they were listed because they 'talk' too much. It was conducted in a biased manner; some non-poor HHs were still listed. Some poor HHs were unlisted. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The poor were given chance to comment |

| | | | | |
|--|---|--|---|---|
| Examine the list of poor HHs | Hamlet | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Synthesize the list (by head of the hamlet) • Organize meeting with leaders in residence area to review the list | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It was conducted in a biased manner; some non-poor HHs were still listed. • The list was reviewed twice, yet the list had not been accurately and properly made. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The review was conducted thoroughly. |
| | Commune | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generate the list by HEPR Board • Meet HEPR Board, leaders of commune and hamlets to examine the list | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The review was not properly undertaken (formality only) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It ensured legal requirements were met • It followed all the steps of the guidelines |
| Review | Labor org. division | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generate the list • Submit to District HEPR Board to approve | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The review was not properly undertaken | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It ensured legal requirements were met It ensured the process of the guidelines was followed |
| Generate decision-making on the rate of poor HHs | Dept of Labor - Invalids and Social affairs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submit to provincial HEPR Board to approve. Define the rate of poverty. • Grant medical treatment exemption cards for the poor. • (Not yet provided with a poverty book) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It has performed slowly (until now it has not issued the certificate for the poor in 2003) | |

Table B-4: Listing poor households in Tu Nghia district

| ACTIVITY | WHO? | STEPS | EXISTING PROBLEMS | POSITIVE POINTS |
|------------------|--|---|--|---|
| Classify poor HH | Comprehensive board of local government officers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Estimate the list of poor HHs (head of residence area); • Meet with Comprehensive Board to select the poor HHs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is inaccurate, because the work was undertaken via a group of HHs. • It is partial and inclusive of non-poor HHs and exclusive of poor HHs. • It was not conducted according to the | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoids the hard discussion at village level. (People want to be the poor) • Avoids situations where the surveyor could |

| | | | | |
|--|--------|--|---|--|
| | | | government's guidelines; villagers had no opportunity to comment on the list. | not ascertain the income. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It saves time. • It included non-registered inhabitants (Nghia An) |
| | Hamlet | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generate the list (by head of hamlet); • Meet leaders of branches, hamlet head and deputy head of the residence area to review the list | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partially conducted • The list has been reviewed once, yet it is not accurate. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The review process is more elaborate. |

(Examinations, reviews, systemization and decision-making were conducted as in Son Ha district).

At present, there is a consensus among non-poor and poor HHs on the procedures for defining poor HHs. The methodology for defining poor HHs in two districts has been agreed by both officials and villagers. However, the villagers expect to have an equitable list of poor households and to take more part in defining households. Although the list of poor households was comprehensively devised, the poor themselves did not know whether they were poor or not (except for those who were very poor and regularly supported by the State or informed unofficially by local officials).

The consultation revealed a high rate of HHs that evaluated themselves as poor HHs in accordance with State regulations, even though they either had never been classified as poor HHs or had been already taken off the list by the commune for a long time. Among four surveyed communes, only Nghia An commune kept villagers informed regularly about the list of poor HHs through women's meetings or the broadcasting station. Other communes did not announce which villagers were classified as poor HHs. Some communes carried out on-site reviews in the residence area, but the completed list of poor HHs, compiled by the district officials, turned out to be 'different' to the original and villagers were not officially informed.

Box B-9: Response of the poor to the list

Lang Gia village, Son Ba commune, Son Ha district

56 HHs in Lang Gia confirmed that only Mr Tre was 'non-poor' but commune staff defined 12 other HHs were 'non-poor' and that these people are not listed in the poor list.

Lang Tra village, Son Cao commune, Son Ha district: Poor women's group

"Can I borrow the list of the commune's poor HHs from you? We do not know who are the poor. The commune authority called us to meet in this poor women's group. That is why we are here."

When the list was read and discussed: "Why is Mrs Mui building up a big house, but she is still defined as a poor HH? Mr. Thai was not named in the list, but he is still

receiving pig and cow from the State?”

Ms Re: “All the village knows that I am a poor household, but why am I not listed?”

Ms Thanh: “I think I am listed as a poor HH. I was listed one time in 2001. Why am I not listed there any more?”

5. Challenges in Poverty Reduction

Stable employment – an efficient HEPR measure for poor HHs – is becoming a more difficult and complex issue.

Non-Farm Employment Has Been Underdeveloped and Is Now Not a Viable Source of Employment

In the surveyed districts, the number of private enterprises has grown very slightly over the past few years. For example, there were less than 10 private enterprises located in each district, which used mainly family members and did not attract large numbers of workers. At the lower level of commune, there was no private enterprise in the locations at all.

Located in a coastal area with an unfavorable geographic position and no agricultural land, Nghia An villagers depend totally on fishing, the major source of income for villagers. The commune had 539 fishing vessels, using more than 3,000 male workers, but for the past few years, this income source has reduced dramatically, leading to lower living standards. The rate of poverty is consequently increasing.

Box B-10: Poverty in Nghia An commune

Mr Long - Deputy Chairperson of the commune

“At present, there are more than 300 fishing ships in the Northern provinces. Since the beginning of the year these ships have suffered a loss. Many of them cannot refund the cost provided in advance by the owner (oil, ice, daily consumptions), therefore they want to return to their home towns. But they cannot. In previous years, each worker earned 5 to 6 million VND per year, but in 2003 it will probably be 3 to 4 million VND only. Surely, the number of poor HHs by the end of the year will exceed the current rate of 9.7 percent.”

Pho An village, Nghia An commune, Tu Nghia district

Fishing is no longer a way to earn a living. Ms Em, 36 years old, Kinh race, illiterate, her husband is working for a wage, she has a 13-year old son who is now learning fishing, she has had a disease affecting her health for the past eight years. In the past, her family could generate an income of 8 to 10 million VND per year (from her husband). Even though it was hard to manage, she could afford expenses for food and medical treatment. In 2003, the family generated hardly any income. She had to borrow to make ends meet and refund the money when her husband went back to work (after one month). Once, the lender came and took a vacuum flask (valued at 25,000 VND) as repayment for the loan.

A small number of villagers are able to get non-farm jobs in provinces and cities job as road constructors, shop assistants, noodle sellers, dressmakers, etc. How did they get these jobs?

Box B-11: Searching for employment

Nghia An commune, Tu Nghia district

My children go to work as dressmakers or clothes shop assistants in HCMC (about 150 females).

Son Cao commune, Son Ha district, and Nghia Tho commune, Tu Nghia district

Someone from Quang Ngai “enticed” children (either sons or daughters), between the ages of 16 and 25 years old, to build a road in Kon Tum and to cut down rattan trees in Kon Tum, Gia Lai and Laos, and to sell noodles in HCMC (about 100 to 150 people per commune).

Farmers encounter a lot of difficulties because of unfavorable natural conditions, little agricultural land, limited opportunities in the forest protection contract and a low level of education.

Box B-12: Agriculture, the main income of the family

Son Cao officials:

“Under such circumstances, villagers have to rely on rice and cassava. It is impossible to change the crop (it is used to transfer to high-yield cassava, but the productivity got lower and lower).

Nghia Tho commune, Tu Nghia district

“The weather is really hard this year, there is no water. Most of us have been able to plant only one low-yield rice crop (even some places have been left unplanted). Sugarcane also could not grow. But what else can we do but depend on the fields?”

Husbandry

Thanks to an incentive orientation on husbandry, stud animal support and veterinary work, there has been a change in thinking about these practices. The practice of husbandry is not developed and is merely focused on cattle raising (one to two cattle). However there are many problems in implementing husbandry because of the lack of capital and available land area, especially since the commune has taken over some land to plant forest. Another problem is that the cattle, if people are careless, will eat the leaves of high-yield cassava, and the system will have no other choice but to ‘collapse’.

Forest career

Afforestation is one occupation taken up by villagers. Generally, the planting area is narrow and the process complicated by the fact that so many agencies take part. The profits generated for the villagers are minimal, and it has almost no function in improving local lives.

Firewood collection is taken up by some poor people in Son Cao and Nghia Tho in times of need between harvest periods. However, they are only allowed to cut down small or dead trees in barren hills. It is now State policy to plant trees on all barren hills, and it is therefore not easy for them to gather firewood under these conditions.

Wage labor in the agricultural sector is problematic: “narrow land and crowded populations”.

Inside province: Villagers mainly engage in short-term employment in neighboring districts like Duc Pho and Mo Duc, in occupations such as grass weeding or sugarcane harvesting. This is only a temporary solution in between harvest periods.

Outside province: A small number of villagers in the surveyed locations were working in coffee fields in Dac Lac, Lam Dong and Kon Tum, because they were ‘enticed’ to work there. In general, the situation for these villagers is not optimistic.

Wage labor: what benefits and what losses?

In surveyed locations, there were a few wage earners. Permanent wage earners made up 3 to 5 percent of the population, except for those who were working in the fishing industry in Nghia An. Most of these were casual workers. They believed that their job contributed somewhat to improving their family’s life (at least the family did not have to feed the wage labor). Yet the income only just contributed partly to the immediate demands of the family. Over the past few years it has only occasionally, if not rarely, taken these families out of the poverty list.

Employment for wages may cause negative economic and social impacts. For instance, if workers don’t send back money or return to the countryside, they leave the family and field uncared for. There is also the risk to the worker of ill health, disease or occupational accidents. As a consequence, any of these events would push some poor HHs into a more miserable plight.

Box B-13: Villagers’ comments on wage earners

Lang Tra village, Son Cao commune

A poor H’re woman, Ms To: “I lost my husband. He went to work for a coffee farm in Dak Lak nearly three years ago. He did not send back any money or news. I know he is still alive because I have some acquaintances there. Now I have to take care of three children.”

Village No. 2, Nghia Tho commune

A poor H’re, Ms Tia: “My child has been working as a wage laborer for six months. She has sent back 300,000 VND which was enough to buy a bike.”

Officials in Nghia Tho, Tu Nghia districts

The commune encouraged members of HHs not to work too far away and made this difficult for them through administrative procedures because, in fact, none of their lives were being improved.

Farm employment is decreasing, non-farm employment is at a stalemate, and more and more people are unemployed, especially among the poor. This situation poses a big question for villagers and officials at all government levels (district, commune); as yet, they have not worked out any efficient solutions.

Box B-14: Employment creation in districts

Son Ha district

- Develop processing enterprises for agricultural products to make use of local input (in the context of whether this would be sustainable or not, given that the cassava

area is getting smaller and its productivity lower).

- Apply preferential mechanisms and incentive investment to outside enterprises (for the past few years the district has not attracted any enterprises).
- Encourage non-farm employment and local enterprises (not yet effective)
- Mobilize villagers to develop crops, husbandry with the assistance of new seeds, and utilize technology, even though the context is a situation of no capital support and low educational levels.

Tu Nghia district

In addition to mobilizing villagers to produce, the commune has not worked out any effective plans to generate employment.

6. The Role of Local Government and Mass Organizations in HEPR

Quang Ngai is one of several provinces that have a high rate of poverty (17.05 percent) and many 'hardship' communes (where the poverty rate is more than 50 percent). During the past few years, the Provincial People's Committee approved the National Target Program on HEPR 2001-2005, and the Provincial Executive Committee promulgated Resolution No. 10 on HEPR in ethnic communes. An office of HEPR and employment was set-up to monitor and settle issues. However, no staff have been employed so far.

According to official directives (province, district, commune), coordination amongst all parties has not been consistent. Furthermore there has been insufficient concern and emphasis on HEPR, to the point where many feel there is no interest in HEPR. At this time, the province does not have specialized officers in charge of HEPR at any level.

Box B-15: Difficulties in poverty reduction

Mr Nguyen Van Tan - Head of Social Protection Division, DOLISA

"Upon the provision of the provincial HEPR Board, the stakeholders have to report to the Standing Committee during the implementation process, as well as coordinate together. In fact, there is no report. If needed, we had to ask for 'documents' and then we meet a lot of cumbersome procedures. Sometimes, we have to ask for the provincial Report of HEPR Board, then comment and send it back to the Board."

At a meeting on the morning of 24 July 2003 between the PPA team and the HEPR Board of Tu Nghia district (chaired by Mr Trang, Deputy Chairman of the district), we asked about the number of poor HHs who have obtained a loan from the HEPR fund. We were told that, because there was no representative from the Bank for the Poor present, they could not answer this question, the implication being that only staff from the Bank for the Poor knew this information.

At another meeting with the Labor division in the afternoon, they did not know the number of villagers who had received loans, or were exempted from hospital fees. They had only just comprehended the 'general' policy. The district HEPR program had not been developed. Because the branches were too busy and had not submitted reports, every year the district had to use the provincial target program to develop a local action plan.

Chairperson and Secretary of Nghia Tho-Tu Nghia

"At the moment we have about 50 percent poor HHs." (whereas it was 82.81 percent when managed by the commune).

Lang Tra hamlet, Son Cao commune, Son Ha district (poor women's group):

"We have not received anything from the State, even though we have been poor HHs since 1998. We have asked and proposed many times in vain."

7. Incentives to Reduce Poverty

This is a problem that is hard to solve. We gained perspectives from functional agencies in the HEPR program, from the poor, and from other villagers and found that there is a big difference in the perception of villagers of State priorities between groups and regions. The ranking of priority is ordered firstly by irrigation, followed by capital (i.e. enough rice to eat, combined with raising cattle).

Irrigation: Son Cao and Nghia Tho communes give a particular emphasis to irrigation. However the geographic situation (mountainous locations, scattered field land) means it is hard to set up an irrigation system. In addition, the forest has been severely destroyed and most of the streams are dry, posing the question of where to get the water needed for the irrigation system. A long-term solution may be for afforestation to take place to restore the water sources.

Capital: The mechanisms for providing loans, determinations of loan sizes, loan terms and interest rates, and local awareness are creating many restraints.

Box B-16: Restraints to access to loans

Lang Tra village, Son Cao commune, Son Ha district

Officials said those who were poor and very poor, with few laborers in the household, were not entitled to access loans because they could not repay the loan. But there are many people as poor as we are.

Village 1, Nghia Tho commune, Tu Nghia district

"In early 2002, my family was granted 2.5 million VND over three years. The interest rate seemed to be 0.6 percent. I bought an ox for 2.6 million. I had to pay an expensive price. If it had not been for the restrictions of the period of the loan provision, the price would be only 2 million VND. If I had not taken out the loan, the money would be refunded, then it was hard for me to afford an ox. At the moment she has not delivered a calf. I was so worried. Since I have this cow, the living standard of my family has stayed the same but I have to worry about the loan.

Lang Gia village, Son Ba commune, Son Ha district

Capital is given top priority by HEPR. However when asked what the capital was used for we were told (for a group of 8 people):

| | |
|------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Buy cattle | 4 people |
| Build house | 2 people |
| Buy motorbike | 1 person |
| Explore the field land | 0 |
| Raise pig | 0 |
| Other | 1 person (for children's education) |

Lang Bung village, Son Ba commune, Son Ha district

(Someone said): "State (commune) asked me if I wanted to receive a loan. I dared not because I was afraid of not able to refund it. However, when asked about my aspirations, the first priority was to get capital to buy a cow."

Xa Ay village, Son Cao commune, Son Ha district

We want to get a loan with a lower interest rate (no or less than 0.2 percent) to raise cattle. The terms would be long, between five and seven years, and the size would be in the range of 7 to 10 million VND. If we had such support we could get out of our poverty. At the moment we dare not raise pigs, because the pig that is from the stud of the Kinh people is hard to raise, and we have to give much food to serve for its meals. If it dies, we lose everything.

C. PARTICIPATION AND EMPOWERMENT IN DECISION-MAKING

The purpose of this part of the study was to assess the progress made in strengthening democracy at the grassroots level, especially the Decree No 29/1998/ND-CP on *Promulgating the Regulation on Exercise of Democracy in Communes (REDC)*. This decree enables poor households to participate in a meaningful way in the planning and budgeting process, after a five-year implementation process. Although the purpose can be clearly defined, it is not easy to draw up a clear picture of the reality of the situation because it is a very sensitive issue. The study focused on the way the REDC was implemented, the factors influencing its implementation in different locations, local authorities' actions and reactions, community responses, and opportunities for change to improve local participation and democracy in favor of the poor.

1. Participation and Empowerment in Local Decision-Making

To see the patterns of participation and decision-making power at commune and village levels, it is best to look at the way annual plans are made. During the survey we found out that no plan is made at the village level. The planning process still occurs from the top-down, passing through the common administrative hierarchy from province to district to commune. The real planning process for the annual commune socio-economic development plan is as follows.

Box C-1: Commune planning approach in the study sites

Step 1: At the end of every year, each district in the province invites the chairmen of the Commune People's Committees (CPC) to participate in the allocation of the annual budget and other norms for a socio-economic development plan for each commune.

Step 2: The Chief of the CPC secretariat makes the year-end summation and prepares the annual socio-economic development plan for the commune based on the allocated budget and norms already approved by the district.

Step 3: This plan is presented at the commune joint meeting in the presence of the leaders of Commune Party Committee, CPC, Commune People's Council and Fatherland Front for comments and discussion. The Chief of the CPC secretariat is then responsible for making adjustments to the plan based on the comments from the meeting.

Step 4: The adjusted plan is then presented at the meeting of the Commune People's Council in the presence of district leaders in planning, representatives of different mass organizations and plan-related sections of the commune. The Commune People's Council is responsible for the collection and treatment of all the comments, if any, and then it approves the plan in the form of a formal document called the Commune People's Council's Resolution, which is then passed to the CPC for implementation.

Step 5: Village heads, with the support of the mass organizations (Women's Union, Youth League, Farmers' Association, War Veterans' Association and Fatherland Front) hold village meetings to inform villagers about the plan and are responsible for the implementation of the plan in their villages. At this kind of meeting, villagers are not asked for comments but they only are informed about the plan.

Usually the revision of the plan implementation is done twice a year by the CPC secretariat. The first revision is done after the first half of the year and the second revision at the end of the year at the time the new plan is made. There is no dependent supervising body, but the CPC secretariat is responsible for planning, half-year plan revision and a year-end summation of the plan implementation for the whole commune.

It is the district who has the power to decide how much budget to allocate to each commune and what kinds of activities to fund. In fact, decision-making power that has been transferred to local government is restricted to making decisions about implementation of the central government policies. The communes in the study sites have no power in the allocation of the budget because they are heavily dependent on the allocated budget, which is often limited and already fixed to certain activities. It is within the power of the commune to make budget plans when it can generate its own budget, but it is not the case in the studied areas.

Therefore all activities for each commune are defined by the district. This situation creates a financially-upward dependency, the lower levels relying on those above for financial support. To a certain extent, it still represents the top-down subsidizing approach, and therefore would be limited in mobilizing active participation from both local authorities and the villagers. This kind of planning approach does not leave much room for meaningful participation and cannot create incentives for the local authorities to be actively involved in the planning process. It also cannot encourage self-motivation and creativity from the villagers. Even some commune leaders told us that they did not see the need to ask villagers for comments on the plan. It is obvious that participation in the planning process is poor. This explains why, from year to year, commune and village leaders rarely find anything new in annual plans for socio-economic development. The consequence of this poor participation in planning, and poor management of the plan implementation, is widespread poverty among these ethnic communities.

Box C-2: Common reasons of poverty and villagers' hope

People from the study sites of Son Ha district are H're minority. Most of the villagers are poor or very poor. They know very well the reasons that make them poor. All of those who participated in group discussions and individual interviews said that they need water to irrigate their rice fields, they need know-how to improve crop yields, they need medicine to save their livestock from diseases etc. Local leaders know this very well but they cannot do anything except ask them to wait for government support (they are waiting for Program 135 funds for poor communes in mountainous areas).

H're people in Son Ha district are still happier than their brothers in Nghia Tho commune, Tu Nghia district, because they have something to hope for. Nghia Tho commune is located in Zone 2 so it does not belong in the category of Program 135-poor communes, although H're people in the commune are almost as poor as those in Son Ha. 86 percent of households in the commune are poor. They earn their livings mainly from wet rice cultivation, but landholding for each family is small (500 m²/capita) and soil fertility is low, so crop yield is often very poor. The local government also cannot do anything to help villagers improve their situation but is waiting for subsidies from a higher level of government.

Here we describe the planning process that followed the slogan "*people know, people discuss, people implement, people monitor*". It is applied to Program 135 in Son Cao and Son Ba communes, Son Ha district. According to Program 135, from 2001 to 2005 each commune in Zone 3 is allocated an amount of 400 million VND yearly for the construction of infrastructure. The district people's committee is the investor. The planning process was as follows.

Box C-3: The planning approach applied to Program 135 in Son Cao and Son Ba commune, Son Ha district

Step 1: Hold a Commune People's Council meeting to make decisions on which items to invest in: schools, roads, dams or bridges, then make a plan for fund allocation.

Step 2: Hold meetings to inform villagers about the plan and answer any questions that arise.

Step 3: Submit the plan to the district.

Step 4: The district is then responsible for the field survey, project approval and inviting bids.

Step 5: Implementation by the successful bidder and supervision by the commune.

Step 6: Check and take over the work.

Due to Program 135, a dam in Son Ba commune has been built, and a bridge and a 4.7 kilometer road have been built in Son Cao commune. The villagers who are beneficiaries of these constructions are very happy. However, there are complaints about the quality of the works, especially the road, which is being downgraded quickly.

Addressing the villagers' complaints about the road, one of the Son Cao commune leaders said that, although the road was under a one-year warranty, when it got worse no one took responsibility for its repair. The commune reported the problem to the district and received the answer that the commune should mobilize its villagers to repair the road. Unfortunately, the commune has no funds to complete the work and the road is getting worse and worse. In addition, he said, if the commune had been the investor the road would have been better constructed and maintained, and money would have been saved for other works in the commune.

It seems that this planning approach went smoothly during the first steps, but problems arose during its implementation. This situation again shows an inevitable consequence of poor management minimal downward accountability from the district side and poor participation by the villagers in the construction work of Program 135.

It is worth looking at one example of how to attract the active participation of the villagers in the construction of a two kilometer earthen road in Gia village, Son Ba commune, and how direct democracy was successfully exercised at the village level.

Box C-4: Participatory planning for the village road construction in Gia village, Son Ba commune, Son Ha district

Realizing the value of the commune's policy on opening a new village road system using the labor contribution of the villagers, the VMG, in close collaboration with the mass organizations, held a village meeting to inform villagers about the commune policy and the need to construct the road for the village. After the villagers agreed to make the road they were asked to discuss a plan for it. The villagers decided to exempt the elderly, lonely and ill from this work, but each laborer in the village had to contribute two days of work and the necessary tools. They then fixed the time for the work. As a result, the two-kilometer road was constructed in only two half-days, with 100 percent participation by the laborers in the village. No one in the village asked for compensation for the crop losses caused by the road opening. Now the villagers are carefully taking care of the road. They are very happy with it. Transportation in the village has become more comfortable and nowadays the village looks more spacious.

From this example it is apparent that if villagers are actively involved in the planning process, and have a strong voice in making decisions, their participation will be active and meaningful.

Provincial and district officials in Quang Ngai may be right when they worry about the poor capacity of commune staff, especially in the mountainous areas where ethnic people are in the majority. That is one of the main reasons why decentralization is taking place very slowly, and commune and village leaders are often seen as incapable of making sound decisions. Let us take Program 135 as an example. The province asked one commune of Kinh people to be an investor in Program 135 and the commune did well.

After discussions with provincial and district officials on what the government should do to empower local governments, so that they could fulfill their tasks better and have a greater ability to make decisions, we would suggest the following methods:

- Provide local government with the necessary knowledge and skills.
- Give organizations access to current information.
- Increase wages for local government staff as a material incentive for their hard work.

2. Implementing REDC in the Study Sites

2.1. Implementation Process

To implement REDC, a REDC Implementation Steering Committee (REDCIST) was formed at each level of the administrative order: province, district and commune. REDCIST usually consists of representatives of Party Committee, People's Committee, Women's Union, Youth League, Farmers' Association, War Veterans' Association and Fatherland Front. REDCIST's task is the implementation of REDC, and periodical and yearly preliminary summing-up of REDC implementation at each level. At first, the provincial REDCIST launched a pilot REDC implementation in two communes to see how it worked and to gain experience. The same thing was done at the district level. The REDC implementation was launched in all communes of the province.

REDC implementation started in 1998 at the study sites. The commune leaders were invited to attend a training session at the district town. They then came back to the communes and held the same training for the village leaders and representatives of mass organizations. At the commune level either the Secretary of the Party Committee or the Chairman of the CPC is the head of REDCIST. Members of the commune REDCIST, together with the village head, held meetings to inform villagers about the main points of the REDC, including what they should know (14 points in article 4), what they should discuss and decide (6 points in article 6), what they should contribute their voice to (8 points in article 9) and what they should supervise and monitor. In Son Cao, Son Ba and Nghia Tho communes, inhabited by H're people, REDC was interpreted in the local language so that villagers could understand.

Thus it seemed that the first step in launching REDC at all levels was well organized, with sound collaboration with related stakeholders. But the most important point is how grassroots democracy written in Decree 29 has been exercised and what effects it has on local community life.

2.2. Overview of 'People Know and People Discuss' at the Study Sites

From the survey we found out that only six out of eight survey villages have been implementing REDC. In the other two villages in Nghia An (Kinh people), most of the activities related to REDC were not maintained for longer than two years, and some residential areas exist only on paper. Explaining this situation, the Head of the commune

REDCIST said that they did not have the funds to run activities in residential areas. In the villages, where implementation of REDC is ongoing, the key activities are as follows.

- Informing villagers of the annual socio-economic development plan via village meetings.
- Disseminating government policy information to villagers.
- Informing villagers of projects/programs that are being implemented in the commune and villages.
- Setting up residential areas and maintaining activities in these areas; for example movements like great national unity, social security, environment protection, and building up cultural families.
- Holding electors contact meetings twice a year, where elected members of the People's Council are able to listen to their electors' problems and answer their questions.
- Holding criticism and self-criticism meetings where the main commune and village leaders have to review his/her work in the presence of villagers, and listen to villagers' criticism.
- Planning and implementing of village infrastructure works including villagers' contributions.

Box C-5: The village leader's knowledge of REDC

The first impression was that there was a big gap between what villagers were expected to know and what they actually knew. In H're villages, Son Ha district, where villagers speak their native language, the situation is even worse. The knowledge of REDC among villagers varied from village to village. Hardly any poor villagers or women understood the meaning of “*people know, people discuss, people implement, people monitor*”. Some of the villagers said that they had never even heard about this slogan. Others said that they heard about this from a village meeting but had forgotten what it means.

How do village leaders know about REDC? The village head of Bung village, Son Ba commune, said he was given a document on REDC but he could not understand it because it was written in Vietnamese. At a commune meeting, commune leaders gave speeches on REDC in the H're language but he could not understand it well. At the village meeting, he then informed his villagers only about what he had in his head about REDC. We asked him why he did not ask the commune leaders to explain to him what he did not understand. He smiled, and said he was waiting for another commune meeting on REDC. It was apparent that the VMG has not been able to inform villagers properly about REDC, let alone involve them in the process of its implementation.

It is important to note that in Son Ha district the main information flow is from village leaders to villagers, so if this information is not disseminated correctly there may be unexpected consequences. We also asked village leaders in other villages to recall what points of REDC they remembered. The answer was always the same level of knowledge and poor retention. This situation has already very much adversely affected the function of local democracy because villagers do not properly know their rights and duties, as explained in Decree 29. District officials who are in charge of REDC implementation in both study sites also shared the same urgent concerns with us. It seems that the existing way in which commune and villager leaders communicate with villagers (through village meetings or loud speakers) causes many misunderstandings. It becomes difficult for villagers to understand and remember government policies and other important issues that relate directly to their daily life. This is especially the case when the communication

skills of local leaders are poor and where villagers do not know Vietnamese well. Moreover, commune leaders complained about too many government policies, both central and local, that they have to consider and deal with. Sometimes it happens that one policy contradicts another, especially when different institutions issue policies. "We are overloaded with policies," said Mr Dinh from Son Cao commune.

From group discussions and household interviews, we often discovered that the villagers were not properly informed about what was happening in their village or commune. Very few villagers could name projects or programs implemented or that are being implemented in their communes and villages.

Box C-6: Lack of information dissemination in Son Cao commune

Many villagers in Son Cao communes did not know why only a few villagers in their village were invited to participate in the forest-planting project. Most of those participating were the commune and village leaders, while others did not have the opportunity to participate. Asked to explain this question, one village leader, who has two hectares of planted forest, said that poor households would not be able to look after the forest. In addition, villagers in one village complained about the fact that one commune leader, who lives in another village, has a six hectare planted forest in their village forest, and he hired them to plant trees for him while most of them did not have access to the project. As people in that area are very poor, the payment from Program 661, the government forest project, is a considerable fortune for them. The research team asked this question at the feedback meeting with the CMG and the latter did not know about this situation because Program 661 is managed by a district official.

It is clear that there are different explanations from local leaders of the same problem. But if villagers are properly informed, complaints will reduce and participation will be more meaningful.

2.3. Overview Of 'People Implement, People Monitor' at the Study Sites

From the planning approaches previously presented, one can see different degrees of participation by villagers. Here some more activities related to REDC implementation are to be discussed in detail with the purpose of drawing a clearer picture of what is happening in reality.

According to the REDC (article 6), people have the right to make decisions about, and to monitor, public works that are funded in full or part by contributions from them, but this process was done differently in different locations. From the example of the construction of rural road systems, in which the government called for villagers' contribution of 20 to 40 percent of the total cost in cash, in kind (sand, gravel) or in labor, we found that in Nghia Tho commune the participation of the villagers seemed meaningful, while in Nghia An it is very poor. In Nghia Tho the planning process for the rural road construction was as follows.

Box C-7: The participatory planning approach in Nghia Tho commune, Tu Nghia district

Step 1: Commune leaders received the policy from the district.
Step 2: A commune leaders meeting was held to explain the policy to the members of CMG and VMG and discuss the plan for road construction.
Step 3: Village meetings were held to explain the policy and ask villagers to discuss the plan to construct the road, including how much and what to contribute, who would

be the object of contribution exemption, and who would be members of the supervising body etc. Finally, villagers decided that each household had to contribute 200,000 VND in labor or gravel. Labor-less poor households, elderly households and social welfare beneficiary households were exempted from the contribution.

Step 4: The commune invited bids, as the commune is the investor.

Step 5: Implementation by the bids winner and supervision by the commune supervising body.

Step 6: Check and take over the work.

Now the road is being constructed in Village No 1. Villagers are happy to see the road being constructed and are ready to contribute labor and gravel to it. Moreover, this project has created temporary job opportunities for young people of the commune.

In Nghia An commune the situation is a bit different. This is a fishing commune, so traveling through the commune one hardly sees any men, except the elderly, because men of the commune go to sea and come back home several times a year. 95 percent of households in the commune rely on sea fishing for their livelihood, but the natural resources of the sea are being seriously depleted from year to year. At village meetings only 30 to –50 percent of old people and women are usually present. Commune leaders said that they rely mostly on elderly people in the commune to realize government policies, especially when the villagers are asked to contribute money or labor for public works in the commune. The CMG of Nghia An applied the following planning process for the road construction.

Box C-8: Management of building the road in Nghia An commune

Step 1: Commune leaders received the policy from the district.

Step 2: A commune leaders meeting was held to explain the policy to the members of CMG and VMG and make a plan for the road construction. The commune decided on three contribution levels for three wealth-ranked groups of households:

- High-income group: 400,000 VND
- Medium-income group: 300,000 VND
- Low-income group: 200,000 VND.

In total, villagers in the commune were expected to contribute 900 million VND for construction of the 5 kilometer cemented road (in this case contribution from the villagers is 40 percent and government 60 percent). Labor less poor households, elderly households and social welfare beneficiary households were also exempted from the contribution. The contribution was all in cash, not in kind or labor. A supervising body was also formed.

Step 3: Village meetings were held to explain the plan and ask villagers to discuss the proposed items in the plan.

Step 4: The commune invited bids, as the commune is the investor.

Step 5: Implementation by the bids winner and supervision by the commune supervising body.

Step 6: Check and take over the work

The result is that the commune has so far been able to collect 47 million VND from the villagers. About one kilometer of the cemented road has been constructed and the work has stopped. The commune is waiting for the villager's contribution and next year's budget allocation from the central government.

Box C-9: The reasons for delays in payment for road construction

When asked why they delayed their payment for the road some villagers said they would do it when the road construction finishes. A few of them said that, as their houses are far away from the road, they would not use the road, or that the road is only for commune and village staff, so they did not feel they should contribute money for it. Others said they were not invited to the village meeting and did not know the amount of their share.

The way the commune collected money from villagers was also very different. Since many households were not ready to pay the share to the commune, when householders came to the commune office for the commune's seal on their official documents (like birth certificates or loan forms) they were asked to pay a certain amount of money. A woman said she had to pay 50,000 VND for the commune stamp on a birth certificate for her baby, while a man complained that he was asked to pay 200,000 VND to get the same stamp for his loan form. We were very surprised and asked one commune leader about this, and the answer was that the money was not for the commune stamp, but for the road construction. It is worth noting that the living standard in Nghia An is much higher than in Nghia Tho and the people in the former are all Kinh.

Box C-10: Top-down planning approach in Nghia An commune, Tu Nghia district

The same situation happened to the clean water project funded by the Australian-Vietnamese program in Nghia An commune. According to the commune, the project provided 75 million VND to build a big water tank and install a well with a leading pipeline. Villagers were asked to contribute 25 million VND as a share of the total costs to complete the clean water supply system to each household. As the commune could not collect money from the villagers, the project was stopped two years ago after the water tank was built and the main pipeline was installed. The villagers are still suffering from lack of clean water.

The experiences from the two communes in Tu Nghia district shows that in the case of the mobilization of people's resources for public works, direct democracy creates a better and more effective participation process than top-down orders or centralized democracy. Collective decision making becomes very important: people then always know very well what they need, what they can do and what they want to do.

2.4. Impacts of REDC on Socio-Economic Life

Despite the fact that REDC has been implemented for about five years, and its success varies from place to place, everyone agreed that it has strong multi-effects on community daily life. We asked villagers to tell us about the changes in their communities since REDC has been implemented.

- Villagers have a clearer realization of their rights and duties. They know more about government policies and they have become more self-confident.
- Villagers have become more interested in common activities in their village and come more often to village meetings.
- More meetings take place and people are eager to come to them because they need information and knowledge.
- Commune and village staff have become closer to people, enabling them to help villagers and to listen to them.
- Villagers have better access to government policies and other information through village meetings, radio and TV.

- Local staff work harder than before and are more accountable to the villagers due to holding criticism and self-criticism meetings in front of villagers.
- The social environment in residential areas has been improved; there are less social evils, more social security, better hygiene conditions etc.
- Villagers' complaints and lawsuits to higher levels of government have been reduced.
- It is easier to ask villagers to contribute to public works and social relief.

Thus the implementation of REDC has created a significant step forward in exercising grassroots democracy within the Vietnamese government. This is only its initial achievement, but it has laid down a basis for further implementation of decentralization and democracy in the future.

Role of village heads

Since implementation of REDC, village leaders are elected by the villagers and recognized by the Commune People's Committee in all study sites, but not nominated as they were before. Village leaders, on the one hand, are the persons who are responsible for the implementation of the commune plans and policies in their villages. On the other hand, they are accountable to their villagers and must represent their interests and benefits. Implementation of grassroots democracy has placed more tasks on their shoulders. They have to hold more village meetings, organize different kinds of activities, meet villagers in their own homes (because there is no village office) or visit villagers at their homes to listen to their complaints, claims etc.

In group discussions and interviews with villagers, it is evident that villagers considered village leaders to be the most important person in their villages, especially for ethnic people. They may not know commune leaders but they know very well their village heads. Asking villagers who they would come to see when they need information, or have complaints or difficulties, we always got the same answer: their village leader. In Son Ba and Son Cao communes most poor people and women in the villages seldom come to the commune centers, only to the village heads. In the case of households facing unexpected disasters or risks, villagers come to the head and ask for urgent help. When this is the case, the village head asks for the villagers' help first, then approaches the commune and asks for help there also. It is interesting that in these communes, all villagers have taken the family name of one of their national heroes, so Dinh is the family name they all have. It implies that family influence has no place in these communities, so social relations among community members became more important and the village leaders become the center of the villagers.

Another complaint from village heads is that today the work of village leaders is more difficult. It is because villagers know more about their rights, government policies, and know-how, and they also require more from village staff. It is true. All of the village leaders in the six H're villages were educated only to primary school level. Some of them cannot speak Vietnamese fluently. This is the main obstacle for their work in general, and for the implementation of REDC in particular. It is obvious that to fulfill the village leader's tasks they need to be well trained in the necessary knowledge and skills to perform their duties, including management, communication and know-how.

Where to go to complain?

When villagers in Son Ha were asked whether they were pleased with their village leaders, most of them gave positive answers and highly appreciated their work. When villagers were asked about how they solve conflicts in the village, they would usually

mention the village leaders as the main arbitrator. This could be when agricultural land or subsidies were not distributed fairly, or if some poor households were not given loans from the Bank for the Poor for instance. However, in most cases village leaders convince villagers to solve conflicts bilaterally or leave them unsolved if possible.

Box C-11: What happened to her land and her certificate of land use right?

When visiting the household of Dinh Van Xa, in Xa Ay village, Son Cao commune, one of the very poor households of the village, we got a complaint about the agricultural land allocation from Mrs Dinh Thi Do. She said that in 1998, when the land allocation was done in her village, there were six people in her family and they were expecting to get 3000 m² of paddy land allocated to them. In fact, only about 2000 m² was allocated to them. The household grew rice in this field for one crop. But the household did not have enough money to pay the land tax and had to borrow 50,000 VND from Mr Dinh Van Bat, who used to be the owner of a 1000 m² plot. In 2000, Mr Bat told the household head that he would not ask him to pay the debt if he allowed Mr Bat to cultivate that plot for a year. So far he has cultivated the plot for almost three years and does not want to give it back to Mr Xa. Mr Xa sent a petition to the commune leader, Mr Dinh Van Hung, the Vice-chairman, but so far there has been no answer from the commune. As a result, since 2000 Mr Xa and his family rely on only 1000 m² of paddy land, the main source of rice to feed the whole family.

When we asked Mrs Do about the household's land certificate we were very surprised to find out that she did not know who keeps it. She said that she went to the commune center to ask Mr Dinh Van Dung, the commune land administrator, for the land certificate of her household. Mr Dung told her that the village head kept it. When she asked the village head she was told that the village deputy-head kept it. She came to the village deputy head and was told that he did not know anything about her land certificate. She said that the village head is Mr Bat's elder brother.

Village leaders also have their complaints. When we asked them about their work all of them complained about the very low monthly allowance they get for their work. In Son Ha district, 100,000 VND per month is paid for a village head and his deputy head. Usually the village heads receive 60,000 VND and the deputy heads receive 40,000 VND. One of the village heads said that this allowance is not enough to pay for petrol for his motorcycle. In Tu Nghia the village heads receive 230,000 VND and the deputy heads receive 70,000 VND per month. They do not have a salary because they are not government officials. Of course everyone can understand that this allowance does not create any material incentives for village staff to work.

In conclusion, the village leader is the main person through whom information is passed between higher levels of government and the villagers, and they hold both executive and judicial power. Their task is not an easy one. They need to be trained to a level that the position requires, and should be paid well according to the tasks assigned.

Village meeting and information flow

During the survey we found that the village meeting is the main official forum where villagers receive information from higher levels of government, share experiences, express their viewpoints, discuss issues related to village life and sometimes make collective decisions or criticism of their local leaders. All villagers said that nowadays they were eager to attend village meetings and most of what they know comes from these meetings. From the VMGs we knew that in the six villages of H're people, the percentage of attendance often varies between 50 and 90 percent, whereas in the two

Kinh villages this figure is often only between 30 and 50 percent. More villagers come to meetings where information about techniques is disseminated, while less villagers come to meetings where they are informed about things they are not allowed to do, or fees they have to pay or contribute. This is also the reason why the number of villagers attending the village meetings in Nghia An commune is always low. Know-how information is not disseminated at all because these are fishing villages. The low percentage of meeting attendance means there is an inadequate transfer of information to some of the villagers. There are other reasons for the low attendance. Firstly, there are many village meetings and villagers have other duties, for example, taking care of households and children. As this is mainly the duty of women, it sometimes has a negative effect on the gender balance in village meetings. Secondly, it may be a very simple reason that they do not know about the meeting, and this would be because when the village head comes to inform them about the meeting, nobody is at home (only Nghia An commune has loud speakers).

Box C-12: The men and women in a village meeting

In the meetings only men speak, women only listen. It is a tradition of the H're people. If women want to say something at meetings they often ask their husbands to speak out. Women only speak at women's meetings. It is also true for the Kinh women in Nghia An Commune; therefore women like to go to women's union meetings rather than the village meetings, because the union meeting is their forum.

The flow of information in the village meetings is usually more general. But villagers need more detailed and useful information.

One of the villagers said that local leaders in the village meetings always talk about the good things but not about what the villagers needed in their daily life. For instance, none of the survey communes informed the villagers about the annual budget balance, including the budget contributed by the villagers. When asked, all commune leaders said the annual budget is often presented before the People's Council and its members have a duty to inform their voters. In fact, not one of the interviewees had ever heard about the annual budget balance. The only information about the budget that they know is based on rumors and hearsay.

Box C-13: The district is too far to go to ask

In Tra village, in one village meeting on the selection of beneficiaries for government support (1 million VND per household for very poor households), all the villagers discussed and finally fixed a list of the beneficiaries of the village. This was sent to the higher levels. Ms Ha was one of the names on the list, but when the money came to the village she found that her name was replaced by another name, that of Dinh Van Xa. She did not know the reason why. Her son asked the village leader and said he was told that the commune decided it. When he asked the commune leaders, they said that the district decided it, but the district was too far for him to go to ask.

Although Decree 29 clearly states that the village leaders have to report their work to the villagers, and make self-criticism before them once every six months, this type of meeting has never been held in Nghia An commune. In Nghia Tho, villagers do not know whether their households are ranked as a poor group or not, and at the feedback meeting with the commune leaders we found out that the commune has not made the wealth ranking for the last two years.

Box C-14: Lack of feedback information in Tra village, Son Ba commune

Thus, the major problem seems to be that sometimes information only reaches villagers in a fragmented and filtered manner, and often with no feedback to or from them. This demonstrates low downward accountability by the local officials.

Villagers get information from the TV, radio and louder speakers, and sometimes from personal communication with local leaders or mass organization meetings. In H're villages very few villagers have TV, but many of them have radios provided by the Government. The main obstacle is that they do not understand Vietnamese well, so they get information mostly from the local programs, which are broadcast once a week.

Another point is that all information passed to the villagers either through village meetings, TV, radio, or loudspeaker is all in spoken language. It causes difficulties to them to understand and remember. We did not see any notices or notice boards at commune offices.

Lack of information is one of the causes of poverty in the villages. Very few villagers we met had opportunities to attend extension training at the commune centers. For those who attended training, it was hard for them to understand what was being said.

In Nghia Tho commune the Australian-Vietnamese cooperation program carried out animal husbandry training for women who were loan borrowers. At the training, villagers were given writing paper, but many of them were not able to take notes. They felt ashamed and decided to leave the training after the first morning. In that very village, six out of eight villagers participating in the group discussion were illiterate. Most of them are women. It seems that the traditional method of extension training did not work effectively in this case.

Judicial function

We asked villagers what they would do if they were unsatisfied with what was happening in their village. Where would they take their complaints? The most common answer was that they would go to the village leader. If he was the one the complaint was directed to, or if he was involved in the misdeed, villagers would have nowhere else to go. Stronger personalities would sometimes say that they could go to the Commune People's Committee or even the district, but when asked if they had done so they would most often say "no". There are at least three reasons for this.

- Villagers generally do not know where to put forward complaints. The judicial system is unclear and not explained to villagers.
- Villagers do not dare complain. In people's minds, it is a long way from a village to the district in political terms.
- Villagers often do not anticipate any change for the better if they complain. At best, nothing happens. At worst, they may suffer from resentment from those at a higher level.

Obstacles in the implementation of REDC

Local leaders and institutional capacity. As mentioned above, the success of the REDC implementation depends firstly on the actors who have devolved the power to make decisions about its implementation. Although the commune leaders know Decree 29 fairly well, the main REDC activities in the study sites focused on points in article 13, building up community residential areas. For the village leaders, who are torn between the demand by a higher level of government for effectiveness in implementing policies and the needs and demands at the local level, the question arises as to whether they

have the capability to exercise grassroots democracy effectively. It is clear that to implement all the points written in the decree, more time is needed for meetings and paperwork, and more skills are required. Unfortunately, local personnel are still the same, in both quantity and quality. In addition, the participation of the mass organizations is poor and unstable. It is possible to conclude that poor management skills and low-levels of knowledge by local leaders contribute to the limitations of the REDC implementation.

Information accessibility: The two-way communication between local officials and villagers is one of the key features in REDC. Villagers need to be properly informed of all they are expected to know according to Decree 29, especially budget planning and balancing which are often the most sensitive issues in all of the studied villages. The information must be reliable and transparent, and not general, fragmented or filtered. In addition, the village meeting – the traditional way of information transfer – nowadays does not provide enough information to villagers and is another constraint to the information flow.

Lack of effective monitoring and supervising systems: It is already five years since REDC started to be implemented, but so far no monitoring and supervising systems exist from the highest to the lowest levels of the administrative order. There is only a one-way report system from the lower to the higher levels. Sometimes it exists on paper only, but in practice almost none of the REDC implementation activities are maintained.

Lack of material incentives for local leaders: It is unfair when the amount of remuneration received for work does not match the value of the work. Although it is common for all government officials in the country to be underpaid, what commune and village leaders receive is really neglectful. Members of the residential management body receive nothing for their work. This does not create any material incentives for local leaders to work harder.

Low intellectual standard of the villagers: It is a fact that the illiteracy rate among adult H're people is high (40 to 70 percent of interviewees) and most of the children nowadays cannot continue in their education at their villages beyond primary school. It is too far away and too expensive for children to go to secondary school, usually located at the commune center. This situation creates a big barrier for implementation of REDC and the participation of villagers in decision-making. Local leaders often complained about the fact that villagers forgot what they had been told at village meetings and technical trainings.

How do you measure the degree of grassroots democracy?

This is a really difficult question to answer not only for district leaders but also for commune leaders who are directly implementing Decree 29. Here are the results, and our suggestion for change, based on our personal consultations and group discussions with district and local leaders.

- The participation level of villagers in contribution activities: Low
- percentage of villagers attending village meetings and percentage of villagers having a voice: Low
- Number of lawsuits sent to the upper levels: Low
- Level of social evils in residential areas: Low
- percentage of cultural families in residential areas: High

To measure these indicators an independent supervising and assessing body is needed.

D. DELIVERING BASIC SERVICES TO POOR PEOPLE

1. Education

1.1. Current Status

According to villagers and educational staff in surveyed communes, in recent years the education situation has changed rapidly and dramatically because of an annually increased number of pupils and teachers. In addition, education facilities and school infrastructure have been improved and upgraded by funding from many government programs. The number of classrooms and number of primary schools has increased in quantity and quality, but they still do not satisfy the requirements of present education. In Son Cao commune, class-rooms are still temporary (hatched, cottage roofed and bamboo, forestry cutting wood walls), and some branch schools are in danger of collapse so that “pupils dare not sit and study in such class-rooms; they bring chairs and tables to learn in an open-air situation” (Mr Manh).

According to study team surveys, the education facilities in Nghia An commune are better than in other communes. The schools are made of brick and have tiled roofs; the commune has a complete schooling system including primary schools and kindergartens. The conditions in other communes are quite different. For instance in Nghia Tho there is no secondary school, and pupils wishing to enter the fifth grade have to go to a neighboring commune's secondary school (Nghia Thang) to pursue further study. Commonly, these pupils attend schools situated about seven or eight kilometers away from their homes, and they ask for bikes for traveling. One villager said: “They like to have bikes to go to school. If they do not have a bike, they will drop out of school”. In other cases, due to the long distance from home to school, a pupil went to school on foot, so when “he gets to the school the study sessions have finished”.

The progressive achievements of education, according to villagers, were caused by many reasons, for example, the program of primary education popularization, attaining the national standard for schools, and the program of assistance for highland and ethnic communes, together with Program 135. These are funded by government and local budgets, through financial channels such as the education sector and the committee for ethnic minorities. In particular, Program 135CT has contributed towards building and upgrading school facilities in highland communes such as Son Cao and Son Ba, where school and classrooms are better and more spacious. Although facilities have been improved, most of the main primary schools in the surveyed communes are at fourth grade level (tiled roofing and brick walls). In Nghia An commune, because the living standard is higher, villagers in the commune contribute more towards the building of schools.

Table D-1: General information on education conditions in surveyed communes

| | | |
|-----------------|-----------------|--|
| Son Ha district | Son Cao commune | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Has the main primary school in the commune center, and branched schools (the first and second grades) and kindergartens in villages, except Lang Mon, Xa Ay villages. There are six kindergartens, 16 classrooms.• Pupils in the furthest villages travel a distance of five kilometers to get to school. Children in Lang Tra village go across a river and streams to school if they wish to continue schooling from the third grade upwards.• From Grades 6 to 9, pupils wishing to study further go to schools in Son Giang commune. |
|-----------------|-----------------|--|

| | | |
|-------------------|-------------------|---|
| Son Ha district | Son Ba commune | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has the main primary school in the commune center, and eight branched schools (the first and second grades) and kindergartens in villages. There are three school branches due to the topographical conditions, and a scattered population. • Pupils in the furthest villages travel a distance of seven kilometers to get to school. Children in Lang Gia village go across a river and streams to school if they wish to continue schooling from the third grade upward. |
| Tu Nghia district | Nghia Tho commune | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has the main primary school in commune center, and branched schools (the first and second grades) and kindergartens in villages. • Pupils who wish to pursue further education (than second grade) go to schools in Nghia Thang commune, seven to eight kilometers from their homes. |
| | Nghia An commune | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has the main primary school in commune center, and branched schools (the first and second grades) and kindergartens in villages. • Has the highest rate of dropout in Tu Nghia district, particularly in secondary school. |

According to the information above, almost all surveyed communes have kindergartens and main primary schools. In Son Ba commune there is a '*lop nho*' (combined sixth and seventh grades) as there are not enough pupils for all secondary grades. If pupils wish to continue their education beyond the sixth grade they have to travel seven or eight kilometers from their homes to the district center of Son Ha.

Most of the surveyed communes' school heads and people's committees have raised the opportunities of children to access education services by continuously organizing branched schools in villages, even though most of the grades are first and second grades.

1.2. Villagers' Perception of the Role of Education

In spite of the different perceptions of the meaningfulness of education and literacy in improving standards of living and production, both better-off and poor people believed that education and literacy are important to enhance an understanding of government policies, and gain knowledge of production and culture. The attitude of the poor to the role of education has changed considerably. For instance, the family of Mr Ngan, in Nghia Tho commune, has two children who go to school. He has a small income from cultivation and raising cattle. He borrowed 3 million VND to buy a cow to raise and spent some of this money so the children could go to school. The school expenses are for school bags, notebooks and extra books. He does not have to pay anything for school fees or contributions. Another poor family in Xa Ay village, Son Ba district, has one child of school age. He is often employed to work for other families, earning 13,000 VND a day. He talked his wife into sparing some money to buy notebooks and pens so his child could go to school.

Better-off families have more opportunities to ensure their children can go to school. The family of Mr Thang, Nghia Tho commune, has four children of school age. Since he is better-off, he has more money to enable his children to go to school. Although he finished the third grade, he believes that in the past there were not so many opportunities to continue at school. He was very miserable that he could not go to school to study, as there was no school in existence at that time. At present he encourages his children to

go to school to learn their letters and gain more knowledge, and he hopes his children can have a better future.

Box D-1: No education: poor

Xa Ay village, Son Cao commune

Mr Tin: Because he had no education, this villager became poor. He gave us an example. Two villagers have the same field area, but one villager harvested 40 ‘ang’ while the other harvested only 15 ‘ang’ because the latter does not know how to take care of the crop. The villager who had only 15 ‘ang’ became hungry before the other. Also, when a villager sold cassava, traders cheat the ignorant: a harvest of between seven and eight tons of cassava was weighed by traders to be only four tons.

1.3. Situation of School Dropouts

According to statistical information provided by the Department of Education and Training, the school dropout rate for Quang Ngai province is negligible (3 to 6 percent for all grades). But in the surveyed communes the ratio is much higher. According to school staff at district and commune levels, pupils drop out of school for a variety of reasons. Mr Hai, from the education division of Son Ha commune, said that the school dropout rate for the whole district was about 4 percent for the 2002-2003 school year. Most school dropouts were in Grades 1 to 6, and they dropped out because their families could not afford to let them study further.

The dropout rate has reduced over the years. In the 2000-2001 school year, the number of dropouts was 31 pupils, but in the 2002 –2003 school year this figure was 17 pupils for all grades. According to Mr Phuoc, from the Tu Nghia district education division, the dropouts in Nghia An commune often occur in the sixth grade. For higher grades, the reasons why pupils dropout are different. These pupils like to help their families to earn money, or are encouraged by their friends to go to other provinces to work, or to support the campaign ‘to work out of the commune’. Dropouts at first grade often result from the foreign language barrier because the children are Hre ethnic. If they do not attend the kindergarten, they don’t learn how to speak the basic Vietnamese that is needed in the first grade and their schoolwork suffers, leading them to drop out of school.

Table D-2: Reasons for drop out by different groups

| Reasons for dropout identified by district education officials | Reasons for dropout identified by commune education officials and villagers |
|--|---|
| Son Ha district: Pupils in Grades 1 to 7 came from poor families, and from Grades 8 to 9 dropouts helped their families to work and earn money. | Son Ba: due to the difficult economic situation, families cannot afford the funds for their children to go to school; it is a high expenditure compared to their income (for notebooks, uniforms, sandals, school-bags). Some older pupils are ashamed to go to school when they learn with younger pupils; some don’t have the support of their families; pupils must travel long distances when they go to school, and cross many streams and rivers without bridges. School facilities are still poor (classrooms with bamboo and hatched roofs). |

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>Tu Nghia district: household economy is poor, poor schooling results, many drop out after the Lunar new year and follow their friends to work and earn money; family is not supportive.</p> | <p>Son Cao: caused by poverty and the difficult economic situation of families; traveling to school across many rivers and streams; schools only accessible in the dry season; perception of going to school is the same as staying home; children aged 13 to 14 years old encourage each other to go to work and earn money; older pupils are ashamed to go to school when they learn with younger pupils.</p> <p>Nghia Tho: traveling too far to school. Nghia An: parents go to work far from home; laziness to learn; poor school results; dropouts work and earn money when the fishing season comes.</p> |
|---|--|

Situating schools in the local environment is one of the better ways of attracting children to attend. But even without this advantage, parents' perceptions have changed to a realization of the important role of education, even within poor families. One villager said: "...a family can be hungry, but still accumulate money to spend so children can go to school". This attitude occurs even without taking into account exemptions from paying contributions and school fees in mountainous communes (Son Ba and Son Cao) or the reduction of half the school fees for children in poor families in Nghia An commune.

Villagers who are better-off believe that dropouts are often the result of children preferring to work, bad study results, or because, when some school sessions are dropped, the pupil can't catch up with the program so they then drop out. Poor families generally believe that if families are so poor they will not have enough money to spend on additional expenditures such as notebooks, pens and pencils, or clothes, and this makes them feel ashamed. Some poor families believe that girls do not benefit from education. Such perceptions mean that girls often give up studying earlier than boys.

1.4. Role of Parents, Associations and School Boards in Education

A parent association is elected yearly by the pupils' parents. This association works with the school board to solve any student-related problems such as the dropout situation, or the organization of cultural and art activities to mobilize pupils to study more actively. In Son Cao, the parent association is made up of nine people including committee staff, parents of good (well-behaved and better academic results) pupils and better-off families. According to villagers, poor families can take part in the association if they are elected, but their participation is limited because, according to a poor person in Nghia An commune, "we have little voice and we must spend time earning a living". In Nghia An commune, because the parents or carers often go fishing offshore, only the older brothers and sisters are at home. They often have to go to school meetings and teach their younger sisters and brothers. When a child drops out due to bad study results, the committee staff and the school teachers cannot meet and talk to the parents and so they have great difficulty in enforcing the children to go to school.

In Son Cao commune, the parents association has nine parent-elected members, collecting contributions valued at 2- 3,000 VND and managing the fund. According to Mr Le, a member of the parents association in Son Cao commune, "we have a small number of contributions; the collecting is so difficult, if we are lucky, we can get half the total number of parents contributing". Mr Le said that the fund is used for buying the

prizes for sport, cultural and art activities organized by the school management board and commune people's committee, as well as for drinking water in summer and at the start of the new school year.

1.5. Illiteracy Elimination Program and its Roles

According to the assessment of Mr Hai and Mr Binh, from the district educational divisions of Son Ha and Tu Nghia respectively, the illiteracy elimination program has been successful since 1997, the popularization of primary grades program has been in place since 2002, and many schools obtained the national standards. In the past, illiteracy elimination classes were organized for people aged 15 to 35 years in mountainous communes such as Son Cao and Son Ba, and aged 15 to 25 years in Nghia An and Nghia Tho. Illiteracy elimination programs are perceived to be successful. However the number of people in this age group is not large, and most literate people are in the much larger age group of over 40 years. These people cannot read and write in Vietnamese. When we interviewed villagers in Son Cao commune, some of them could not read and write. They said that they are unable to attend illiteracy elimination classes due to time constraint and other reasons.. They suggested that these classes should be organized in the evenings, two to three sessions a week, for a maximum of four months, and targeted to a broader range of age groups.

1.6. Accessing Education Services: Barriers

Education services are not really attractive to schoolchildren due to the poor activities on offer and the physical infrastructure, including schools, classrooms and teaching instruments. Materials for pupils can be provided by better-off households but in general they are not enough to support the study requirements, particularly for poor households. Most pupils come from poor households. Of course these families try to encourage their children to go to school, but their efforts are not enough unless there is some assistance to purchase notebooks and books for their children. In better-off families, school children live in more favorable conditions that encourage them to go to school. Besides the encouragement of the family, they obtain notebooks, books and school bags that have been bought by their parents.

The long distance between home and school is also a barrier to accessing the school. In Nghia Tho commune they told us that their children go to school eight kilometers away by bikes. During the dry season, in Son Ba commune, children can go to school easily but in the rainy season they have to run across streams and rivers. Although they can access the school, they can hardly keep up with the study programs.

Box D-2: Total expenditures for three children to go to school

Nghia An commune, poor household

Ms Sen, Kinh group: There are seven people in her family. Three children are attending school in the commune. Her contribution for constructing the school and school fees is reduced to half. However the total expenditure for her children to go to school is 400,000 VND for two children in Grades 5 and 6. According to her, the cost was too high for their family income. Sometimes she borrowed some money for the contribution fees and tuition fees so the children could attend school.

In focus group discussions in villages, villagers told how the poor had no money at the beginning of the new school year. Even though they cannot pay anything towards the school fees and contributions, they still spend money on buying notebooks, extra books and school bags. According to Ms Tam the amount of expenditure was around 100,000 to 200,000 VND for one child to attend school. Long journeys and roads that are in bad

condition are also factors affecting access to education. In Son Cao and Son Ba communes, for instance, the children go to school where they must cross rivers and streams. During rainy seasons in Lang Gia village, Son Ba commune, or in Lang Tra village, Son Cao commune, the only safe way is for the children to stay home instead of going to school. But the efforts of the people's committee have been effective in encouraging children to go to school. In Son Cao, the commune committee decided to spend some of their financial assistance funds by renting a boat to carry the children to school from June to September, the rainy months.

Another barrier is the perception of parents; some families do not have an adequate perception of the important role of education for their children and for their lives later, in particular for girls without opportunities for further study. Also, school management boards have not had enough activities to attract children to go to school voluntarily, except in Son Cao commune where there are cultural and art activities and sport (football). It is a good way to attract children to school and should be encouraged and promoted. In addition, school facilities and physical infrastructure are in short supply, and equipment and teaching instruments are of poor quality and therefore not enough to cause merriness in the pupils who do attend the school.

2. Health Care

2.1. General Status

In recent years, according to villagers, primary health care activities are much improved. Thanks to Program 135CT, most communes have health clinics equipped with facilities and materials to at least satisfy the needs of preliminary emergency procedures and primary health care. Communes under Program 135CT, including Son Cao and Son Ba communes, were provided with medicine by the program, and villagers can receive free medicine from the health station. In group discussions, it was clear that villagers believed that epidemic diseases, such as tuberculosis and malaria, were greatly reduced. In some communes (Son Cao and Son Ba) these diseases have almost disappeared, though common diseases such as coughs or diarrhea still occur. To eliminate these more common diseases, health clinics and associations need to educate the villagers in disease prevention.

Table D-3: Health care staff and clinics in communes

| | |
|-----------|---|
| Son Ba | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two doctors, four nurses • Grade 4 health care clinic: four rooms, no separated labor ward room, curative room • Vaccination program: 95 percent, malnourishment rate: 16 percent |
| Son Cao | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health care staff: five: four doctors, one nurse, and volunteer health workers in all villages • Grade 4 health care clinic • Good education and disease prevention programs |
| Nghia Tho | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three doctors, one midwife, two volunteer health workers • Brick health clinic, built in 1994, has four rooms: diagnosis and treatment, labor ward, provision of medicine, common room. |
| Nghia An | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two doctors, two midwives • Grade 4 health care clinic |

In spite of the efforts of health stations and of villagers, diseases still occur in the communes. In some communes, malaria has been reduced, but its existence still occurs in the surveyed communes, for instance in Son Cao and Nghia Tho (particularly due to villagers working outside the communes, catching malaria and bringing the disease back home).

Table D-4: Diseases popularly occurring in the communes

| Diseases | Son Ba | Son Cao | Nghia Tho | Nghia An |
|--------------------------|--------|---------|-----------|----------|
| Hepatitis | x | | | |
| Malaria | | x | x | |
| Tuberculosis | x | | | |
| Goiter | | | | |
| Malnourishment | x | | | |
| ARI | | x | x | x |
| Stomachache | | x | | |
| Cough and fever | | x | | |
| Diarrhea | | | x | |
| Gynecological complaints | | | x | x |
| Dysentery | | | | x |

2.2. Available Local Health Care Services

When villagers get sick, they often search for simple ways to cure and treat according to their traditional medicine practices. They may find some traditional herbs and leaves in the forest for their illness. They weigh up the pros and cons of the benefits of the health clinic, the costs and distance to travel. In the surveyed communes, villagers often go to health care clinics for the following reasons.

Table D-5: Health clinics and private doctors provided health care

| | |
|------------------------------|---|
| Policlinics in province | A modern health care unit, has the capability to cure serious diseases that cannot be treated at the commune health centers, or create psychological safety for patients, in particular, poor households when they have illness; reduced or free health care fees. Patients in Nghia An commune often go to policlinics hospital, due to short distance from the commune to the Quang Ngai township. |
| District health care centers | Health care centers at district level have the capability of curing hard diseases that cannot be treated by the commune health clinics; especially for poor patients, treatment is free; patients from Son Cao and Son Ba communes go to Son Ha health care center. Health expenditures incurred to the poor are paid by relevant local authority under insurance scheme in accordance with Decree No 39. |
| Health care clinics | Most communes have health care stations, dealing with temporary emergencies and informing upper health care services when handling more complex illnesses; undertaking national health programs such as tuberculosis, malaria and extended vaccinations. |
| Private doctors | Only exists in Nghia An commune, often sells drugs and medicine, and gives instructions for curing common |

| | |
|------------------------|--|
| | diseases. |
| Village health workers | Providing tablets and medicine; reporting to commune health staff when villagers have more complex diseases. The health workers network exists in Son Ba, other communes do not have health workers. |
| Herbal doctors | There are some herbalists in Son Cao commune who use herbs that they take from the forest to treat and cure patients. Traditional medical knowledge is shared amongst villagers. |

2.3. Behavior of Villagers in Search of Good Health

When villagers suffer from illness, if it is a simple disease, they can go to the nurses around their homes. In Nghia An commune, there are five pharmacists and communal health staff. Villagers usually go to commune health clinics because they are near their homes and there is no fee, such as in Village 1 in Nghia Tho commune. In Nghia An commune, due to the convenient access by road (14 kilometers from the commune, taking 30 to 40 minutes to get to town), villagers go to the polyclinics hospital in Quang Ngai town. Since the beginning of this year, poor households do not hold poor health care cardholder documents, so they go to the polyclinics hospital, where treatment fees are reduced by 50 percent. In other mountainous communes, such as Son Cao and Son Ba, villagers go to the health clinic to take oral tablets and other medicines, which are provided by government health programs and supported by Program 135CT.

2.4. Medical Fees as a Burden for the Poor

Poor patients in mountainous and remote communes, particularly those belonging to ethnic minorities, need to have free medical care. This is the case, and has been for some time, for people living in Son Cao and Son Ba communes. But for people in Nghia Tho commune this only applies to H're ethnic minority people, and in Nghia An commune, poor people only get a reduction of half the medical fee. The main financial burdens for the poor when they go to healthcare clinics is the expenditure for traveling costs, food and lodging for the patients and their families. For example, the families of some patients who are very ill will spend more money so that two or three people can accompany the patient. This is too large an amount of money in comparison with their incomes, so they find some ways around it, such as buying medicine and drugs according to the instructions of pharmacists and nurses around their homes in Nghia An commune, or, for people in Son Cao commune, praying and using medicine. Some people told us that praying can make one's health better. Mr Ve, H're ethnic, from Xa Ay village, always maintains a belief in praying: "I have gone to hospital but doctors do not know what disease I suffered and they gave me some tablets, but my disease is not reduced, so I choose praying. Finally my disease has disappeared".

3. Extension Services

3.1. Extension Workers' Network

The current extension network is arranged according to vertical lines of authority. At the provincial level, there is a Center for Extension, which conducts research on, for example, seedlings and fishing promotion in Quang Ngai. At the next level are extension stations, such as in Son Ha and Tu Nghia districts. In the communes there are no extension workers, or even volunteer extension workers.

Mr Tam told us that the numbers of extension workers are so few that it does not satisfy the requirements of transferring farm techniques to farmers. For instance, at Son Ha

extension station there are only three extension staff (the head of the station, and two technical workers, specializing in forestry and livestock raising respectively) who are responsible for providing all extension services for 16 communes in the district. In Tu Nghia district, the extension station has five extension workers (the head of the station, one accountant and three engineers, most of whom have graduated in Hue Agricultural and Forestry University), who are in charge of providing extension services in 13 communes. These conditions have limited the efforts of maintaining and expanding extension activities in the communes such as demonstration models or training courses, particularly for target groups including the poor and women.

Without extension workers in the communes, the vice-chairman of the CPC often has to take up these responsibilities. This again limits the work, because he does not have the time or special skills to conduct this professional work, and extension activities as a consequence tend not to be effective. In Son Ha district, Mr Tam said that they have developed an innovative way of dealing with this situation by involving the Farmers' Association, the Women's Union, the War Invalids Association and well-off farmers in extension activities. This improves extension activities and makes them more effective.

3.2. Main Extension Services to Farmers

a. Training Courses on Farming and Livestock Raising

According to commune staff in Son Cao, training courses usually take place two or three times a year, including intensive pig farming, chicken raising in a garden, raising pond-fish, and raising cattle intensively (feeding enough straw and grasses). These training courses are organized by district extension workers and staff, sometimes even by provincial extension officers, at the communal level, or the vice or chairman of the CPC involved in the organization of these courses. Most of the farmers in the commune will be invited to participate in turn, and a participant receives 15,000 VND per day, and gains knowledge and experience in farming and raising animals. According to villagers, the number of poor households taking part in these courses is so few because they do not have pigs, cattle or buffaloes. However some households who do not own any of these animals also take part in the courses related to raising animals. This means that some households who have participated in the training do not get the opportunity to apply that knowledge in practice. Due to the low level of education, and high incidences of illiteracy, these participants' ability to receive and retain technical information is limited and poor: 'learn, then forget later'. This is the main reason the lives of the poor have become worse in Son Cao commune.

b. Transferring Techniques and Demonstration Models in Different Local Areas

Extension activities vary from region to region due to topographical conditions, priorities for training and differing ethnic groups, for instance Son Ha in the highlands and Tu Nghia in the lowlands. In Son Ha, permanent crops are suitable for local conditions, so pure and hybrid rice seeds have been delivered and planted, including Khang dan 18, 205, and TN15 (hybrid), peanut (HL15), hybrid corn (T5, T6, T7) and cassava (KM94, KM98-1, KM98-5). Thanks to the introduction of new seeds, the crop yield has increased more than ever before. But access to these new seeds for poor farmers is not promoted, because the new seeds require intensive farming techniques and poor people cannot afford to buy the chemical fertilizers that are needed. According to Mr Dung, from Son Cao commune, while the paddy rice yield in the demonstration model was 60 'ang'/perch, the yield in the participating farmers' fields was only 20 to 30 'ang'/perch due to the farmers and the poor being unable to invest more and apply the correct techniques. In Tu Nghia, there were demonstration models of hybrid rice (Cong uy 15,

Nhi uu 88) and hybrid corn DK applied by farmers in Nghia Tho and Nghia An communes. Supported techniques in this province also included rearing bovine cows, intensive cattle raising and growing stylo grass.

Livestock farming activities, such as raising cattle and pigs in livestock sheds and feeding them enough straw and grasses in the winter season are encouraged, according to Mr Tam. Between 1996 and 1997, new grass varieties were introduced into the communes in the district, but the farmers did not understand the effectiveness of these grass varieties. But in recent years, they have come to know the beneficial effects and they grow more grasses for feeding their cattle. The farmers become more efficient as they have enough supplies of feed for their cattle and buffaloes. In Son Giang commune, there are some households growing two or three perches of stylo grass.

Another extension activity introduced by extension stations is the raising of Mong Cai pigs in pig sheds grounded by cement, and with the support of proper feed materials. The model was assessed to be suitable for the locality and came directly from the Extension Center in Quang Ngai. However, the model has some limitations because there is little financial support for investment in pig breeds. But the number of participants involved in the model was more than the participants taking part in the training on raising cattle and buffaloes. Farmers like to raise buffaloes, and they therefore invest more money in buffaloes (a buffalo is priced at between 2 and 3 million VND in Son Cao). These households often choose to get a loan from the bank through the policy and program of poverty elimination because they believe that is the way to escape from poverty. But the low level of understanding of techniques to raise cows and buffaloes cause these animals to die during epidemics or through a shortage of feeds. This leads the poor into more debt and accelerates payments of the interest rate, such as that which happened to Mr The, a H're ethnic man.

c. Activities Combined with Other Associations

According to Mr Tam, from Son Ha commune, coordination among the extension, labor and war invalids sector and the Bank for Social Policies¹ is minimal, while "some staff in the division of labor or war invalids do not invite me to take part in their projects". But in Tu Nghia district the situation has improved, according to Mr Chien. For example, when the Women's Union has projects and programs they often invite him to give training courses to farmers. Because of the poor coordination amongst sectors and associations, efficiency of investments is not so high and this creates a risk in production. According to villagers, they would like to combine getting a loan with learning farming techniques, but this combination does not exist.

The existence of hobby clubs in livestock and farming is one way where well-off farmers can help poor farmers in improving production, but it does not exist in the surveyed communes. Mr Nem, from Lang Gia village in Son Ba commune, and Mr Xac, from Xa Ay village, are both better-off households who have helped poor farmers and neighbors by giving information and holding discussions on ways of increasing production. Mr Sam, from Lang Bung village, created employment for the poor by hiring them to clear and prepare land for cassava growing and clearing grasses in sugarcane fields, paying them 13,000 VND per day. Other households help the poor by letting their employees raise a cow if she is pregnant so that the employee will own the newborn cow.

¹ The Bank for Social Policies is established from the Bank for the Poor.

3.3. The Participation of Villagers in Extension Works

The number of households taking part in extension activities is limited due to the shortage of funds, thus restricting the services that can be provided to target groups such as women and the poor. One woman said, "my husband likes to go meetings so he can talk with his friends", so she is unable to participate in this activity. According to Mr Tam, the Son Ha district extension agent, the rate of women participating in training courses on intensive raising of pigs is higher than in other training courses (30 to 40 percent of participants in the course).

Poor and better-off households are allowed to take part in the courses. However for the pig demonstration models, the extension staff only select households with the proper conditions for pig-raising, including the ability to invest, owning materials for sheds, production experience and being able to perform tasks like recording an increase in pig weight. In Son Ha district, the poor have few opportunities to take part in extension activities, except in the introduction course on raising a water fish, since they spend very little money on the preparation of fishponds, and breed free fish. In Nghia An commune, the participants often are commune officials, village heads or associations' members, while the number of villagers taking part is few.

The study team visited a household, (Ms Noa from Lang Tra village, Son Cao commune) that is participating in the program of raising swine with the assistance of an extension activities program. She raised the pig well, but she says that there are few taking part in this program, even though these households have the possibility of building a pig shed. Villagers also take part in other extension activities such as hybrid rice cultivation, but because of their low level of knowledge and perception, they have only participated in a field demonstration and watched extension workers' demonstrations. When the extension workers left, the villagers forgot what they had learned. They might apply some techniques but not at the correct time, for example for weeding or fertilizing and, finally, the rice yield is low and not improved by that training course and demonstration.

In Son Cao, Son Ba and Nghia Tho communes, there are forests and barren land for afforesting. Program 661 CT provides for the planting of 5 million hectares of new forest on barren land.. However not many villagers have been involved in this program. In various communes, the management of this program is different. In Son Ba, villagers dealt with Mr Thanh, who received the money and forest seedlings directly from DARD Quang Ngai, then employed villagers to forest the area by paying 52,000 VND per quarter. In Son Cao, the CPC had the responsibility for receiving the money and assistance from DARD, then distributing to the villagers who have barren land to forest this land. We observed that the forest in Son Ba was nicer than that in Son Cao commune.

3.4. Animal Disease and Veterinarian Services

In all surveyed communes, animal diseases and epidemics often occur but there are only one or two volunteer veterinarians. These staff have no salary, and only receive a small fee and medicines when the extension agents facilitate a vaccination program for animals and poultry. They receive a service fee of 2,000 VND for each injection for pigs, 3 to 4,000 VND for each cattle and buffalo, and 500 VND per injection for poultry. We were told that some households in Xa Ay village, Son Cao commune, were afraid to waste money so when their cattle suffered light diseases they did not invite the vet to come to their home to give injections. Unfortunately the buffalo then died and they regretted their actions. Some villagers have many buffaloes so they cannot afford the fees for injections and medicine. Poor households in Son Cao and Son Ba communes decided to raise cattle and buffaloes to escape from poverty, but they did not think about the animal

diseases and epidemic that often occur. This means there are some households that have escaped from poverty, but have now become poor again.

3.5. Some Suggestions on Delivering Extension Services to the Poor

According to suggestions by extension staff in two districts, there should be specific extension programs for the poor, and extension activities should be coordinated between extension agents, the Department of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs, and the Bank for Social Policies . These activities should be undertaken on the principle of '*cam tay chi viec*' whereby extension staff need to work closely and have good relationships with poor households, to bring about more effective change. Mr Tam, a Son Ha extension agent, told us that the poor dared "not get into any more adventures; if they suffered more losses they would be defeated again". Therefore, specific extension programs for the poor must take into account a need to train villagers in dealing with risk factors, beyond those of normal extension programs. They should also be pitched to villagers who have low education and difficulties in retaining information. Such programs should be considered by concerned organizations in the future.

Mr Tam also recommended that each commune in the district should have extension workers specializing in agriculture, and should increase the incentives for these officials (including salary and payment of travel costs). He recommended that there should be an increased coordination among extension organizations and the banks, so that the loans from the banks can be used more effectively. Mr Hung, an extension agent in Tu Nghia district, suggests that the provision and support of research materials, constructing seed shrimp stations, and forming production clubs are necessary if extension activities are to be improved.

3.6. Necessary Requirements for the Provision of Extensions for the Elimination of Poverty

In the focus group discussions it became clear that in some communes the preference is to build infrastructure such as roads or irrigation schemes as a way of reducing poverty, as well as introducing more extension activities related to cultivation and raising animals. The belief is that new roads can assist them to access the market, and information about agricultural products, in order to increase their opportunities of escaping from poverty.

Extension needs vary from commune to commune because of the particular and diversified topographical and climactic conditions. For instance, in Nghia Tho commune and Son Ba commune, villagers liked to introduce forestry seedlings (acacia, styrax) to their communes, but in Nghia An commune, villagers preferred to have training courses on raising animals that included more villagers as participants, not only the commune's officials and staff as at present. In Son Ba commune, villagers suggested that they need credit and loans from the banks to purchase cattle and buffaloes, as they consider this to be a way to increase their fortune and eliminate their poverty.

Table D-6: Ranking of prioritization of extension needs

| Extension service provision | Son Ba | Son Cao | Nghia Tho | Nghia An |
|-----------------------------|--------|---------|-----------|----------|
| Afforestation | +++ | ++ | +++ | |
| Cultivating cassava | +++ | +++ | + | |
| Raising buffaloes | ++ | ++ | ++ | |
| Raising cattle | + | ++ | + | |
| Growing fruit trees | +++ | + | +++ | |

| | | | | |
|-------------------------|---|--|--|-----|
| (grape, apple, mangoes) | | | | |
| Rearing shrimp | | | | +++ |
| Raising pig | + | | | +++ |

Note: +++: much, ++: rather, +: less preference

E. SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

1. Regular Support

Regular support, according to villagers, is not based on any priority of targeting particular disadvantaged groups. The procedure of listing poor households, and including those that should really benefit from social assistance, does not involve participation at the grassroots level. Moreover, the standard of support (45,000 VND per month) is not enough to satisfy the least requirements of daily life. Generally however, the recipients are people from very poor households.

Box E-1: Situation of accessing social assistance

Son Ha district:

The number of people who receive the regular support is 717 in 2003, accounting for nearly 70 percent of those who have met the criteria to receive.

Tu Nghia district:

The number of people receiving the regular support was 350 between the years 1999 to 2003. Meanwhile, the number of people who have met the criteria to receive was about 1,100. There is no implementation of Circular 18, a policy supporting the payment of funeral fees for people who receive the regular support.

Target groups are orphan children who can receive it until 18 years old, and old people who can receive it until they die. After these allowances have been paid, others will be selected. Poor people receive this money every quarter (135,000 VND per quarter year).

Table E-1: Procedures for targeting groups benefiting regular assistances

| Level | Considerations and Procedures | Responsibility |
|---------|--|---|
| Village | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider how many people satisfy enough of the criteria to receive the regular support. Ask these people to write an application. Poor villagers hand in their application for the regular support. | Village leader |
| Commune | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider the list of the recipients. Discussion the eligibility of those who receive the regular support. Add people to or eliminate people from the list. However in reality, this period is for documentation purposes only | Commune chairman, Vice chairman, representatives of the Women's Union, Fatherland Front, Association of War Invalids, Department of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs, and leaders of villages in commune. |

| | | |
|-----------------|---|---|
| District | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider the list, which is handed in by the commune committee. In theory, it can be discussed and changed but in reality the District level always approves the list. This period is for documentation purposes only. | Vice chairman and department representatives from Women's Union, Fatherland Front Farmers' Association, Association of War Invalids, Department of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs, Finance Department, Planning Department and Peoples' Committee. |
| Decision making | | Vice chairman of district |

"This process follows accurate procedures however it is unable to avoid mistakes", said Mr Luu, Deputy head of District Division of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs.

Responses from villagers

In all eight villages we visited, the villagers felt that the amount of 45,000 VND is only enough for them to buy 12 to 13 kilograms of rice every month. If they want to have more food, or when they are sick, they do not know how to improve their situation because they have no ability to work and earn money. Poor people, especially the ethnic minority of H're in the three communes of Son Ba, Son Cao and Nghia Tho, have no information about regular support from the government. As a result, the recipients often did not know why they were receiving the benefit, others did not receive the benefit despite satisfying enough of the conditions to receive it, and poor people did not know where they could go to ask about the benefit.

The list of villagers who benefit from regular assistance, compiled by the commune administration, is not based on any ranking of priority of villagers in need, so that villagers who are in a worse condition than others do not receive these supports. In Nghia An commune, there is a notice that the process of assessing people so that they can receive regular support is not made at village level. Therefore, village heads do not know how many villagers in the village meet the criteria to receive these supports.

Box E-2: Cases of earning the regular assistances

Lang Tra village, Son Cao commune, Son Ha district

Mr Ua: He is considered to be the poorest in the village. He is 80 years old and is both blind and deaf. His wife is 64 years old. Both of them had made a contribution to the victory of the national revolution. All their children died before 1975. They rely on each other alone to live. When he is sick she looks after him, but when she is sick they do not know what will happen because he could not look after her. Day after day, she goes to the forest for firewood and then sells it to have something to eat. And they also do not hope for the regular support from the Government because "we are about to die; if there had been any support it would have been done already".

Lang Tra village, Son Cao commune, Tu Nghia district

Mr Ba: "I also do not know why I can receive VND 135,000 per quarter of the year."

Pho An Village, Nghia An commune, Tu Nghia district

Mr Dau: He and his brother, 35 and 45 years old respectively, were both born blind. Their father is a revolutionary martyr. Each of them has two children. His brother is now paralytic and in a difficult condition because his wife also has no job. They do not receive regular support or the temporary support for the three days of the Lunar New Year. When asked whether they had any questions about the support, they said that they had no questions, although they think the selection by the commune is not correct.

2. Emergency Support

In 2001 and 2002, Quang Ngai PPC gave 3,135 million VND to poor people. This amount was used for emergency support to buy rice for 40,757 households. Villagers were also provided with 9,154 iron sheets, 100 tons of cement, and 250 rolls of oilpaper from the PPC to repair houses damaged by natural calamities.

2.1. Rural District Support

The Division of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs in Tu Nghia district did not have a list of households that received emergency support between the years 2000 to 2002. There are also no statistics on the percentage of households that receive emergency support or regular support.

The emergency support fund financed by the province and district authorities has received funding from the Social Support Fund of the district, and other supporting organizations, such as the Red Cross, to help households that have suffered from natural calamities such as floods.

When there is a crop failure, the district administration must put forward a proposal to the province administration for emergency support because the district has no such budget. They then distribute this money to commune authorities, who in turn bring it to households. When floods and storms occur, the CPC will inspect the damage and then make a list of the households that require assistance. The list will also be handed to the DPC. Based on this list and the extent of the losses, officials of the District Division of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs, commune staff and sometimes representatives of the Red Cross give emergency support to households affected by floods or storm.

Box E-3: Emergency support situation in two districts

Son Ha District

The emergency support in 2002 was as follows: households having completely damaged houses were supported with 1 million VND and 16 iron-sheets. Households whose homes were burned down were supported with 50 kilograms of rice, 200,000 VND, two pans, a kettle, a blanket and a mosquito net.

Tu Nghia District

The amount of emergency support in 2002 was as follows: 8 kilograms of rice per person (not over 40 kilograms per household), 46,016 iron sheets (from 15 to 30 sheets per household), from one to two cans of instant noodles per household, cash money (from 200,000 VND to 1 million VND for damaged houses), house frames (provided by the Red Cross; 30 for completely collapsed houses), cement (from three to five bags of 50 kilograms each), and miscellaneous items such as clothes, blankets, mosquito nets and pans.

2.2. Response from, and Reality of, the Villagers

Villagers are aware of the government's efforts to help them but the country economy is still poor. They have an immense gratitude for this support, but this assistance is not always enough. In general, villagers contacted in the six villages did not have access to information on support. When their houses are damaged they always repair them with the help of the neighbors, and do not inform the CPC. The four events that the villagers are most scared of are accidents (because this effects their ability to work and it can make them die), sickness, epidemics and natural calamities. They wish that these things do not happen to them but if they do it will make it difficult for them to recover, even though they receive the assistance.

Table E-2. Villagers' opinions of emergency assistance

| Questions | Villagers' answers |
|--|--|
| Are there any cases where orphans, disabled, elderly or lonely people in the village do not receive the regular support? | "There are some cases in which orphans do not receive the regular support." |
| When you suffer from shocks, do you receive any assistance? | "When going off to sea, if there is a risk, the owner of the ship (boat) is supported but the fishermen are not supported." |
| What benefit does the government assistance bring to you? | "It helps people for a short time". "The emergency support is not enough for us to recover our livelihood. It does not help prevent us from falling into poverty or getting poorer. The regular assistance is not enough for us to have a minimum standard of living. So that most of us are the poorest in the commune." |
| Do you know the criteria in which you can receive government support? | "We do not know because we are not informed." |
| What does the government need to do in order to support the villagers better? | The government needs to assist the poor more. It needs to help households along the river to be out of danger because we suffer from frequent flooding. The policy by which the grassroots contribute 40 percent of the cost to construct the commune road is only making people poorer, if the commune administration forces us to contribute. We would like to have another policy. If the Government does not construct Nghia Hoa bridge, it will not help poor people. |
| Focus group discussion in Tan My village, Nghia An commune, Tu Nghia District, 15 villagers participated, 100 percent from the Kinh people, some were illiterate, the majority finished lower secondary education and only one completed Grade 12. | |

What Do the Poor Receive at Grassroots Level?

Box E-4 Case studies of emergency assistance

Lang Gia village, Son Ba commune, Son Ha district

Mr Phe, 50 years old: This household is one of the 100 poorest households. He has seven children, ranging from four years old to 25 years old.. His house partly collapsed in 1999 but he did not receive anything. Meanwhile his neighbor's house, which was damaged more lightly, received emergency support. He handed in his paper of request to the commune administration but it was not approved due to its unclearness. He no longer questions this.

Lang Bung village, Son Ba commune, Son Ha district.

Mr Ep, 60 years old, with seven children: His house roof was blown off by a whirlwind last year. He was supported with 300,000 VND, 25 kilograms of rice, two pans and one mosquito net. Meanwhile he needed around 4 million VND to rebuild his roof. As a result, he became poor because he and his sons could not afford to rebuild it. He also dares not borrow money to rebuild because he is afraid that he could not pay it back. At that time the commune officials informed him that he could receive support the second time and he waited for this support. But Mr Hung, Vice chairman of the commune, said in the feedback meeting with the study team "he cannot receive anymore". It means that, due to the lack of communication, he will have waited for the support in vain.

The temporary support for three days in the Lunar New Year

The criteria and provisions for this support are different in each district. In Son Ha district, during the 2003 Lunar New Year, every poor person received 1 liter of oil, 2 kilograms of rice, 1 kilogram of salt and a packet of glutamate, while in Tu Nghia district every person received 4 kilograms of rice. This support is only meant to be a small support for each household at Lunar New Year. However, there were some poor households in Nghia An commune who did not receive this assistance. The CPC had insufficient funds to support all households and so priority was given to households in more difficult circumstances. In conclusion, this support is sometimes distributed unfairly by the CPC. Villagers did not know the criteria and the list of poor households who received this relief.

| District and commune | Grassroots |
|--|---|
| Poor households and households of ethnic minority people receive this support. | The Kinh ethnic people, despite being the very poorest in Nghia Tho and Nghia An commune, did not receive this support. There are households of very poor H're ethnic people who did not receive this relief, particularly in– the difficult and suffering communes such as Son Cao and Son Ba. The poor people, who do not receive it, resign themselves to their fate and do not question it. |

3. Fee Exemption and Reduction in Health Care

Villagers think that the government is concerned about their health and they highly appreciate this concern. However, this support does not have as much effect as they would like. Villagers who receive this support generally know their rights, but in some cases it is difficult to achieve and in other cases it is better not to take it.

Villagers in Son Ba, Son Cao and Nghia Tho communes

The ethnic minority H're people are exempt from health care fees for common diseases. When they are sick they can go to health stations in the communes to receive drugs without paying a fee. However, the quantity of drugs available, even in communes belonging to Program 135 like Son Ba and Son Cao, is still not enough. Villagers in these two communes sometimes do not receive free drugs. Villagers often have to buy more drugs in private drug stores. If they return to the health station another time, they will not be granted any more of the same drug because the "health care official said that the medicine needs to be spared for others". Villagers are sometimes reluctant to travel a long distance, so they often don't travel to the health station when it is situated far away. They will stay at home if they have no money, or buy drugs in private drug stores.

District officials responsible for health care say that there are not enough trained health staff in communes. For instance, there are 69 health staff in 14 communes in Son Ha district, but there is only one doctor. Commune health staff are sometimes not fully trained in procedures such as the use of drugs. Managers of health stations in Son Ba and Son Cao communes only know that HIV can make people die but do not know anything else about it. They told us that they had heard about it through newspapers or watching television. This proves how difficult it is for villagers to receive up-to-date health information.

When villagers come to treat other diseases or they need to have injections, they still have to spend extra money that can reach hundreds of thousands of VND. Villagers attending the District Health Center do not have to pay medical fees. But if they want a quick recovery or when there are no free drugs available in the center, they have to buy medicine from private drug stores. Plus traveling from Son Ba and Son Cao communes to the District Health Centers is a fairly expensive exercise for the poor (around 100,000 VND). Patients also have to pay lodging expenses for their relatives who accompany and look after them. Therefore if the medical treatment is not considered to be urgent, villagers often do not go to the Health Stations or Health Care Centers in their districts.

| |
|--|
| Province: gives the health insurance certificate to the poor households of Kinh race. |
|--|

| |
|---|
| Tu Nghia district: only 30 percent of poor households receive health insurance certificates. |
|---|

Nghia An commune (where 100 percent of the population comes from the Kinh race)

Villagers who receive Health Insurance Cards sometimes do not know what they are for, usually because the adults in the household are illiterate, and they are not given any instructions from the card provider.

When villagers are sick and have to attend the provincial hospital for treatment, the behavior of doctors to those who have the card and to those who have to pay is different. Some doctors speak so harshly to villagers with the card that it makes them go to private health services. Many villagers who use the card complain about the doctors' manner in the provincial hospital. They are made to pay the fee if they leave the card at home, even if they can bring the card in the next day. For many villagers, the card has no effect on treatment because, in practice, they receive only a portion of the drugs that were needed for their recovery. If they have enough money, they prefer to be treated in private clinics because, in their minds, they deliver better services.

4. Fee Exemption and Reduction in Education

Under Decree No. 2797 of the PPC, the district Division of Education may provide an exemption from education fees to pupils of ethnic minority households or poor households for primary and secondary education. They are also supplied with textbooks and notebooks. However, in Son Ha and Tu Nghia district, the number of textbooks provided under this scheme is very small (around 60 to 70 percent). Therefore, around 3,000 to 4,000 pupils have to buy textbooks, and the rest use second-hand textbooks. . In practice, their parents can only afford to buy one or two important textbooks. They also have to contribute from 10,000 VND to 20,000 VND a year for class funds. There are a lot of different amounts of money that they are required to pay but their parents do not know what it is for, nor do they care.

5. Incentives to Improve the Delivery of Social Assistance

According to officials at the district and commune levels, and villagers, the amount of regular support needs to be raised to 60,000 VND, equal to between 18 and 20 kilograms of rice every month. The budget for regular support needs to increase to be able to support more people who need to receive assistance. Information about support needs to reach villagers much more effectively. Villagers should reference the list of supported people, because they know best who needs the support in their village. And finally, the CPC has to widely and effectively publicize the list of households receiving assistance and the budget for assistance, provide necessary explanations about the supporting policies of the Government, and furnish the reasons why some villagers are not approved to receive support.

In addition, it is necessary to upgrade the infrastructure in villages, to create jobs and to develop markets for villagers' outputs. In practice, there is a redundancy of labor in Nghia An, the coastal commune, and in the hard natural conditions of such communes as Son Cao, Son Ba and Nghia Tho. If there is no more investment from the Government, villagers will be continuously poor and the Government will have to raise the support.

It is also necessary to supply more textbooks and notebooks because if villagers are poor they will not have enough money to buy all the textbooks for their children that are required for a meaningful education..

It is recommended that there needs to be better links between the provincial services. The provincial health service sometimes requests the list of poor households from the provincial Department of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs but they receive no reply. Programs and policies to improve the ability of local health staff to carry out their work are important. Health insurance card providers need to fully explain the use of the card to receivers. Finally, it is important to resource the mobile health groups to go to remote areas more regularly.

F. PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REFORM

1. Public Administration Reform at the Provincial Level

The public administration reform (PAR) program intends to establish a more responsive, transparent, accountable and efficient public sector that is better organized, structured, resourced and staffed to deliver services to people and businesses. A strong administration system could yield benefits by reducing transaction costs and opportunities for rent seeking while freeing up people's time and resources to deal with production issues rather than with 'red tape'. The poor remain in the weakest group both socially and politically and are the least able to handle rent seeking, or to cut through red tape. Undesirable and arbitrary bureaucratic behavior directly hinders their social and economic endeavors more than those of any other group. Thus, the poor and deprived segments of society would be the greatest beneficiaries of administrative reforms.

PAR has been carried out since early 2001 in Quang Ngai. PPC put into effect an administration reform plan for the period 2001 to 2005, which focuses on four issues: (1) institutional administration reform, (2) administrative system reform, (3) strengthening capacity for staff and civil service employees and (4) public finance reform.

1.1. Institutional Administration Reform

According to information obtained through group discussions, the PPC has established legislative lobbies for investment, which dealt with the regulations of construction and investment management, ODA and FDI capital management, policies for investment in Dung Quat and other industrial zones in the province, and the regulation for the compensative rate of land restoration. Since January 2002, the PPC had experimentally applied a 'one stop shop' service. Firstly, it was applied to seven departments: Construction, Cadastral, Planning and Investment, Provincial Clerks, Project Management Unit of Industrial zones, Provincial Board of Compensation, and land restoration of Dung Quat industrial Zone. Up to this point, six of the seven departments were conducting a 'one stop shop' service that primarily favored institutions and people in administrative activities, especially in matters relating to land allocation, business permission and registration. The PPC considered these activities as an initial base for a broader experimental application of ISO 9000 standard in administration services in the coming years.

1.2. Administrative System and Act Reform

To modernize administrative management, the PPC has approved the program "Informatics application in governmental administration in the period 2001 to 2005" and the experimental application of ISO 9000 standard in administration services. A Center of Investment, Commercial and International Relationship Promotion was established based on the combination of the Center of Commercial Information and Tourism Promotion (of the Commercial and Tourism Department), the International Relationship Division (of provincial PC clerk) and the Investment Promotion Division (of DPI). This combination concentrated on the management and administrative practices into – as the saying goes – a 'one stop shop' in delivering services.

1.3. Strengthening Capacity for Staff and Civil Service Employees

In recent times, the process of regular staff allocation and redundant staff replacements was carried out at the same time using a re-structuring mechanism that produced a more responsive and effective administration service.

The staffs' planning, training and strengthening capacity activities are due to be completed during the period 2002 to 2007, of which the most important is the planning of personal resources for Provincial communist party congress in the 2006 to 2010 term.

1.4. Public Finance Reform

In public finance, the PPC carried out experimental assignments of staff regularization and administrative budgets in five institutions (three departments and two DPCs). The budget is assigned for three years (January 2003 to January 2005) with a rate of 21 million VND per capita per year. During the process of budget management decentralization, several DPCs implemented the decentralization and assigned responsibility for budget management to the education sector, thus creating a chance for this sector to work independently.

1.5. Summary

The province has made a lot of effort to change institutional and political mechanisms. The government structure has cut out wasted labor to become more responsive and efficient than before. The study team interviewed staff at provincial divisions, departments and professions that who were involved in experimental programs to implement reform. All of them had a good understanding of the provincial guidelines in administration reform. However, there are still some problems related to PAR in Quang Ngai.

- There are overlaps in several administrative procedures.
- The 'one stop shop' service was not expanded as much as expected, and its application met with lots of confusion.
- Almost all institutions that are not in an experimental application phase are still vague about public administration reform programs; their responses were "we did not know" or "it is just experimented in some institutions".
- The same situation occurs in the dissemination and implementation of the New Enterprise Law. DPI, Tax, Finance, PMU of industrial zones, and the provincial PC clerk understand this law but others lack information about it. The understanding of this law by business and the general public is also under question.
- The arrangement of non-productive offices and the privatization of sectors like education, health care and culture, as well as the implementation of new finance mechanisms in productive offices, have not matched the expectations of the provincial PC. The staff did not fully understand the responsibilities and position of public administration services and its privatization, as the custom is to rely on government-dependent thinking.
- The decentralization from provincial level to district level was not effective in some sectors, for example, veterinary, pest control and local health care systems.

2. Perception and Implementation of Administrative Restructure at District Level

2.1. Officials' Perception on Administrative Reform at District Level

The survey team conducted the study in the two districts of Son Ha and Tu Nghia. These two districts have different natural and socio-economic conditions, representing two mountainous regions that are geographically remote from the center and have difficult

access (Son Ha); and the coastal delta, with quite favorable traveling conditions and near to the town (Tu Nghia). The perception of the importance of administrative reform differs between each region.

Son Ha district

Officials in Son Ha district have only just heard about administrative reform, as the locality has not yet been selected for the pilot program. When applying PPA tools, however, to illustrate set questions, local officials all expressed the opinion that they have difficulties and encounter obstacles within the local administration structure. The decentralized management of plant and livestock protection units is one of the emerging concerns. The district Division of Agriculture and Rural Development, the current management board, is facing various constraints in conducting an effective operation, and is unable to directly manage these two bodies. Documents directing the administrative reform process, such as One Stop Shop, New Enterprise Law etc, have not been disseminated widely yet. In addition, the administrative apparatus that is responsible for such sectors as agro-extension, health, savings and credit, and forest allocation, among others, continues to have numerous shortcomings, caused by weak capacity and the low number of officials with expertise.

The situation above is not so particular to the case of Son Ha district, but can also be found over many localities of the province and nationwide. In fact, it can be seen that district officials are quite passive, and always wait for top-down instructions. This can take away development opportunities for the people, and local officials themselves, in the current process of open-economic reform and fierce competition in attracting domestic and foreign businesses to invest in the local area.

Tu Nghia district

Although Tu Nghia is not a pilot district for the model on democratic regulation and administrative reform, district Party People's Committee and People's Committee have both actively made decisions and plans for specific action plans (decision No.407 QD/UB and plan No.168 KH/UB dated July 3, 2003) for renewing and enhancing the quality of the political structure at district's town and grassroots commune levels.

Box F-1: Changes after the implementation of giving strong direction to administration reform.

Mr Soan, Head of Tu Nghia district's Division of Personnel, Department of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs

“At communes, before putting the democratic regulation into practice (Decree No 29), we operated under undemocratic conditions. The commune people's committee were themselves deciding to make decisions for all actions, then submitting to the district people's committee for approval. In quite a few cases decisions were made that did not represent villagers' needs. Requests were made for contributions to build schools, forcing villagers to pay according to the commune's orders. These payments were usually high and the allocation of the expenditure was not transparent, and this caused public dissatisfaction. Officials were bureaucratic in manner, and administrative services did not correctly and sufficiently respond to farmers' demands, claiming that the situation warranted their behavior, especially because of the continual demands made by the villagers. In some cases villagers gathered to demonstrate against the commune officials. In addition, there was agitation by some bad elements of society and some religious organizations that made the situation more complicated.”

“Since the district applied a strong-hand to administrative reform, apparatus organization and the implementation of democratic regulation, the situation has been much improved, and the number of claims has been substantially reduced. ”.

This schedule and action plan has concentrated on dealing with specific problems in the process, including checking and investigating the institutions linked with administrative actions, strengthening the governing machinery at all levels within the district, improving the effect of administrative management, addressing government employees' efficiency, and personnel planning.

Box F-2: Several activities of Tu Nghia district People's Committee are specified in the action plan No.168 KH-UB dated 3 July, 2003

- Professional divisions under district bodies need to actively arrange working regulations, to report to the People's Committee for approval and decision-making.
- The district organizes all administrative action at grassroots levels by strengthening all actions at commune level, such as making an agenda and publicizing the calendar to the people; a suggestion box should be available at the commune office.
- District personnel officials supervise grassroots levels to overcome slow-moving activities, bring people's participation fully into play, and deal with the burdens of administrative management.
- District's People Committee reviews and issues documents and regulations on the decentralization of management for commune government in the input and output of state budgets, staff organizations and management, land and housing management, environmental sanitation, management of medium and small sized projects funded by the state budget and people's contributions, educational materials management, and healthcare.
- District People's Committee also pays consideration to the province's People's Committee to adjust regulations for the organization of villages and wards for the clear identification of the function and responsibilities of the village head.

Many officials who are involved in the implementation of this policy were very positively voicing their opinions to the mission team on the importance of improving the efficiency of administrative procedures in the service of hunger eradication and poverty reduction.

2.2. Administrative Mechanism Reform at District Level

The reform of administrative mechanisms is one of the most important parts of the whole process of administrative reform. Local officials often passively wait for the promulgation of regulations and resolutions at the higher province level before carrying out the administrative reform. During the interviews and surveys, it was found that district officials, in fact, are able to understand the grassroots levels' situation and have the capacity to strengthen administrative mechanisms. However, the precondition is that core staff should have the knowledge of policy and procedures in order to implement urgent programs for economic development. This can be illustrated by the surveys. Tu Nghia district, with its favorable location, educated officials, and fierce competition in attracting investments from the town, has itself been aware that development needs not only preferential and supportive policies but also dynamic and flexible machinery, with a sound and open mechanism.

The research shows that both districts committed to having promoting a unique approach in the management of the agricultural sector, which was defined at province between the

plant protection unit and veterinary station (now under province's umbrella) and between agro-extension and the irrigation sector (now under district's management). Under the existing management mechanism, the district Division of Land Administration – only manages all collaborative activities relating to these two sectors but they are unable to directly manage other activities. This results in barriers in directing and dividing appropriate works and actions.

2.3. Implementation and Impediments in the Implementation of the Reforms for Strengthening the Capacity of District Officials

Enhancing an official's capacity is always considered a basic element in the development process. Generally it was found that leaders have been aware of these problems and have paid attention to overcoming them. With the creation of programs by the province for improving knowledge as the demands of the work increase, Tu Nghia district People's Committee has also actively set a planning process for their staff for the period 2005 to 2010. Contents of the planning are not publicized yet, but according to Mr Huynh Ngoc Soan, Head of Personnel, Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs, "planning will be finalized by 2010 for four core functions and five positions for districts and communes".

Communal officials' capacity is a decisive element in administrative reform, especially in difficult and remote communes. Generally, commune officials are limited in number. The number of commune officials categorized under the pre-official type is low. One commune on average has 19 officials; when they are close to retirement, a replacement is sought. As a district official said: "All holding a retirement certificate, then seeking for replacement". Even in Tu Nghia, where there are positive efforts to plan the recruitment of officials, the identification of leadership sources has only just begun and there is no specific plan for substitution at the commune level. Using PPA tools for analysis, the district would need six to seven substitution officers (at both commune and district levels) to ensure the quality of officials in employment and for further training.

According to Mr Soan the "village head works much harder than the commune's vice-chairperson!" As a regulation, the village head is now paid 100,000 VND per month through the province's budget; the remainder of the subsidy is provided by the locality (district level). However, actually putting solutions in to practice differs from one locality to another. Son Ha district can only provide sufficient amounts from the province's budget to village head. But Tu Nghia is in different circumstances. The district People's Committee decided that the wage for villages heads should be two thirds of the commune's vice-chairpersons, of which 100,000 VND comes from the province's budget and the remainder from the district's budget. At present in Tu Nghia the average salary of the village head is 230,000 VND per month and the position of village deputy head does not exist.

2.4. Public Finance Reform at District Level

Both studied districts have not implemented the pilot public financial reform in official planning and financial expenditure.

2.5. In Summary

Applying the PPA tools in the two districts of Son Ha and Tu Nghia, the study team encountered some problems in administrative reform at district level.

- District officials have a high perception of the role of administrative reform, especially in localities that have potential and favorable locations for the development of industrial and processing zones.

- The potential for district officials to manage themselves to execute reform of the administrative machinery is there; however, it still needs to have support from the province in localities that require assistance.
- It should encourage localities to implement administrative reform at the most suitable conditions in the locality.
- The role of planning for staff recruitment of young and capable officials is seen to be important, though the paradox is that a poor locality cannot attract educated officials. Local resources must be fully utilized to improve the capabilities of existing staff, as this is crucially necessary in both enhancing the efficiency of administrative machinery and saving for the state budget.
- District administrative machinery can quickly respond to the requirements of potential and current investors, even though the 'one stop shop' mechanism is not formally widespread. However, the lack of a specific sanction from top levels of government means continuing unforeseen elements for investors.

Some works have been decentralized to commune level; for example, revenue and expenditure of the state budget, personnel organization, land and housing management, environmental sanitation, management of medium and small sized projects funded by the state budget and people's contributions, and management of basic materials for education and healthcare. The results have shown more effective administrative procedures and a release of pressure on the work levels of district officials. Paradoxically, numerous difficult communes, with a high rate of poor households, have to depend on the district for support due to the lack of knowledge and capacity of commune officials. According to Mr Dinh Huy Thuc, secretary of Son Ba party's committee, Son Ha district the "commune's financial staff are too weak, unable to manage a balance-sheet for Program 135, and cannot even call for support from district financial staff".

The issue of public administration is totally new to district officials and even provincial officials. According to them, the purpose of government is to serve the people. Many administrative activities must be explained by government staff, even to poor and uneducated people, who must be persuaded and even given support to implement set schedules. In the opinion of the district officials, it is best to enhance the capacity of the administrative machinery, provide higher allowances, and fully inform people on upcoming orientations and directions. The way of thinking that people are 'clients' and officials are 'sellers' has not yet imprinted in the mind of both people and administrative officials.

During interviews, district officials all said they did not know about the New Enterprise Law 2000, even though some were from the district's Division of Planning and Investment. The main reason might be that there are few businesses operating in the locality. In an open market economic environment, professional staff are still poorly informed, which raises the question of how much information is available to private businesses and individuals.

3. Perception and Implementation of Administrative Reform at Commune Level

3.1. Perception of Administrative Reform

The four communes studied represent different natural and socio-economic conditions, different staff's capacity levels, and different ethnic peoples.

Commune officials had all heard about administrative reform and democratic regulation at grassroots level, except for the 'One Stop Shop' mechanism and the New Enterprise Law.

3.2. Implementation and Impediments in Implementing Administrative Institutional Reform at Commune Level

Throughout the survey, it was found that the provision of administrative services has progressed since 2000, the start of the implementation of administrative reform. Requirements for carrying out administrative procedures (birth certificates, marriage registration, registered resident book, temporary resident registration, etc) have been communicated by district officials to commune, from commune to village, and so on. Higher-level officials have had to take responsibility to inform lower level officials and actually visit the grassroots level to facilitate the implementation. Especially in areas where the villager's education is at a minimal standard, people's perceptions of the importance of administrative services almost do not exist, so this is still an effective measure.

Box F-3: Comments from legislation official of Son Cao commune

Mr. Duc: "Villagers' knowledge in the commune is low. Commune officials ensure all types of the most common public administrative procedures are known to villagers, and collect money in accordance with ministry of finance's regulations. For instance, a birth certificate form was sold for 1,000 VND, and the fee for making birth certificates was 3,000 VND but almost no household applied. When children go to school, once again we inform them that they must apply for a birth certificate as part of the regulations but no household complies; even many parents forget their children's birthday."

"The fee for making an ID card is 12,000 VND. Since 2002 officials visit the villages to persuade villagers to obtain a card but many households don't think it is necessary. However, to ensure the assigned plans, I still issue cards and then persuade the villagers to pay after."

"Villagers have been informed of the procedures for temporary resident registration, but they still do not follow them. The labor force goes far away for work but the villagers don't obey the requirements for registration of temporary residents, as well as identification cards. Recently, the police and I arrested a vehicle full of communal residents traveling far to seek work but no one had declared this at all. "

Many directives and policies of the Government on administrative procedures have not properly reached the farmers, due to the limitations on commune and village officials' knowledge. A village official when asked, "how is information disseminated to the villagers in commune meetings?" answered, "It is unavailable at the moment; I will recheck when meeting with the commune officials". We replied, "In case you have no chance of checking with commune officials?" We just received a free-minded smile for the answer!

Fee levels for undertaking administrative procedures in communes are the same as the regulation fee, and prices were suitable and checked by the study team through different information networks. Whatever the charge, the villagers do not implement these necessary procedures, especially in the poor communes. Commune officials informed us that living conditions are poor so the level of charge, however small, is unaffordable to

the farmers. Procedures may be simpler but this level of charge does not enable the poor to access all administrative procedures.

Table F-1: Fee levels for implementing administrative procedures at commune

| Administrative service | Total fee | Detail |
|---------------------------------------|------------|--|
| • Birth certificate | 4,000 VND | 1,000 VND certificate + 3,000 VND fee |
| • Marriage registration | 15,000 VND | 4,000 VND certificate + 1,000 VND paper + 10,000 VND fee |
| • Temporary leaving (from 1-6 months) | 15,000 VND | |
| • Making population declamation NK3 | 12,000 VND | 4,000 VND book + 8,000 VND file fee |
| • Identification card | 10,000 VND | 8,000 VND card + 2,000 VND file fee |

Throughout the survey it became clear that officials of some agencies don't create favorable conditions for implementing administrative services but use their power to increase the income for the commune to finance local infrastructure projects and.

Box F-4: How much to stamp an administrative document in Nghia An

Nghia An commune, Tu Nghia district

The commune has a plan to make concrete inter-village roads, using villagers' contribution. The commune has a large population and management of its affairs is complicated. The livelihood of the villagers of the commune is based on fishing far from their homes. The commune people's committee gave a directive that anyone who obtains any administrative permission or certifying documents from the commune will be charged and that these charges will be used for the purpose of constructing the road (from 100,000 VND per poor household to 400,000 VND per better-off household). This leads to a situation where many villagers would rather not obtain birth certificates for their children or identification cards than pay that large amount!

The provision of administrative procedures, judging by the comments of the commune's officials, is sometimes slow. The main reason is that responsible officials have insufficient knowledge and capacity to make the right decisions (especially in regards to easily disputed issues like land allocation, or social assistance from the Department of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs). Local officials pretend to be waiting for a related agency's participation as an excuse for delaying the decision.

Emerging problems related to the implementation of administrative procedures have distinct features at each studied commune. It illustrates the diversity of villagers' demands, as well as the way problems are dealt with by the local officials.

The study also reveals that the transparency of the commune's administrative activities is considered to be improving. Volunteer services in implementing administrative procedures are now in place, decreasing demands on public administrative services, though they still contain outdated facets.

Box F-5: Perception of commune's official on administration reform

Mr Trai, Chairman, Son Ba commune people's committee:

Administrative reform since 2000 is more favorable to the people. The legislation sector has effective actions, with encouraging results in the provision of administrative services, and it is more convenient for people to receive public services.. Transparency

in administrative works, particularly in finance, has to be communicated to the people, and directives all have to be reported to the people.

Box F-6: How officials provide extra administrative service

Mr Nem, Secretary, Son Cao party committee:

Administrative procedures have been improved. For example, recently, the commune has directed the land administrative sector to deal with disputes on land claims as soon as possible. However, there remain a number of shortcomings. For instance, a commune official assisted villagers to receive allowances faster. The money was not given to the villagers but kept by the official. The villagers in reality received the allowances in the form of grocery from the official's own store which are charged at a higher price.

3.3. Implementation and Impediments in Implementing Mechanism Reform and Recruitment at Commune Level

At present, a commune has 19 members (including positions in the Party, People's Council, People's Committee, functional officials and mass organizations). Responsibility for administrative activities are now assigned to various individuals, but one official still has to cover different areas of responsibility.

The commune is divided into smaller villages, then residential areas and then production groups. The province and district decided that each village should have only one head and no deputy head, but in fact all surveyed communes have a deputy head. Besides village officials, there are policemen, village health workers, and personnel in mass organizations.

The biggest problem at present in poor communes is the capacity and education level of officials. Lack of hard work plus a low education level has a strong impact on the organization, efficiency and arrangement of programs. Training for the future replacement of officials is also a concern. Children growing up within the district are the most obvious choices for training to become officials, but experienced on-the-job training is really a necessary element.

Box F-7: Comments from Secretary of Son Ba Party Committee

Mr Thuc, Secretary, Son Ba party committee:

The management system should supplement the commune's regular staff; we require five more administrative positions.

The assistant official for the commune is now supplemented from the province, but he graduated from land administration so his experience with other administration and legal documents remains insufficient.

The financial staff are ineffectual, and incapable of managing the balance sheet for Program 135, so the commune chairperson has to directly work with district Program 135 management board.

The staff of the Department of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs also have a weak capacity; even those voted into the Party and People's Committee who have a Grade 12 education level, cannot work efficiently.

The agro-forestry sector has no professional staff to take charge, and so the commune's vice-chairperson is in charge of the agricultural sector but has no professional knowledge. Therefore all professional works cannot be supervised. If there can be no professional staff for the agro-extension sector, then the district agro-extension workers should conduct more training to support farmers.

The practice of placing graduate students in the commune to help the commune's officials is highly appreciated, and received numerous support from the communes' officials. But, as Mr Thuc mentioned, their fields of study differ from what they face day-to-day in the commune. Consideration should be given to this point when the province and district continue this practice.

The practice of shifting commune's officials in to permanent civil servants, according to various opinions from the commune, should be considered carefully in terms of education level as well as professional knowledge. Since the number of officials are abundant, but those who can meet the demands of their work are lacking, who should be shifted to the position of civil servant and who should not poses a big question. Higher salary and subsidies for civil servants make the idea of shifting officials more attractive to some. But many officials said that, at present, after being busy with piles of paperwork in the mornings, they then go to grassroots sites in the afternoon. If they became civil servants, how could they visit the sites We found that opinions on shifting officials into the civil service were not the same.

Box F-8: Perception on working time of commune officials

Mr Nac, legislation official in Son Ba commune, Son Ha district

When being asked about administrative reform and your idea on shifting officials into civil servant, he said: "At the moment we work only in the morning, and we have heard that if we became civil servants, we will have to work **24 hours per day**".

The type of discipline applied to incapable officials who breach regulations attracted much discussion at commune level. When we asked, "Does the chairman of the commune people's committee have the power to sack officials or reject an elected position?" Mr Thuc, Communist party secretary of Son Cao commune hesitated. "... No, and it is good if that works..." He still wants to be the person responsible in the district for personnel management, but added that it "...should be subject to the approval of the district to avoid mistakes". Mr Nem, Secretary of Communist party committee in Son Ba commune said: "in many cases, the officials are weak in capacity but we cannot replace them because that person has been approved by the people's council".

Village officials are the ones who directly work with villagers. Mr Soan in Tu Nghia district observed that the "village head works much harder than the commune's vice-chairperson!" The village head plays a key role in the dissemination of information to households in his residential area. The village head defines the degree in which villagers can have relationships with higher-level administrative bodies. He has a great influence over the quantity and quality of the information that the villagers get from the Government. He propagates the State's policies and plays a role in providing feedback from the bottom up to higher levels of government.

Since most villagers go to the village head to ask for information, and to send their petitions to higher levels, it is important to know how fair and how well the village heads push information upwards. In many cases, there are clear signs of bias, depending on the village head's own interests. New requests for information from poor households can be rejected and not reported to higher levels because the village heads are afraid of bearing responsibility. Village heads can overuse their power to benefit their family and friends.

One important thing to note is that all village heads are men and, as a result, their attention to the urgent needs of women in poor households is minimal.

Our recommendations for administration reform at commune level, based on information gained from PPA tools, are as follows.

- There have been some positive changes in the reform of administrative procedures at commune level but the pace is very slow.
- Poor households cannot access fundamental administrative papers and procedures due to economic difficulties. As a consequence, it makes it harder to send children to school, borrow capital from the bank or assure employment rights.
- There have been some private administrative services but they are not organized. As a result, the poor cannot benefit from these services.
- Procedures for land allocation and afforestation display signs of corruption and the misuse of power to benefit the relatives and friends of officials in the commune.
- Transparency and equality are always in mind but not really implemented. It can be seen in the difference between the living conditions of commune officials and the villagers. This also is illustrated by comparing villages. In Son Ba and Son Cao, the villages that have more officials, are richer than other villages in the same communes.
- The importance of capacity building for commune officials has been noted by higher levels of government and some measures have been carried out such as to regularly exchange staff, and to support graduate students to work as secretaries for the commune chairperson. But there are limitations. Exchange officials found it difficult to work in a new environment, particularly when faced with local concerns. Graduate students, following the regulations, have no power and can only complete minor tasks like finalizing a report or correcting documents. They cannot promote socio-economic development or put scientific techniques into practice. Meanwhile, PPA tools proved that the demand for officials with expertise, especially in the agricultural sector, is quite large.
- PPA tools also illustrated the great demand for knowledge on developing business, economic shifts, farming economy and large-scale production to push the commune's economy, but these demands have not been touched upon yet.

4. Villagers and Administration Reform

4.1. Villagers' Perception of Administration Reform

PPGA results showed that villagers realized the initial success of the administration reform through more convenient and faster processes in administrative procedures: "Normally it takes one day to finish". However, information is disseminated differently in the study areas. In villages that are far from the central commune (such as Xa Ay and Lang Gia village) villagers often lack the knowledge to conduct procedures, or have few opportunities to implement them.

Box F-9: Problem of villagers' awareness of administration reform

In 2000, ID cards were publicized to villagers in Lang Gia village, Son Ba Commune. Commune officials communicated to the village heads, who informed the leaders of the production team, who then publicized to the villagers. To obtain an ID card, each person has to pay 12,000 VND, (or 15,000 VND in a different village). However, at the time the provincial police made the ID cards, villagers did not have enough money to

pay for the card. In contrast, villagers may have enough money but not at the time the provincial police are making the cards.

At a meeting of the poor families group, Mr Phan and another poor man from the Bung village, Son Ba Commune said that they did not know what the ID card is!!!

Administrative service fees are widely known to the villagers and they were able to list them for the survey team. This is a result of successful efforts by commune and village officials. The problem of officials charging a higher cost, or making difficulties with payments, was not often mentioned, except one case of a DOLISA official in Son Cao commune.

The study team asked whether the service fees were reasonable, and villagers replied: "poor families are in too much financial difficulty to buy a document for the birth registration". The difficulties are even more for self-supported families located in upland and remote areas, even though the certificate costs only 2,000 or 3,000 VND. The question is whether the government reduces or exempts administration fees for poor families.

Administrative procedures directly effect families, especially the poor ones who do not have enough money to pay the administrative fees. Even in the family of the leader of the Lang Gia village, the last-born child is attending Grade 1 without a birth certificate. This leader did not know about the procedure for birth registration. He thought the teachers would do it for their students. In fact, the birth dates for children are not accurate, and based mainly on the number of years that he/she had been registered. Therefore there are some children who are learning in Grade 1 or 2 but who are actually older than others in the grade.

Concerning the process for making ID cards, most households could not borrow money due to the lack of an ID card. They said that they couldn't afford the costs of 12,000 VND at the time the police officers conducted this process. Even during the interviews, some villagers still answered that the cost is too expensive to pay.

4.2. Related Procedures for Implementation and Reflection from Households

a. Procedure of Allocation for Agricultural Land (Red Book) and Forestland

Agricultural land allocation processes in surveyed sites almost completely followed the Government's Decree 64 ND/CP. The fee is 10,000 VND per 'red book' and most households complied because villagers perceived the advantages of this work.

Communal registration staff, together with village heads and production team leaders measured the area of land to allocate. Villagers who are owners of the land cannot take part in this process. According to several comments, the allocated area was inadequately recorded in the 'red book'. We agreed with Mr Ni, deputy chief of Lang Gia village, who said: "even a 'wise guy' who tried to re-measure would know that the allocated land was inadequate". Actually, there were two households whose allocated land was less than they believed it should be, and they asked the registration official to re-measure and re-allocate the land. Despite paying 10,000 VND for the 'red book', the farmers were very excited about its advantages.

There were erupting conflicts over the forestland allocation, protection and plantation activities. The PPGA's results showed that the process of forest plantation planning took place without villagers' participation, that the choice of allocated households was

doubtful, and that the conflicts about allocated forest were not solved effectively. The conflict is not only between villagers and communal officials but also between villages, because some villagers in one village were allocated forestland in the area of another village.

Box F-10: Problems in forestland allocation in Son Cao commune, Son Ha district

In Son Cao commune, Mr Pheng, chief communal clerk, is responsible for forest plantation's management. Forestland allocation began its implementation process. The commune informed the head and deputy head of the village in order to hold a meeting for household registration. The registered household would be given money for planting and transporting the seedlings (planting: 936,000 VND/ha, taking care: 300,000 VND/ha/year, regenerating: 52,000 VND/ha/quarter). However, in the village meeting, a farmer objected to planting in the forest because numerous forestland areas were cassava planted terrace-fields. The allocated households (approximately 30 households) did not have this kind of terrace-field. Communal staff instructed the villagers to plant in >15° sloped land, but now the trees are planted right at the foot of the mountain. The planter spoke directly "to plant is to plant, but we would pull them all out then". Village staff were powerless, communal officials had no comment!

There was a problem in the commune because some villagers wanted to forest but they were not accepted. In Son Ba and Son Cao communes, forestland under 372CT and five million hectares forest programs are allocated mostly to the commune leaders and better-off villagers. The afforestation allocation was not communicated in open meetings; there was no vote for the allocation. Villagers said that, "only officials from the level of village chief and over would be allocated". They also said that "the poor must not plant cinnamon trees"; communal authorities "would allocate some officials without the agreement of the poor".

b. Procedure in Access Credit and Loans

The PPGA showed that the need for borrowing money is large but financial procedures were not available to poor households. Mr Them, from Nghia An commune, said that he wrote an application but it had been rejected without explanation, and he cannot understand the reason why. After we checked, we were told that the reason is that there were so many villagers in the commune who failed to pay back the loans by the due date, so that the bank will not finance poor households. The real problem is that these reasons are not explained or communicated to the villagers.

Box F-11: Question of financing registration

Mr Phan (Son Cao commune) said that from 2000 there were 100 households who had registered already with Mr Trinh, Chairman of the commune's Farmer Association. Each household paid 2,000 VND, and then signed (or finger printed) the loan application form. Three years have passed by and people forgot what is in the form, they do not know where their files are at the moment, they are not financed yet and they did not know who they could ask. Some villagers asked Mr Trinh and were told that it is at a "higher level".

c. Administrative Procedures for Merit Certificate Holders

In some regions, the implementation of rewarding men and women for their contribution to the national liberation cause was facing big problems such as in Xa Ay and Lang Tra

villages, Son Cao commune. In Xa Ay village, 25 households claimed for their contribution and 18 households were approved and granted a certificate of merit but these people have still not been given money. The same thing happened in Lang Tra village with many certificate of merit holders not rewarded.

The big problem is that the officials in charge of filing documents for the certificate of merit asked the applicants to share their money if they are rewarded. This information was verified at a feedback meeting with the commune and communal policeman who said that, "of course, those men of merit have to share because it is a service". This information was re-checked, and it illustrates a more serious situation of corruption than was first realized.

Box F-12: Problems of charging higher 'service costs' for merit-people of Son Ba commune, Son Ha district

Information from in-depth interviews showed that there is a case of a communal social affairs official, who also has his own business selling groceries and machines. He often asked for money (higher than regular) for procedures to help villagers get subsidies from MOLISA. He made villagers who could receive money buy things from his business but pay back later at a very high cost. When their money was allocated, he just receives money from these people. The interviewee (in Lang Bung village) admitted that he had received 1.4 million VND from the reward of the first class medal. He had to give 400,000 VND to those who had assisted him to receive the reward through this communal social affairs official; other villagers have to do the same. The official also continued to earn more money by forcing villagers to purchase at a high price.

d. Propaganda System and Implementation of Democratic Regulations

In remote communes, the problem of communication is not only because of non-participating households but also careless propaganda staff. Many villagers said that because they were illiterate they cannot write down the directives and then they forget. For this reason, we should have a better method to disseminate and communicate information to the villagers. It could be via a broadcasting system; for instance, in Son Ba commune, because of the difficult geographic conditions, the way to the center is to cross the river without a bridge, so that propaganda staff cannot go in to the village, especially in rainfall season.

Villagers' knowledge of democratic regulations and administrative renovation in communes is insufficient. When we asked villagers whether they knew about democratic regulation, all the answers were unspecific. For example, democratic regulations were understood as inviting the old man of village for meetings then talk about great national unity, helping each other... In fact, they have no idea on the democratic regulations.

We asked the question: "Do you know about the rights of citizens? Do you know where to go if you need to complain?" Most villagers answered that they would come to see the village head or higher to the communal chairman, but when they were asked, what if the complaint is about the chairman?, they did not know who they would go to see.

More important, villagers reflected on the deficiency in administrative responsibility. Many villagers said, "I have some questions about forest-land allocation. I asked the village head, and he said ask the commune staff. When I came to the commune staff they said go back to ask the village head. Finally I did not know who I can ask."

e. Household's Evaluation of Administrative System and Procedure

In meetings, when they were asked whether the communal officials work effectively or not, the villagers had no answer; they just looked at each other, then bent down. They answered, after being encouraged, "...still not good in some matters". By using PPA tools, the research team has identified the following problems.

- So many communal officials do not understand the activities and detailed tasks of the commune. They are elected to hold the post on a short-term basis and they are not so interested in doing the work. Many of them are authoritative.
- Communal officials try to limit the publicity of its activities and the status of implementation-related regulations and programs. Particularly, no one knows about annual income and expenditure of the commune's budget in the four surveyed communes.
- Villagers cannot recommend anything on measures to improve the working quality of communal officials. They do not know how they can help.
- Villagers have not heard of, and cannot imagine, a policy to shift communal officials into permanent civil servants.

G. ENVIRONMENT AND ITS DEGRADATION

1. General Status

The environmental issue in Quang Ngai province generally, and in the surveyed sites particularly, is alarming. Environmental deterioration and resource shortages have become a great threat to the life of villagers. Deforestation, severe shortage of water sources, and soil slides and erosion in the mountainous region, as well as overpopulation, water source pollution, uncontrolled solid wastes and the habit of indiscriminate defecation in the coastal regions, make it difficult to manage and protect the environment. The habits of the villagers also contribute to this difficulty. For example, in the mountainous areas, most households do not have latrines, and in the coastal areas only 10 percent of households have latrines. Moreover, fishing using explosives, poison, electricity and “*gia cao - net trawling*” has exhausted the fish populations of the region. This is one of the reasons that have led villagers to the abyss of poverty.

2. Definition of ‘Environment’

The number of villagers and officials with knowledge of the environment was very small. Only younger people could talk about environmental issues. Provincial and district officials did not express their opinions on the current environmental situation. After talking with officials in four communes, it was found that only Mr Thuc, Secretary of Party, Son Ba commune, could explain his understanding of the environment. He said: “the environment is the forest coverage, water sources, traffic works, schools, difficult living standards and low intellectual levels of the villagers”. In spite of a lack of knowledge about environment, villagers in mountainous and coastal areas were still able to give us their specific definition of the word ‘environment’.

Box G–1: Definition of environment by villagers

| By villagers in mountainous areas | By villagers in coastal area |
|---|--|
| ‘Environment’ is the forests, soil, water, traffic, and unbridled animal husbandry. | ‘Environment’ is the surrounding factors that directly affect our health and life such as sanitation, wastes, green trees, food safety, air, climate, disasters and natural resources. |

3. Natural Resources and the Behavior of the Communities

The Government and local authorities have already issued policies on the improvement and protection of resources but, contrary to expectations, the resources have been in short supply and ineffectively used. In practice, overexploitation, and inefficient and uncoordinated management, coupled with the impact of natural disasters, is the cause of this shortage and ineffective usage.

3.1. Forest Resources

Forest coverage, as compared to 10 years ago, is greater, which is a result of State policies concerning afforestation and prohibition of wood exploitation. Despite these policies, deforestation for cultivation and illegal wood exploitation is still popular. For example, it was evident that Mr Vip possessed two paddy fields and was intending to make more; his house was newly-built with timber exploited by himself from the natural forest. On 11 July 2003, the villagers of Son Ba commune discovered Mr Ra illegally exploiting dozens of cubic meters of wood.

In Son Ba commune, afforestation programs were allocated mostly for officials of the communes and village heads. They received payments (995,000 VND per hectare) from Mr Thai and Mr Vuong (former Deputy Chairman of Son Ha district), and then asked for other villagers to grow the trees. There was unequal access to the afforestation because farmers, especially poor farmers, really wanted to grow trees but did not have a chance. For instance, Lang Bung village received an allowance to plant 50 new hectares, in which village heads received 12 hectares. The rest was allocated to officials of the commune and villagers in other villages. In particular, Mr Ut, Chairman of the Communal People's Council was given six hectares.

Box G–2: Wishes of villagers in forest protection and afforestation

Villagers expressed wishes that: They liked to have allocation of land and forest, and to afforest. The distribution of afforestation contracts had to be really equal, so that everyone would have a right to afforestation and forest protection. Seedlings, according to them, should be valuable ones such as cinnamon, acacia, etc. By such works, the forest will be protected and exploited effectively.

3.2. Land Resources

Villagers' use of land for cultivation has been stable since their land-use right certificates were granted. Some households at present are landless because a large area of land is annually washed away. Moreover, the ground surface is often eroded so the arable land has become sterile and insufficiently watered. The phenomena of soil sliding in mountainous areas near rivers and streams in highland regions, flooding and erosion by the sea in coastal regions, continuously occur. For instance, in 1986 a mountainous collapse filled in some arable land and killed 17 people in Ranh village, Son Ba commune. In 1999, another strong landslide broke up 32 houses in Nghia An commune. Many households in Nghia Tho commune have no more land for cultivation because of land collapses. An example is that of Mr Mau, from Village No 2, who did not have any land for cultivation and had to earn his living from rock mining.

Villagers here considered that it would be useless if they had land without water. Irrigation works are a great demand of the villagers in the two highland communes of Son Ba and Son Cao.

Since 1976, the coastal land of Nghia An commune has been eroded by approximately 400 meters by sea waves. Three households in Tan My village of this commune had to build their houses near a graveyard. Mrs Viet in Pho An village said: "If there are not any measures to prevent the sea waves hitting the shore, only in a few years, the villagers in Nghia An commune will have no place to bury their dead bodies when they die".

Box G–3: Wishes of villagers towards improvement of land resource

Villagers wished that: the local authorities should have measures to prevent land collapses by building wave-stopping dykes, planting bamboo along rivers, streams, and at the same time speeding up the Terraced Field Improvement Program proposed by Quang Ngai Provincial People's Committee. It should be coupled with the provision of consultancy services, technical assistance, extended agricultural encouragement networks, agricultural services, good irrigation works and replacement of seedlings for the dry areas.

3.3. Water Resources

Compared to a few years ago, the water source is drying up to a much greater extent. More than 50 percent of the cultivation area that has not been irrigated generates only one crop instead of the double crops that occurred before. Mrs Tin in Bung village, Son Ba commune, said: “My family would get rid of poverty if we had enough irrigation water”.

River and stream water levels have visibly gone down. Many streams have run dry. Son Cao commune has four completely dry streams, some malfunctioning irrigation works, 32 dams in which only three contain water, and some leaky irrigation channels with too much soil and too many rocks clogging the flow. The inner field channel system for three western communes in Tu Nghia district has been invested with dozens of billion VND, but according to Mr Tam, Chief of District Agriculture and Rural Development Department: “it has only been the place for mice to reside since completion”.

Water sources in the coastal region have been heavily polluted due to the solid wastes and plant protecting chemicals. Villagers in Ly Son village are still using DDT for onion and garlic crops. Ms Van, from Tan My village, Nghia An commune, said: “Because of the dirty water and indiscriminate defecation, women here usually suffer from gynecological diseases”.

The quantity of clean water works was too little and they usually run dry during the dry season. Furthermore, polluted water sources have brought diseases to the villagers’ shrimp ponds and caused great losses for them. In Nghia An commune, 40 households are in debt as a result of the failure of their shrimp crops. Mr Hay, who used to be a shrimp pond owner, now earns his living by working as a hired laborer.

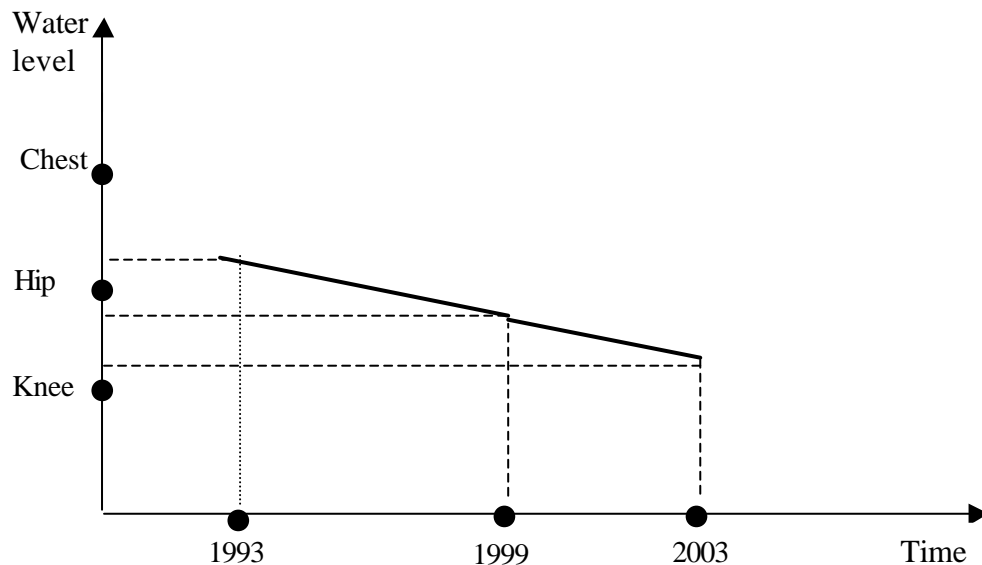
The number of clean water works is too few, and they usually run dry during dry seasons. Villagers from mountainous regions mainly take water from rivers and streams or from shallow dug wells around the field edges near their villages. For example, in Tra village, Son Cao commune, there were 215 households but only two community wells were dug. Many poor women in Gia village said that the whole village had to suffer from spotted scabies and trachoma diseases in 2002 because of this lack of water. In Nghia An commune, there were two water supply facilities, in which one, funded by a private company, was serving about 65 percent households. But its water was dirty and salty because there is no water treatment system. Another, aided by the Vietnamese Australian Project, has still not been used for two years since its completion.

Box G-4: Wishes of the villagers in regard to water management

Villagers expressed wishes that: The Government would give priority to construction and improvement of irrigation works. In addition, they wanted to submit their suggestions to the local leadership surveying process, so that the completed works would be suitable for them. They found it necessary to strengthen and evenly distribute welfare projects to the residential areas, and especially that these works should be implemented in the dry season in order to avoid water shortage. Mr Hung in Son Cao commune said that: “If the electricity agency had consulted with the villager when they did their surveys for the installation of electricity cables, we would have been much more benefited because we would have suggested three phase electricity that could be used for a water pumping station.”

Figure G-1: Flow chart of Re River water level in Son Ba commune in June annually

Water levels down: Dry weather, little rain



Much deforestation

3.4. Marine Resources

Marine resources have decreased to an alarming extent. In 2003, there were many households becoming poor or 're-poor' due to the extreme decrease of fishing outputs. The fishing season was about to end, but the output has not reached even one-third in comparison with the same periods before. A strange fact this year is that many jellyfish and seaweed are floating in the sea. Forecasting works, as well as consultancy services, technical assistance and communication have not reached the villagers. Mr Dinh Phong from Pho An village, Nghia An commune, said: "I believe that the villagers here have never met any encouragement from fishery officials or those from the Sea Product Protection Sub-department".

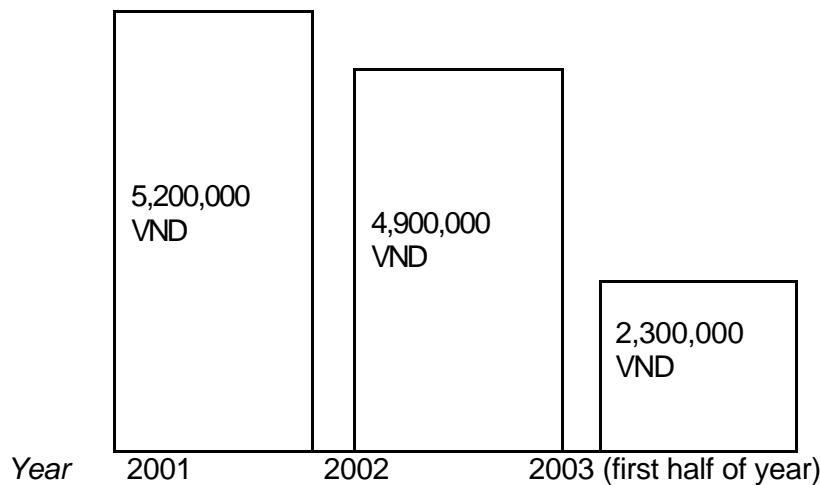
Nghia An commune had two waterways for boats and ships to go in and out but both of them have been filled and not dredged for a long time. Some households even illegally occupied rivers to build shrimp ponds but had not been fined by the local authorities. One hundred percent of the officials and villagers shared the common opinion that the main cause for the extermination of sea creatures was the use of explosives, striking power and 'net trawling' fishing.

Box G-5: Villagers' view on how to improve marine resources

In order to improve marine natural resources, the villagers thought that: The Government should assist villagers in borrowing capital for off-shore fishing by establishing groups of joint-stock fishers who would contribute their own capital for ship building and procurement of fishery equipment. Relevant organizations should provide the villagers with exact forecast information on conditions and places to fish, and at the same time completely stop illegal fishing. When transferring 'net trawling' fishing licenses, it is necessary to reduce the license taxes and arrange to collect resource exploitation taxes only once and in one place. Villagers also expressed their

wishes to diversify the income by creating jobs for women.

**Figure G-2: Average income of seven discussion households
(Tan My village, Nghia An commune)**



Incomes down due to continuously decreased fishing output

4. Equality in Access Ability to Public Properties

It is the Government's wish that all people benefit from public property sources to improve their standard of living. The fact is that the poor are very limited in their access to public property and rarely benefited from State priority policies. The poor were not allocated land for afforestation or allowed to participate in training courses or modeling shows because, according to the local officials' explanations, they did not have sufficient resources for the implementation. Thach Nham Upstream Afforestation Project, successfully bid by Mr Thai who then divided it into pieces for the communal officials and some other households to afforest, is an example. According to Mr Long, Deputy Director of the Department of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs: "The villagers live in the forest but are not benefiting from it".

Publicly dug wells were usually concentrated in the commune center, while the poor did not commonly live in these areas. Regarding exploitation of sea creatures, the poor only worked as hired laborers for the ship owners. Many households without land for cultivation were not allocated with additional land, while the standby land was allocated to the officials or the wealthier. This is very typical in Nghia Tho commune.

5. Strategies to Solve Problems and Key Challenges

Problems that concern the local officials were water source shortage, sterile land, forest and land allocation, emptied resources and solid waste management.

| Local authority's policies | Difficulties in finding solutions to resource improvement |
|---|--|
| Program considered the biggest now for land improvement in the mountainous region was the Terraced Field Improvement Program. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complex geographic location, too big slopes, continuous collapse and erosion. • Poor agricultural network. • Investment and contribution from the villagers. • Villagers' shortage of manure as a result of |

| | |
|--|--|
| | indiscriminate animal husbandry. |
| Replacement of traditional seedlings to solve water shortage problems | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Villagers' habit of single-crop rice cultivation. • Alternative seedlings that produced low income not attractive to villagers. |
| Issuance of guidelines on land and forest allocation. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Villagers' inability to access forest allocation. • Knowledge of local officials could not meet requirements of determination of areas, locations, quantity of lots and mapping for land and forest allocation. • Too limited annual guidelines on afforestation that lead to inequality and inability in speeding up afforestation. |
| Coordination with the Forestry Agency in preparation of forest protection regulations. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited budgets. • Poor education and communication. • Signals, prohibition boards or equipment for forest fire fighting have not been equipped. |
| Cooperation with the national defense post and marine police in suppressing illegal fishing. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weak marine police force. • The cooperation was not close enough and the performance was not usually carried out. |
| Resolution has been passed by the Communal People's Council to encourage villagers to change their fishing jobs. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Villagers were short of capital. • 'Net trawling' fishing is a traditional job. |
| Solid waste treatment and latrine building matters have already been paid attention. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A master plan for solid waste treatment has not been carried out. • Villagers have not been assisted in borrowing money for building household latrines. |
| <p>Apart from the above-mentioned difficulties, it should also be noted that the knowledge and ability of the communal officials is too poor while the population per unit is too big. For example, Nghia An commune had a population of 17,000 but was only divided into two unit villages. Except for the movement of the villagers to replace their traditional seedlings for solutions to the water shortage, the local officials could not come up with any other possible methods other than waiting for the Government's investment projects or programs.</p> | |

6. Methods to Improve Environment Management and Protection

- Speed up the socialization of environment by strengthening the close coordination among management branches and levels. Seriously consider including environmental education in school curriculums. Mr Tan, Environment Manager of the Provincial Resource and Environment Department said: "The coordination among the agencies and management branches is too slack and environmental education in schools is too limited".
- Build strategies for socio-economic development in connection with environment management works.

- Strengthen the management distribution and hand over authority to the local levels and villagers. The management levels, in making plans, should develop environment management and protection proposals.
- Apply civil and criminal treatment solutions to violating individuals and collectives.
- Consider environment management and protection works as competitive prizes to assess criteria for the local organizations, agencies and residential areas.
- Encourage entrepreneurs to invest in raw material areas for the villagers to have opportunities to access the resources.
- Privatize some kinds of services such as the water supply and solid waste treatment.

7. Response of Different Groups to Questions Posed

The contents of feedback from the various villager groups were similar but the villagers' feedback contradicted that of the officials.

| Officials' feedback | Villagers' feedback |
|---|--|
| "The environment is deteriorating and resources are being emptied" (Feedback from both the villagers and officials) | |
| "There is no household in my commune that is short of agricultural land," said Mr Pham Lai, Land Official of Nghia Tho Communal People's Committee. | "There have been many households running out of lands to cultivate because of the land being washed away by floods, and even they have already requested the communal authorities to reallocate them with land from the standby land fund but have not succeeded," confirmed the villagers in Village 2. |
| "The villagers have already been allocated with 3.7 hectares of forest," stated the Officials of Nghia Tho Communal People's Committee. | "That was not the forest allocation guidelines. The allocated forests were the ones the villagers planted on the hillsides," confirmed the villagers. |
| "The villagers have been equal and fair beneficiaries," confirmed the official groups from Son Ba commune. | "The villagers had not been allowed to afforest and only the officials and the rich had access to the afforestation," commented the villagers. |

Although the environment and resources have now deteriorated, the awareness of the villagers has been remarkably improved. The evidence is that the villagers have expressed their concrete concerns about environment and resources and they have also expressed their valuable opinions and made recommendations that will contribute to a general environmental improvement.

H. KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Introduction

The overall objective of the PPA in Quang Ngai Province in the Central Coast Region was to assess people's perceptions on: issues related to poverty and its determinants with special reference to non-material dimensions of poverty, poverty dynamics, and sources of vulnerability; the quality and effectiveness of service delivery; voice and participation in local planning and policy making processes at the local level; quality and targeting of social assistance; progress made in public administration reform; and issues concerning migration, environmental degradation in relation to poverty.

The PPA was carried out in Son Ha and Tu Nghia of Quang Ngai province. The PPA team spent 20 days in the field, meeting 640 people in 4 communes of 2 districts of Quang Ngai. 13 out of 14 communes in Son Ha district belong to Program 135 (except Di Lang town). The heroic commune of Nghia Tho is one of the poorest communes in the Tu Nghia that rejected to be listed in 135 program. Nghia An is located on an isolated island, connecting with main land by a new private built bridge. Following are the key findings of the PPA and ensuing recommendations.

2. Key Findings and Recommendations

2.1. Perception on Poverty and Poverty Dynamics

Findings

The perception of poverty varies from group to group, area to area and is different from MOLISA's perception. People know more about the society and more interactions with outside world due to the development of roads and migration trends.

Physical infrastructure (roads, schools and electricity supply) has been significantly improved in recent years in the area, which paves the way for the development of the poor people whose living conditions actually have not changed much in recent years.

On the other hand, living conditions of salaried people (including government officials, leaders and officials, and other who get salary from the Government), are improving very much. These people make use of their power position to bring many privileges for themselves and their relatives.

The poor always are the last ones to benefit from the social programs because of weaknesses in administration and information lopsidedness. Majority of them are also illiterate. Poor people are still being dependent on other better-off groups because of the lack of alternatives and opportunities in terms of markets, access to credit and information.

Reasons for being poor, according to the local officials, included the lack of capital, arable land, knowledge and skill to adopt new extension technologies. It is also the result of underdeveloped market economy in the surveyed communes.

Recommendations

There should be simpler but more specific criteria to define poor households, the poor households should be listed publicly on the notice board of commune office.

Physical infrastructure construction must go hand in hand with training courses on small household economic development models; helping family businesses by giving various kinds of small loan and credit. Information on the administration system must be widely disseminated.

Most people in the surveyed area recommended the Government to invest more on small irrigation works and they believe that it is useful to reduce poverty because it will create higher food productivity, especially for paddy.

2.2. Villagers' Participation in Decision Making Process

Findings

Indirect participation of the poor is limited because they do not have real and reliable representation in the local government. The election of people's council, in many cases, does not reflect the wish of the villagers. Direct participation of people in local planning is limited.

Planning process in the surveyed communes is still mainly top-down based on the fixed budget allocation and planned indicators. Most of the annual plans are the duplicates of the previous ones; therefore participation of the local leaders and people is poor, and local influence is limited. No planning is done at the village level.

In spite of the intended meaningful effects of the grassroots democracy on the community life, its implementation varies from place to place, and to a certain extent it depends on the preferences of the local leaders.

The poor participation together with poor supervision often leads to the poor quality of public construction works. Poor management and lack of effective monitoring and supervising systems are the other factors causing the poor implementation of the REDC at the commune level. People do not know where to go for making a complaint, they seem to have a very vague idea on how the administration system works.

Implementation of REDC at the commune levels is affected by a number of factors, including capability of local leaders and their accountability, local institutions, information access and villagers' intellectual standards. While there is stated government policy of local level democracy, poor people and disadvantaged groups still have low voice at common village meetings.

Recommendations

Since decentralization and local democracy have proven their leading influence in mobilization and wide participation of villagers in multi-aspect of the community socio-economic life, it is necessary to have a clearer and legitimate framework and guidelines for implementation. It is important to accelerate decentralization at commune level, and enhance the involvement of communes in physical construction work.

Local level government officials and officials should be provided with necessary knowledge and skills in management and communication so that they can fulfill their tasks more efficiently. This is an important task to reduce the government policy misinterpretation to the villagers, continue to apply the policy of employing graduate students come to work in the communes.

Local leaders should provide people with reliable and transparent information. This is a crucial issue. Since people do not have information, they do not know how the local

government works and then they become suspicious of everything because of sheer ignorance. When they are suspicious, they do not want to participate in the common activities for common interests.

There is a need to (i) effectively implement propaganda programs to help the villagers know very well about the grassroots democracy; (ii) organize training courses for villagers in which all the contents that are mentioned in the Decree can be made clear so that people can understand what they must “know”, must “discuss”, must “do” and what they “monitor”; and (iii) build up the belief of the people in the State and encourage women to participate in the social activities.

Communities based and other nongovernmental organizations could play an important role in local level capacity building, awareness creation and enhancing local level democracy in line with the Government decree in this regard.

Monitoring and supervising systems independent from the provincial and district levels to monitor the status of implementation REDC at commune level would be useful. The commune people's inspection body should be encouraged.

2.3. Basic Service Delivery: Education, Health and Extension

Findings

The improvement in delivering education services is evident. The primary school enrollment is increasing; the number of dropout pupils is decreasing. Teaching instruments and school facilities have been improved. However, illiteracy rate is still very high.

Long distance from home to school is a barrier for attending schools, especially in rainy season. Teaching methods appear to be too difficult for poor ethnic minority children, because they do not get any chances to learn Vietnamese language before going to schools.

The poor households still experience education as an extra financial burden. Expenditure for higher education is not affordable to the poor people.

Awareness of parents regarding the education for their children seems to be limited. Many families have not had adequate understanding of the important role of education for their children and their lives later, particularly for schoolgirls, who seem to have no opportunities of studying further.

The poor people recently have been provided with health care service thanks to newly built communal clinics, however, people are not familiar to using health care services. Poor people are not benefited much from free health care programs. In some cases, they tend to stay home and rely on traditional healings. They also tend to experience significant expenses (travel time, cost, subsistence, etc.) incurred in getting to hospitals.

Extension activities/courses are useful for the villagers. However, there is inequality in accessing and attending these courses between the better-off and the poor, between men and women.

Recommendations

There is a need to build more school facilities and supply more teaching instruments to attract children to go to school, because in the upland, schools are not only a learning place but also a meeting and playing place for the children.

Similarly, government should open more literacy classes for illiterate adults and build more branched schools for young children; these should be based in villages because the young children would not have to go long way for study and the adults would not be shy to study.

There should be more financial support for children going to school, for example: extra-book, text book, school bags or clothes on the occasion of the new school year to encourage school to go to school.

Open more extension classes, which is very important for extension service and also important to education because many people can go to extension courses and the literate ones are very proud, many poor people said that they wanted to know "letter" to learn extension classes.

Conduct more training courses on the communication that changes behavior for the communal health staffs so that they can organize strong propaganda to make people use modern health care service. Build up village health care networks; encourage private sector to provide service to the villages.

Extension activities need to be specific according to characteristics of each local, so the poor can participate in these activities, need to have particular extension program for the poor and women.

2.4. Social Assistance

Findings

Social assistance is good for the poor; helping them to fight starvation and helping also many war invalid people in the former guerrilla's bases of Son Ba & Nghia Tho to escape from poverty. This is an important implication to demonstrate the consideration of the State to the poor. And people seem to be grateful to the State for social assistance.

Decision No.139 in general has been carried out fairly successfully in surveyed communes. However, the demands are very large while resources are very limited and decreasing every year. There are shortcomings in the selection and delivery as well.

Recommendations

The amount for regular support needs to be raised up to 60,000 VND, equal to 18 to 20 kilogram of rice every month, from the current level of 45.000 VND. On the other hand, there is a need to give about 20,000 VND per month to "marginally poor" people to ensure sustainability in escaping poverty of those people. Regular support must come "regular" but not 3 or 4 months because recipients can die of starvation.

The information on such support needs to be reached villagers in a more effective way and the list of people supported should be referenced from people, because they know most exactly about villagers who need the support in their village.

Commune has to inform regularly the list and budget of assistance, necessary explanations about the supporting policies of government, about rights and responsibilities of the receiver as well as the reasons why some people are not approved to receive the support.

The number of “grant” should be retained partly to create “something” for the poor to work because if they do not have job, they are poor and then the government, again, has to support. Job creation or asset creation would be a possible mechanism for a sustainable poverty reduction.

There is a need to promote better co-operation between provincial departments to support the poor on time.

The health insurance card providers need to explain better card receivers about the using conditions of the card. And it is important to make mobile health groups to go to the remote areas more consequently.

2.5. Public Administration Reform

Findings

Public administration system seems to have been fairly understood and discussed at provincial & district levels, but it is not so at commune and village levels where the village heads are still considered as the “State”.

Many poor people have been suffering from not having birth certificates and ID cards, etc, which are fundamental documents for the villagers, mainly because they cannot afford to pay the fees – e.g., it costs VND 4,000 to register a birth; and ID Card costs about VND12,000.

Decentralization process has been implemented successfully at provincial and district levels. Many activities have been decentralized to commune level and this showed more effectiveness. However, the poor still have a very vague idea on how the administration system works.

The training for strengthening capacity of communal officials got initial success but there is more desired. The utilization of graduate students as secretary of commune PC’s chairman was an appropriate and flexible solution, however, in some cases the jobs did not match with the students’ capability.

Recommendations

PAR should be continued to expand actively to districts and communes, this will strengthen administration body, and serve better villagers, especially the poor.

The central government should subsidize the fees for the poor to make identification card, birth registration and other fundamental personal identity documents.

Decentralization must play a key role in PAR and should be strengthened and speeded-up. Villagers must be well informed about working mechanism of the commune. Print and deliver free of cost commune working handbooks to the people.

Capacity building for officials in communes and villages should be considered crucially. It is suggested to send law university graduates to commune’s chairman people committee under the decentralization process.

Conduct training courses on democracy and administration system for all communal staffs. 'One-stop shop' administration reform should be rolled down to commune level. Capacity of officials is to be strengthened.

2.6. Environment Issues

Findings

Environment is an alarming issue; deterioration and depletion of resources have become a great threat to the life of villagers. Deforestation, severe shortage of water sources, land slides and soil erosion in the mountainous region, as well as overpopulation, water source pollution, uncontrolled solid wastes and habits of indiscriminate defecation in the coastal region have become difficult for management and protection works.

The environmental awareness of the villagers has been remarkably improved. The evidence is that the villagers have expressed their serious concerns of environment and resources and they have also provided their valuable opinions, recommendations that contribute to the general environment improvement.

Recommendations

First of all, it is necessary to improve and strengthen the ability of service provision, communication and education to the villagers. After the villagers get reliable access to such services, their awareness and responsibilities to the environment protection and public property usage will be improved.

It is necessary to provide budget to the local authorities, apply priority to the local environment workers, increase assistance budget for the forest care and protection, reduce license taxes for the fishers, assist the households to borrow money for construction of toilets, and make a master plan for the solid waste treatment area.

Villagers' opinions as well as their supervision should be continuously paid attention to. This would provide the villagers chances to understand their important roles. Government's policies in connection with the environment shall be connected to the villager's benefits.

It is also necessary to conduct trainings on Law on environment protection, emphasize on right and responsibility of the villagers deterioration activities. Privatize some kinds of services such as water supply and solid waste treatment.

Apply civil and criminal treatment solutions to the violating individuals and collectives. Build strategies for socio-economic development in connection with the environment management works.

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

| No. | Name | Position |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------|--|
| <i>Quang Ngai province</i> | | |
| 1 | Hoang Ngoc Tran | Chairman of Provincial Fatherland Front (PFF) |
| 2 | Vo Thanh An | Deputy Chairman of PFF |
| 3 | Nguyen Quoc Tinh | Deputy of Provincial Public Mobilization Organization |
| 4 | Dinh Minh Hoai | Deputy Chairman of PPC |
| 5 | Pham Dinh Phuc | Deputy Director of Provincial Administration Office |
| 6 | Nguyen Van Minh | Staff of Provincial Administration Office |
| 7 | Tran Van An | Deputy Director of DPI |
| 8 | Nguyen Thi Hoa | Deputy Director of DPI |
| 9 | Nguyen Vuong | Chief of Foreign Economy Office of PDI |
| 10 | Ho Minh Hoa | Staff of DPI |
| 11 | Huynh Tan Can | Staff of DPI |
| 12 | Vu Thien Long | Deputy Director of DOLISA |
| 13 | Than Phuc | Staff of DOLISA |
| 14 | Dinh Thi Lan | Staff of DOLISA |
| 15 | Tran Quang Hai | Director of Ethnic Minority Department |
| 16 | Tran Luong | Deputy Director of Ethnic Minority Department |
| 17 | Nguyen Thai Ngan | Staff of PCEMMR |
| 18 | Nguyen Van Chinh | Deputy Director of DSO |
| 19 | Duong Thi Mai | Director Provincial Population and Family Planning Dept. |
| 20 | Ngo Thanh Ha | Staff of Planning & Finance Division in PPC |
| 21 | Tran Huu Thap | Officer of DOET |
| 22 | Nguyen Thi Huong | Officer of DOET |
| 23 | Cao Van Liep | Staff of DARD |
| 24 | Nguyen Anh Phong | Staff of DARD |
| 25 | Tran Duc Viet | Staff of DARD |
| 26 | Nguyen Tang Binh | DNRE |
| 27 | Nguyen Ngoc Dai | DNRE |
| 28 | Vo Tan Nam | DNRE |
| 29 | Doan Van Nhan | Director of Provincial Technology Center |
| 30 | Dinh van Hung | Staff of Provincial Technology Center |
| 31 | Vu Van Sau | Staff of Provincial Agricultural Extension Center |
| 32 | Pham Hoang Phuong | Deputy Director of DOH |
| 33 | Tran Van Cuong | Staff of Provincial DOH |
| 34 | Nguyen Duc Anh | Staff of provincial DOH |

Son Ha district

| | | |
|----|-----------------|---|
| 1 | Tran Dinh Su | Agriculture and Rural Development Division |
| 2 | Pham Van Tam | Agriculture and Rural Development Division |
| 3 | Vo Phi Lan | Director of Bank for Social Policies |
| 4 | Dinh Xuan Loan | Staff of Bank for Social Policies |
| 5 | Huynh Day | Assistant Chief, District Financial and Planning Division |
| 6 | Tran Quang Hao | Deputy Chairman of Son Ha People's Council |
| 7 | Phan Chau Trinh | Chief of district Industrial Commercial Division |
| 8 | Dang Ngoc Dung | Chief of District Administration Office |
| 9 | Phung To Long | Officer of People's Committee |
| 10 | Nguyen Hoang | Chief of Personnel Division of Son Ha district |

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|----|-----------------|--|
| 11 | Nguyen Hong Son | Deputy Secretary of District Youth Union |
| 12 | Ho Minh Nen | Director of Health Center |
| 13 | Dinh Van Ai | Deputy Chairman of Son Ha People's Committee |
| 14 | Nguyen Thai | Secretary of Party Committee |
| 15 | Tran Van Hai | Deputy Director of District Training Division |
| 16 | Tran Hoang Luu | Officer of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs Division |
| 18 | Lu Dinh Ngo | Farmers' Association |
| 19 | Dinh Van U | Farmers' Association |
| 20 | Nguyen Van Su | Farmers' Association |
| 17 | Truong Thi Loan | Women's Association |
| 21 | Ho Thi An | Women's Association |

Tu Nghia district

| | | |
|----|-------------------|--|
| 1 | Nguyen Phuong Lan | Assistant Chief of Financial and Planning Division |
| 2 | Vo Van Tiet | Deputy Chief of Administration Office |
| 3 | Nguyen Su | Deputy Chief of Land Office |
| 4 | Vo Quang Minh | Deputy Chairman of district Fatherland Front |
| 5 | Vo Van Luan | Officer of District Personnel Division |
| 6 | Huynh Van Trang | Deputy Chairman of People's Committee |
| 7 | Nguyen Khac Tho | Staff of Personnel Division |
| 8 | Le Dinh Phuoc | Chief of District Education Division |
| 9 | Vo Thi Le Thu | Officer of District People's Committee |
| 10 | Nguyen Xuan Lam | Farmers' Association |
| 11 | Hoang Trung Viet | Deputy Director of District Training Division |
| 12 | Luong Quy Thang | Training Division |
| 13 | Nguyen Thi Phuong | Women's Association |
| 14 | Ly Phuoc | Chief of Industrial and Commercial Division |
| 15 | Nguyen Thi Hoa | Women's Association |
| 16 | Trinh Thi Thu | Chairman of Women's Association |
| 17 | Nguyen Mot | Chairman of Farmers' Association |
| 18 | Dinh Van Ri | Farmers' Association |
| 19 | Nguyen Van Duc | Farmers' Association |
| 20 | Phung Thi Hanh | Women's Association |
| 21 | Tran Thi Tuyet | Women's Association |
| 22 | Pham Thi Nhan | Women's Association |
| 23 | Do Thi Thom | Women's Association |

Son Ba commune

| | | |
|----|----------------|---|
| 1 | Dinh Huy Thuc | Secretary of Commune Party Committee |
| 2 | Dinh Van Ui | Chairman of Commune People's Committee |
| 3 | Dinh Van Thi | Vice Chairman of Commune People's Committee |
| 4 | Dinh Van Treo | Vice Chairman Commune People's Council |
| 5 | Dinh Van Mua | Chairman of Commune Fatherland Front |
| 6 | Dinh Thi Hoay | Chairman of Women's Association |
| 7 | Dinh Van Luong | Chairman of Farmers' Association |
| 8 | Dinh Quang La | Head of Public Security |
| 9 | Dinh Xuan Tu | Strengthening Officer (to assist Chairman of CPC) |
| 10 | Dinh Xuan Vai | Head of Medical Station |
| 11 | Dinh Xuan Thu | Social, Invalids and Social Affairs Officer |
| 12 | Dinh Huy Trong | Deputy Secretary of Youth Union |
| 13 | Dinh Thi Thenh | Deputy Chairman of Women's Association |
| 14 | Dinh Van Heo | Vice Chairman of Farmers' Association |
| 15 | Dinh Minh Lo | Deputy Secretary of Party Committee |

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|----|-----------------|---|
| 16 | Dinh Van Nen | Head of Lang Gia village |
| 17 | Dinh Van Trim | Head of Lang Bung village |
| 18 | Dinh Van Manh | Chief of Commune People's Committee Secretariat |
| 19 | Nguyen Ngoc Son | Principal of primary school |
| 20 | Dinh Van Tan | Commune's Finance Officer |
| 21 | Dinh Van The | Commune's Cashier |
| 22 | Dinh Van Mit | Head of Lang Ranh village |
| 23 | Dinh Van Roi | Deputy Chairman |
| 24 | Dinh Van Voi | Head of Mo O hamlet |
| 25 | Dinh Thanh That | Commune's Land Office |
| 26 | Dinh Van Roi | Head of Di Hoang hamlet |
| 27 | Dinh Cong Nat | Judicial Officer |
| 28 | Dinh Lam Reng | Head of Communal Detachment |
| 29 | Dinh Hong The | Deputy of Communal Detachment |
| 30 | Dinh Xuan Hanh | Deputy Chairman of Fatherland Front |
| 31 | Dinh Huy Thu | Deputy Head of village |
| 32 | Dinh Van Quy | |
| 33 | Dinh Van Thanh | |
| 34 | Dinh Van Trac | |
| 35 | Dinh Thi Thoa | |
| 36 | Nguyen Van Manh | Staff in the commune office |

Son Cao commune

| | | |
|----|------------------|---|
| 1 | Dinh Xuan Phang | Officer of Commune People's Committee |
| 2 | Dinh Van Dung | Officer of Son Cao commune |
| 3 | Le Thi Bich Thuy | |
| 4 | Dinh Thi Viet | |
| 5 | Truong Thi Loan | Women's Association |
| 6 | Dinh Van Tap | |
| 7 | Dinh Van Thuy | |
| 8 | Dinh Van Truong | |
| 9 | Dinh Van Bay | Nurse |
| 10 | Dinh Thi Thia | |
| 11 | Dinh Thi Sinh | |
| 12 | Dinh Thi The | |
| 13 | Dinh Thi Ut | |
| 14 | Dinh Van Thuoc | |
| 15 | Dinh Van Tho | |
| 16 | Dinh Van Eo | |
| 17 | Dinh Thi Nguyen | |
| 18 | Dinh Van Vot | |
| 20 | Dinh Van Dut | |
| 21 | Nguyen Van Hung | Deputy Chairman of Commune People's Committee |

Nghia Tho commune

| | | |
|---|---------------|---|
| 1 | Nguyen Van La | Secretary of Commune Party Committee |
| 2 | Pham Cu | Vice Chairman of Commune People's Committee |
| 3 | Pham Van Nhi | Chairman of Fatherland Front |
| 4 | Pham Thi Nga | Chairman of Women's Association |
| 5 | Pham Van Lai | -- |
| 6 | Pham Bu | Deputy Secretary of Youth Union |
| 7 | Pham Ung | Deputy of Communal Detachment |
| 8 | Pham Ngoc Nhi | Commune's Finance Officer |

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|----|--------------------|--|
| 9 | Pham Uu | Member of Culture and Society |
| 10 | Le Van Dong | Principal of primary school |
| 11 | Pham Em | Head of Medical Station |
| 12 | Pham Doi | Head of village No.2 |
| 13 | Dang Thi Chung | Strength Officer |
| 14 | Pham Thang | Chairman of Commune People's Committee |
| 15 | Dang Thi Kim Chung | Women's Association |
| 16 | Pham Vuong | Deputy Head |
| 17 | Pham Eo Hue | |
| 18 | Pham Com | |
| 19 | Pham Phuong | |
| 20 | Pham Quyen | Head of village No.1 |
| 21 | Pham Bong | |
| 22 | Pham Nong | |
| 23 | Pham Thi Nu | |
| 24 | Pham Cu | |
| 25 | Pham Ra | |
| 26 | Pham Bo | |
| 27 | Anh Thang | |
| 28 | Le Van Long | |
| 29 | Dang Thi Chung | |
| 30 | Dinh Van Thi | |

Nghia An Commune

| | | |
|----|--------------------|---|
| 1 | Pham Xi | Social, Invalids and Social Affairs Officer |
| 2 | Phan Thi Thanh Tam | Women's Association |
| 3 | Pham Thi Nhan | Agricultural Extension Officer |
| 4 | Le Van Dien | Deputy Chairman |
| 5 | Le Anh Phu | |
| 6 | Do Thi Thom | Vice Chairman of Women's Association |
| 7 | Do Van Tay | Secretary of Youth Union |
| 8 | Pham Ngoc Anh | Head of village |
| 9 | Do Tri Thuc | |
| 10 | Vo Van Han | |
| 11 | Tran Ngoc Xon | |
| 12 | Le Tuan The | Deputy Head |
| 13 | Le Huy Phuc | |
| 14 | Tran Thi Tuyet | Chairman of Women's Association |
| 15 | Vo Thi Le Thu | Strength Officer |
| 16 | Le Gia Loi | |
| 17 | Nguyen Phuong Long | Chairman of Commune People's Committee |
| 18 | Pham Van Nhu | Head of Medical Station |
| 19 | Nguyen Thanh Tam | Chairman Commune People's Council |
| 20 | Nguyen Ngoc Ngan | Deputy Chairman |
| 21 | Vo Thi Mai | |
| 22 | Vo Thi Hien | |
| 23 | Pham Dinh Quy | Officer of Commune People's Committee |
| 24 | Bui Hong Dung | Party Committee Secretary |

Villagers of Lang Bung village

| | | | |
|---|-----------|----|-----------|
| 1 | Dinh Loi | 32 | Dinh Phun |
| 2 | Dinh Kich | 33 | Dinh Thu |

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|----|--------------|----|-----------------|
| 3 | Dinh Lieu | 34 | Dinh Ngoi |
| 4 | Dinh Vien | 35 | Dinh Ben |
| 5 | Dinh Lup | 36 | Dinh Lia |
| 6 | Dinh Kham | 37 | Dinh Quyen |
| 7 | Dinh Pa Lenh | 38 | Dinh Thi |
| 8 | Dinh Thinh | 39 | Dinh Tin |
| 9 | Dinh Mia | 40 | Dinh Ut |
| 10 | Dinh Tia | 41 | Dinh Ot |
| 11 | Dinh Trim | 42 | Dinh Trau |
| 12 | Dinh Trung | 43 | Dinh Troi |
| 13 | Dinh Bui | 44 | Dinh Troa |
| 14 | Dinh Lang | 45 | Dinh Ra |
| 15 | Dinh Liu | 46 | Dinh Uong |
| 16 | Dinh Trep | 47 | Dinh Loi |
| 17 | Dinh Lich | 48 | Dinh Thuong |
| 18 | Dinh Sam | 49 | Dinh Thi Tram |
| 19 | Dinh To | 50 | Dinh Po Liet |
| 20 | Dinh Dung | 51 | Dinh Thi Tim |
| 21 | Dinh Thi Rap | 52 | Dinh Thi Ria |
| 22 | Dinh Thi Ria | 53 | Dinh Thi Huyet |
| 23 | Dinh Thi Mai | 54 | Dinh Thi Truong |
| 24 | Dinh Tu Thua | 55 | Dinh Thi Tria |
| 25 | Dinh Ba | 56 | Dinh Thi Rum |
| 26 | Dinh Tra | 57 | Dinh Van Pheng |
| 27 | Dinh Ua | 58 | Dinh La |
| 28 | Dinh Lo | 59 | Dinh Thi Tra |
| 29 | Dinh Teo | 60 | Dinh Thi Lang |
| 30 | Dinh Giang | 61 | Dinh Thi Tre |
| 31 | Dinh Veo | | |

Villagers of Lang Gia village

| | | | |
|----|--------------|----|-----------------|
| 1 | Dinh Tre | 31 | Dinh The |
| 2 | Dinh Khanh | 32 | Dinh Do |
| 3 | Dinh Tre | 33 | Dinh Thu |
| 4 | Dinh Na | 34 | Dinh Pho |
| 5 | Dinh Duong | 35 | Dinh Hoat |
| 6 | Dinh Pa Lenh | 36 | Dinh Tin |
| 7 | Dinh Det | 37 | Dinh Nat |
| 8 | Dinh Dien | 38 | Dinh The |
| 9 | Dinh Tra | 39 | Dinh Phoi |
| 10 | Dinh Nen | 40 | Dinh Thi Hien |
| 11 | Dinh Ta | 41 | Dinh Thi A |
| 12 | Dinh Lem | 42 | Dinh Thi Am |
| 13 | Dinh Re | 43 | Dinh Thi Thuong |
| 14 | Dinh Loi | 44 | Dinh Thi Ke |
| 15 | Dinh Trom | 45 | Dinh Thi Rang |
| 16 | Dinh La | 46 | Dinh Thi Chach |
| 17 | Dinh Thua | 47 | Dinh Thi Nu |
| 18 | Dinh Lanh | 48 | Dinh Thi Ke |
| 19 | Dinh Dai | 49 | Dinh Thi Trach |
| 20 | Dinh Lien | 50 | Dinh Thi Bao |
| 21 | Dinh Thi Tan | 51 | Dinh Thi An |
| 22 | Dinh Phe | 52 | Dinh Thi Ta |

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|----|---------------|----|--------------|
| 23 | Dinh Luong | 53 | Dinh Deo |
| 24 | Dinh Thi Ngan | 54 | Dinh Can |
| 25 | Dinh Trong | 55 | Dinh thP Dun |
| 26 | Dinh Chut | 56 | Dinh To |
| 27 | Dinh Hanh | 57 | Dinh thi Din |
| 28 | Dinh Tinh | 58 | Dinh thi The |
| 29 | Dinh Thi Em | 59 | Dinh Thi Ton |
| 30 | Dinh Thi Trai | 60 | Din Thi Hat |
| | | 61 | Dinh Thi Ta |

Villagers of Xa Ay village

| | | | |
|----|-----------------|----|-----------------|
| 1 | Dinh Van Ve | 29 | Dinh Thi Hoe |
| 2 | Dinh Vot Thu | 30 | Dinh Thi Tri |
| 3 | Dinh Van Xac | 31 | Dinh Van Huy |
| 4 | Dinh Van Tinh | 32 | Dinh Van Vach |
| 5 | Dinh Van Ho | 33 | Dinh Van Trai |
| 6 | Dinh Van Tim | 34 | Dinh Re |
| 7 | Dinh Van Lac | 35 | Dinh Van Tan |
| 8 | Dinh Van Von | 36 | Dinh Van Thuong |
| 9 | Dinh Thuc | 37 | Dinh Van Va |
| 10 | Dinh Voc | 38 | Dinh Van Moc |
| 11 | Dinh Van Viet | 39 | Dinh Van Ranh |
| 12 | Dinh Van Be | 40 | Dinh Van Tieu |
| 13 | Dinh Van Bin | 41 | Dinh Thi Koan |
| 14 | Dinh Van Troa | 42 | Dinh Thi Do |
| 15 | Dinh Van Bay | 43 | Dinh Thi La |
| 16 | Dinh Thi Ben | 44 | Dinh Thi Ranh |
| 17 | Dinh Van Bay | 45 | Dinh Thi Vao |
| 18 | Dinh Thi The | 46 | Dinh Thi Vo |
| 19 | Dinh Thi Thia | 47 | Dinh Thi Rat |
| 20 | Dinh Van Truong | 48 | Dinh Thi Treo |
| 21 | Dinh Van Thuy | 49 | Truong Thi Loan |
| 22 | Dinh Van Tap | 50 | Dinh Van Rem |
| 23 | Dinh Van Thay | 51 | Dinh Thi Do |
| 24 | Dinh Thi Sinh | 52 | Dinh Van Pheng |
| 25 | Dinh Van Doi | 53 | Dinh Thi Set |
| 26 | Dinh Van O | 54 | Dinh Van Ho |
| 27 | Dinh Van Treo | 55 | Dinh Thi Roi |
| 28 | Dinh Van Trien | | |

Villagers of Lang Tra village

| | | | |
|----|----------------|----|----------------|
| 1 | Dinh Van Be | 29 | Dinh Van Chep |
| 2 | Dinh Thi Boi | 30 | Dinh Van Gop |
| 3 | Dinh Van Na | 31 | Nguyen Tinh |
| 4 | Dinh Van Phoa | 32 | Dinh Van Phui |
| 5 | Dinh Bo Rem | 33 | Dinh Van Sang |
| 6 | Dinh Van Bon | 34 | Dinh K Ray |
| 7 | Dinh Van Phen | 35 | Dinh Van Tinh |
| 8 | Dinh Van Tra | 36 | Dinh Van Ham |
| 9 | Dinh Van Mo | 37 | Dinh Van Trai |
| 10 | Dinh Van Hoach | 38 | Dinh Van Phut |
| 11 | Dinh Van Ni | 39 | Dinh Van Trang |
| 12 | Dinh Van Dam | 40 | Dinh Van Xot |
| 13 | Dinh Van Trau | 41 | Dinh Van Mat |

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|----|-----------------|----|----------------|
| 14 | Dinh Van Not | 42 | Dinh Van Bip |
| 15 | Dinh Van Phat | 43 | Dinh Van Dam |
| 16 | Dinh Van Nuc | 44 | Dinh Thi Noa |
| 17 | Dinh Van Tro | 45 | Dinh Thi Lien |
| 18 | Dinh Van Ut | 46 | Dinh Thi Xu |
| 19 | Dinh Thi Mia | 47 | Dinh Thi Vo |
| 20 | Dinh Van Eo | 48 | Dinh Thi Bin |
| 21 | Dinh Van Phan | 49 | Tran Thi Hoa |
| 22 | Dinh Thi Nguyen | 50 | Lam Thi Mai |
| 23 | Dinh Van Hoach | 51 | Tran Thi Thanh |
| 24 | Dinh Van Thuat | 52 | Dinh Thi Mai |
| 25 | Dinh Van Dot | 53 | Dinh Thi La |
| 26 | Dinh Van Phoa | 54 | Dinh Van Mo |
| 27 | Dinh Bo Lin | 55 | Dinh Thi Nu |
| 28 | Dinh Van Tram | | |

Note: H're people do not have family names. Their surnames are given by local government based on the surname of a Hero : Dinh Nghit.

Villagers of Village No. 1, Nghia Tho commune

| | | | |
|----|------------------|----|-----------------|
| 1 | Pham Thi O | 30 | Pham Thi Tu |
| 2 | Pham Thi Na | 31 | Pham Thi Oanh |
| 3 | Pham Thi Vong | 32 | Pham Thi Yun |
| 4 | Pham Thi Ly | 33 | Pham Thi Nu Mit |
| 5 | Pham Quang Thach | 34 | Pham Thi Huyen |
| 6 | Pham Thi Nhieu | 35 | Pham Thi Mo |
| 7 | Pham Van Dieu | 36 | Pham Thi Bai |
| 8 | Pham To | 37 | Pham Thi Hoay |
| 9 | Pham Thet | 38 | Pham Thi Nhan |
| 10 | Pham Dau | 39 | Pham Eo Nay |
| 11 | Pham Ro | 40 | Pham Cung |
| 12 | Pham Thi Binh | 41 | Pham De |
| 13 | Pham The | 42 | Pham Nguyen |
| 14 | Pham Huy | 43 | Pham Thi Sinh |
| 15 | Pham Thi Nang | 44 | Pham Thi Buo |
| 16 | Pham Nga (Sao) | 45 | Pham Thi Yen |
| 17 | Pham Thi Bien | 46 | Pham Thi Xuan |
| 18 | Pham Vinh | 47 | Pham Chi |
| 19 | Pham Don | 48 | Pham Thi Thuy |
| 20 | Pham Muoi | 49 | Pham Min |
| 21 | Pham Thi My | 50 | Pham So |
| 22 | Pham Doi | 51 | Pham Thi En |
| 23 | Pham Suong | 52 | Pham Thi Mit |
| 24 | Pham Thom | 53 | Pham Thi Tu |
| 25 | Pham Quyen Nu | 54 | Pham Thi Oanh |
| 26 | Pham Nong | 55 | Pham Thi Yun |
| 27 | Pham Thi Nu | 56 | Pham Thi Nu Mit |
| 28 | Pham Cu | 57 | Pham thi cun |
| 29 | Pham Thi Boi | 58 | Pham thi toi |
| | | 59 | PhamThi chu |

Villagers of Village No. 2, Nghia Tho commune

| | | | |
|----|-------------------|----|-----------------|
| 1 | Pham Van Trung | 28 | Pham Thi Nu |
| 2 | Pham Van Ngau | 29 | Pham Thi Nu |
| 3 | Pham Luong | 30 | Pham Ky |
| 4 | Pham Thi Hong Van | 31 | Pham Thi Yen |
| 5 | Pham Thi Yen | 32 | Pham Quang Binh |
| 6 | Dinh Van Tri | 33 | Pham Thi Nga |
| 7 | Pham Thi Chieu | 34 | Pham Thi Duong |
| 8 | Pham Thi Lay | 35 | Dinh Van Duoc |
| 9 | Pham Thi Thuy | 36 | Pham Onh |
| 10 | Pham Thi Mo | 37 | Pham Thi Yen |
| 11 | Dinh Thi Lieu | 38 | Pham Thi Neo |
| 12 | Pham Thi Dieu | 39 | Pham Thi Ai |
| 13 | Pham Ban | 40 | Pham Thi Huyet |
| 14 | Pham O | 41 | Pham Thi Nang |
| 15 | Nguyen Van The | 42 | Pham Thi Hoa |
| 16 | Pham Luot | 43 | Pham Thi Vo |
| 17 | Pham Them | 44 | Pham Trien |
| 18 | Pham Chien | 45 | Pham Tri |
| 19 | Pham Ai | 46 | Pham Yen |
| 20 | Pham Bai | 47 | Pham Doi |
| 21 | Pham Doai | 48 | Pham Thieu |
| 22 | Dinh R Rim | 49 | Pham Thuy |
| 23 | Pham Nga (do) | 50 | Pham Chinh |
| 24 | Pham Onh | 51 | Pham Nam |
| 25 | Pham Thinh | 52 | Dinh Van Gioc |
| 26 | Pham Thi Ke | 53 | Pham Cao |
| 27 | Pham Thi Ni | | |

Note: H're People's in this commune do not have family names. Their surnames are given by local government based on the surname of late Prime Minister Pham Van Dong

Villagers of Tan My village, Nghia An commune

| | | | |
|----|---------------------|----|-------------------|
| 1 | Pham Thi Van | 28 | Tran Ngoc Xon |
| 2 | Lam Si Tao | 29 | Le Tuan The |
| 3 | Le Truong Nga | 30 | Le Huy Phuc |
| 4 | Pham Van Dung | 31 | Le Van Dien |
| 5 | Tran Thi Kim Anh | 32 | Le Anh Phu |
| 6 | Vo Thi Hien | 33 | Tran Dinh Thong |
| 7 | Do Ngoc Tay | 34 | Nguyen Hong Dau |
| 8 | Nguyen Thi Kim Hien | 35 | Pham Hong Vu |
| 9 | Nguyen Thi Ni | 36 | Dinh Thi Chien |
| 10 | Mai Thi Mau | 37 | Nguyen Van Tan |
| 11 | Tran Thi Moc | 38 | Lam Thi Don |
| 12 | Le Thi Hiep | 39 | Pham Ben |
| 13 | Vo Thi Thiet | 40 | Huynh Thin |
| 14 | Vo Thi Hong | 41 | Nguyen Thi Nguyet |
| 15 | Le Thi Oi | 42 | Nguyen Thi Mot |
| 16 | Tran Thi Kieu | 43 | Vo Thi Nga |
| 17 | Tran Thi Luy | 44 | Tran Thi To |

| | | | |
|----|----------------|----|-----------------|
| 18 | Le Thi Xa | 45 | Tran Thi Lam |
| 19 | Nguyen Thi Nam | 46 | Huynh Thi Thu |
| 20 | Pham Thi Hoan | 47 | Vo Thi Phe |
| 21 | Vo Thi Dao | 48 | Huynh Thi Cung |
| 22 | Tran Thi Vuong | 49 | Le Thi Chanh |
| 23 | Cao Chan | 50 | Nguyen Thi Khac |
| 24 | Tran Buong | 51 | Pham Thi Phep |
| 25 | Pham Ngoc Anh | 52 | Huynh Thi Thuy |
| 26 | Do Tri Thuc | 53 | Nguyen Huu Xuan |
| 27 | Vo Van Han | | |

Villagers of Pho An village, Nghia An commune

| | | | |
|----|--------------------|----|------------------|
| 1 | Nguyen Le Huyen | 32 | Tran Thi Dung |
| 2 | Nguyen Loi | 33 | Le Thi Yen |
| 3 | Nguyen Van Thanh | 34 | Nguyen Van Hung |
| 4 | Nguyen Duc Pho | 35 | Nguyen Van Khanh |
| 5 | Nguyen Tam | 36 | Nguyen Van Lon |
| 6 | Nguyen Long | 37 | Tran Ca |
| 7 | Tran Dinh Khoa | 38 | Tran Bien |
| 8 | Dinh Van Duc | 39 | Nguyen Hoanh |
| 9 | Mai Thi Tau | 40 | Nguyen Thanh Tam |
| 10 | Vo Thi Lon | 41 | Nguyen Do |
| 11 | Ta Thi Nhu | 42 | Nguyen Hanh |
| 12 | Tran Thi Kim Phung | 43 | Nguyen Van Ka |
| 13 | Ngo Thi Ui | 44 | Le Thanh An |
| 14 | Do Thi Ngo | 45 | Nguyen Van Muoi |
| 15 | Co Thi Thuy | 46 | Nguyen Van Tuoi |
| 16 | Tran Hue Em | 47 | Vo Sat |
| 17 | Tran Thi Thay | 48 | Vo Hut |
| 18 | Dinh Thi Vet | 49 | Pham Minh |
| 19 | Dinh Tan Anh | 50 | Pham Thi Nhi |
| 20 | Le Anh Phu | 51 | Mai Van Hon |
| 21 | Ngo Duc Vuong | 52 | Pham Tao |
| 22 | Le Si Luc | 53 | Pham Hanh |
| 23 | Tran Ngoc Xon | 54 | Do Thanh Tam |
| 24 | Tran Hong Hai | 55 | Nguyen Thi Lo |
| 25 | Vo Thi Phuong | 56 | Do Van Duc |
| 26 | Mai Thi Nga | 57 | Pham Thi Mung |
| 27 | Le thi Bich | 58 | Vo Thi Men |
| 28 | Nguyen Thi Ba | 59 | Pham Thi Nuoii |
| 29 | Tran Thi Mat | 60 | Tran Thi Nguy |
| 30 | Do Thi Nghi | 61 | Pham Van Kim |
| 31 | Tran Thi Tro | 62 | Mai Hong So |