

## TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE COMPLETION REPORT

Division : SESS

TA 4205-VIE: Early Childhood Development for the Poor			Amount Approved: \$450,000	
			Revised Amount: \$450,000	
Executing Agency Vietnam Commission for Population, Family and Children		Source of Funding Poverty Reduction Fund (PRF)	Amount Undisbursed: \$84,792.64	Amount Utilized: \$365,207.36
TA Approval Date: 24 Oct 2003	TA Signing Date: 28 Nov 2003	Fielding of First Consultants:  1 Mar 2004	TA Completion Date Original: 31 Oct 2004	Actual: 01 July 2006
			Account Closing Date Original: 31 Oct 2004	Actual: 13 Mar 2007
<b>Description</b>				
<p>While Viet Nam has achieved strong economic growth, challenges remain with regard to the growing income and regional inequalities. Evidence shows that the living standards of the poorest 30% of the population did not increase substantially during the 1990s. Children from poor and vulnerable households have little access to day care, preschool and kindergarten and are thus disadvantaged compared with other children when entering primary school. Research shows that investing in early childhood development (ECD) has a significant impact on children's health and readiness to learn and can bring important economic returns, often greater than investments in formal education and training. Targeted interventions that integrate health, nutrition, education and care for young children not only offset the effects of poverty but also reduce future public expenditures on health, education and social welfare. The TA helped the Vietnam Commission for Population, Family and Children (VCPFC), the executing agency (EA), to undertake an in-depth analysis of early childhood education, health and care policies and programs including the development of a five-year ECD strategy.</p>				
<b>Expected Impact, Outcome and Outputs</b>				
<p>The expected impact of the TA was to enable children from poor households to reach their full human potential through a safer and healthier environment. The expected outcome was increased knowledge and understanding of ECD among decision-makers for future policy and program development. The expected key outputs of the TA were (i) a situation analysis of ECD and (ii) an investment strategy for ECD. During TA implementation the EA requested the preparation of a five-year ECD strategy (2006-2010), which contained an action plan in three phases to strengthen advocacy, capacity building for ECD services, approaches for home-based ECD and resource mobilization.</p>				
<b>Delivery of Inputs and Conduct of Activities</b>				
<p>The TA was financed on a grant basis by the Poverty Reduction Cooperation Fund and administered by ADB. The TA financed 9 person-months of international and 21 person-months of national consulting services. Four individual consultants with expertise in early childhood development, education, health and economics were recruited. The TA implementation period of 12 months was too short given the comprehensive scope of work and the consultations needed between the Government and donors. The TA funded seminars and consultative workshops to discuss policy strategies on child health, nutrition, and early childhood education. The TA was relevant in terms of providing specific recommendations for poverty reduction through ECD, including an in-depth analysis on the situation, trends and challenges of early childhood education and care. The TA outlined recommendations for ECD policies and programs, especially for vulnerable households and strengthened coordination and investments for ECD. Technical ministries such as the Ministry of Education and Training, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs, and donors such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the United Nations Children's Fund were closely involved in the analysis and development of the ECD strategy. The team leader was replaced during TA inception because of illness. The TA was extended three times to complete the expected outputs and the ECD Strategy (2006-2010). The first extension was approved for the completion of the economic analysis of early childhood investments; the second to assist the Government in the completion of the ECD Strategy (2006-2010), and the third to publish the final report and organize a national workshop on ECD investments. The consultant team prepared three TA progress reports (inception, mid-term and final report), the ECD Strategy and a bilingual publication on Holistic Early Childhood Development in Viet Nam. The performance of the consultants is therefore rated as fully satisfactory. The EA provided support to the consultant team and was proactive in leading the preparation of the ECD Strategy. The performance of the EA is rated as fully satisfactory. Two review missions and a final review were completed. The final dissemination workshop discussed the findings of the final report and the draft ECD</p>				

strategy with Government and key stakeholders. The performance of ADB was satisfactory.

### **Evaluation of Outputs and Achievement of Outcome**

The TA achieved all expected outputs. The TA was successful in preparing and disseminating an in-depth analysis on ECD for decision makers and supporting the Government in the development of the ECD strategy. The first output, the situation analysis, is an in-depth analysis of early childhood education, health and nutrition. The report revealed that (i) there is a shortfall in the provision of early childhood education in remote areas because of a lack of qualified teachers and the rather high opportunity costs for parents; (ii) inadequate nutrition in early childhood adversely affects child health and development, so communication and behavior change should focus on breastfeeding; (iii) the private sector needs to be involved in the provision of ECD services in urban areas; and (iv) no services for poor children from 0-3 years are at present available. The second output, the investment strategy, examined the economic rationale for future investments in ECD. The report includes a cost-benefit analysis of early childhood education investment for preschool age (4-5 years) and examines how public subsidies provided to ECD services are distributed. The report cautions against the further expansion of untargeted subsidies and recommends a shift towards pro-poor subsidies for ECD services. The third output, the ECD strategy, highlights (i) the need to help decision-makers see ECD as tool for poverty reduction; (ii) identify mechanisms to coordinate the various stakeholders in ECD; (iii) strengthen the capacity of pre-school teachers, social workers and health staff to deliver facility- and home-based services; and (iv) establish pro-poor targeting of ECD programs. The TA produced an additional output, which was the Early Childhood Development Strategy (2006-2010). The TA outcome was achieved in terms of raising awareness among decision-makers through advocacy and consultations and engaging them in the preparation of the ECD Strategy.

### **Overall Assessment and Rating**

The TA can be rated as successful. It made an important contribution to knowledge-sharing on ECD among stakeholders, revealed gaps in the provision of services, and identified future investments needed to reduce poverty and vulnerability among children. In addition, a national ECD Strategy (2006-2010) was prepared jointly with Government and key stakeholders under the TA.

### **Major Lessons**

(i) As the responsibility for ECD planning and implementation is with technical ministries (health, education, social welfare) as well as the private sector, more resources to strengthen coordination and consensus building between the public and the private sector would have been beneficial; (ii) given the decentralized context, poor provinces and districts should have been more closely involved in the design of the ECD strategy, to better reflect regional needs and capacities for enhancing ECD services for poor families, and (iv) TAs involving a comprehensive scope and extensive consultation will take time to implement. Careful planning and realistic setting of the completion date will help avoid the need to extend TAs multiple times.

### **Recommendations and Follow-Up Actions**

Identifying public-private approaches for facility and home-based care is vital to enable children's physical, cognitive and psychosocial development. While in the past donor financed programs focused on early childhood education, there is a need to close the gap between education and child care and provide a more holistic approach which includes cognitive development, health, and nutrition. The Government has recognized this gap and has requested ADB to assist in piloting approaches for home-and facility-based approaches for ethnic minority groups and migrant workers. This will be carried out under a project on Community-Based Early Childhood Care and Development, financed through the Japan Fund for Poverty Reduction and approved in January 2008 for \$1.9 million. This project will pilot community-based strategies for ECD.

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