

DFID PROJECT PROGRESS REPORT - Annex D

Type of Report:PCR

Load Review

*For quarterly monitoring, complete Part A and C; for annual review complete Parts A, B and C
For Project Completion Reports complete Parts A, B and C but it is not necessary to complete the Outputs/OVI field in Part A.*

PART A.

Country:	Vietnam	Project:	Ha Tinh Poverty Alleviation Programme
Project Officer	Alan Johnson	Start Date:	28/11/1996 [but Project Memorandum is dated 10 th March 1997]
Date of Visit:	21/04/03	End Date:	31/03/03
Date of Report:	30/04/03	MIS Code:	186508002
		Risk Category:	Low

Project Budget	Spend in period under review	Cumulative spend	Forecast for current financial year
£5,754,000	£5,260,142	£5,260,142	0.00

Ha Tinh Poverty Programme Logical Framework: Achievements In Relation To Indicators 1997-2003

Total Expenditure: £5,260,000

[text removed from here. For access to the full text of the Project Completion Report, go to
<http://www.mande.co.uk/htpap/docs/DFID%202003%20Ha%20Tinh%20PCR.pdf>]

Last updated : Tue, 20 May 2003

Lessons learned, and suggested dissemination. For PCRs please comment on (i) Project/Programme Level Lessons, (ii) Sector Level or Thematic Lessons, and (iii) General Development Lessons

A. Programme level lessons

1. **Analysis of internal variations in performance is as important as with/without and before/after differences.** Information on the impact of project interventions, especially savings and credit, was collected by all three NGOs, with some investing more effort than others. In one case there is both with/without and before/after data on the incidence of poverty. In another there is before and after data. In another people were asked to estimate the percentage of people whose living conditions had improved over the previous period. With investments in irrigation infrastructure evidence was more substantial, in the form of visible and substantial increases in agricultural productivity. However, much less attention has been given to documenting and analysing *internal variations* in performance and impact. Most notably between different savings and credit groups, and to a lesser extent, across different infrastructure works. Major differences do exist in the operations of savings and credit groups and analysis of their causes has the potential to identify new ways of ensuring above average performance, and avoiding below average performance. SCF US's search for "positive deviance" in children's nutritional status in poor households in Vietnam is the most well known effort of this type. This sort of analysis is directly relevant to organisational capacity building efforts. Furthermore, where data on these variations correlates with data available on differences in changes in poverty then this will constitute much stronger evidence of savings and credit having an attributable effect on poverty than simple with/without and before after comparisons of the whole intervention.
2. **Future plans can undermine present opportunities.** During the OPR in 2000 serious consideration was given to DFID funding a province level replication fund, that would overcome the problems of no evident mechanism for facilitating Purpose level lessons learning from project Outputs at the District level (and for making that process evident). But once it was decided in early 2001 that the HTPAP would not be funded beyond 2002 (at that stage) it was decided that there would not be sufficient time available to see the results of the replication fund. However, as above, one NGO ended up establishing its own replication fund, using money it had been budgeted but not been able to spend through its own programmed activities. The fund's design, and subsequent operation, received much less scrutiny than would have been the case with a fund set up with additional DFID money, as proposed in 2000. Opportunities to learn about how to promote and monitor lessons learning were lost (But see Recommendation 1 below).
3. **Document replicable work processes, not truisms.** Expectations about the nature of lessons to be identified and disseminated need to be defined early on within a project rather than towards the end. Emphasis should be on documenting in some detail the various *work processes* that lead to achievements in various areas (e.g. establishing savings and credit schemes in new communes, planning, building, managing and evaluating new community based infrastructure works), in such a way that will enable them to be *replicated* elsewhere by others. What is not needed are more homilies and truisms. The latter are the easiest for staff to produce, whereas the former needs more in-depth training around case examples. Some progress was made, but this was too late in the history of the project to capture details of processes that were no longer being used at that stage (e.g. dyke construction), and others still in use (e.g. irrigation works design).
4. **Target and prioritise the audiences to be influenced.** All three NGOs have been active in communicating their experiences to other

audiences outside of Ha Tinh, most notably SCF. Possibly for reasons of economy of effort, the NGOs tended towards broadcasting rather than targeting of their documentation of the lessons learned from their work in Ha Tinh. Yet, as established in 2002, there were clearly some high priority target audiences for each of the main groups of project activities. Communications strategies with disaggregated and prioritised audiences need to be developed early within a project, around the same time as expectations are clarified about the types of lessons that need to be produced. Their absence during much of the programme period suggests a weakness in the “theory of change” about how Outputs should lead to Purpose level changes, both at the programme and individual project level.

5. **Lessons from other organisation’s experiences are most likely to be adopted when a programme or activity is starting up, not after it has been established and running for some time.** It cannot be assumed that three UK NGOs working in adjacent districts over a period of more than 5 years will learn from each others achievements in a common field of work (i.e. savings and credit). A specialist third party (e.g. World Council of Credit Unions) can help draw out lessons and recommendations for the future, but the usefulness of these may be disputed and prevent their adoption. It seems that there is a greater prospect for the adoption of lessons learned by other organisations if they are at the stage of *starting up* new programmes. Even within Ha Tinh the one area where there was significant cross-NGO lessons learning was where one of the NGOs had not been involved in that activity before (i.e. Water Users Associations). Similar findings have been found in organisational ecology studies. One implication is that introducing a *sequence* of organisational partners into a programme may be one means of increasing the adoption of existing lessons learned.
6. **Influencing starts at home, within DFID’s own programme.** DFID is funding 13 other projects in Vietnam through partnerships with other institutions, in other provinces. Although the 3 NGOs have been quite active in promoting the lessons learned from their activities in other provinces in Vietnam they have given relatively little attention to influencing DFID’s own portfolio of projects and associated relationships, even though the environment for doing so would seem to be very conducive. Knowledge of DFID’s portfolio was surprisingly limited. (Perhaps future project designs should contain a mandatory networking with other DFID projects). Following the ending of DFID funding in 2003 one NGO said the relationship was changing from DFID as a partner to DFID as a target of influencing activities. Arguably DFID should always have been seen as such a target, and perhaps the language of partnership here has actually been a problem, encouraging a too comfortable relationship and leading to some important influencing opportunities being overlooked.
7. **The primary focus of a programme plan should be on the *behavior* of the aid agency’s most immediate partners, not events beyond them.** The outputs in the HTPAP Logical Framework should have been focused:
 - More on the development by each implementing NGO of an explicit strategy about which local partnership they would engage in and why. Instead these choices were in effect treated by the HPAP project document as tacit background knowledge, with more detailed descriptions being given of material and social outputs generated within the various local partnerships.
 - More on NGO’s achievements with building the capacity of each of their partners, defined in terms of their partners planning,

implementation, monitoring and evaluation capacities, with the outputs of these processes being treated as the *evidence* of the quality of this capacity building work. Progress would have been evident not only in what was achieved, but also the changing nature of partners objectives.

8. **Outsourcing of programme M&E is not the same as outsourcing of programme management.** Contracting out of DFID's monitoring responsibilities has allowed for much more attention to be paid to monitoring of project progress and to M&E capacity building than would otherwise have been the case. However this process should not be confused with outsourcing of the *project management* role. CDS, the external provider of M&E services, was not in a Project Management role, they did not have the official authority to convert their views into required actions by the implementing bodies (NGOs and their partners in this case). On the other hand DFID was by default still the project manager, but its willingness to make its own explicit judgements about project progress seemed limited (the OPR and PCR were the only reports produced which did so), and it managed the project with a light hand. In future contracts there should be a clear description of the expected relationship between DFID and the outsourcing M&E provider, including how the performance of the latter should be assessed. For example, by the number and percentage of recommendations they produce which are acted upon by their clients (e.g. both DFID and the NGOs). In the process this will make DFID's project role more visible.
9. **History evaporates, unless attended to.** Projects like the HTPAP are not only generating new knowledge, they also lose it at a disturbing speed. Towards the end of the project a bibliography of project documentation was produced and put on a HTPAP website (www.mande.co.uk/htpap/hatinh.htm). Unfortunately digital copies are now available for only 22% of the 126 NGO documents. The number of documents where hard copies are available is not known, but maybe higher. Collation of project documentation needs to be an ongoing activity from day one, and responsibility for maintenance of copies needs to be built into DFIDs contracts with NGOs and other partners. This is especially important in the case of manuals and guidelines. The demand for information builds up over time, and continues after projects end. One example are the requests for information about People's Supervisory Teams, which is now greater than ever, but coming in at a time when the key staff involved are leaving the NGO who developed this approach.
10. **Knowledge generated should be in proportion to the scale of investment.** In the HTPAP there has not always been a direct relationship between the scale of investment and the value of knowledge produced by those investments, as might ideally be expected. A large amount was invested in labour intensive infrastructure development at the beginning of the project, yet the amount of well documented lessons from this experience is small. On the other hand the amount invested into the development of Water Users Associations has been small, but the lessons learned have been relatively well documented. In the Savings and Credit area there has been more proportionality between investment made and knowledge generated. Similarly with more recent investments in participatory approaches to community level infrastructure works. In future projects of the HTPAP kind, aimed at generating lessons for adoption by other parties, clear expectations should be stated in the original contract that knowledge generated should be in proportion to investment. And that the failure of greatest concern will be the failure to analyse

and document lessons from activities that have not been successful. Not simply the failure of an activity in itself.

B. Sector level or thematic lessons (taken from the November 2002 Hanoi workshop report)

1. People's participation in infrastructure development: Oxfam's experience indicates that Commune-level Peoples Supervisory Teams (PSTs) can be important vehicles in involving local people and authorities in the supervision of small-scale rural infrastructure projects. (a) PSTs play a valuable role in deterring corruption and malpractice, in ensuring transparency and local accountability and in coordinating between different stakeholders. (b) the PST model helps to improve construction quality while controlling project costs, (c) the PST model helps to build the capacity of local people and authorities to manage similar infrastructure projects.
2. Peoples participation in irrigation management. In Can Loc district ActionAid Vietnam (AAV) helped establish Water-Users Association (WUAs) in 7 communes in the Tra Son zone. These WUAs have 75 village branches and more than 8,000 members and are responsible for the maintenance of small-scale irrigation works constructed or rehabilitated with AAV funding. An agreement with the district and provincial Peoples Committees and local irrigation companies allows these WUAs to retain one-third of the irrigation fee collected. This provides local funds for the operation of the WUAs and the maintenance of irrigation works. Involving local people in irrigation works has helped control costs; average investment in AAV-supported communes averaged VND 3m per hectare; Strengthening peoples participation in the management of irrigation schemes, combined with the improvement of irrigation infrastructure, helped improve fee collection rates (to 100% in AAV-supported WUAs) and mobilized further community contributions for additional works; Production has increased with the spread of rice double-cropping; before AAV intervention, few people could plant two crops per annum but by 2001, 2,031 hectares could be double-cropped while yields increased from less than 3.5 mt per hectare in 1998 to more than 4 mt in 2001;
3. Savings and Credit services targeted towards the poor: It is possible to experiment with a range of forms of savings and credit provision within one province, and to achieve large-scale coverage, despite an environment characterised by policy uncertainty. The three NGOs have introduced the concept of poverty focused micro-finance to Ha Tinh. The extension of financial services down to a large number of poor people has been achieved using the proven 'micro-finance' formula of: small loans, lending through groups, regular repayment in installments. The savings and credit programmes have upheld the principle that financial services for poor people should be sustainable, that income should cover costs, that poor people can pay market rates of interest.
4. The limitations of generalists or specialists?: While all three NGOs have been energetically promoting the idea of sustainable micro-finance, WOCCU has argued that the NGO programmes have not paid adequate attention to institutional issues. The operations of many of the CFIs in Ha Tinh are comparable in scale to those of the VBP and the PCFs, yet ownership and governance structures are unclear and staff are often

part time and unspecialised. It has also been argued by WOCCU that the NGOs have also not paid adequate attention to the basic infrastructure of accounting, internal controls, management and supervision, although it is recognised that these issue have received more attention in the last two years. However, one of the three NGOs has questioned this analysis and suggested instead that the problem is in the types of solutions being proposed by WOCCU, operating as a specialist NGO with its own preferences, not one operating simply as an independent analyst.

C. General development lessons

These are not new lessons, rather they are lessons that have been around but not yet been fully learned, in the sense of leading to different development practice.

1. The difficulty of extracting the lessons available from failures. All three NGOs have been able to identify particularly successful project activities, which have generated useful lessons and identifiable practices that can be replicated elsewhere. What has been much more difficult is to obtain adequate documentation about failures. Knowledge about these is equally important, if only to discourage others from going down the same path. This is especially important where there have been substantial expenditures at stake. The most notable example being the funding of some dyke construction works in the early years of the project. There have also been others on smaller scale, involving paravets, Education Department MIS systems, and savings and credit models that did not work. Perhaps what every large programme should produce is a “Book of Bad Practice” built up of from anonymous contributions if necessary, and perhaps published some years after the events concerned (which would be better than not being published at all). It could also be argued that CDS has been not been sufficiently systematic and critical in its examination of the reviews commissioned by the NGOs, some of which focus almost wholly on the successes, and which have negligible critical content. More use could also have been made of specialist external evaluations, whose results could have been used as major inputs into the annual review workshops. People’s participation and specialist expertise need to be combined.
2. The time it takes for attitudes to changes. Over a period of five years one change that has been noticeable is that of increased openness by participants in the various annual province and district workshop. While there is still a substantial ritualistic element to people’s participation in these events there have also been a number of times when quite critical comments have made, of a kind not seen at the beginning of the project. While this is partly due to wider changes in Vietnamese society it also seems likely that the continuing emphasis on participatory approaches to development by all three NGOs over almost a decade in Ha Tinh has helped encourage these developments in the province. Observing these changes is difficult because few development workers, especially foreigners, remain in the same location for such periods of time. We need to develop ways of bringing in a historical perspective into the very time-bound worlds of individual aid projects and country programmes.

3. Success may be irrelevant. SCF feel that their savings and credit programme has been successful. However, changes in SCF's global policies mean that they will no longer become involved in savings and credit activities, and will withdraw from those they are involved in. Although successful, AAV are moving away from large-scale irrigation works, because of a re-orientation towards a rights based approach. Oxfam has been similarly successful yet is also moving away from infrastructure for wider policy reasons. DFID Vietnam feel the HTPAP itself has also been successful (see ratings given in this PCR), but again because of changes in the over-arching country strategy, they will no longer be supporting this type of project. One implication for DFID is that it should not be simply adding up or averaging project ratings via PRISM to get an idea of its global success. That would be misleading. At the very least those ratings need to be weighted by the degree to which they are *aligned* with DFID's current priorities, as expressed in its various strategy papers. The other implication is that much more attention needs to be paid to ensuring that the performance of country strategies is monitored and evaluated. An essential first step is to make sure that they are at least *evaluable* (e.g. are there a clear set of priorities, can these be related to budget allocations, and is there in-built M&E plan? etc).

For further information on all the above see the HTPAP bibliography at www.mande.co.uk/htpap/hatinh.htm

Part C

Key Issues / Points of information. For PCRs please comment on Sustainability

1. There are two major investments where sustainability issues are a concern: (a) savings and credit services in three districts, (b) community based infrastructure development in two districts. These have also been the two largest areas of investment (See Recommendation 1 below)
2. There are important sustainability issues *within the lifespan of a project*, most notably within the last six months. Staff, out of understandable self-interest, start looking for and moving off to other positions with longer term prospects. With them can go much of the history of the project, or knowledge of where to find that history in documented form. This is at the time when the most important lessons from the projects' experience should be becoming evident. Maintaining interest in the HTPAP has become more difficult at the very time that any worthwhile results should be more evident than before. And, based on recent experience, when there is more interest by other parties in those results, than ever before.
3. The HTPAP experience, possibly like many others, raises important questions about what is an appropriate lifespan for a project that aims to test approaches at the field level and then use the knowledge generated to influence policy at the national level. Or whether such tasks should be *partitioned* into separately managed projects, the second of which is concerned about collating, and promoting the lessons learned from a range of HTPAP-type projects, with some degree of independence from the various experiments on the ground.

Recommendations	Responsibility	Date for completion
1. An ex-post evaluation in 2005 of specific aspects of the HTPAP (esp. savings and credit, and infrastructure development), as spelled out in the attached TORs. This should be planned as an input into the review of the 2003-2006 CAP, and referred to in the text of the 2003-2006 CAP	DFID Vietnam	Late 2005 prior to the review of the 2003-2006 CAP

which relates to CAP review procedures		
2. The review of the 2003-2006 CAP should also include examination of the evidence for the contested view that in not continuing funding for the HTPAP beyond March 2003 DFID has cut itself off from access (via NGOs) to information about policy implementation and people's lives the grassroots level. And the counter-view that co-funding of some multilateral projects has provided DFID with alternative avenues for obtaining such information.	DFID Vietnam	During the review of the 2003-2006 CAP
3. The HTPAP web site should be maintained until at least the completion of the review of the 2003-2006 CAP. Copies of all documents available on that site should be recorded on a CD, with copies going to all three NGOs and DFID Vietnam, the NGO Resource Centre and the Vietnam Development Information Centre	CDS	2006
4. Hard copies of all the (non-digital) documents listed on the HTPAP website should be kept in an accessible archive by each of the three NGOs until at least 2006.	Oxfam, AAV, SCF	2006

Review team:	CDS Swansea (Davies) and DFID Vietnam (Johnson)
People met:	Staff of ActionAid Vietnam, Save the Children UK, Oxfam UK, and Ha Tinh province and district officials during the final annual review workshop held in Hanoi in November 2002, and in meetings in late April 2003

Scoring system:

1 = likely to be completely achieved

2 = likely to be largely achieved

3 = likely to be partially achieved

4 = only likely to be achieved to a very limited extent

5 = unlikely to be realised

x = too early to judge extent of achievement

