

**Assessment of District Social Development Fund and Hunger  
Eradication and Poverty Reduction Fund  
1997 – 2002**

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## **ABBREVIATION**

AAV	ActionAid Vietnam
BOET	Bureau of Education & Training
HEPR	Hunger eradication & Poverty reduction
HH	Household
M & E	Monitoring & Evaluation
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
PC	People's Committee
PACCOM	People's Aid Co-ordination Committee
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
SDF	Social Development Fund
VND	Vietnamese Dong
WUA	Water Users' Association

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In September 2002, a consultant team from the Institute of Economics was contracted by ActionAid Vietnam (AAV) to conduct a participatory assessment of the SDF of Can Loc district and the HEPR Fund of Ha Tinh province in co-ordination with staff of AAV office in Can Loc District, staff of People's Committee (PC) of Can Loc District and Ha Tinh Provincial PACCOM.

### **1. The SDF of Can Loc District**

After five years, through capacity building activities to key partners such as District Health Center of Can Loc, Provincial Center for Preventive Health, District/Commune Women's Unions, District Department of Education and Training of Can Loc, District Learning Promotion Association of Can Loc, and Project Management Boards of Communes in Can Loc District, the SDF has achieved its planned objectives. Since 1997 the SDF has invested in:

- Infrastructure building (primary schools and a kindergarten, Center for Community Counselling and Health Care, public wells, communal halls etc. )
- Training on knowledge of agricultural extension and HEPR related activities for local officials and people.
- Health interventions (surgery for cataract people, rehabilitation for children affected by orange agent. and
- Training on gender development for district and commune officials.

### **Achievements:**

- Change in people's understanding and attitude on HEPR work: they no longer rely on or wait for support from outside (government, donors), and consider HEPR work as their own responsibility.
- Effective co-ordination in HEPR work at district level with positive results.
- Transparent financial management.
- Success in creating bottom-up and participatory work approach among district officials. People's participation was promoted
- Great impact on the community because the projects have met people's needs, though the size of Fund was limited.
- Building HEPR models, rural economic re-structure with positive effects within the district.

### *Constraints:*

In the early years of Fund's operation (up to 1999), training activities were formal with too large number of participants that focused on officials rather than the poor. Training contents were theoretical with limited practical application and as a result it did not meet the people's needs. The SDF existence was not promoted by involved district and commune officials, therefore lot of people did not know who supported HEPR activities in their communities. Some activities funded by the Fund at commune level did not target at the beneficiaries as regulated by the MOU between AAV and PC of Can Loc. Financial work of the SDF maintained some shortcomings, such as lacking of vouchers leading to late balance work. The contribution from commune and beneficiaries was not clearly recorded, causing difficulties in financial assessment of the project.

## **2. The HEPR Fund of Ha Tinh Province**

### *Main activities:*

- Development of the Action Plan for Provincial HEPR Strategy 1999-2005.
- Support in infrastructure constructions focusing on small-scale irrigation system in some poor communes in Huong Son District so as to create conditions for farmers in promoting rice intensive cultivation, ensuring food security at household level.
- Build capacity of provincial, district and commune officials involved directly in HEPR work.
- Provision of training for local officials and farmers on agriculture extension, technical science transfer in agricultural production, in which the priority was given to poor households. Training on family planning combined with free medical check for women.
- Some support to poor pupils in Huong Son and Nghi Xuan Districts.
- Training on gender development.

### *Achievements:*

- The Fund's activities targeted at poor communities rather than only the poor people. Living standard of people in project areas has improved remarkably after the project implementation.
- Participatory approach has helped the Fund to meet the urgent needs of people in poor communities.
- The Fund mobilised existing resources of the communities to the HEPR work, and helped to change the people's understanding and attitude on HEPR work: HEPR work were also their own tasks, and not rely on and wait for support from the Government.
- Poor people, especially the women had chance to participate and raise their voices in social activities relating to local HEPR work.
- Provincial, district, commune and village officials have learned and applied approach method of "bottom up" and participatory" in planning, development and assessment of development work.
- The roles of mass organisations at grassroots level especially Women's Union and Farmers' Union have been strengthened.

### *Constraints:*

- Though the Fund has helped change people's understanding and attitude to "bottom-up" and "participatory" approach its application was sometimes a formalism, and leaders' opinions often prevailed.
- The number of participants at training courses was too large, training contents were rather theoretical and lacked practice experience.
- The participation of poor households in infrastructure construction projects was limited.

### **Lesson learnt**

Building capacity for partners in combination with close co-operation with them in planning, development, management, and M & E of the projects will increase the effectiveness of the operations of SDF and HEPR Fund. Lessons from An Loc commune (Can Loc District) and Son Binh Commune (Huong Son District) show that once the co-operation was established and the participatory approach followed, communities and

people will be eager to mobilise and contribute resources to achieve the set HEPR objectives.

## **INTRODUCTION**

**The Social Development Fund (SDF)** of Can Loc district was established in February 1997 after signing an MOU between AAV and the PC of Can Loc district. Up to now it has been operational for 5 years. The objectives of the SDF are i) to help the district PC in developing and managing small-scale HEPR and rural development projects; ii) to support poor communities in developing health care, education and clean water systems and to create favorable conditions for the poor in accessing to basic social services; iii) to build up and strengthen participatory capacity of the people involved in small-scale rural development projects; and iv) to contribute to building up capacity for the women's union in development work.

The fundamental operational principles of the SDF are:

- The Fund is used only for strengthening capacity of officials at district, commune levels and people involved in HEPR activities and programmes through i) training on skills and knowledge, and in-country study tours; ii) implementation of small scale projects with capital investment less than VND300 million (US\$20,000) focusing on the poor at commune and village levels; iii) management costs.
- After each year of implementation, the PC of Can Loc and AAV will sign a new MOU to regulate the activities of the SDF for the following year. The budget for each year has to be spent and liquidated within its fiscal year.
- The budget contribution by AAV which occupied higher rate at the initial period will gradually reduce while that of the district PC and beneficiaries will gradually increase.

**The HEPR Fund of Ha Tinh province** was established in 1998. Its objective is to help in developing and implementing small scale development projects following the project models of AAV in Can Loc district basing on the following principles:

- i) Meeting the priorities set in the HEPR strategy of the province.
- ii) 25% out of the Fund will be used for building capacity for officials at provincial, district, and commune and village levels who participate in HEPR activities.
- iii) Meeting various areas of activities.
- iv) The Fund is approved by the HEPR Board of the province.
- v) Priority is given to the projects that bring obvious benefits for the poor as well as for the women's equality.

### **Objectives of the assessment**

To assess the outcomes and impacts resulted from the operation of the two Funds during the period from 1997 – 2001 following the MOUs signed between AAV with the PC of Can Loc and AAV with the Foreign Relations Department of Ha Tinh province respectively.

To assess the capacity of the partners at provincial, district level in developing and implementing HEPR and development projects; the local participation and contribution; the changes in the working approach of the partners as a result.

To provide recommendations and lessons for AAV and its partners for future cooperation.

**Assessment time:** 12 days (from 4 - 15/9/2002).

**Assessment team:**

The team led by Dr. Nguyen Van Huan was divided into two groups:

The group to assess the SDF of Can Loc:

Mr Vu Hung Cuong (ME) – staff of Economics Institute, group leader.

Mr. Nguyen Duy Cuong – staff of Bureau of Planning & Finance, Can Loc district.

Mr. Nguyen Van Tue – staff of Bureau of Education & Training, Can Loc district.

Mr. Vo Cong Hoan – AAV staff, coordinator for An Loc commune.

Ms. Nguyen Thu Hien – accountant of AAV Can Loc

The group to assess the HEPR Fund:

Dr. Nguyen Van Huan – staff of Economics Institute, group leader.

Mr. Duong Hai Luu – Provincial PACCOM.

Mr. Manh Loc Khoa – staff of Foreign Relation Department of Ha Tinh province.

Ms. Phan Thi Lan – staff of AAV Can Loc

Ms. Vo Thi Lan – staff of AAV in Vu Quang

**Assessment methodology**

The assessment team study the MOUs and annual evaluation reports related to two funds.

The assessment team discuss and agree on the contents, requirements and methodology of the assessment.

The assessment team interviews individuals and groups: local authority groups at district and commune levels, beneficiary HHs, and non-beneficiary HHs.

The findings of assessment are described in the followings:

## **CAN LOC DISTRICT SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT FUND**

### **I. Outcomes and impact resulted from the operation of SDF from 1997- 2002**

#### *1.1. Projects funded by the SDF*

- **1997-1998: two projects**

1. Construction of My Loc II primary school: Two new building with 8 classrooms for 520 pupils were built with total expenditure of VND227,400,000 (USD15,160)<sup>1</sup> of which AAV contributed VND200,000,000 (US\$13,333) and the district contributed VND20,000,000 (US\$1,333). In addition, the commune requested each labour to contribute 2kg of rice, used VND7,000,000 for preparing the foundation and each parent, who had their children as pupils, contributed 5 working days to complete the school playground. The project helped increase the rate of children attending school as well as the quality of education.

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<sup>1</sup> Note: the translator uses the exchange rate: US\$ 1 = VND 15,000

2. Strengthening knowledge and application of agricultural extension in HEPR work: The total projected Fund of VND28,180,000 (US\$1,878) was supported by AAV. In addition, the district also contributed VND7,000,000 (US\$470). The project organised two training courses for 1,794 participants from the all 31 communes and township in the district. However, the rate of female participants was rather low (15 – 20%). In general, the project was effective in enhancing knowledge for the people. However, it should have involved more people and the contents should be more specific and pragmatic. The number of participants in each course should be limited to 50 people, and the training duration should be designed to suit the local conditions and to increase the effectiveness of learning for participants.

- **1998-1999: 4 projects**

1. Construction of Phu Loc primary school: Two new buildings with 8 classrooms were built with the total expenditure of VND269,800,000 (US\$17,986) of which 10% in cash of the budget committed by the district and commune according to the MOU. In addition, each parent contributed one working day for preparing the school foundation. Beneficiaries include 585 pupils from grade 1 – 5 and families living around the centre of the commune, school teachers and the people of Phu Loc commune as a whole. The construction also helped encourage children in school age to go to school as well as improving their awareness of keeping the school beautiful.

2. Training course on HEPR activities: The project spent VND44,930,000 (US\$2,995.33) on two training courses for 1,411 participants including officials from communes, villages, district line agencies, women's union and farmers' association at village and commune levels.

3. Disaster preparedness: A total sum of VND31,000,000 (US\$2,066) was spent on upgrading 7 village wells and drilling 40 wells for several communes prone to drought. Beneficiary villages and people contributed about 40 – 50% of the project costs. VND2,000,000 (US\$133.33) was spent on training for village officials on the natural disaster preparedness and prevention. The participants then disseminated the basic messages on the preparedness and prevention of natural disasters to the whole people through communication media installed in each village. VND7,000,000 (US\$467) was spent on purchasing first aid bags for 70 schools but without training on how to practice it. VND10,000,000 (US\$667) was spent to increase the medicine Fund of the Health Counselling Counter of the District Red Cross. After 3 months in operation (from October – December 1998), this revolving medicine Fund provided free health counselling to 500 patients.

4. Support to the children protection Fund: The project spent VND19,941,000 (US\$1,329) on purchasing cooking stoves, books and two sewing machines for 10 children at a catering house in Nghen township; support to 5 girls who were in difficulty to learn tailoring. The project also provided small supports to 154 children in very difficult situation.

- **1999-2000: 4 projects**

1. Training on HEPR and improving knowledge on agricultural production science & technology: According to the MOU, the budgeted Fund of the project was VND67.593 million (US\$ 4,506.2) of which AAV were to contribute VND50 million (US\$3,333) and the district VND17.593 million (US\$1,173). However, at the end of the project whole

expenditures of VND50,04 million (US\$3,334) was born from AAV money. The total number of trainees was 1,100 and they were organised in ten courses. Like in 1998, the participants were mostly the officials of communes, women's union, village managers and representatives from better off farmers of each commune. The training contents focused heavily on theory covering different subjects, the duration was short and as a result the participants could absorb very little what they had been taught. The project did not clarify what the trainees should do after the training in order to disseminate the knowledge to the rest of people in their community. Few trainees in some villages disseminated training contents to their relatives or using loudspeakers. One can say that the project did not concentrate on the poor and the participation from beneficiaries was very limited.

2. Clean water projects in 7 communes (Hong Loc, Binh Loc, Tan Loc, Xuan Loc, Vuong Loc, Song Loc, Quang Loc, Vinh Loc): The total budget for this project was VND222,268,000 (US\$14,818) of which VND190,000,000 (US\$ 12,667) was supported by AAV and VND34,268,000 (US\$ 2,284.53) was contributed by the beneficiaries in labour work (15.4% of the total). The project built 10 public wells in 7 communes serving 13,000 people. After the construction villagers set simple regulations on the use and protection of the wells and since that time people's awareness of protecting clean water source became much better than before. In general, occurrence of some common diseases such as diarrhoea, malaria was reduced. In summer public wells became a common place for villagers to gather and exchange production experience. However, due to the inaccurate initial survey and design, there was a confusion on 4 wells built in 1998 in Quang Loc commune with support from a priest.

3. Construction of Son Loc primary school: The project built 8 classrooms meeting the demand of 620 primary education pupils. The total expenditure was VND327,351,000 (US\$ 21,823) of which VND297,351,000 (US\$19,823) was contributed by AAV and VND30,000,000 (US\$2,000) by the commune (9.1% of the total cost by mobilising each HH to contribute VND15,000). A part of the contribution was used for other activities such as building school garden and more classrooms. The implementation of the project showed that the higher participation from local people the higher quality of construction and the more contribution in terms of planning, supervision, protection and maintenance of the project in the future.

4. Surgery for cataract people in 7 communes of Tra Son zone: The total expenditure of VND51,570,000 (US\$ 3,438) was supported by AAV while the patients covered the hospital fees, food and travelling. The cataract surgeries were provided to 56 people in Tra Son zone 45 out them were adults and 11 were children. However, due to insufficient advice on after operation care two patients got infection. In addition, the vouchers and receipts related to this project were unclear.

- **2000-2001: 5 projects**

1. Training on HEPR programme: Two training courses for 2,774 participants were held and priority was given to poor people and women in 31 communes. The total expenditure of VND96,414,000 (US\$6,428) were supported by AAV. The quality of training materials was improved. However, due to insufficient pre-assessment of training needs from each commune, the result from the training was not high. Though the content was not specific as required, the training had good impact on poor people.

2. Surgery for cataract people: The project provided surgery for 62 cataract people all of them were elderly people from Tra Son zone and adjacent communes. The total expenditure was VND52, 629,000 (US\$ 3,507) of which VND50 million (US\$ 3,333) come from AAV support, the remainder was contributed by the patients and communes. However, the contribution from communes was not even - some communes requested too high contribution from people. Though the target beneficiaries were different from planned ones (children), the project had very good social impact. Due to the insufficient information dissemination on the project, the majority of patients did not know who supported them.

3. Construction of Thuong Nga primary school: The project built 8 classrooms for more than 1,200 pupils. The total expenditure was VND375,184,000 (US\$ 25,102). Of which VND300 million (US\$20,000) was supported by AAV and VND35 million (US\$2,333) was contributed by the district and VND40,184,000 (US\$ 2,678.93) by local people. The women's union, youth union and the parents of the pupils contributed labour to prepare the foundation. Parents contributed soil for the school playground. However, after the project was transferred to the commune, according to a decision from commune authorities the project was used for differently target group – lower secondary pupils. In exchange, primary pupils and teachers now use the facilities that belong to lower secondary school. At the same time of building a new school, the school management mobilised contribution from pupils' families to build a school office at cost of VND73 million (US\$ 4,866.66). The construction of a new school had good impact on improving the quality of learning and teaching. Some poor families whose children were dropped out now encourage them to return to school and they are exempted from contribution. The school management has contracted teachers and pupils in each class to the protect their facility and as a result the school is being better maintained and expenses for annual repair reduced.

4. Upgrading the Community Health Counselling Centre: The total cost of construction was VND400 million (US\$ 2,666.66) of which AAV contributed VND100 million, the remainder was mobilised from provincial, district sources and from the budget of the District Health Centre. A new building with one meeting hall and 7 rooms was built (two rooms are used for operation and 5 rooms for patients (20 beds). The project met the objective as planned. However, because of lack of information many staff of the centre did not know about the funding sources.

5. Development of HEPR strategy and the plan of action for HEPR of Can Loc district:

Because the two parties were so busy, the project did not finish the majority of work as agreed and the budget was not spent in full. The underspent budget was transferred to the budget for 2001. The project finished the PPA process in two communes (An Loc and Song Loc) in preparation for the workshop on “plan of action for HEPR from 2001 – 2005 of Can Loc district”.

• **2001-2002: 7 projects**

1. Construction of Nhan Loc II primary school: The project built 6 classrooms for 560 pupils. The total expenditure was VND277.7 million (US\$18,513) of which VND200 million (US\$13,333) came SDF budget and VND77.7 million (US\$5,180) was contributed by the district, commune and local people. The project quality was good and meeting the objective as planned as well as expectation of the people. However, the school did not have a policy to reduce the fees and give priority for poor pupils.

2. Developing and implementing the “Joint HEPR Action Plan of Can Loc District 2001 – 2005” and piloting some pilot activities in An Loc commune: In order to implement pilot activities of the Joint HEPR Actio Plan in An Loc commune, a district 5 member working team led by a vice-Chairman of the district PC and a commune project management board comprising 6 members were established and become operational right after the district workshop in April 2001. Basing on the results from HH wealth ranking 70 HHs (2/3 of them are poor) have been selected and divided in 3 interest groups with purpose to build up 3 pilot HEPR models: improved gardening (15 HHs), husbandry (20 HHs), shifting crop structure and production (35 HHs). The total expenditure for all activities was VND86,984,000 (US\$5,799) including VND10 million (US\$680) for management cost. Due to carefully initial assessment the plan of action was clear and suitable to the needs and expectations of the people and it encouraged active participation from all stakeholders particularly the beneficiaries. In addition, due to great effort of the the district and commune teams in terms of close collaboration and maintaining contact with local people the pilot project has achieved very good initial successes. Bellow are some activities:

*Two training courses* on agriculture extension knowledge were held for more than 300 farmers at a cost of VND24,498,000 (US\$1,633). The selection of participants was prioritised for poor HHs who wanted to attain knowledge for economic development. The rate of woman participants was 60% of the total. The training contents were close to reality and the training methodology was suitable to participants.

*Two in-country study tours* were organised for core officials of communes to visit the model of re-arranging production land and shifting agriculture economic structure in Tho Xuan district, Thanh Hoa province, and for 35 participants to visit the model of growing high value crops in Me So commune, Hung Yen province. The expenditure for two studytours was VND18.7 million (US\$1,247).

*Introduction of mushroom production:* The project spent VND9.1 million (US\$ 607) for 4 participants nominated by the youth union to participate in two training courses on mushroom production held in Hong Linh and Cam Xuyen districts, Ha Tinh province. Right after the course 4 participants started the mushroom production. However, due to small-scale production and lack of marketing skills, the result was rather limited.

*Introduction of breeding Mong Cai piglets:* The project transferred 5 Mong Cai piglets to the HHs who registered to raise and provided training on breeding techniques to them. However, not all of these 5 HHs understood well of the techniques and one HH lost the piglet due to animal disease. The initial expenditure for buying piglets and food was VND2,575,000 (US\$172).

*Improvement of multi-purposed garden:* The project spent VND2 million (US\$133) for seedling purchase. After the training, the extensionist came to each HH to advice how to use techniques and purchased orange seedlings for them to plant. HHs planted 235 orange seedlings.

*Production of rice and groundnut seeds:* The project spent VND4.5 million (US\$300) to buy one ton of X23 rice seed and VND2,5 million (US\$ 1667) to buy new varieties of groundnut seed. The yields from the HHs who adopted new seeds were remarkably higher than these of the HHs who used normal seeds.

*Education and health activities:* The project spent VND10 million (US\$667) to distribute textbooks and medicine to poor HHs.

3. Construction of a kindergarten in Can Loc township: The total expenditure for the project was VND186 million (US\$12,400) of which VND100 million (US\$ 6,667) was contributed by the SDF, VND50 million (US\$ 3,333) by the district budget and the remainder by the township. Implementation of the project was rather slow.

4. Training on HEPR for poor HHs: Because there were many training courses within the project area, the project management board proposed AAV to change the operation content. The total budget of VND80 million (US\$6,000) was allocated as follows:

- Training on improving the multi-purposed gardens and on growing fruit trees for 2,450 participants from 21 communes. The total expenditure was VND13.7 million (US\$913) in which the SDF contributed VND9.5 million (US\$633) and the communes contributed VND4.2 million (US\$280) for trainer fees. The training contents were practical and the materials were sufficient, the results were very good.
- Shifting crop structure, land reallocation in Quang Loc commune: the total expenditure was VND50.467 million (US\$3,364) in which the SDF contributed VND16.5 million (US\$1,100), the district contributed VND10 million (US\$667), the remaining was contributed by the communes. After land re-arrangement, the number of paddy plots has reduced to just 1/3 of the previously one and this factor has helped in increase in planting areas for each HH and in building field channel and roads.
- A Workshop on sloppy gardening was held in Dong Loc commune at expenditure of VND3.4 million (US\$227).
- Supply of fingerlings fish to the HHs who suffered from storm (VND20 million or US\$1,333). Loan provision for seed production and nursery garden development (VND30 million or US\$1,500).

5. Training on gender for local officials: The project spent VND20 million (US\$1,333) to organise training courses on gender for 400 core officials from women's union at village, commune level in the whole district and for 300 officials at district level in which 125 participants were women. Though the project met the need of providing gender knowledge to the target groups as planned, it did not have plan of action and activities for gender issue after the training, thus the effectiveness was limited. Also, the number of participants in each training course was too high and they were not provided with handouts. As a result the participation of participants was limited.

6. Supported to build village meeting halls cum kindergarten: The SDF provided VND50 million (US\$3,333) to build 5 village meeting halls in 5 communes. The total cost is doubled and the remainder was contributed by local people and communes. Local people were asked to discuss and comment on the design. The construction of village meeting halls varied from commune to commune. The contribution mobilised from the people was higher than planned in some area or the scale of construction was different of that planned.

7. Functional rehabilitation for children who are handicapped or affected by orange agent: 51 children and adult aged from 4 – 24 years in the district received support from the project at total expenditure of VND85,465,500 (US\$5,698) of which the SDF contributed VND50 million (US\$ 3,333) for purchasing 10 wheelchairs, payment for orthopaedic surgeries of 20 children, purchasing of orthopaedic equipment and artificial limbs for 6 children, paying for medicine and fees for physical therapy. The District Committee for Children Protection and Care contributed VND4,265,500 (US\$284) to cover travel costs of patients and doctors, examination fees, and purchasing one wheel chair. The Centre for Functional Rehabilitation and Orthopaedy of Vinh City contributed VND12 million (US\$800) to cover treatment fees. The families of patients paid VND19.2 million (US\$1,280). The project focused 100% on the patients from poor HHs and created a good impact on the local society. However, due to the lack of technical staff at the District Committee for Children Protection and Care (CCPC), the guidance and counselling for the

patients in the post-surgery period was not sufficient. In addition, the beneficiaries did not know who provided them support through the CCPC.

### *1.2. Development of SDF objectives*

- The authority and mass organizations at the district and commune levels totally agreed with the objectives of the SDF which were in line with the strategy for socio-economic development of the district and the national HEPR programme.
- The working approach of “providing a rod rather than a fish” helped the people and local authority to change their understanding and working approach, awakening their awareness of shifting economic structure to growth rather than waiting for support from the government by the poor HHs as previously in the district.
- The detailed objectives in the later years were discussed carefully with the communes and HHs, thus become more suitable to the local needs.

### *1.3. The outcomes of the implementation against the annual MOUs*

- The prioritized interventions were appropriate to the objectives of the SDF and the needs of the local people. This was due to careful assessments with the commune and people before making planning.
- There was almost no change in the general criteria proposed by AAV for the SDF. The district, communes and the people just proposed for more budgets in some activities and more details in order to get closer to the local reality. The construction of school, public wells etc. was contributed by the beneficiaries and supervised by them, thus the quality of the projects were good.
- There were some problems in the training courses held in the first three years such as too many participants, so short duration while so long for the contents, lack of materials, heavy theory, inappropriate time for the training course etc. thus, the effectiveness of training was low. In addition, as the participants were mainly grassroots officials, it did not meet the criteria of the SDF which requested to focus on poor groups particularly the women. These constraints were overcome in the following years (2000 – 2001), thus the effectiveness became higher and the people were happier.
- Charity activities such as cataract surgeries, support to poor children etc. made very good impact on local people and communities.
- However, there was still some error in selecting target beneficiaries of the project at commune level (i.e. cataract surgery in 2000 in Tra Son zone: while the objective of the project was to prioritize the children, the commune selected the old people; or the construction of Thuong Nga primary school: the commune used that school for basic secondary education school).
- The annual progress of the SDF implementation was generally in time. However, there was some delay in some activities due to many factors such as weather, drought, flood and storm or in some cases, this was due to the shortage of time of involved district/commune officials.
- The financial work of the SDF was not sufficient in the first years such as lack of sufficient vouchers/ receipts that made the activities were not liquidated upon finishment such as construction of school, training courses. The contribution from the commune and people were not sufficiently recorded, thus made difficult for AAV to assess financial factor. However, due to guidance from AAV basing on the annual evaluation, since 1999 the financial work of the SDF has been much improved. The

disbursement of Fund was on time though depending much on the contribution from the district (the MOU regulates that only after the contribution from the district being done, the activities can be implemented) while the budget of the district was limited and they often had to mobilize contribution from the communes and people particularly from direct beneficiaries.

- The dissemination of information on the Fund activities was very limited, thus in most of the areas where the Fund provided support, the people did not know where the Fund came from while in AAV project area the people just knew that the Fund came from AAV rather than understood that there was an existence of such Fund.
- As the annual budget was managed by the district, the commune did not know the details of expenditures for each activity. Annually, the SDF organised annual review workshop in which financial report was a part for the review. However, such review was just for the grassroots officials and representatives of farmers (i.e. village officials, head of village women's union) rather than for the beneficiaries to review.

#### *Difficulties:*

- Supplies could not meet demands – the Fund's budget was limited while the needs from people/communities were so high.
- The implementation of some activities was slow due to complicated natural conditions and the constraints from the officials in charge.
- At the beginning, local people felt confused due to limited knowledge. Some of them were sceptical in contributing opinions/putting forward proposals. Selfishness and localism of some officials affected the cooperation among stakeholders.

In order to overcome these situations, the project management board brought the issue for open discussion among stakeholders so as to prioritize the activities basing on the limited budget as well as define more appropriate time for training courses, decentralize the activity to the related offices to manage the activities within their own profession such as agriculture extension centre in charge of training on extension, health centre in charge of cataract surgery etc.

#### *1.4. Assessment of the impact from the projects funded by the SDF*

- The projects funded by the SDF have created a clear impact on socio-economic life of communities and people across the district. The yield from paddy rice has increased from 3,200-3,500 kg per hectare to 4,000 – 4,500 kg per hectare. Various kinds of livestock and fowls have been introduced to local people, a model of good gardening to replace multi-purpose gardens.
- As the SDF has been in operation for just 5 years, it is still early to test its quantitative economic impact on whole community. However, for beneficiary HHs, particularly for those participating in the pilot scheme in An Loc commune, initial positive impact is obvious.
- The community projects such as construction of school, public wells and cataract surgery etc. have brought about great social impact on not only the direct beneficiaries but also the community as a whole. All projects have had great spiritual impact on people, particularly on the poor because they have created opportunities for them to be the active part of society and their voices are heard by community.
- The projects on social activities instead of small budget, have had positive impact on community because the activities were prioritized basing on the actual needs of local people.

- One of the greatest impact of the Fund is that it has contributed to strengthening people's awareness in general and awareness the poor in particular on HEPR work, on their participation in development of their community. In the past poor people, because of their lack of capital and economic knowledge, used to rely on support from outside mainly from government. After taking part in training courses, their passive attitude to HEPR work has changed step by step, their voices have become heard and they themselves, equipped with new knowledge, started participating pro-actively in discussions as well in sharing experience. However, the voice of women, particularly the poor women is still weak partly due to their timid nature and partly due to the existence of prevalent social view of women in rural area which is discriminating.
- The principle of cost sharing of the budget (AAV, district, commune and local people) in project implementation has made local authority and people to be aware of that HEPR work is responsibility of whole society. This, in turn, has enhanced their pro-activeness in participating in planning and supervising the implementation of development projects.
- Through implementing development projects staff of district and commune authorities have learnt scientific working style. During the initial years (1997 – 1998), the projects often suffered slow progress due to late planning (often completed in Jun). Since 1999, the planning methodology has changed. Review workshops held at the end of each year were also the opportunities to gather people's opinions/recommendations for planning of the following year activities. As a result plans have become more pragmatic and reflecting more the ideas of the people and commune leaders rather than the will of district authorities.
- The management skills of district and commune officials have also improved through participatory processes of project management and supervision.
- The working style of commune officials also changed particularly in regard to working on time (though it was just applied in AAV-funded projects), improved democracy and work division. Commune officials have maintained closer contact with and listened more to people. Their accountability seemed to be improved remarkably.
- The working on time style has not only impacted on commune officials but also on the people, especially when there was a meeting or training related to AAV (they did not know that these activities were supported by the SDF). Through training courses, people have also been able to understand more about HEPR work.

## **II. Assessment of capacity in developing and implementing development projects of the partners at district level, the participation and contribution from local people**

### *2. 1. Partners at district and commune levels*

- Right after the establishment of the SDF, the district PC established a steering board including representatives from related departments/units.
- Because of the small size of the Fund's budget the planners at district level had to cooperate with their partners in prioritising activities. Based on the district socio-economic development strategy the district leaders have been able to attract external funding to achieve development objective without compromising the overall objective of the Fund. The planning methodology was that the district allocated tasks/projects, commune and local people selected the location and targets so that hunger areas were eliminated while there was some balance between regions.

- At the beginning of the Fund's operation, district partners were dependent much on and hesitated to exchange opinions with AAV. This was because of differences in working approach between the two parties. While AAV focused on the poor, the district and commune authorities wanted to include some better off and average HHs in the programme, as core HHs, for ensuring its success and for replication of the good models (at that time local authorities were of an opinion that poor people were unable to economic development because had very limited knowledge and experience). After discussion with AAV, both parties agreed that the Fund's activities should include about 30% better off and average HHs while maintaining its focus on the poor.
- For the communes within AAV project area, most of commune officials and people thought that all project carried out in their communes were funded and managed by AAV. This is a misperception because according to the MOUs the contribution to the SDF comes from AAV, district budget, communes and people. This fact confirms that dissemination of information on the Fund activities to people was not sufficient. The main cause was that the local officials involved in project worked part time and they were often busy with other tasks.
- Since the Fund started its operation, every communes have established project management boards including core members of the commune PC and mass organizations. The way of working was that whenever any problem occurred, it was to be discussed at village level first and after that put forward to commune boards for consideration and decision making. Communes had no voice in discussing priority of activities as it was AAV and district matter. However, once the activities being implemented communes were to discuss in the details what, when and how things would be implemented. The fact that the Fund's budget was managed by the district caused that communes did not know total money allocated for each activity.
- Among all communes having Fund's projects, it seemed that An Loc commune achieved better results because of the close collaboration between AAV, District and commune, scientific planning and designing activities that meet the needs of people. In addition, the understanding of the project approach and activities of commune officials and the people has improved very fast, and as a result their working style has become more scientific than that of other communes - things are managed by the project management board who do not have to consult with and report to many other people/agencies thus the work has been carried out well and faster.
- Local contribution to Fund's budget in imlementation of projects was done differently among the communes who implemented the same activity (i.e. building village meeting halls). According to the MOU, AAV would contribute 70% of the Fund annually while the district contributed 30% of which 10% in cash was from the district budget and 20% in cash or in kinds or labour from the beneficiaries. However, this regulation was not followed strictly and it was difficult to supervise the contribution from the district and communes. As the budget of the district and communes was very limited, it depended much on the contribution from the beneficiaries. In any case, it should be recognized that the contribution of local people to Fund's projects has increased steadily. In 2001, the local contribution accounted for 48% of the total expenditures for the projects funded the SDF.

## 2.2. *Community and local people*

- The participation from people in the project activities depended much on the communication and the quality of the training. When the training on demonstration models was effective, people's knowledge and understanding increased. They (including indirect beneficiaries) would have sense of self-learning and experience exchanging through the models. For example, the model of raising chicken in An Loc commune in 2001 the project supported just 25 HHs with 1,200 chicken, until 2002 the model expanded to 102 HHs with 5,000 chicken.
- The activities did not bring benefits to the direct beneficiaries only but also reached indirect beneficiaries. Some HHs who participated in the pilot schemes were willing to exchange the new variety of chicken to their neighbors or to lend them without interest for raising. According to some indirect beneficiaries in An Loc commune, before the project there were new variety of rice but people had to have money to buy, at present they could get the seed even when they do not have money in hand. This means that the solidarity within the community was strengthened due to the project.
- The HHs who were selected for the pilot programme were well aware that they had to try their best to ensure the success of the programme. On one hand it was for their own benefit and on the other hand it was for the image of their village. The people who participated in the training were aware that they should take advantage of the support from AAV and government to overcome poverty. They were more active in contributing ideas to planning discussion at the village meetings. They also shared knowledge and experience learnt to other village people (An Loc commune). However, given the fact that there were too many poor HHs while the budget for programme was limited, the people's consciousness was as high as required, the support within the community was not high. There was still some HHs who had already benefited from the programme but still wanted to have more and unwilling to share with others. This made selection of beneficiary HHs very difficult.
- Among the AAV project area, it was seen that because An Loc commune was selected for the pilot coordination of action among stakeholders and got more attention from AAV, the people benefited more from the project. The poor HHs after participating the training had opportunities to apply the new knowledge to their production. Thus they were able to draw out effective lessons and experience. From that point they became more confident to speak opinions at the village meeting and to share experience to others. While in other places (i.e., Phu Loc commune) due to theoretical training and the training focused on formality rather than practice, the participants almost forgot the new knowledge after the training. They were able even just remember that they attended some training but could not remember what was the training and what was about. In addition, some training courses were participated by grassroots officials and the project did not give them the task to disseminate the knowledge to other people. Thus, the training did not reach the poor.
- The forms of contribution from people in the projects varied depending on the type of activity and the level they could benefit from. The contribution ranges from 10 – 12% for school construction to 40 – 50% for construction of public wells and village meeting halls. Once people were well aware of their benefit from a project, it was easier to mobilize their contribution even when there was not further external support. For example, after building the Phu Loc primary school in 1998 local people continued to contribute to build a school office in 1999 and build more two classrooms in 2001. This fact shows that the higher contribution from people the

higher their responsibility, participation and supervision and the better maintenance and protection of project now and in the future.

## **HUNGER ERADICATION & POVERTY REDUCTION FUND**

From 3 – 7 September 2002, the assessment team including staff from the Foreign Relations Department, expert from the Economics Institute, staff of AAV and of Huong Son district together with the people, officials of the village and commune conducted a participatory assessment on the HEPR Fund of Ha Tinh province supported by AAV which has been implementing in Huong Son district since 1998. The assessment analyses the impact of the Fund on HEPR work and socio-economic development of the beneficiary localities.

### **I. Assessment of overall impact**

For the last 5 years, AAV and Ha Tinh province (represented by the Foreign Relations Department) have been implementing effectively specific commitments following the objectives of the Fund. The HEPR Fund has contributed to increase in the quality of the people's life, in reducing poverty situation in some communes of Huong Son district. All parties participating in the assessment of the HEPR Fund implemented in Son Binh and Son Tay communes after five years have agreed that:

- a. All objectives of the Fund were carried out at different levels. The Fund targeted at the poor community rather than at only the poor people.
- b. The living standards of the people in the project areas were significantly improved in comparison with that before the project and better than that of the communes where there was no such project.
- c. The working approach promoting the participation helped the Fund to meet pressing issues of the people in poor communities. It also helped the local authority to pay more attention to the pressing issues of the people in HEPR programmes.
- d. The Fund mobilized the resources available in the community for the HEPR programmes. It helped to change the understanding of the people that the HEPR was of their own and they should not wait for the government as before.
- e. The Fund helped the poor, particularly the women to participate and have their voice in social activities relating to local HEPR programmes "*we - the poor have been able to join with the rest of village, our lives have improved and we are no longer inferior as we were before.*" (Feedback from poor participants at the assessment of HEPR Fund in Son Binh commune, Huong Son district, Ha Tinh).
- f. Partners from village up to provincial levels have been aware of the effectiveness in using the "bottom – up" approach in developing, implementing and evaluating local development plans. The Decree on grassroots democracy has been implemented and become a part of life in villages.

- g. The implementation of the HEPR Fund has strengthened the roles of grassroots mass organizations, particularly the Women's Union and Farmers' Association.

Though the Fund has had impact on changing working approach from "top-down" to "bottom – up" in HEPR activities as described in the above, the implementation of these approaches sometimes seemed to be a formality and the opinions of leaders were still decisive. The reason to explain for this was the bureaucratic attitude, lack of democracy of the agencies related to HEPR work.

## **II. The activities supported by the Fund**

### *II.1. Development of HEPR Action Plan*

Encouraging achievements the small scale projects supported by the HEPR Fund have brought about was the result of AAV's initial request that partners seek for consultants who would participate truly in researching, consulting and developing the "HEPR Action Plan of Ha Tinh Province 1998 – 2005". Adopting the participatory research methods (PPA, analysis of stakeholders, participatory planning, interviews in depth), the Action Plan set out strategic directions, steps to be taken and specific prioritized programmes in HEPR work. It also recommended some local areas for pilot scheme in Huong Son district (Son Ham and Son Binh communes).

In fact, the Action Plan reached to liminated other offices or localities in the province. The reason for this was that after the Economics Institute (the contracted agency for developing the plan of action) submitted the final version, the publication was not carried out by AAV and the Foreign Relations Department.

*Recommendations:* It needs to revisit the Action Plan, specifying further other poverty reduction plans and strengthen the coordination in fighting against poverty in Ha Tinh province in the coming years following the national HEPR strategy.

### *II.2. Building and strengthening the capacity for government officials at all levels involved in HEPR work:*

"In the first two years, we received a small scale project supported by the HEPR Fund in a "top - down" manner and faced lot of difficulties. There were many shortcomings in coordination of planning between the district and commune.

In the following years because of the support the HEPR Fund given to us we've got familiar to and applied knowledge on rural development in implementing government HEPR projects such as the programme 135, programme 120 and programme 661 (reforestation of 5 millions hectares of forest land). We listen more to the people and meet their pressing needs, particularly the poor. People in turn have understood and supported us. Planning has been developed at commune level and put forward for approval at district level. Commune authority has become the holders of many small scale projects with participation from the people during their implementation". (Mr. Binh, vice chairman of Huong Son district).

Annually, according to the MOU between AAV and Ha Tinh province, the HEPR Fund should allocate 25% of the budget for capacity building for government officials at village,

commune, district and provincial levels who are involved in HEPR work. In fact, the Fund has just allocated about 10% of budget for this work.

A number of government officials participated in training on PRA, development and M & E the rural development projects, community development projects, M & E irrigation projects etc. Those who attended training have applied well new knowledge in their HEPR work. A significant change was their working style with people. The “bottom – up” approach has helped local officials to listen to the expectations of people and integrate their opinions into the planning process. The capacity of the commune officials to mobilize people in planning has been improved. For example, officials in Son Binh commune applied relatively well community based planning methods in small scale irrigation project. They discussed with people and basing on their opinions the technical staff designed the project. After that they continued to invite comments from people to improve the design. In this case, people were respected, so they were eager to mobilize resources available in the community into development projects in the commune. The beneficiaries agreed that the officials had worked together with them listened to their voices etc.

In addition to the change in working style, after the training development workers at district and commune levels became experienced trainers (participatory teaching). For the collaboration among local officials in fighting poverty, the assessment team agreed that the officials who participated in HEPR work started to get familiar with the team work with clear responsibility. Thus, their work has become more effective than before.

**RESULTS:**

- *6 provincial officials participated in the training on evaluation of rural development projects.*
- *5 district officials participated in the training on management of irrigation and agriculture extension projects.*
- *3 district officials became trainers for the farmers.*
- *2 officials of the Foreign Relation Department became trainers and had knowledge of evaluating rural development projects.*
- *46 commune officials participated in the training on agriculture extension, IPM. 10 out of them were women.*

AAV staff have been keen on improved coordination with partners by giving them more power in running the HEPR Fund while retaining supervising responsibility according to annual MOUs. AAV staff have shared their experiences in rural development work with partners thus have helped to improve the effectiveness of M & E work on the the Fund’s activities.

However, within the frame of the HEPR Fund at provincial level, changes in working approach, bottom-up planning, and teamwork are still hindered by the bureaucratic working style that is characterised by top-down demand, weak listening skills, low sharing

and participation etc. The selection of training courses focused on project evaluation rather than on provision of knowledge on community development, working together with people, management of other institutions working on socio-economic activities.

### *II.3. Training on agriculture extension, study tour to models of shifting crop structure*

The assessment team interviewed with the experts who participated in training on agriculture extension (the Agriculture Extension Department of Ha Tinh province, the Centre for Agriculture Technology Transfer of Huong Son district). The experts said that these were the activities to create opportunities for the farmers to access to advanced agriculture production condition so as to increase the productivity of crops and minimize the risks in agriculture production. The contents of these training in the communes of Huong Son and Nghi Xuan districts included:

- Skills in growing high yield rice varieties which were suitable to the local production condition.
- Pests and the ways to prevent the pests
- The ways to use fertilizer and to care for the crops
- Techniques in raising live stock
- Techniques in gardening

In general, training contents tried to deal with the technical obstacles in agriculture production faced by the people in each year.

In talking with a farmer group who participated in the assessment of the Fund in Son Binh & Son Tay communes about the impact of the training, they said that in the past the Agriculture Extension Centre of the district had organized some training courses. However, these training were mainly for village and commune officials, and some excellent farmers while the poor were not able to participate in. The reason for this was the limited budget of the centre. In addition, due to the shortage of grassroots extension workers, they were not able to meet the demands of transferring the techniques to the farmers.

The provincial HEPR Fund contributed to meet these demands of the people in the communes. The training on agriculture extension attracted the majority of people to participate in. The poor were prioritized to participate in the training. Mr. Le Tuan Minh – a poor farmer in Son Binh commune said that *“we – the poor were invited to learn new production techniques for the first time. I tried to listen to the trainers in order to apply the knowledge in raising*

#### **Results**

**In 1999:** organised 21 training courses on agriculture extension including 1,164 farmer participants in Huong Son district. 54.9% out of them were women. The rate of the poor was about 50% in the total poor HHs of the commune. The total expenditures were 106,686,000 VND (US\$ 7,112.4).

**In 2000:** The total people participated in the training courses on agriculture extension was 1,164. The rate of women was 68.7%. The rate of the poor was more than 56.8% in the total poor HHs of the commune. The total expenditures were 235,000,000 VND (US\$ 15,666.66).

**In 2001:** organised 32 training courses in Huong Son district including 2,441 participants. The rate of women was 75%. No statistics on the rate of the poor.

- In Duc Tho district: 6 training courses including 580 participants
- The total expenditures were 180,434,000 VND (US\$ 12,029).

**First 6 months of 2002:** Organised 18 training courses in Nghi Xuan district including 1,486 participants. The rate of women was 65%. No statistics for the rate of the poor.

The total expenditures were 64,734,000 VND (US\$ 4,315.6).

*chicken in my family, growing fruit trees. Hopefully, my family would have sufficient food in few coming years.”*

Training on agriculture extension recommended new varieties of high yield rice to people helping the shift of crop structure in Huong Son district to be well carried out. The farmers knew about new rice varieties and shifted the crops effectively. In 2001, the communes of Huong Son district planted new rice variety in 3,500 ha. Binh Son commune planted new rice variety in 108 ha.

The extension material, particularly the “farmers’ work” became a manual for daily work of many farmers in cultivation and live stock raising.

In order to meet the need in improving the knowledge for agriculture production of the people in the communes, the training courses often included from 60 – 80 farmers. On average, there were often 4 officials at village/ commune level to participate in a course. The duration of the training was often short (about 3 hours). *With such size of participants and short duration, it was impossible to employ the participatory learning and practice. Thus, many people who participated in the assessment of the Fund said that the acquisition of new knowledge from the training courses was still very limited, difficult to apply in actual production.*

The opinions from the people said that the training should include smaller number of participants, the duration should be longer - at least one day for one training. Many people proposed that the training duration should be two days and there should be separate training courses for poor people. The training should focus on particularly crops or animal suitable to the local production conditions. The Fund should develop some demonstration models for the people to visit. This would limit the theory training, minimizing the study tours to faraway places while the budget was insufficient and the majority of farmers were not selected to participate in.

***Recommendations from the district officials:***

- The materials developed for the training courses should be close to the specific production conditions of the locality.
- Making the training course to be sharing sessions on production knowledge, solving problems in the production rather than training on the knowledge that was not so necessary for the local production conditions.
- Training courses should organized in agriculture leisure time
- Separate training course on agriculture extension should be organized for the poor.

***Recommendations from the assessment team:***

- Training need assessment should done. Basing on the result, design quality training courses appropriate to the practical needs of the local production.
- The development of training materials should focus on the locally special plants, live stock which are potential for commodity production.
- It needs to recruit a team of capable farmers who are able to become farmer trainers so as to form agriculture extensionists – grassroots trainers.
- These grassroots trainers then organise training on small scale in sufficient duration and having practice for the farmers.

#### *II.4 Training on family planning and providing health check for women*

- This activity was carried out in 2001 – 2002. Its objectives were:
- Providing basic information on family planning
- Providing family planning services free of charge.
- Providing health check free of charge for the training participants

The participants of the programme were women within the child-bearing age who were willing to register with the women's union on family planning method. In 2001, the total number of women participating in the training was 334 and 298 out of them were provided with health check and medicine. The rate of poor women was 92% and 88% out of them was provided with health check and medicine.

This activity provided basic knowledge on family planning to the poor women and contributed addressing the cause of having many children and lack of laborer in poor families living in remote communes. This also activity helped to bring the family planning services to the village level where people had little opportunity to access to this kind of services. In addition, it contributed to identify gynecological problems of the poor women and provide treatment for them who did not have opportunity to access to health services.

Due to the large scale of implementation in remote areas, the traveling faced difficulty. In addition, the mobile health services required modern facilities. In Ha Tinh province health services relating to reproductive health lacked of facilities for a mobile service. MSI (an INGO) was contracted by the Foreign Relations Department of Ha Tinh province to carry out this mission. The total value spent for the family planning in 2001 was VND7,518,000 (US\$5,012). In the first 6 months of 2002, the expenditure was VND78 million (US\$5,200) (MSI report).

The issue was that how to combine the health check and treatment free of charge provided by MSI with family planning services so as to maximize the use of expenditure in bringing these services to the remote areas for the disadvantageous people.

#### *II.5. Development of small scale irrigation system*

In order to create good conditions for farmers to utilize the available water sources in agriculture production, solving one of the important causes of poverty, the HEPR Fund allocated majority of its budget to support the irrigation projects. The total investment for irrigation was 79.5% annually.

The projects include Hau Hau dam (Son Ham commune), pumping station (Son Binh commune), Cay Chanh dam (Son Tay commune), Dinh De dam (Son Thuy commune), Binh Khe dam. All were small scale irrigation projects with the participation from local people. They were effectively utilized, contributing to eradicating poverty in the communes.

In assessing the impact of Cay Chanh dam, Hau Hau dam and pumping station farmers participating in the assessment said that:

- The rice yield increased from 3 metric tons per ha annually to more than 5 metric tons.

- Favourable conditions were created for shifting crop structure from two unstable crops to two stable ones. Thus, it helped to ensure food security for the HHs.
- For the first time in the communes, the people were allowed to discuss on building projects, to nominate representative to supervise the construction. The commune authority presented the plan of building the project, the budget, the financial support etc. at the meeting with the farmers from villages at the commune headquarters. After that the people discussed on the way to supervise the quality of the project construction, the level of contribution, and the time to fulfil the contribution. The people nominated representative to participate in supervising the construction.
- Therefore, the project mobilized the participation and contribution from the people in making planning, implementing and supervising the construction of the projects.
- The irrigation projects provided water source for fish raising and livestock raising then contributing to generate income for HHs and ensure sanitation in the villages.
- The project helped to maintain the underground water at the village wells in dry season, thus reducing the workload of women in collecting clean water.
- Having sufficient water for rice production, the workload of women in farming also reduced as the men were often doing wage labour in other localities.
- The support of irrigation projects contributed to reducing the rate of poverty in the communes. In Son Binh commune, before the dam construction the rate of the poor HHs was 6%, after having the dam the rate was 2% (according to the old criteria in 1999).
- The project established WUAs and trained them on water management. Thus people knew participatory water management and as a result the use of irrigation water and the maintenance of the project were more effective than before.

However, some guiding points and solutions for the next phase should be clarified in order to improve the effectiveness of the Fund in supporting the poor during the implementation of small scale irrigation projects in Huong Son district:

- On one hand, it needs to conform to the objectives of the Fund to support the local HEPR work, focusing on building capacity for the local officials and the poor. Thus, the Fund should not allocate too much budget for building irrigation projects.

**Results:**

**Hau Hau dam** (Son Binh) irrigates 50 ha for 460/810 HHs.

- The total expenditures of AAV: VND345 mill (US\$23,001)
- District contribution: VND10 mill (US\$667)
- People's contribution: VND70 mill (US\$4,667)
- Expenses for training WUAs: VND20 mill (US\$1,333)

**Pumping station & canals** (Son Binh) irrigate 10 ha for 700 HHs of 11/11 villages of the commune.

- AAV contribution: VND200 mill (US\$13,333)
- District contribution: VND10 mill (US\$667)
- People's contribution: VND170 mill (US\$11,333)

**Cay Chanh dam** (Son Tay) irrigates 180 ha for 460/960 HHs, fish raising job for 15 HHs.

- AAV contribution: VND350 mill (US\$23,333)
- Commune contribution: VND42.5 mill (US\$2,833)
- People's contribution: VND14.5 mill (US\$967)

**Dinh De dam:** Irrigates 40+ ha for 256 HHs. The rice yield increase 22+kg/500m<sup>2</sup>/crop

- AAV contribution: VND80 mill (US\$ 5,333)
- People's contribution: VND22.89 mill (US\$1,526)

**Binh Khe dam** (Son Ham):

- AAV contribution VND549.2 mill (US\$36,614)
  - People's contribution: VND112.5 mill (US\$7,502)
  - Province's contribution: VND22.5 mill (US\$1,489)
- 1,545 people were training on water management

- On the other hand, as a number of research on poverty in Ha Tinh province indicates that one of the important causes of poverty was poor agriculture production due to insufficient irrigation system. In order to shift the crop structure, minimising the risks in agriculture production in the central region caused by natural disasters, the investment in small scale irrigation projects is considered as one of the top priorities. This is also an area of importance listed in the “HEPR Action Plan of Ha Tinh Province 1998 – 2005”.

In fact, the irrigation projects were implemented following the expectation of the people and thus, mobilized their internal strength. Therefore, the assessment team assumed that *the support in building small scale irrigation projects was necessary*. However, the investment in irrigation projects should not change the rural infrastructure investment funded by the government.

- The contribution from the people should be at appropriate rate as they were very poor.
- In the project construction, it needs to consider to hire local labour for manual work so as to help them to generate extra income.

#### *II.6. Support of textbook bank for children in poor communes.*

In 2001, the HEPR Fund spent VND14,380,000 (US\$960) to support a book bank for the children of poor HHs at general secondary school in Huong Dien commune (Vu Quang). In the first 8 months of 2002, it also spent VND24,701,000 (US\$1,640) to support book banks for poor pupils in Huong Son and Nghi Xuan districts.

This activity contributed to reduce difficulties of poor pupils in learning. However, as the budget was limited, the book banks were not able to meet all poor pupils in the communities. In addition, the contents of textbooks were changing, thus the book banks could be used in a limited time.

*Recommendation of the assessment team:* In the coming years, the Fund should continue to supplement the textbook which had changes in the contents to the book banks so as to maintain this model. In addition, the Fund should consider invest other book banks for more poor communities so as to help the poor children to access to education.

In addition from the main points in the above, the Fund supported the voluntary youth of the province to fight poverty in remote areas.

## RECOMMENDATIONS AND LESSONS

Though the two Funds have two different names, they share common long term objectives of building and strengthening the capacity for local partners in HEPR and rural development in Ha Tinh province. Through the analysis of the Funds, the assessment team has drawn out some recommendations and lessons as follows:

*For AAV*

1. In order to promote the partnership effectively, AAV needs to participate in developing strategies and action plans for HEPR at provincial/ district levels and materialising them at grassroots level (commune and village) so as to increase the collaboration between two parties in fighting poverty in Ha Tinh province.
2. AAV should not request too high standard level from the partners (as knowledge and awareness of HEPR work of the partner at district and commune levels are still limited). In doing so, the partners would not feel the pressure from the donor and be able to participate actively in discussion/debate on development and in developing more feasible plans.
3. The partners, especially provincial and district leaders expect AAV to have greater understanding and empathy to local situation, more flexibility in selecting priority of projects and beneficiaries. AAV should also understand better the priority in socio-economic development strategies of benefited districts and make necessary adjustments in its plans so that they are in harmony with partner plans.
4. At the beginning of operation of two Funds, AAV should assign some of its capable staff to provide direct supervision and technical support. The lessons learnt from An Loc commune show that the closer AAV's collaboration with partners and community the higher results will be attained. This should be done in combination with gradual transfer of management responsibility to partners at commune level. However, as the capacity of commune officials is limited, AAV should build up management capacity for them in the first two or three years. This approach is seen as necessary step in partnership building and working through partners.
5. AAV needs to work more closely with the partners to ensure the quality of the activities funded by the two Funds, particularly of the training courses. Training courses should be held in right time (when farmers are less busy), targeting the right people and with the number of participants not exceeding 40. The training contents should be close to the reality so that the trainees will be able to apply in practice. There should be closer monitoring of AAV on site surveys not rely totally on partners so as to avoid problem of misinformation as the case of building public wells.
6. AAV need to provide guidance on and close supervision of technical and financial aspects of project management from the beginning so as to ensure the project's

efficiency and right direction. The agreements between the two parties on financial contribution need to be discussed and agreed in more details in order to increase the accountability and contribution from the partners and local people.

7. There must be detailed data on the contribution from each party in project financial reports, particularly that of the commune and people to enable accurate assessment of the projects. This also helps the parties in adjusting the contribution level in the future projects if necessary. Mobilisation of contribution from the beneficiaries is very important because it increase their awareness and accountability as well as the sustainability of projects.

*For related partners at commune and district level:*

1. It is important that staff assigned by local authorities to work with AAV in supervising and managing the operation of the Funds at district and commune level are capable people. The project management structure at district and commune level should involve minimum number of people for easy reaching mutual consensus. It is absolutely unnecessary to have all representatives from related agencies/organisations in that structure.
2. There should be representative from commune level in the district management board so that the opinions/needs from grass roots level will be taken into the planning process.
3. The management boards of the Funds should have a plan to disseminate information on the Funds' activities to local organisations and people.
4. The management boards of the Funds also need to calculate the level of contribution required from districts and communes carefully in order to avoid putting all the burden of contribution on the shoulder of local people in case the district and commune authorities fail to contribute.
5. The project management boards at commune level should start making plans at the beginning of the year. At the annual project reviews they should gather opinions and feedback from people on the following year plans, then discuss with AAV and the district in order to adjust their priority of investment accordingly to the local practical needs, and to ensure the progress of the project. In selecting beneficiaries they are to make sure that the projects are conformed to the Fund's objective of focusing on the poor on one hand and be successful on the other hand. The priority should be given to the activities that generate high impact on the community such as small scale irrigation, capacity building, environmental protection, health care and education etc.
6. The commune project management boards should not be "too flexible" and change the objective of the project (as in the case of cataract surgeries or the construction of

Thuong Nga primary school). They can only make changes after consulting AAV, district management board and local people and get their consent.

7. The commune officials should explain clearly the criteria for the selection of beneficiaries to villagers in order to get their understanding and consent. This can be done by using village loudspeaker system. The commune authorities should promote good HEPR models, increase people's solidarity and sense of community so that to encourage mutual support and avoid ill intentions and conflicts.
8. The district working team and commune project management boards should use community development skills to improve the participation of people in project activities. They also need to acquire skills in cross-checking collected information, to intensify participatory M & E work so as to become more responsive in problem solving. The people's opinions need to be collected and responded in time... All these are sorts of work that will ensure the project success.

## **APPENDICES**

### **Appendix 1: List of informants in the assessment of the SDF of Can Loc district**

#### 1. Authority and the management board of the SDF

- Mr. Nguyen Van Son – Chairman of the Can Loc PC, head of management board.
- Mr. Le Van Luong, head of ... (GT – XD) of Can Loc (former vice head of SDF Fund from 1997 – 2001)
- Mr. Tran Dinh Suu, head of BOET of Can Loc
- Mr. Tran Dinh Son, director of centre for technology science transfer.
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#### 2. Authority and project management board of Phu Loc commune

- Mr. Le Thuc, commune Party secretary, vice head of commune project management board
- Mr. Nguyen Huu Dien, standing member of commune project management board
- Mr. Nguyen Huu Hai, member of commune project management board, chairman of commune WUA
- Mr. Le Hao, school master
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#### 3. Authority and action coordination team, some beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries in An Loc commune:

- Mr. Dang Ngoc Thach, chairman, the head of commune project management board
- Mr. Nguyen Dinh Tuy, standing member of HEPR board, vice head of commune project management board
- Mr. Nguyen Van Luc, vice chairman of commune PC
- Mr. Nguyen Dinh Thanh, head of agriculture economy of commune.
- Mr. Nguyen Dinh Thanh, secretary of commune youth union.

#### Beneficiary groups:

- Mr. Nguyen Quang Huong, village 5.
- Mr. Nguyen Trong Nam, village 6
- Mr. Nguyen Trong Thanh, village 7
- Mrs. Nguyen Thi Thuy, village 8
- Mr. Nguyen Trong Nhung, village 4.

- Mr. Ngo Duc Thanh, village 1
- Mrs. Phan Thi Tinh, village 3
- Mr. Tran Van Niem, village 2

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Non-beneficiary group:

- Mrs. Nguyen Thi Xuan, village 8
- Mrs. Ho Thi Ly, village 1.
- Mrs. Tran Thi Ha, village 6.
- Mr. Nguyen Dinh Long, village 4.

## **Appendix 2: List of informants in the assessment of the HEPR Fund in Huong Son district**

1. District and provincial group:

- Mr. Tang Nghia, Director, Ha Tinh Provincial Foreign Relations Department
- Dr. Nguyen Trong Quang, MSI staff
- Mr. Binh, vice chairman of Huong Son PC
- Mr. Phan Doai, Huong Ha consultation company
- Mr. Nguyen Tien Lai, director of district centre for technology science transfer.

2. Official group in Son Tay commune

- Mr. Nguyen Van Tien, commune chairman of PC
- Mr. Tran Huu Tuat, chairman of commune People's Council
- Mr. Le Dinh Vi, chairman of farmers' association
- Mrs. Pham Thi Toan, accountant
- Mr. Le Dinh Hanh in charge of agro-forestry

3. Beneficiary group

- Mr. Phan Anh, Hoang Nam village manager
- Mr. Nguyen Anh Trai, Cay Chanh villager
- Mr. Nguyen Phuong Nam, Cay Chanh villager
- Mr. Ho Van Cong, Hoang Nam villager
- Mrs. Pham Thi Huong, representative of women beneficiary

4. Authority and mass organisation of Son Binh commune

- Mr. Le Ton Bao, chairman of PC
- Mr. Nguyen Khac Han, commune official
- Mrs. Vu Thi Hoa, vice chairwoman of women's union
- Mr. Le Thuyet, manager of agriculture service cooperative
- Mr. Le Quynh, chairman of Father Land Front
- Mr. Le Tuan Minh, member of WUA

5. Beneficiary group in Son Binh commune

- Mr. Nguyen Dinh Tai, member of WUA
- Mr. Nguyen Van Thach, member of WUA
- Mr. Nguyen Vinh, member of WUA
- Mrs. Nguyen Thi Minh, member of WUA
- Mr. Doan Trung, member of WUA