This synthesis report, authored by Dr. Scott Fritzen (Assistant Professor of Public Policy, National University of Singapore), is one of four outputs of the UNDP/UNCDF/CIDA–financed study on institutionalizing participatory planning, conducted by a mixed team of international, national consultants and government officials over two non-continuous months in the first half of 2000 (see chapter one for a list of team members). Assistance and contributions from a large number of individuals and projects are gratefully acknowledged (see annex for a partial list), as is the special assistance of Mr. Pham Hai (Division Chief, Division of Economy and Local Governments, Ministry of Planning and Investment), who provided both logistical support for the study and detailed feedback on an earlier draft. The opinions expressed in this report are those of the author and team, not necessarily those of the UNDP.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Chapter 1. Introduction

Area-based national programs such as 135 (poorest commune program) have formally adopted decentralization and local participation as key strategies. This accords with the spirit of the Grassroots Democratization Decree. But how will these principles be translated into an improved local planning and implementation process? What constraints will have to be overcome for this to happen? These questions are still very much open, and to date there have been few studies focusing specifically on them.

This policy paper analyzes current constraints on, and makes recommendations regarding, the participation of local communities and local government in poverty-related national programs.

The study has resulted in four separate papers, of which the current one is the synthesis. Each of these is quite long and goes into considerable descriptive detail; the interested reader is encouraged to contact UNDP Hanoi (Social Development Unit) for copies.

Chapter 2. Problem statement

National programs form a major component of the Government’s overarching poverty reduction strategy, but evince a number of problems:

1. The national programs examined are seriously lacking in transparency of resource distribution and decision-making.
   - The 133 program at the programmatic level (as opposed to a collection of sectorally implemented projects) is found in the field review to be largely lacking in transparency of resource allocation.
   - The 135 program enjoys moderately high levels of agreement on the criteria for selecting the poorest communes, and agreement that these were being applied fairly (i.e. no major distortions in data). But there is little clarity among major stakeholders – especially communities – regarding what degree of support is likely to be forthcoming under the program.
   - Mechanisms for tendering and contract implementation show high potential for misuse, inefficiency and corruption.
   - Community members have no clear ideal as to how they can monitor construction or raise complaints.

2. Both programs – but especially 133 – evince low overall levels of local government and community participation.
   - The 133 program is essentially sectorally driven and top-down in its planning and budgeting; thus, the role of local governments, to say nothing of communities, is quite limited. It is fair to say that communities essentially have no idea what the 133 program is, what projects it comprises, and what kind of assistance may be expected under it.
   - The decision-making process for infrastructural investments under 135 in practice does not involve systematic, and in some cases not even token, community consultation.
Implementation of 135 does not fully utilize locally available labor.

It is particularly clear that women and other disadvantaged groups are likely to be excluded from whatever (limited) decision-making is occurring within the national programs. The role of mass organizations in national program implementation appears to be extremely weak in mountainous localities.

3. National programs examined are characterized in general by “slow and ineffective implementation”, in particular the 133 program. Consultancy reports point to interlocking weaknesses:

- Investment is scattered and not integrated at the grassroots.
- External resources do not enhance local resource mobilization or efficiency.
- The 133 program, meant to be intersectoral, shows a low level of effectiveness in use of existing grassroots personnel assigned to this program.
- Efficiency of investments is further hampered by the lack of adequate community consultation described earlier.
- Finally, monitoring and evaluation systems are extremely weak in these programs, making it unlikely that inefficiencies are quickly caught or that any learning experience over the course of project implementation takes place.

As a result of these weaknesses, the overall efficiency of national program expenditure is widely considered to be far lower than it could be, given more sustained political and bureaucratic attention and systemic reform. With a large number of households perched just above the poverty line at present, inefficient expenditure may reinforce the precarious nature of the poverty reduction gains made over the previous decade.

4. National programs, which are to a large extent meant to address equity concerns, often suffer the same problems of overall government investment and development policy.

- The 133 program is ambitious in its intersectoral aims, probably under-funded in terms of central-level transfers, and requires substantial sub-national outlays to make it feasible (which will be weaker in fiscally poorer provinces such as mountainous ones). It stands to reason that this program is not particularly concentrated onto relatively poor areas.
- The 135 program is unlikely to achieve significant targeting onto relatively poor and remote villages within a commune, and thus to be targeted onto the poorest members of mountainous communities. Lack of community participation in identifying the poor, weak administrative capacities at the grassroots and component design problems make targeting problematic and ineffective.

5. With local (i.e. commune- and village-level) management structures weak or non-existent in both programs, the sustainability of short-term gains is seriously in question. Most importantly, the equity and sustainability of poverty-focused national programs is hampered by lack of an integrated capacity development plan for the poorest localities. However, both programs show potential for improved sustainability and long-term capacity building.

To summarize, national programs have attracted much interest and play a major role in Vietnam’s poverty reduction strategy, but at present suffer from generally – sometimes critically – low levels of transparency, community participation, efficiency, equity and sustainability. These weaknesses have two major impacts.

- The problems sketched above lead to an overall lower impact and effectiveness of the investment in terms of its contribution to poverty reduction.
Low overall effectiveness combined with poor process undermines confidence in local governance.

Chapter 3. Causes, constraints and opportunities

This chapter examines key causes of the often disappointing performance in national program implementation related to community participation. In the broadest terms, the policy framework and intentions underlying participation appear to be positive. Organizational design issues and flaws are noted and, in theory, could be corrected readily, given the fact that these programs are currently being considered for redesign in the lead-up to the 9th Party Congress.

The most trenchant constraints appear to lie in the set of incentives within the broader public-sector environment for major stakeholders to adopt a participatory process. Key actors face little pressure from above or below to adopt participatory planning, and have little incentive to do so on their own accord. Quite the contrary: institutional analysis suggests their wariness to open up planning and implementation is fully rational from particular institutional and individual perspectives, consistent with their responsibilities and resources. Changing these incentives is difficult, but it is hard to see how substantial long-term progress can be made without doing so.

At the same time, it is important to stress some positive elements at the grassroots. Vietnam does enjoy formal commitment, expressed and often repeated at every level of government, to broad participation in policy-making and implementation. This is something many better-organized communities have actually experienced over many years. The key is to design a system that lowers the costs for people to adopt such a participatory process, making it more in their own self-interest to do so.

Chapter 4. Lessons from donor-assisted projects in Vietnam

This chapter offers a number of “good practice” principles relating to the whole challenge of building up participatory approaches within an often inhospitable bureaucratic environment. They are culled from a number of projects in Vietnam as well as familiarity with the practitioner and academic literature on capacity building.

At the risk of having the individual statements here seem obvious and trite (the points are deepened in the text), the following should given some indication of the key “headlines” of the chapter:

Cross-cutting principles

- Strive for innovation, flexibility and constant change.
- Factor the heterogeneity of local environment into project calculations.
- Programs that seek to institutionalize participation should be demand-driven and seek changes that are consistent with the interests of major stakeholders involved.
- Emphasize continuous development of information systems as the key to a learning orientation.
- Thoroughly investigate the patterns of accountability – downward, upward and horizontal – involved in the proposed changes to get a sense of why outcomes are as they are, and how one might change them.
Design planning and resource allocation systems from the bottom-up, striving for a match between resources allocated, and mandates assigned, to local governments.

**Address competing visions and trade-offs clearly**

- Decentralization and community participation: For promoting improved service delivery or for better governance? Devolution or deconcentration?
- Balance program emphasis on facilitating direct community participation outside of established channels (i.e. by creating new user groups not linked to local governmental structures) with improvements to and utilization of existing systems of political representation.
- Intersectoral vs. sectoral; vertical vs. horizontal trade-offs: Donor-assisted projects vary greatly in the degree to which they take on intersectoral concerns; and to which they work with multiple levels of government simultaneously. There is no one formula representing best practice.
- Individual vs. regional approaches to poverty alleviation; efficiency vs. equity approach
- The ‘high quality’ vs. ‘high replicability’ debate
- Pilot approach vs. need to up-scale and have larger impact quickly; standardization vs. flexibility

**Approaches to institutionalization and capacity strengthening**

- Think long-term in building up capacities.
- Local ownership drives success, but it comes in several forms and is a dynamic process.
- Finding the right strategic entry point for assistance is crucial.
- Sustainability has different meanings; carefully considering which is meant and pursuing its vision are important parts of program development.

**PRA and Training**

- Participatory methods have been found to be often consistent with Vietnamese capacities and local administrative and political culture.
- Follow-up and relationship building are crucial.
- Funding norms and levels constitute a crucial variable, with implications for plan and process quality, and for replicability.
- Successful approaches to institutionalizing participatory methods address stakeholder demands and interests.

**Fiscal issues**

- Rigorously link fiscal and administrative decentralization.
- Fiscal commitment and local contributions are possible even in very poor places.

**Democratizing local development**

- Powerful local organization is the key to successful institutionalization of participatory methods.

**The problem of buy-in**

- Clarifying roles rather than giving up power as the way to understand decentralization.
The single most crucial variable for the long-term success of institutionalizing new approaches is the quality and persistence of government leadership.

Donors need to think long-term, with flexible funding linked to performance and with a coherent vision for institutionalization, to have any possibility of making a difference.

Chapter 5. Recommendations

The chapter charts out a long-term vision for institutionalizing participation do the following recommendations aim marked by four basic transformations:

- From “xin-cho” to local mobilization, creativity and accountability.
- From top-down to partnership and horizontal relationships
- From condescension to capacity strengthening.
- From service delivery to participatory governance

Towards effective decentralization

Institutionalizing participation means strengthening or establishing effectively and appropriately decentralized systems – of both service delivery and governance.

- Keep eyes on the overall reform environment.
- Consider launching a high-profile policy committing the government to meaningful devolution of power and resources.
- The means by which decentralization can boost both service delivery and local governance need to be clarified.
- Apply good practice principles to tap into benefits of decentralization and avoid easily foreseeable pitfalls.

Adopt a facilitative framework for local organizations and participation

- Look at ways for states to improve social capital. Strengthening norms of trust and cooperation is likely to be extremely effective way to increase capacity for community participation.
- Reinforce the legal standing of local organizations, like user groups and credit associations. These provide a more voluntaristic point from which to approach community participation.
- Recognize that different types of localities may have widely different capacities, which may not be obvious on the surface

Reforming national programs: Some initial considerations

A seven-point strategy is outlined:

1. Make adjustments to program design:
   - Emphasize a coordinated packages of assistance for poorer areas, and planning framework for local resource mobilization in richer ones.
   - Focus on pilot activities.
   - Invest in planning and ensure sufficient recurrent costs.
Focus on experience transfer.

2. Boost local government demand for horizontal coordination and community participation:
   - Shift wherever possible towards non-categorical, central-to-local grants coordinated by local governments with broad flexibility.
   - For the 133 program, it is critical to move towards a 135-like experimental block grant application. Provinces should be made responsible for both quality and output, and for the distribution of funds.
   - For the 135 program, devolution would involve moving towards formula based transfers, the provision to communes of indicative planning figures with local control over allocations, and a long-term capacity strengthening approach focused at the commune level.

3. Aim for improvements to national program organizational culture:
   - Upgrade recruitment and personnel management within national programs in particular, and civil service generally.
   - Emphasize improved inter-organizational coordination.
   - Adopt reforms to make national programs high-profile, attracting a more elite group of local officials.

4: Fund success, encourage competition

   The question is how to reward local initiatives and risk-takers – both individuals and different levels of government – while linking performance to results. A fair, workable system for doing so is needed. Two ways of accomplishing this are to target officials themselves, through a system of one year special contracts for national program responsibilities; and a redesign of national programs towards competitive block-grant transfers to local governments, dependent on prior round implementation results.

5. Reinforce accountability:
   - Evaluate both use of inputs and process of involving local government and communities in decision making from the bottom-up and reward high-performing provinces based on this.
   - Use participatory poverty assessments with international assistance as part of the long-term evaluation of impact of national programs.
   - Identify key individual stakeholders holding high positions in government at each level who take personal responsible for implementing national programs effectively.
   - Review and enforce minimum standards regarding bidding procedures. Consider establishment of an anti-corruption unit specific to selected national programs like 135.

6. Develop, strengthen and better utilize capacities
   - Focus on inculcating skills for improved interaction between levels of government.
   - Gender training and analysis will be necessary as a special priority.
   - Direct incentives (e.g. higher pay for officials working in remote areas) for national program performance may also be necessary.

7. Facilitate demand and organization from the grassroots
   - Build up grassroots demand for participation in specific programs through certain design and implementation reforms. For the 133 program, emphasizing the integration of program inputs
at the village level should be considered a prerequisite for boosting demand for participation at the grassroots; failing this, the multi-sector program will be invisible, seen only as a collection of non-integrated, vertically-implemented sectoral reforms.

- The 135 program needs to adopt a strong capacity building element, involving communes and communities in substantial planning and management responsibilities.
- Develop basic ground rules – i.e. rules for upholding minimum standards of community consultation and participation – tailored to each of the national programs.
- Consider reforms to taxes, fees and local contributions (including labor contributions in poor localities. One radical solution would be to consolidate all such contributions into a single, high-profile “national program fund”, which could include both fiscal and labor contributions. The details would warrant close attention, but the basic idea is to link local contributions to a high-profile national development policy benefiting residents in their own communities.
- Support grassroots organizations in taking on a range of specific functions within national programs.
- Finally, develop an integrated information, education and communication strategy targeted at the grassroots to boost people’s knowledge of their rights (e.g. under the democratization decree), and of the national programs being implemented in their locality.

Priorities for a results-oriented capacity strengthening initiative

This section describes the outlines of a long-term, demand-facilitating training approach implied throughout this report. In its most ambitious form, government and donors would establish a strategic center (not necessarily funded from entirely new resources) focused on the dissemination of participatory approaches with multiple applications. Such a center might adopt the following basic approaches:

- **Partnership orientation with multiple applications.** This center would become a high-profile, think-tank-like operation with the capacity to support both national programs, donor projects, and contribute to the learning experience within even the democratization initiative itself.

- **Regional / local support units; decentralized structure.** Support units – perhaps regional, perhaps eventually provincial – linked to this center would be established and expanded throughout the country. The task would be to make the program operational down to the local government level, to base its own learning experience in local governments and the grassroots.

- **Flexible, demand-driven training approaches.** As suggested in chapter four, the center would further develop flexible and innovative training designs that have been pioneered by some programs in Vietnam, such as vertically integrated participation in training and program development, and horizontal dissemination of methods.

The following are the types of functions and characteristics of the training capacity needed (which could be supplied in one coordinated effort, or – less desirably – attract piecemeal donor support):

- **Political and organizational skills.** Training would cover skills sets for facilitating and implementing participation.

- **Strengthening technical capacities.** Making available to local decision makers some basic planning and technical information and simple techniques to evaluate projects against commonly agreed multiple criteria are seen as fundamental tasks.
- **Learning orientation.** There is a need for efforts specifically directed at design of national program efforts and patterns of community participation. This involves applied action research with a diagnostic orientation.

- **Grassroots demand.** An integrated “information, education and communication strategy” would underpin participatory communication. This could be implemented in diverse ways, using working groups and nation-wide campaigns focusing on capacity development for the production and delivery by the people of key messages, i.e. for the democratization campaign.

  Donor reform will be essential to pursue a coordinated approach to capacity building. Three areas stand out.

  **Internal reform.** Donors need to strive to achieve organizational cultures that reinforce the aims of participatory development.

  This report emphasized the importance of an enabling development policy framework for decentralization and community participation. Donors should support this orientation in a much more direct and high-profile way.

  **Cross-sectoral approach.** The challenge is to operationally this policy support across sectors with a donor response across sectors to decentralization issues.

  Donors should devote scarce resources to supporting, or helping the government to establish, local planning processes that emphasize intersectoral and horizontal coordination. The point is to forge links to locally articulated plans. Efforts to do so could benefit from the kind of intensive experience sharing, comparative analysis and joint donor-NGO-government policy analyses that are just beginning to see fruitful application in Vietnam over the past few years.
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1. INTRODUCTION

Background

Area-based national programs such as 135 (poorest commune program) have formally adopted decentralization and local participation as key strategies. This accords with the spirit of the Grassroots Democratization Decree. But how will these principles be translated into an improved local planning and implementation process? What constraints will have to be overcome for this to happen? These questions are still very much open, and to date there have been few studies focusing specifically on them.

These questions are being addressed against the background of a long-standing commitment of both government and donors to participatory development. Recently, there have been some shifts within academic and practitioner thinking regarding that concept. Participatory development is increasingly seen as:

- Holistic rather than sectoral;
- People-centered and diverse, rather than assuming undifferentiated communities;
- A learning process rather than a ‘quick fix’;
- Both a means towards greater program efficiency and an end in itself (the latter in the form of empowering communities and supporting participatory governance);
- Linked to overall public-sector fiscal and planning systems; and
- Stemming from societal demand for participation.

Study objectives

This policy paper analyzes current constraints on, and makes recommendations regarding, the participation of local communities and local government in poverty-related national programs. The issue of participation is tightly linked to that of decentralization, since participation, to be meaningful, implies some degree of local control. Local governance is also central: the ability to decentralize will depend on the capacities and incentives of local governments to interact with communities in new ways. Thus, this paper takes a broad view of the issue of institutionalizing participation, arguing that a range of public-sector reforms is necessary for it to happen.

The study aims to do three things:

- Clarify existing constraints on participatory approaches within the context of national program planning and implementation. These constraints may operate at several levels: human and fiscal capacity, legal procedures, conflicting policy mandates, organizational culture etc. [chapters 2 and 3].
- Assess the diverse experiences of donor-assisted projects in various aspects of participatory planning and implementation. While pointing out constraints and difficulties, this part begins to formulate “good practice” principles emerging from these experiences (though there is no single formula for success) [chapter 4].
Frame recommendations for Government consideration aimed at overcoming these constraints and building institutional capacity for participatory approaches, with particular reference to the major poverty-focused national programs [chapter 5].

Organization of study

Institutional support

The director of Economy and Local Governments Division of the Ministry of Planning and Investment provided the overall direction of the study, which was funded by UNDP, UNCDF and CIDA, with UNDP as the executing agency. The study was conducted directly by a team leader (Scott Fritzen) and four national consultants, together with four government resource persons located in related ministries, whose participation was evaluated highly (see annex). The study faced the constraint of tackling a demanding range of donor and government program information in a short time of two (non-continuous) working months over the first half of 2000. A workshop or conference is being organized to discuss and disseminate results of the study.

Methods

Work was carried out in three areas through the national consultancies:

1. Policy and institutions review. Nguyen Dinh Khoi conducted a review of government institutions and policies, related to decentralization and national programs, based on interviews, documentation collected and participation in fieldwork.

2. Field study. A field-level review of National Programs 133 (HEPR) and 135 (Small-scale infrastructure to assist the poorest communes) was carried out by a small team that spent a week each in two provinces – Yen Bai and Kon Tum. These were felt to be representative of two strategic regions of the national programs (the Northern Uplands and Central Highlands). The review was led by Nguyen Ba Ngai and Le Trong Hung and included work at provincial, district and commune levels.

   The review led to the identification of interesting variations and commonalities in the way in which national programs are implemented in the two provinces. It also recorded the perspectives of a number of senior officials at each level in extended interviews. It was more difficult, given the time constraints, to achieve a nuanced picture of local (commune and village) implementation and perspectives. One challenge for the donor community as a whole is to support more ethnographic, long-term work in representative implementation areas to carefully document community impacts.

3. Assessment of selected donor experiences. The study solicited contributions from a range of donor-assisted projects in Vietnam. The goal was not be exhaustive, nor to document experiences in a compendium-like report. Rather, it was to identify salient issues using particular projects as examples.

   In all, close to 20 projects participated in some form. Of these, eight were given more sustained attention by Tran Huu Cuong, who worked with project staff to document experiences in more detail, based on existing project documentation and interviews. Other projects or organizations submitted brief written case studies of their own (responses to a survey prepared by the study), project documentation and/or agreed to an interview with the national consultant or team leader. A list of project contributions received is given in Annex A.
Case study projects varied from small or large, from a variety of sectors and institutional affiliations, and involved investments in a number of different sectors. Some were still in progress, others completed. What they had in common were the following:

- Active attempts to introduce participatory planning approaches.
- Capacity building, for community groups and/or local governments, as a key component and strategy.
- Active concern for the potential of up-scaling pilot approaches, particularly with respect to institutionalizing community-based planning processes.

**Study outputs**

The study has resulted in four separate papers, of which the current one is the synthesis. Each of these is quite long and goes into considerable detail with extended examples from the field; the interested reader is encouraged to contact UNDP (Social Development Unit) for copies. The three papers are:

- “Kinh Nghiem cua Cac Chuong Trinh Quoc Gia” (Institutional analysis), by Nguyen Dinh Khoi. Available only in Vietnamese, the report documents in some detail the policy and institutional framework underlying national programs, including an examination of center-local fiscal relations.
- “Review of donor-assisted experiences” by Tran Huu Cuong. Examines experiences of eight selected projects with institutionalizing participatory approaches. Available in [unedited] English only.
- Present report – integrative analysis – available also in Vietnamese.

For clarity, it should be stressed that the current synthesis report is not in fact a summary of the above. Rather, this report represents the analysis of the team leader based on participation in, and careful reading of, the above study components, as well as separate interviews, personal experience and analysis of the academic and practitioner literature in the area of capacity building and participation. In particular, this report does not provide a clear overview and summary of national programs and their implementation; this is done quite comprehensively in the above study reports, as well as some other recent donor reports. It is thus assumed that the reader already has a basic familiarity with the national programs addressed: 133 (multi-sectoral Hunger Eradication and Poverty Reduction program) and 135 (Program of small-scale infrastructure to assist the poorest communes).

**Conceptual framework**

This section presents the basic study approach to the issue of institutionalizing participation. Three conceptual issues need disentanglement:
• How can we characterize the degree of local government and community participation? (This, in social science terms, is the “dependent variable”—what we want to explain.)

• What impacts on the degree of meaningful local government and community participation in planning? (In other words, what are the key “explanatory” variables or category of variables involved?)

• How should we conceptualize the process of “institutionalization”?

The study approach to these questions is summarized in figure 1. Working from right (ultimate outcomes) to left (inputs and influences), tells the following story:
Conceptual framework: Influences on the institutionalization of participatory approaches

Existing and program-induced factors underlying participatory outcomes
(chapter 3)

Outcomes: Process
(chapter 2-3)

Outcomes: Impact
(chapter 2)

Program design / investments / interventions

Action environment:
* Degree of social organization, social capital
* Other conditions on the ground, e.g. geographical

Public-sector institutional context:
* Intergov't relations
* Macro/sectoral policies
* Human and fiscal capacities

Task network
(organizational design and implementation issues):
* Policies
* Rules / procedures
* Planning process

Incentives / stakeholder interests and capacities:
1. Motivation to participate; expected benefits
2. The costs or risks associated with their participation

Level and kind of local participation of:
- local government levels
- communities
(disaggregated by several characteristics).
Typology of participation ranging from:
1. Passive participation
2. Participation as information giving
3. Participation by consultation
4. Participation for incentives
5. Functional participation
6. Interactive participation
7 Self-mobilization

Process of institutionalization in which:
* program "deepens" and "integrates"; local capacities and incentives increase.
* program coverage "expands"; balance of external / local inputs shifts;
* program influences enabling environment

Outcomes: Program outcomes in terms of:
- sustainability
- equity
- efficiency
- confidence in local participatory governance

program redesign / upscaling
**Ultimate impacts and outcomes**

Why the interest in participation? There are a number of views on this, and to some the answer is so obvious that it seems odd to even raise this question. Basically, views are split into two groups – those who view participation primarily as an end in itself (empowering individuals and communities and forming the bedrock of responsive governance) and those who see it as a means to an end (e.g. improved program service delivery).

This paper affirms both perspectives and acknowledges that these links are mutually reinforcing. Five main criteria for evaluating the outcomes of a participatory process are employed:

- **Sustainability**: To what extent are program achievements sustained or the local learning process continued?
- **Efficiency**: The degree to which inputs are used rationally and cost-effectively to achieve desired outputs and outcomes.
- **Equity**: The perceived fairness of the process, which can be examined from several perspectives. Most important here is the question of how national programs are redressing growing disparities between socioeconomic groups and regions.
- **Transparency**: Do major stakeholders perceive the process of resource allocation and decision-making to be clear and justifiable?
- **Grassroots participation**: To what extent have local governments and communities participated directly in, and achieved some local control over, project outcomes?

Broadly speaking, the first three measure impact on program outcomes, whereas the last two are central to the ‘participation as governance’ idea.

**Chapter two** analyzes national programs in the above terms.

**Characterizing local government and community participation**

Local government “participation” is conceptually just as important as that of communities. In a context such as Vietnam, where there are few independent means of organizing social groups apart from the State, local government capacities and means of interacting with social groups are critical. It is especially important to examine the role of local governments since we are ultimately interested in increasing the effectiveness and equity of local government performance in national program implementation.

The degree to which communities (and local governments) participate in planning processes for major national programs can be described as a continuum, ranging from functional to full participation. Several useful typologies of participation have been developed; see for instance the one by Jules Pretty below.

**A typology of participation: how people participate in development programs and projects**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Typology</th>
<th>Characteristics of each type</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Passive participation</td>
<td>People ‘participate’ by being told what is going to happen. It is a unilateral announcement by program management without any listening to people’s responses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Participation as information giving</td>
<td>People participate by answering questions posed by extractive researchers using questionnaire surveys or similar approaches. People do not have the opportunity to influence proceedings, as the findings are neither shared nor checked for accuracy.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Participation by consultation
People participate by being consulted and external agents listen to views. These outsiders define both the problems and the solutions. While people may contribute their views, no decision-making power is shared with them – the outsiders make all important decisions.

4. Participation for incentives
People participate by providing resources, for example labor, in return for material incentives. People have no interest in prolonging activities when the incentives end.

5. Functional participation
People participate by forming groups to meet predetermined objectives related to the project, which can involve the development or promotion of externally initiated social organization. This happens usually after major decisions about the program have been made. These groups are not self-dependent, but may become so under the right conditions.

6. Interactive participation
People participate in joint analysis, which leads to action plans and the formation of new local institutions or the strengthening of existing ones. These groups take control over local decisions and can continue without external support.

7. Self-mobilization
People participate by taking initiatives independent of external institutions to change systems. They develop contacts with external institutions for resources and technical advice they need, but retain control over how resources are used.

Source: Pretty, 1995; Sustaining Agriculture, London, Earthscan; p. 173

A final important principle is the assumption that communities are heterogeneous. That means that any description of and recommendations regarding participation have to ultimately be disaggregated by several social characteristics to be realistic. Practitioners must assess the degree to which various, more or less marginalized groups are capable of meaningful participation:

- Women as opposed to men;
- People in remote as opposed to accessible villages / areas;
- Relatively poor as opposed to relatively better-off households;
- Households with government officials as members as opposed to others, etc.

Impacts on local government and community participation

A multitude of factors could potentially affect the success of participatory approaches; what is needed is a way to simplify these into categories, establishing the main types of influences on the degree of local participation. The four main categories used in the study are presented in the table below. These form the basis of how the study identifies constraints and opportunities in the context of both donor projects and national programs.
### Action environment

This covers aspects of the socioeconomic and policy environment that impact on local participation.

- At macro-level: Policies, policy directions, at central and local government levels; may include donor policies as well.
- Social characteristics (e.g. the degree of “social capital” in communities, or the degree of ethnic heterogeneity in a community) impacting on social organization.

### Task network: Organization of planning process and other design issues

The way in which the planning process is organized, e.g. what stage in the planning process are people’s views solicited? Whose views? Through what forms of organization?

### Capacities

- **Human capacities**: training, knowledge and information specific to planning process being pursued.
- **Fiscal capacities**: material and financial resources that can be tapped for local participation.

### Incentives / stakeholder interests

Extent to which local people feel it is in their (short- and long-term) interest to participate; their motivation or “buy-in” regarding the process. Balanced against the costs and risks (also to other stakeholders who are “giving up” power over local decision-making, or at least who find their roles changing) associated with participation.

### Institutionalization

The basic idea of institutionalization relates to the process by which projects move from being heavily dependent on external resources – both manpower and material – to becoming increasingly based on existing resources and “owned” by project partners. This represents the crucial challenge underlying the study’s attempt to formulate recommendations for national program implementation based on the experience of what are essentially pilot projects. The challenge is to identify both what has “worked” in a project environment – and assess what is applicable as the project scales up, e.g.:

- from one commune to all communes in a district;
- from one district to all districts in a province; or to the level of implementation exclusively through existing government channels through national programs, etc.

Institutionalization of participation (in the context of foreign-assisted projects) can have a number of different meanings. Two key categories have been identified to date, shown below with several subcategories. The study attempted to describe and assess project experiences in these areas.

### Institutional deepening of project experience in the target area

Institutional “deepening” can refer to the process by which the locally executed project becomes more accepted and integrated in localities. It may be assessed using several indicators:

**Local “ownership” and acceptance**, e.g. increasing acceptance of project approaches in the local government area where it is implemented, both by local governments and communities. This might be accompanied by changes in attitudes and behavior internalized, both of local governments, communities and upper levels of government. For instance, what constitutes an “acceptable” planning process for a non-project related activity might gradually change, for all stakeholders involved.

Integration with local government practices, e.g.:

- Increasing integration of project approaches with “normal” local government practices and procedures. Plans and procedures introduced or employed by the project become more linked with those of local government.
- This may or may not be accompanied by a broader range of problems / sectors addressed at local level through the project.

- Increasing capacities to implement project approaches (e.g. to participatory planning) sustainably. There is a decreasing reliance on external inputs, and the role of external assistance may change over time. Local organizations involved in planning and implementation process become more mature and sustainable.

**Project expansion / up-scaling**

- The project attempts to have a greater impact on the "enabling environment" for local participation, advocating for changes in rules, regulations, procedures etc. on the basis of project experience.

- The project attempts expansion of the planning methodology or parts of it to larger area. Other aspects of the project (e.g. sector-specific practices) may be adopted on a wider scale. The project would typically need substantial redesign as it expands.
2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Situation analysis for key goals

National programs form a major component of the Government’s overarching poverty reduction strategy. As explained above, their implementation is evaluated using five criteria: transparency; community participation; efficiency; equity; and sustainability.

This chapter argues that there are major challenges for the two programs evaluated on all these fronts. Understanding and pinpointing the weaknesses and (in the next chapter) their root causes is crucial to developing recommendations for current and future capacity building efforts.

Note that although the discussion below is focused on the two national programs investigated, the points are likely to be more broadly applicable, particularly since these are ‘flag-ship’ programs.

Transparency

The national programs examined are seriously lacking in transparency of resource distribution and decision-making. This aspect has attracted much public attention, with a spate of newspaper articles focusing on rural discontent over national program implementation, and local governance generally. The more high profile a national program becomes, the greater the demands for transparency in implementation, the lack of which then leads to correspondingly greater discontent.

133 program

The 133 program at the programmatic level (as opposed to the collection of sectorally implemented projects that it comprises at the level of actual implementation) is found in the field review to be largely lacking in transparency of resource allocation.

Excluding a small number of people who struggle to tabulate resources allocated to the HEPR, virtually no one has a clear idea of the level of resources being channeled into the program, least of all communes and communities. A recurring theme of the field study was that the 133 program as currently implemented is not a program at all, but at present merely a loose collection – consolidated on paper – of a number of sectorally planned and implemented projects.

135 program

The 135 program enjoys moderately high levels of agreement on the criteria for selecting the poorest communes; and agreement that these are being applied fairly (i.e. no major distortions in data).

In practice, there have been disagreements, but most would accept that the some two thousand communes selected are among the very poorest in the country. So this does not seem to be the major problem.
There is little clarity among major stakeholders – especially communities – regarding what degree of support is likely to be forthcoming under the program.

Communication gaps are evident, particularly below the district level. Apart from a very small number of commune cadre (at best), there is little understanding of what kind of program 135 is, what level of support it entails, over how long, etc. This causes concern, since communities not so informed will have a hard time policing corruption and/or suppressing unrealistic expectations.

Mechanisms for tendering and contract implementation show high potential for misuse, inefficiency and corruption.

This is arguably where there exists the biggest transparency problem. At the local level, for these small projects, anecdotal evidence suggests much decision-making takes place behind closed doors. The field review found examples in which local authorities were contracting for line-items that communities clearly had the capacity to do themselves; this not only reduces the scope for community participation, but also suggests the possibility that under-the-counter deals are being doled out. The informal system of kickbacks – the infamous 10-15% – widely applied in infrastructure projects, is too widespread to be ignored, though the study itself was in no position to uncover direct evidence of abuse.

Community members have no clear idea as to how they can monitor construction or raise complaints.

Community ownership of the program is low, not merely because communities do not feel consulted in a significant way regarding project selection (see below), but because implementation often appears to be out of their hands. Community monitoring and evaluation boards anticipated under program design appear to be absent or dysfunctional. As a result, people have little recourse to voice complaints if they detect major problems or financial abuses during implementation.

Despite the serious transparency related problems noted above, our review found that the grassroots democratization decree in theory provides a powerful tool for addressing and improving these issues. This is covered below in greater detail.

Participation – Local ownership

Both programs – but especially 133 – evince low overall levels of local government and community participation.

The 133 program is essentially sectorally driven and top-down in its planning and budgeting; thus, the role of local governments, to say nothing of communities, is quite limited. It is fair to say that communities essentially have no idea what the 133 program is, what programs it comprises, and what kind of assistance may be expected under it.

The decision-making process for infrastructural investments under 135 in practice does not involve systematic, and in some cases not even token, community consultation.

actual implementation as described in field-trips to two study provinces appears to be as follows:
A circular may or may not be sent from the district to each Commune People’s Committee informing them of the 135 program.

Either at the same time or shortly thereafter, a small number of district-level officials responsible for the program (typically 1-3) travel to the commune. There, meeting with the commune People’s Committee leadership, they come to a tentative agreement on which projects will be shortlisted for possible funding.

Possibly on the same day or shortly thereafter, a brief feasibility visit will be made to the sites involved.

The prioritized list is taken back to the district, where, based on funding availability and the results from other communes, district officials decide which projects will be funded.

As can be seen, there is little room in the above “accelerated” process for community members to voice any substantive opinions.

On the other hand, it is claimed by local officials that the projects thus selected have already been discussed with, even proposed by, local community members, since local governments regularly prepare infrastructure investment proposals for submission to higher levels. The extent to which that is true will vary by community with the strength and inclusiveness of local governments themselves. But it underlines the point that there is no separate process at present for this to happen, as required by the grassroots democratization decree.

**Implementation of 135 does not fully utilize locally available labor.**

One of the strengths of 135 program is that it does offer the opportunity for employment generation on labor-intensive, small-scale infrastructure works – a classic element in the safety net of a poor, largely agrarian country. While one can debate whether working for incentives through a labor contract is truly a form of participation⁸, this can be a meaningful form of income generation, and is anyway vastly superior to the (impracticable) alternative of relying on external funding for everything.

However, the team found evidence that certain types of investment could be done locally but were instead contracted out. No clear guidelines on the matter appear to have been formulated. And, in any case, the lack of transparency regarding the implementation arrangements makes it a faulty work contract system as well.

Khoi sums up the situation as such: “Through our contacts and studies at the communes, it is clear that the commune infrastructure management board of program 135 is in the real role of a foreman, while workers are villagers. The members of the commune infrastructure management board are not provided with information about technical design, advanced estimation of expenditures and the total investment budget…and none knew that communes are in theory supposed to play a decisive role in the plan making and monitoring of the program…”⁹

*It is particularly clear that women and other disadvantaged groups are likely to be excluded from whatever (limited) decision-making is occurring within the national programs. The role of mass organizations in national program implementation appears to be extremely weak in mountainous localities.*

Three barriers severely curtail opportunities for women to participate in national program decision-making or implementation. The first is the design of the planning process of such programs that (as seen above) preempts meaningful community participation. Formal mechanisms for involving women are limited to consultation of the commune’s Women’s Union chief.¹⁰
The second is the weakness of commune-level mass organizations in mountainous localities. This may vary by locality, but even relatively active mass organizations, such as the Women’s Union, are not actively involved in local governance issues (such as deciding on infrastructure) in most localities.

The third is a host of informal, cultural barriers to women’s participation in public life, both within Kinh and minority cultures. There is reason to think, however, that women and other disadvantaged groups would be eager to participate given the chance.

Other groups also stand at a disadvantage in making their voices heard in decision-making. Certain minority groups less fluent in Kinh and/or the dominant minority language within a commune would presumably be one example.

So are households in the most remote parts of a village. Villages far from the commune center and not enjoying easy transportation access are likely not to be chosen for infrastructure investments, due to the difficulty of implementation and even of conducting feasibility assessments. Budgets and human resources for planning national programs are stretched extremely thin. This reinforces a roadside bias that could be tempered only by explicit directions from above to select the poorest localities coupled with adequate cost norms to facilitate work there.

Efficiency

Resources for national programs grew exponentially during the middle part of the 1990s. But despite the fact that some programs are receiving high priority (such as the 135 program), the state budget at present is in fact contracting¹¹ and funding therefore precarious. It is extremely vital to make efficient use of these scarce resources, especially since a stated policy of the Vietnamese government is that all social expenditure take economic efficiency as a primary point of evaluation.

National programs examined are characterized in general by "slow and ineffective implementation", in particular the 133 program. Consultancy reports point to interlocking weaknesses:

Investment is scattered and not integrated at the grassroots.

The design of 133 program is integrated and multi-sectoral. While this has its advantages in theory, investments are in practice dispersed (phan tan), not integrated at the village and household level, where they would have the potential for synergistically interaction.

The 135 program is also in practice (if not by design) a sectoral intervention (focusing on small-scale infrastructure). The contention is sometimes heard that the 135 program must quickly expand to include other sectors – but a strong argument can be made for consolidating this program’s success before getting more ambitious.

External resources do not enhance local resource mobilization or efficiency.

External resources in national programs (i.e. resources from donors and the central government) are generally not being used to enhance the efficiency or impact of existing local resources. They are not leveraging local resources. Rather, external resources tend to be seen as a strings-free grant of a one-off nature – “tien cua Chua” or “God’s money” as the Vietnamese idiom goes.
The 133 program, meant to be intersectoral, shows a low level of effectiveness in use of existing grassroots personnel assigned to this program.

The current policy of providing short term incentive payments for the transfer of staff to poor localities (districts and communes) to look after the 133 program is promising. But in practice, due to the top-down nature of planning in the program’s sectorally-driven projects, staff thus posted do little to improve the coherence and integration of the program. Rather, actual responsibilities fall mostly into the specific program-related tasks assigned to the MoLISA line departments – such as conducting surveys identifying ‘poor’ and ‘hungry’ households. These staff are thus better seen as extensions of MoLISA at the grassroots, sharing in the near complete lack of ability to coordinate that their institutional sponsor experiences at the head of the 133 program generally.

Efficiency of investments is further hampered by the lack of adequate community consultation described earlier.

Infrastructural and other investments most needed in a community may be passed over in favor of those appealing to a more narrow set of interests.

On the other hand, it should be noted that the infrastructure works selected for 135 program investment in communes visited by the team were judged to have attracted high community interest and approval. There was no evidence of clearly inappropriate projects being selected, in the team’s limited sample.

Finally, monitoring and evaluation systems are extremely weak in these programs, making it unlikely that inefficiencies are quickly caught or that any learning experience over the course of project implementation takes place.

As a result of these weaknesses, the overall efficiency of national program expenditure is widely considered to be far lower than it could be, given more sustained political and bureaucratic attention and systemic reform. With a large number of households perched just above the poverty line at present, inefficient expenditure may reinforce the precarious nature of the poverty reduction gains made over the previous decade.

Equity

National programs, which are to a large extent meant to address equity concerns, often suffer the same problems of overall government investment and development policy.

Equity in development expenditure is extremely difficult to achieve and maintain. Two aspects come into play.

The first is geographical targeting. Being targeted on what are generally considered to be the poorest communes in the country, the 135 program enjoys considerable geographical focus on equity. Many components of 133 program, in contrast, are in principle meant to be implemented in all provinces, and it is unclear to what extent the program is intended or practically able to prioritize relatively poor provinces for increased expenditure.
The 133 program is ambitious in its intersectoral aims, probably underfunded in terms of central-level transfers, and requires substantial sub-national outlays to make it feasible (which will be weaker in fiscally poorer provinces such as mountainous ones). It stands to reason that this program is not particularly concentrated onto relatively poor areas.

The second is identification of, and targeting of expenditure onto, relatively poor or needy households. Neither programs appear to successful target relatively needier households within a commune in a systematic way.

The 135 program is unlikely to achieve significant targeting onto relatively poor and remote villages within a commune, and thus to be targeted onto the poorest members of mountainous communities. Some 133 program activities in theory are targeted onto such groups, e.g. via preferential access to credit. But lack of community participation in identifying the poor, weak administrative capacities at the grassroots and component design problems make targeting problematic and ineffective.

**Sustainability**

*With local (i.e. commune- and village-level) management structures weak or non-existent in both programs, the sustainability of short-term gains is seriously in question.*

This is most obviously seen in the 135 program, where there is a clear danger of infrastructure works not being maintained, for two reasons. First, such works are not selected with adequate community participation (and thus may not reflect the priorities of the community). Second, there is at present no functioning management board to cover operating and maintenance costs, which are currently handled as an afterthought, as discovered during the fieldtrips.

*Most importantly, the equity and sustainability of poverty-focused national programs is hampered by lack of an integrated capacity development plan for the poorest localities.*

Neither program, it must be said, is making notable strides towards the creation and solidification of administrative capacities at the grassroots in the poorest localities.

A recent work that examined the impact of decentralization of planning responsibilities for a major set of national programs related to basic social services shows why this is a concern. It found that better-off provinces did well under the new system while the reforms did little or nothing to help improve the effectiveness of service planning in poorer provinces. The main reason for this was that the central government failed to come up with a coherent capacity building program specially targeted at the needs and situation of the poorest localities. Such localities face special hardships, such as the high administrative costs of service delivery in upland areas, as well as the low levels of social development and high ethnic heterogeneity of upland communities.

The danger in all this is that the gap between well- and poor-performing localities is continuing to grow, unaddressed by national programs – the only government investment of sufficient scale to make an appreciable dent in capacity differentials between richer and poorer areas. This is perhaps the most significant shortcoming of current national programs, viewed from a long-term perspective.

*Both programs show potential for improved sustainability and long-term capacity building.*

The 135 program appropriate focuses attention onto grassroots needs and small-scale, ‘doable’ infrastructure projects that can draw substantially on locally mobilized labor and other resources. Its
problem is that, at present, it is primarily a district-centered program, which does not substantially transfer responsibilities or administrative resources to the commune level. Without the demand for grassroots capacity, there is unlikely to be substantial improvements in local supply (i.e. administrative performance).

Furthermore, the sectoral investment areas of the 135 program have attracted significant local interest and, from that angle, have the potential for long-term sustainability of impact.

The 133 program, in turn, has a training component, which, if expanded and upgraded, could be the center point for a more comprehensive capacity building program for poor areas. At present it tends to focus on implementation of the HEPR program itself, which, due to the design and investment features showed above, has very limited administrative viability at the grassroots.

Summary

National programs have attracted much interest and play a major role in Vietnam’s poverty reduction strategy, but at present suffer from generally – sometimes critically – low levels of transparency, community participation, efficiency, equity and sustainability. These weaknesses have two major impacts.

*The problems sketched above lead to an overall lower impact and effectiveness of the investment in terms of its contribution to poverty reduction.*

In particular, given the limited sustainability and efficiency of these investments, the gap between policy intentions of these programs and their grassroots impact remains large.

*And, low overall effectiveness combined with poor process undermines confidence in local governance.*

National programs *should* be increasing the profile and reputation of Vietnam’s leadership – both national and local, both among the Party and state – among the rural population. After all, they represent a major attempt to balance Vietnam’s current uneven development and to share its benefits equitably among the population. To some extent, these programs are doing just that, yet the serious and obvious problems – particularly those related to the lack of participation and transparency, which undercuts local perceptions and ownership – dull this impact and, if sufficiently serious, could even help further undermine the confidence of the rural populace in the government and government policies.
3. CAUSES, CONSTRAINTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Overview

The previous chapter examined core problems with Vietnam’s national programs, as exemplified by two cases – 133 and 135 – examined through field visits to two provinces.

The present chapter looks at root causes and factors contributing to these problems. Following the scheme in the (conceptual framework) figure above, it examines these contributing factors at four different levels:

- The action environment
- Public-sector institutional context
- Task network (organizational design and implementation issues)
- Organizational capacities and stakeholder interests

Action environment

The “action environment” refers to the set of objective factors in the current environment that enable or constrain the functioning of these programs of interest. These are well-entrenched and cannot be changed in the short-term. Any reform plan should be sensitive to these factors and account for them.

Provinces and localities have extremely uneven endowments, making a unified approach to capacity development and organizational design extremely difficult.

The study cited in the previous section found huge differences between provinces in administrative capacity, policy orientation, economic development, social cohesion and other factors, all of which interacted complexly to impact on provincial performance implementing a major national program. With its variegated terrain, long coast, diverse regions, and mosaic of ethnic groups, Vietnam and particularly its uplands constitute an amazingly complex environment. The fact that some localities – and particularly better-off ones – are more successful than others is to be anticipated.

The newness of these national programs necessitates an attitude of learning by doing. Many countries have experimented with programs to target slow-growing regions, but there is no one set of lessons that emerges. Vietnam will naturally have to go through its own learning process as it puts these programs to the test.

The programs are being implemented in the poorest, most under-developed regions of the country.

These are exactly the areas that have experienced the least social service delivery (and thus have less of a learning experience to go on). They are also the areas with the weakest fiscal position within the current distribution of intergovernmental revenue assignments. Clearly, these are the most difficult (if most relevant) proving grounds possible for the kind of integrated, intersectoral program – difficult even in relatively favorable conditions – which national programs represent.
Public administration in Vietnam is going through a period of constant change and transformation.

The external environment for consolidating these demanding programs is thus itself hardly stable.

**Public-sector institutional context**

*Government policies and development strategies*

Current government policies and predispositions should, in theory, facilitate the effectiveness of poverty-based national programs.

On the one hand, the government’s long-standing commitment to broadly-based social development is a reflection of the high policy importance it attaches to the social sectors. This importance has been underscored in recent years by fears that current development patterns are accentuating disparities and may eventually contribute to disaffection on the part of the rural populace in slower-growing regions.

Also evident is a strong ideological commitment to community mobilization behind common social, political and economic goals, under the leadership of the Communist Party. This commitment is rooted in a history of struggle and sacrifice against immeasurable odds to attain national reunification and independence throughout this century. Khoi notes that this government commitment is captured in the oft-repeated slogan “The people know, discuss, implement and monitor”.

This tradition is perceived by many to be continuing through the recently enacted democratization decree, hailed as an “exciting initiative” by many observers. The decree outlines a number of very specific steps that are to be taken in a participatory decision-making process. With, for example, rules stipulating that fully two-thirds of a village population must be present for certain types of collective decisions to have validity, the decree is particularly relevant for such national programs as 135, meant to involve communities in decision-making and monitoring for government investments.

Key aspects of the current macro-policy environment that hamper national program development include a large policy-implementation gap; a lukewarm policy environment for civil society; and a de facto orientation of public expenditure towards urban areas and non-basic services.

The grassroots democratization decree is poorly understood at the grassroots in areas visited by the team. One commune official at first could not recall what it was, then (upon prompting by a district official) confirmed that it was “that thing that was mentioned during a recent meeting at the district.” Participation is a long-standing formal commitment mainly in the form of social mobilization, i.e. mobilizing people after basic decisions have been made, for effective implementation.

The policy environment for transparency is mixed. Many people are not convinced of the sincerity or purposefulness with which various anti-corruption campaigns are implemented. At the local level, the perception that local officials are extensively involved in corrupt practices, such as the 10-15% kickback scheme on infrastructure investments, is widespread. Some – the fear is many – of the same people who are charged with implementing anti-corruption policies themselves benefit from non-transparency in minor and major ways, raising the question of the credibility of the reforms.

State policy towards non-State-based social groups is also in flux. For national programs to truly enjoy diversified means of investment and service delivery, they must increasingly draw on local organizations; only in some cases will these be organized by the state via mass organizations etc.
Clearly, mass organizations in many minority areas, for instance, have failed to attract the imagination and efforts of many community members. Whether the state will encourage more voluntaristic, independent entities to fulfill new roles is still an unanswered question.

The biggest macro-policy threat to national programs lies entirely outside the social policy debate. Failure to accelerate progress on macro-economic reforms, leading to a continued inefficient, urban-based, capital-intensive growth pattern, would have far-reaching consequences for rural areas, and particularly poorer ones. It would essentially consign the economic efficiency and productivity of the infrastructural investments to remaining very low.

**Donor policies**

*Donor policies and weaknesses can often undermine meaningful decentralization and community participation.*

Donor communities often suffer from poor coordination, in Vietnam as in other developing countries. In Vietnam, recent forums for discussion on practical coordination along sectoral lines, such as the Partnership to Assist the Poorest Communes, show promise for rationalizing investment in individual sectors; but these are relatively new and the degree to which they will become functional is uncertain.

Donors are often unwilling to decentralize their own operations in a manner that would enhance community participation, for many reasons. Decentralization injects uncertainty into decision-making and resource allocation. Donors (like central government officials at all levels) are highly wary of creating opportunities for demands on their assistance to be voiced that they will not be in a position to address.

**Intergovernmental relations**

*The current distribution of responsibilities and resources between levels of government accentuates fiscal and administrative disparities, despite some attempts to redistribute resources. These marked disparities weaken capacity to implement anti-poverty programs as well as lines of accountability.*

The current set of intergovernmental relations in Vietnam has the following major characteristics:

Current fiscal redistribution taking place between provinces is only partially successful in bridging revenue gaps in poorer localities. There, external transfers in part undermine own-level fiscal effort and allow for minimum flexibility (since provinces claim they cannot but follow central guidelines), but are insufficient to result in minimum service delivery standards.

Inter-governmental relations are marked by a top-down style, in which vertical accountability is more heavily emphasized than downward. This accentuates information sharing problems; lower levels have disincentives to report problems or failure to meet targets, while upper levels have little capacity to check or to clearly link local performance to resources allocated for specific goals.

Partly as a result of the above, there is a distinct culture of *avoiding and/or denying accountability* within the national programs examined. Accountability to the center for meeting set goals is weak, as these goals are not clear linked to the level of resources allocated; goals are not “owned” by the level to which they are assigned.

Downward accountability is even more absent. Given the limited community participation in the programs, there is no clear avenue by which communities could demand timely implementation of
those anti-poverty projects to which they are entitled. Chances for this happening are better for the 135 program, which potentially involves transfer of a somewhat fixed sum of money to a fixed number of communities, for a clear set of possible investments. But weak information flows currently prevent this from happening.

There is still no clear policy mandate for comprehensive decentralization in Vietnam. Policy pronouncements speak of the need to improve the functioning of local governments. But the transfer of power and resources to local governments or communities is not considered a potential solution to the problems plaguing center-local relations. Current forms of administrative decentralization being implemented, involving the piecemeal transfer of selected responsibilities and resources to local governments, have the potential to improve local efficiency of national program implementation, but have distinct disadvantages and dangers as well. Chapter five will return to this theme.

Task network: Design and organization issues for national programs

This section examines specific design and organization issues for the two national programs. The 133 program in many ways is similar in its weaknesses to other integrated, multi-sectoral national programs, while 135 might be more typical of those with a sectoral focus.

133 Program

Poor horizontal coordination is the most consequential weakness of the 133 program. Low ability for local government coordinators – both of the People’s Committee and for the sectoral officials charged with the difficult task of coordinating a multi-sectoral program – manifests itself in several ways in the 133 program:

*A disjunct between formal rules and what actually is done, both in terms of reporting and the importance of the actual plans.*

Formal requirements for participation of various sectoral representatives on provincial and district HEPR steering committees are impressive, involving for example extensive reporting on program implementation and financing. In fact, formal rules are simply not followed, nor do they appear to be enforceable in practice.

*Lack of integration in program inputs.*

Program inputs are not concentrated onto a common geographical area in a way that would make for a synergistic effect – i.e. at the village or household level. In fact, below the district level there is essentially no integration whatsoever. The idea of multi-sectoral integration, on which the 133 program is predicated, is essentially unachievable at the present time, given the lack of transfer of greater coordination powers, decision-making and adequate resources for doing so to the grassroots.

*A impressive planning framework that is nevertheless often quite irrelevant to what is happening on the ground.*

Formal HEPR plans systematically chart out time-based goals, targets, and resources to be mobilized and monitoring arrangements. In practice, there is little evidence that such multi-year plans
have any affect on resource allocation or result in any integration of program inputs at the grassroots level. Ngai and Hung considers the planning framework itself weak: it is “too comprehensive in its integrated, multi-sectoral focus on central and provincial level planning, while neglecting planning at the lower levels that determine whether targets can be met or not”. The content of the plans is found to be “too large and integrated for one (relatively weak) sector to be the standing unit in coordinating and leading by issuing documents”.16

**Feedback and dissemination mechanisms are largely absent in the 133 program.**

The 133 program began with considerable experimentation, which was its key strength.17 This appears to be weak or non-existent at present. There is little if any evidence of a learning orientation within the program, which is not surprising since this would rely on: a) strong vertical cooperation between levels of governments; and b) a coherent, integrative coordinating committee. Neither of these are present.

In the extreme, the weaknesses noted above relegate the 133 to being a “shell” program with no substantive intersectoral impact on implementation. There are two root causes for these problems: lack of meaningful decentralization and lack of a match between resources and responsibilities.

**The 133 program is vertically oriented, and has achieved little in the way of meaningful decentralization.**

Resources are concentrated at upper levels and sectors, and local coordinators are either too weak or not sufficiently motivated to significantly affect line-item allocations passed on from above. The role of the potentially powerful People’s Committees (particularly of the provincial level) is currently insufficiently developed.

In the first incarnation of the program, there was little in the formal distribution of roles and responsibilities to motivate substantial local involvement or interest (aside from the transfer of resources involved). Subsequent modifications to program design (detailed by Khoi, 2000) suggest an effort to strengthen the unified control under provinces.18 The latest revisions, taking effect from this year but probably demanding more time to visibly affect practice, place substantial budgeting and goal-setting power with the provinces. The extent to which these revisions will be successful will depend on their ability to address the lack of clear accountability, both upward and downward, as well as lack of the flexibility in practice to adjust budget allocations between program components.

**There is a lack of overlap between assigned responsibilities, and resources available for undertaking planning and management tasks.**

This disjunct shows itself in two ways. First, one sees it in the current mismatch between the formal coordination responsibilities for this complicated program and the program secretariat’s capacity (headed by local branch of MoLISA).

Second, there has been inadequate attention to actual planning and recurrent costs relative to coordinating and integration work. Cost norms for both planning and intersectoral management are far too low to motivate or enable proactive local involvement, beginning at the provincial level. There are no resources for making plans using any kind of participatory methods. Coordination costs are to be borne entirely from discretionary provincial budgets; these of course are extremely limited in fiscally weak provinces in which national programs are prominent.
135 Program

The 135 program has had considerable initial success, due to its higher political profile and clearer geographical and sectoral focus.

The 133 program is struggling with issues of horizontal coordination and lack of a clear resource base for the program. The 135 program, being primarily sectoral, and with a relatively clear overall allocation benchmark per commune, has problems in other areas.

Design and organizational problems in the 135 program center on aspects that currently mitigate against transparency, and local capacity development and ownership.

Transparency issues are fundamental due to specific design and organizational features of the program. These (discussed in greater depth in the previous chapter) include:

- Unclear distribution of 135 program funds between communes;
- Regulations on democratization not being used in planning activities;
- Fundamental problems in the tendering processes;
- Controversial selection of communes for inclusion in the program; and
- Selection of projects by districts and commune leadership, with little community participation.

The second main issue is the limited impact which 135 program is making in terms of capacity building and local ownership. It is very much a district-based scheme at present. While communes are invited to participate in program management, as a formal requirement of the program, this often does not happen. Districts in practice:

- make plans;
- issue decisions;
- invite and propose partners to take part in scheme contract auction; and
- ask communes to participate in approved constructions.

Participation of farmers is limited to labor – very much a ‘functional’ form of participation, albeit a highly relevant one.

Organizational capacities and stakeholder interests

The premise of this section is that, to be effective, national programs need more than a conducive policy environment and appropriate organizational design. A crucial – if often unexamined – feature is the direct incentives and interests of major stakeholders in the process. It is exactly these kinds of interests and incentives that are the primary determinants of whether potential capacities at the grassroots are actually utilized or not. This section reviews these incentives and capacities for the central government, lower levels of government, and grassroots leaders and communities. The review is meant to be indicative rather than exhaustive.

Higher levels of government
Sectoral line agencies at higher levels of government emphasize the need to meet implementation targets coupled with weak ability to intervene in, or understand, local level implementation processes.

Such agencies (and the leadership they reflect) are eager to “deliver the goods”, as measured by a planning framework which emphasizes specific implementation targets. Yet they have little ability to check substantially on the quality of that implementation at the grassroots, reinforcing their need to emphasize quantitative targets within that monitoring framework.

They often have a “magic bullet” approach to development strategies, which makes them somewhat inflexible.

A ‘magic bullet’ approach is one in which it is assumed that a single set of interventions, implemented in a specific way, is the one and only solution to the development problem at hand. Sectoral agencies tend to think in this way. They are strong at identifying solutions that have the potential for broad applicability. Yet they are weak in seeing how these may have to differ by locality, not least due to Vietnam’s great heterogeneity.

An often negative view of the capacities of lower levels.

Sectoral agencies at the center often demonstrate strikingly low capacity to understand or intervene in lower level implementation processes. Yet they are likely to seriously doubt the capacities of lower level officials – particularly from the district level downwards. This is partly due to their regard for formal sophistication in writing and presentation. They are also likely to be afraid that lower levels will misuse any discretionary power granted to them – for which higher level officials delegating these responsibilities might be held accountable.

A preference for simple, hierarchical planning and service delivery mechanisms that they directly control.

‘Simple’ in this context means ‘easily consolidated and compiled’ at upper levels, and involving relatively clear lines of authority and control between levels of government. Such arrangements have two positive features for them. First, they reduce the complexity of upper-level coordination and resource distribution. Second, they establish clear bureaucratic and sectoral ‘ownership’ over particular programs and resources, uncluttered by conflicting demands from ‘competing’ sectors.

An eagerness to take on coordinating responsibilities where possible, while avoiding ‘being coordinated’ by other sectors.

Line agencies are eager to protect and, where possible, expand their bureaucratic turf. One way of doing this is to accept coordinating responsibilities for major programs (such as 133); such programs allow agencies access to greater resources (for their coordinating role) and higher visibility. On the other hand, line agencies will typically resist attempts to intervene in their intra-sectoral distribution of expenditure, particularly by other line agencies (as opposed to the same-level People’s Committee), and are in general more attuned to vertical sectoral relationships than to horizontal ones at the same level.
The result of these basic characteristics is that line agencies at the center will tend to be weak on supporting the quality of decentralized implementation.

Instead, they will tend to push for quick implementation of national program targets along simple ‘input-output’-type indicators.

Local governments

Within local governments one can distinguish between technical agencies and local leadership.

Technical agencies

Local level technical agencies share the following characteristics:

Unclear accountability. Lower-level technical line agencies share a dual accountability towards the People’s Committees of their own level, and toward the sectoral agency of the next highest level. Of these, the vertical orientation is clearly strongest in most cases: decision-making and resource allocation is typically vertically oriented and technical, particularly where lower-level discretionary resources are limited – clearly the case for mountain-area governments. If accountability is primarily vertically oriented, there is virtually no ‘downward accountability’, i.e. towards communities or even lower levels of government.

Low accountability for impact. Line agencies may or may not have considerable flexibility in the specific ways they distribute the scarce resources allocated. Pro forma discretion may be limited, but in practice they may have significant discretion since monitoring mechanisms are so weak. What is clear is that there are very few performance measures for which these agencies are held accountable for reaching which relate to the specifically to the integrated impact of their work. Sectoral representatives are responsible for spending resources, not earning them or for their efficiency of use in terms of ultimate impact.

Little or no training in participatory processes. PRA methods – or any kind of planning process that involves multiple sectors, let alone community representatives – is essentially unfamiliar to line agency personnel.

Based on these factors, how is a lower-level line agency official, responsible for implementing a new national program which in theory is supposed to be participatory, likely to act? On balance, the incentives are stacked against participation. A participatory process would:

- Decrease discretion of technical staff;
- Possibly open them up to criticism if they are unable to deliver inputs as expected; and
- Increase interdependence of program resource allocation (i.e. making the agency dependent on other agencies) and thus complicate attempts to control or attain maximum predictability regarding the flow of inputs.

Local government leadership (district-level)

Local leaders are under two kinds of pressures to deliver. The first relates to outputs: they must demonstrate to constituents that national program funds have been utilized in some (preferably visible) way. The second relates to process or quality. Simple analytics and stakeholder analysis suggests that
they are much more sensitive to the first kind of pressure given current arrangements (and in this they are similar to the central-level technical agencies).

Local leaders are sensitive to be seen to respond pro forma to administrative requirements imposed from above in Vietnam’s hierarchical administrative system.

Production of plans, reports, and delivery according to fixed implementation outputs is thus a key concern, overshadowing the actual quality of such work. Quality is harder to measure, more ambiguous, less likely to be measured, and if measured, given less weight by those above.

Leaders are sensitive to be seen to ‘deliver the goods’ at the grassroots, but in a way that maximizes their own benefit and minimizes risks.

They are eager to avoid being held accountable (particularly by grassroots constituents) for things they consider to be largely outside of their control. They thus seek to minimize expectations for assistance, and thus to downplay or not try to communicate clearly entitlements or resources handed down from above.

Leaders also wish to avoid open competition among their constituents for resources they may or may not control with discretion. This suggests a preference for non-transparent as opposed to transparent criteria, as well as for restricted access to information about entitlements.

Local leaders face daunting limitations on their discretion and capacity that weigh heavily on their calculations.

First, particularly in poor, mountainous localities, leaders are extremely cash-strapped; they have very little discretionary fiscal resources with which they could respond to more quality-conscious, participatory planning process.

Secondly, local leaders face the challenge of coordinating line agencies whose own accountability, training and sensitivity is overwhelmingly vertical in nature.

Third, they may face competing demands from below.

Local leaders may stand to benefit personally from non-transparent allocation.

It must be acknowledged that for some local elites, there may be considerable gray area for supplementing income – both for the People’s Committee coffers and personally, as well as cementing client networks – by keeping resource allocations and other decision criteria relatively opaque.

Stakeholder analysis suggests that both local technical agencies and local leadership are likely to avoid transparent allocation processes and a participatory approach.

The basic calculus facing a local leader as well as line agency official is that opening the planning process up to greater participation would, as suggested above:

- Decrease their discretion;
- Possibly open up to criticism if unable to deliver inputs as expected;
- Increase interdependence and make difficult to control flow of inputs;
Open them up to criticism if higher-level line agencies criticize; they could chose to move
inputs to a different area;

The tendency will be to again push for quick decision making followed by murky implementation
arrangements, using contractors under direct control.

The commune and village level

The above constraints could be considered the “supply-side” of participatory planning – whether
government officials and leaders are likely to establish a participatory, transparent planning process
within the national programs.

Unfortunately, stakeholder analysis suggests that “demand” for such an open process is itself not
necessarily strong, particularly in mountainous localities.

Commune-level leadership

Commune-level leadership is unlikely to demand a planning process that opens planning to
community members.

Commune leaders face the following basic situation:

Little leverage. They have few mechanisms with which to hold line agencies or upper levels
accountable for delivering inputs to which they are entitled (e.g. national program allocations).
Moreover, they may not even know what these are, particularly since their immediate access to
information is from this immediate upper level. They are thus likely to accept, rather than question,
whatever goods come their way.

Prestige and position. Their natural priority is to use local resources to strengthen their position
and prestige among their immediate constituents and the broader community. What drives individual
motivation very much varies. But it is likely that even those with excellent intentions feel they have
the clearest understanding of local needs and wants in a community, and that therefore they themselves
are in the best position to mediate outside resources and local needs.

Fear of accountability and conflicting demands. As in the case of district leaders above,
commune leaders are perhaps even more sensitive to the danger of being held accountable by the
grassroots for resources over which they enjoy very little discretion (since these are in the hands of the
district line services or leaders).

Limited time and other resources. Local leaders are the people who are called on to bear the
brunt of participatory planning, in terms of facilitating meetings etc. Yet their ability to do so is
extremely limited, given their own limited budgets, time availability and, most importantly, motivation
(the last stemming from poor salaries and uncertain prospects for advancement in their careers).21

Limited access to information. Like technical agencies but to an even greater degree, local
leaders are likely to be very unclear about the grassroots democratization decree and specific means for
implementing its provisions. To say that they are required to follow a participatory planning process
means nothing unless one is clearer about the specific procedures, resources and accountability that
accompanies such a mandate.

Potential for personal gain. Commune leaders are the likely conduits – the ‘nets’ – for outside
assistance channeled to a community. They are thus likely to stand to gain from non-transparent
implementation or to be afraid to complain of it, given district discretion in resource allocation (and
hence the danger of losing out in subsequent rounds of funding).
Local people

Local community members face their own constraints on demanding participation. People may have inadequate “buy-in” to a participatory process because of:

**Inadequate information.** Community-members’ knowledge of outside procedures and decision-making processes is very unclear. Contact is typically with local Peoples Committees or village leader, who themselves are not always clued in.

**Non-participatory previous experiences.** Minorities and mountainous communities in general are often accused of attitudes of dependence (ý lai) and passivity vis-à-vis upper levels of government. This may be true and certainly does hamper community ability to interact with the bureaucracy. But in fact, to some extent such attitudes represent adaptations to their environment, in the sense that participatory processes in government resource allocation rarely extend down to grassroots consultation; so when resources do come, they are in the form of “tien cua chua”, mentioned earlier. Community members are unaccustomed to demanding their rights (which they may in any case not be aware of). Communities may also be downright suspicious of processes labeled ‘participatory’, when in fact they have experienced these primarily from the perspective of labor mobilization, and have rarely seen resources transferred to their effective control.

**Low social organization and social capital.** As noted earlier, mass organizations are typically weak in mountainous localities. And social organization in multi-ethnic villages, with highly dispersed populations and poor infrastructure, is often low. Low levels of social development further hamper community organizational capacities in relation to outside programs of assistance. Suspicions between different villages competing for outside resources may also hamper organization. The point should not be taken too far. Where social capital is higher, organization and ability to participate in inclusive planning processes are positively affected.

These constraints can lead to ‘acute localitis’ when combined in a decentralized regime: elite capture; majority discrimination against the very poor; lack of inter-jurisdictional coordination for some types of investments; and limited capacity to move forward.  

*As a result, even where latent demand for local participation exists, there are serious obstacles to its effective expression.*

**Implications of stakeholder analysis**

The analysis gives some idea of why the dominant incentives of major stakeholders are for low accountability and transparency, and why training alone – in the form of supplying a new “skills set”, typically to lower government officials – is not an acceptable solution.

It also becomes even more apparent why the 133 program is failing. At present, the incentives of central and local technical agencies lead to the breakdown of its integrationist aims before inputs reach the district or commune level.

This kind of institutional analysis becomes even more striking when set against the backdrop of a few immediately obvious problems mentioned earlier:

The first is the low, or more precisely the *uneven*, capacities of local governments. The gap between district and commune level planning and implementation capacities is huge. Lower levels suffer from insufficient finance – they are not formally incorporated into the state budget. They also tend to have fewer trained manpower.
The second is the obvious lack of the adequate direction or ‘models’ for how the participatory intentions of the grassroots democratization decree as applied to national programs are to be carried out. As Khoi notes, “there is no indication that district officers have any sense of what participatory rural appraisal methods are or what they might entail in practice.”

Third, grassroots organization is weak, and grassroots demands for participatory processes weakly articulated, due in part to decades of relative neglect of local roles.

Finally, engrained attitudes have to be taken into consideration and emphasized. In a vertically oriented system, power, prestige and resources are concentrated at upper levels. Lower levels of government are viewed by higher level officials with some condescension. Moreover, despite formal commitment to the ideology of equality of all ethnic groups, some people still hold condescending attitudes towards minority cultures and their capacities, and find it difficult to imagine significant transfer of technical responsibilities and control over resources to them. Moreover, the attitude that programs must be standardized is common, and mitigates against flexibility in application at the local level and against a learning approach.

Summary

This chapter has examined key causes of the often disappointing performance in national program implementation related to community participation. In the broadest terms, the policy framework and intentions underlying participation appear to be positive. Organizational design issues and flaws are noted and, in theory, could be corrected readily, given the fact that these programs are currently being considered for redesign in the lead-up to the 9th Party Congress.

The most trenchant constraints appear to lie in the set of incentives within the broader public-sector environment for major stakeholders to adopt a participatory process. Key actors face little pressure from above or below to adopt participatory planning, and have little incentive to do so on their own accord. Quite the contrary: institutional analysis suggests their wariness to open up planning and implementation is fully rational from particular institutional and individual perspectives, consistent with their responsibilities and resources. Changing these incentives is difficult, but it is hard to see how substantial long-term progress can be made without doing so.

At the same time, it is important to stress some positive elements at the grassroots. Vietnam does enjoy formal commitment, expressed and often repeated at every level of government, to broad participation in policy-making and implementation. This is something many better-organized communities have actually experienced over many years. The key is to design a system that lowers the costs for people to adopt such a participatory process, making it more in their best interest.
4. LESSONS FROM ACADEMIC LITERATURE AND DONOR-ASSISTED PROJECTS IN VIETNAM

Overview

This chapter offers a number of “good-practice” principles relating to the whole challenge of building up participatory approaches within an often inhospitable bureaucratic environment. They are culled from a number of projects in Vietnam as well as familiarity with the practitioner and academic literature on capacity building. (See Tran Huu Cuong’s report for an in-depth analysis of eight case study projects.)

Anyone who tries to go from complexity to generalizations feels (or should feel) uncomfortable: individually, generalizations typically appear obvious, or sound like truisms. The hope in this specific case is that together they may act as a guide to good practice, from which one can draw specific recommendations for the reorientation of Vietnam’s national programs. This work is still a very initial step, and it is hoped that the donor community will continue to more systematically draw out implications of its own capacity building work.

Cross-cutting principles

Strive for innovation, flexibility and constant change.

It is crucial to recognize that in a rapidly changing situation such as that found in Vietnam through its transition, programs must develop the ability to adjust to changing circumstances and feed new information regarding the project environment into program redesign.

Think heterogeneity and diverse capacities. Factor local environment into project calculations.

The most basic starting point for program design should be the recognition of the heterogeneity of local endowments of all sorts of resources – fiscal, social, organizational, even political – as well as the varying quality of local leadership. Programs that attempt to cover any substantial amount of social and ecological terrain should be able to point to specific local characteristics that have been factored into program design. It is also this recognition that motivates the need for decentralization and constant innovation as well.

Programs that seek to institutionalize participation should be demand-driven and seek changes that are consistent with the interests of major stakeholders involved.

Demand-driven changes implies that people are made aware of the benefits to themselves of the proposed changes (or the costs of inaction). Demands can be from within the bureaucracy – i.e. officials realizing the advantages for their own work of a more appropriate planning process that can be brought about through greater participation. Or they can come “from the people”, i.e. from communities and the grassroots, eager to take advantage of changes introduced.

In general, the more superficial the changes in the roles and responsibilities involved, the less people can be expected to respond. This is clearly the case with many kinds of administrative decentralization.
This principle also holds that to the extent possible proposed changes to bureaucratic routines should be consistent with people’s perception of their own best interest. Reforms that ask people to do things for little or no personal benefit – let alone those that appear contrary to their self-interest – are clearly likely to go nowhere. And yet many proposed institutional changes do exactly that. This emphasizes the need for stakeholder analysis, to ask and have answers ready for the basic question of ‘why would people want to adopt this kind of change?’

There are of course changes that “ask too much” of certain groups, i.e. they will always be opposed because of the nature of changes that impose costs on them. The key task is then to co-opt or neutralize their opposition to the extent possible.

Another key extension of this principle is that participation should be structured in a way that is relevant and meaningful to the people involved.

Emphasize continuous development of information systems as the key to a learning orientation.

Information systems are vital to bureaucratic learning. Programs that are dynamic and responsive to heterogeneity are only possible with strong information systems. It is particularly important to examine the flows of information from different levels of government, and to be sensitive to the incentives of various collectors, reporters and respondents of program-related information might have to couch their interpretation in particular ways – not necessarily only to ‘distort’ information, but to frame it in a way most likely to benefit oneself.

Thoroughly investigate the patterns of accountability – downward, upward and horizontal – involved in the proposed changes to get a sense of why outcomes are as they are, and how one might change them.

Patterns of accountability are fundamental to bureaucratic performance. What people are held responsible for in theory and in practice can also vary significantly, so it is necessary too to be sensitive to that fact.

Downward accountability refers to the ability of lower levels of government and/or the end-users of services to hold higher levels accountable for the quantity and quality of service delivery to which they feel a certain sense of entitlement. It tends to be the weakest developed – or practically non-existent in many cases – in vertically-oriented bureaucracies, as in Vietnam.

Upward accountability refers to the accountability of lower to higher levels of government to meet minimum standards of service delivery or otherwise to meet implementation targets which have been agreed to or imposed by fiat. Upward accountability tends to be strong in theory in hierarchical systems, but can be weak in practice if information and monitoring systems are not well developed.

Horizontal accountability in this context is typically from technical agencies to coordinators of multi-sectoral programs (People’s Committees or sectoral agencies that have been entrusted with sectoral coordination, like MoLISA for the 133 program), and vice-versa. Horizontal accountability tends to depend on the strength of the local government. This kind of strength varies widely in Vietnam based on leadership ability and the discretionary resources available to the People’s Committees. In other words, where local Committees actually have resources available to distribute, as opposed to being in a dependent position relative to upper levels, this has a positive effect on horizontal coordination.
Design planning and resource allocation systems from the bottom-up, striving for a match between resources allocated, and mandates assigned, to local governments.

Administrative systems – certainly those attempting to alleviate poverty – are complex. At each step in the implementation chain, serious problems can occur. In terms of building in community participation, though, what is important at the end of the day is what happens at the bottom end of the chain: do resources, mandates and capabilities come together to make participation a reality?

Planning from the bottom-up means looking at what has to happen for certain outcomes on the ground to occur. One can then focus on the chain of events – the implementation and incentive structures –most efficiently engineered to make this outcome happen.

The point about resources and mandates being aligned is a classic one from the fiscal decentralization literature. One of the most common design mistakes in decentralized systems is to assign responsibilities without ensuring resources adequate to the task. This mistake is quite common in Vietnam in mountainous localities, in which: a) local governments involved are extremely poor; and b) the central and provincial levels are reluctant to transfer funds directly to the grassroots, leading to a long chain of ‘middle-men’.

Address competing visions and trade-offs clearly

Involving communities and local governments in a fundamental realignment of public-sector resources and responsibilities is a huge task, and it is vital to recognize conflicting or competing visions from the beginning.

Decentralization and community participation: For promoting improved service delivery or for better governance? Devolution or deconcentration?

This is more an issue of macro-vision. Devolution refers to the wholesale transfer of authority for policy development and implementation to locally constituted governments. It is a political act. Deconcentration is basically administrative decentralization, a much more limited orientation towards improving service delivery.

 Orientations in this case do not necessarily conflict, but they do have different implications. The smaller the range of powers decentralized, the less likely some local stakeholders will support the reforms.

This is true at the commune level and for more limited issues as well. For instance, the 135 program is straddling the two visions. In theory, it could develop into a commune-level capacity building cum infrastructure development program. Yet at present commune-level participation under 135 is seen primarily as a means of expediting implementation.

Balance program emphasis on facilitating direct community participation outside of established channels (i.e. by creating new user groups not linked to local governmental structures) with improvements to and utilization of existing systems of political representation.

This an institutional design question. The concrete need faced by proponents of participatory approaches is to find vehicles for systematic community consultation in the identification, selection and implementation of development projects. The tendency to bypass and hence disempower elected local boards (such as the People’s Councils) is marked in much foreign assistance. This needs rethinking; but one should also not overestimate the existing capacities of such representative bodies (in any
country) to effectively mediate the participation of the lower strata of society, the poor and the marginalized.

The most viable way forward would seem to be the promotion of local civil society as a means of *both* strengthening local representative institutions *and* of providing an entry point for special government and donor programs to directly interact with the poor.

**Intersectoral vs. sectoral; vertical vs. horizontal trade-offs**

Donor-assisted projects vary greatly in the degree to which they take on intersectoral concerns; and to which they work with multiple levels of government simultaneously. There is no one formula representing best practice. Some projects stress horizontal, same-level-of-government linkages focusing on improved governance across a range of sectors. These are in a good position to promote wider ranging local capacity development for local governance. Projects that are more sectorally oriented and working with multiple levels of government, in contrast, are more likely to enjoy flexibility in specific interventions and to advocate for specific policy reforms. Yet they face the weakness of limited impact on local governance processes. Ambitious, large-scale projects attempt both simultaneously, at great risk of importing too much managerial complexity and of locals seeing the project as a generous blank check.

**Demographic characteristics vs. regional approaches to poverty alleviation; efficiency vs. equity approach**

Regional approaches to poverty alleviation stress locating the poorest localities and supporting them across the board. Their premise is that socioeconomic differentiation in such localities is likely to be relatively weak; most people in a very poor locality are likely to poor and in need of external intervention. Programs of this type face the disadvantage that often the poorest localities are not only the hardest to work in (and thus the efficiency of expenditure can be low) but due to low population density in mountainous areas a large majority of those who are poor may be bypassed.

A ‘demographic characteristics’ approach attempts to target individuals and households who are relatively poor, wherever they are. Programs in this vein face the challenge of considerable administrative capacity requirements necessary to identify the poor. Moreover, such programs are less likely to enjoy the political support of local elites, who stand to benefit little or not at all.

The 133 program takes in general a “demographic” approach, whereas the 135 program of course targets the poorest regions.

Related to the poverty approaches above, the equity / efficiency difference manifests itself in different approaches to local entitlement. A focus on equity leads one to emphasize greater support towards relatively poorer areas and/or more *equal* entitlements per area. An approach towards efficiency would be to try to reach the largest number of relatively poor people, even if they are not the poorest, for the maximum effect of program expenditure.

**High quality vs. low replicability**

This is one of the most common trade-offs with which practitioners struggle when it comes to participatory processes. High quality participatory planning, for instance, is time and resource-intensive; it also tends to be open-ended as opposed to specific-purpose. The higher the infusion of external resources involved, the lower the replicability within the “normal” implementation situation, i.e. without the presence of special programs and resources.
Pilot approach vs. need to up-scale and have larger impact quickly; Standardization vs. flexibility

Flexibility is typically easier in small-scale systems with a limited number of stakeholders. It is furthermore easier in contexts that are seen as ‘special’, i.e. where ‘normal’ bureaucratic routines do not have to be followed from the beginning. This is arguably an important advantage of the small-scale pilot projects often conducted by international NGOs. Gaining permission for experimentation in such cases is much easier and bureaucratic and political support for pilots thus introduced can be built up over time with demonstrated success of project interventions.

On the other hand, programs that seek to work on or to expand to a large scale fairly quickly soon encounter a different picture. Only relatively broad-ranging projects are likely to command the high-profile political attention around which major new approaches to poverty reduction may be built. Yet institutional environments are both more complex and typically more rigid on such a scale.

The more successful a project becomes, the more tempted proponents are to standardize, to write a “cook book” representing the project method. When then applied to different environments and with typically far lower amounts of human and financial resources (ingredients) as compared with the initial successful trial, replication becomes increasingly problematic.

Approaches to institutionalization and capacity strengthening

Several of the projects examined shared certain commonalities regarding their long-term approach towards capacity development. Three include: having a long-term approach; building up local ‘ownership’ of, or demand for, the project-induced changes; and emphasizing a flexible vision of sustainability from the beginning.

Think long-term in building up capacities.

Trite as this may sound, it is the case that most donor-assisted attempts to institutionalize participatory approaches begin with too short a time-horizon to realistically accomplish that goal. Partly this may be a problem of donor-driven requirements and limitations on funding, particularly for something viewed as institutionally risky (i.e. depending to such a great extent on government commitment, attitudes, extensive public-sector reform etc.). But it also reflects a failure to grasp the long-term structural issues at work: the need to build up a core of trained, committed staff; to co-opt opposition of some stakeholders; to facilitate changes in institutional and bureaucratic rules blocking the approach; to respond to unanticipated obstacles; and above all to go through a sufficiently long period of experimentation.

Three sub-principles help operationalize a long-term approach:

Begin with the end in mind, building a vision for sustainable institutional impact into the project from the beginning. A surprising number of projects examined do not seem to have a clear notion of how one would (or why government should want to) upscale current efforts. Institutionalization is not likely to happen by accident.

Recognize and plan from the beginning for the major reorientations and transformations projects go through as they expand. Some of these are technical, while others are cognitive, cultural and organization. The financial variable – the necessity for declining external input provision and the program redesign this necessitates – is among the most important.
Link to broader, intersectoral development in regional development. As a general principle, the more narrow and self-contained is the project format, the more local stakeholders will perceive it as a one-off intervention. That in turn leads to further rent-seeking. In contrast, projects that look towards multi-sectoral development and the development of models which can be upscaled and applied in a particular type of environment – and which are therefore specifically billed as learning experiences from the beginning – have greater chance of attracting policy-makers’ attention.

Local ownership drives success, but it comes in several forms and is a dynamic process.

There is no way to design a project so that local ownership automatically occurs. Two approaches stand out, which are can be pursued simultaneously.

One approach found in many successful projects is to look for local or central-level “champions”, i.e. people in key positions who buy into the project idea and are willing to support it over time. Persistently supporting their position becomes a project priority.

A second approach is to try to create broadly-based grassroots demand for the project intervention at hand. Here, the focus is on organizational development: building up core group of people at each level who are concentrated enough to demand for certain changes. Local ownership doesn’t mean passive acceptance of “the” formula for local development initiated by a project. The degree to which local organizations are project-induced and inspired varies. In some cases, local organizations established for one purpose can begin to get involved in other areas.

Thus, the question is not one of how many sectors are involved, nor of the minimum necessary scope of the project. The more sectoral a project is, the more it needs to be vertically driven and involve stakeholders from multiple levels. The more horizontal, the more support from a wide number of people and the local leadership is needed to institutionalize project interventions.

Finding the right strategic entry point for assistance is crucial.

Some analysts point to the need to get away from a project-driven approach to institutionalizing participation. This can be done by supporting broad socioeconomic planning; or by supporting decentralization policies that also transfer some recurrent funding authority.²⁷

However, there are grounds for starting decentralization policies with projects:

- That are broadly communal rather than focusing on a limited sub-sector (example: income generation projects that can attract participation of a large percentage of people in a commune);
- For which one can apply relatively simple criteria of number of beneficiaries or cost-effectiveness to the decision to invest or not;
- And which are relatively “off-the-shelf”, applying proven interventions.

Sustainability has different meanings; carefully considering which is meant and pursuing its vision is an important part of program development.

In thinking about local organizational development and capacity building, the complex meanings that sustainability can take on become important. In the “traditional” view, sustainability is the ability to continue project-induced interventions in the absence of external funding. Thus, external funding for
certain types of grassroots organizations – like farmer groups – is often frowned upon by donors, who naturally question whether in the absence of such funding such groups would continue to function.

But sustainability can be seen from a more dynamic perspective. The important fact would not be whether the project-induced organizational form itself persists in exactly the same form and with the same functions as before. Rather, it would be to what extent a process of local development is initiated that leads to increasing local capacity. “Sustainability does not mean a guarantee that a given activity can go on unchanged forever. Rather, it means that individuals and groups reach a stage of self-reliance that enables them, first, to carry on given activities under present circumstances…and second, to face up to changing circumstances with a high degree of autonomy.”

A dynamic view of sustainability is even more important when viewed in the context of institutionalization. Functions that originally begin as project-inspired become “institutionalized” when these interventions are adopted by or influence local government actions themselves. Rarely will this adoption be wholesale. Some project-related interventions will be more appropriate given local concerns and capacities than others; it is probably impossible to predict which will be successful at the beginning. The important thing is whether a learning experience has been initiated or deepened that continues to lead to interesting local capacity shifts and innovations.

**PRA and Training**

Review of donor experiences with participatory planning and training methods is still in the early stages. The following presents some initial generalizations that seem warranted by experience and theoretically sound.

*Participatory methods have been found to be often consistent with Vietnamese capacities and local administrative and political culture.*

As noted earlier, Vietnamese public administration has long cherished the ideal – and has often made strides in the direction of – broad-ranging social mobilization and participation. Practitioners of participatory methods with experience working in Vietnam and other countries typically are favorably impressed by local capacities and attitudes that are facilitative of participatory methods application.

*Follow-up and relationship building are everything.*

A long-term approach is essential to the success of participatory methods such as PRA. One-off PRAs are likely to have virtually no institutional impact. If participatory methods and follow-up are not made part and parcel of projects in all their phases, a participatory plan will have little meaning.

This principle also springs from the perception that people are rarely interested primarily in participatory planning per se. Communities are more interested in assurances that budgeted funds will actually reach the grassroots, i.e. in preempting misuse of current and potential community resources.

There are diverse approaches to the question of whether PRAs and participatory plans in general should be broad ranging or narrow. The important question, this principle suggests, is whether the plans are demand- and user-driven in practice.
Funding norms and levels constitute a crucial variable, with implications for plan and process quality and replicability.

Two opposite and related statements are relevant here. First, there is no quality planning on the cheap. Participatory planning methods cost more than their alternatives, in terms of direct costs. Any plan for improved participatory planning that does not address the cost issue – and specifically, that does not budget adequately for a participatory process meeting minimum standards of quality – cannot be taken seriously.

There are many ways to justify increased expenses for planning. Proponents argue that expenditure on participatory planning ensures that direct investments pay off: for instance, that the end-users of services or infrastructure actually need and will use them. Development is replete with failures due to inadequate community participation.

The second statement is equally valid. The more expensive the foreseen participatory method, the less chance it has in the long-term of being institutionalized, at least in a form resembling the initial process.

Proponents must therefore equally take into consideration severe budgetary constraints, as well as the perceived necessity in governmental investments – quite different from many donor projects – to keep planning costs to a “reasonable” fraction of the actual investment costs. Indeed, often planning costs are often considered to be more susceptible to corruption, misuse or simply as dead-weight loss. For example, in national programs, there is considerable resistance from the National Assembly itself to increasing costs for planning the 135 program due to fears that this expenditure will be misused, that the funds so allocated will not actually reach the people.

Successful approaches to institutionalizing participatory methods address stakeholder demands and interests.

There are a number of implications of conceptually and practically emphasizing the interests of important stakeholders – such as local government officials at each level – with regard to capacity building for institutionalizing participatory methods. These grow out of the experience of organizations that have focused on training.

First, link training to practical needs, designing the process so that trainees are in a position to put into effect what they have learned as rapidly as possible. Training followed by long lag periods in which the new skills and knowledge are not used is unproductive. People need to get a “feel” for what they are learning for it to have more than a superficial, and quickly lost, influence.

Second, address the complexity of training within decentralized systems, and with multiple stakeholders, through a combination of techniques:

Within the training itself (applicable in some cases to program design and ongoing assessment), it has been found useful to stress integrated vertical participation, i.e. representatives from multiple levels affected by a process going through the training together. This has the advantage of forcing a systems approach to program development and training, in which the concerns of lower levels are more likely to reach the agenda.

Yet another technique is to employ horizontal dissemination of methods introduced wherever possible. This refers to local groups either formally or informally disseminating techniques learned (or even organizational forms, like village committees) to neighboring localities. Project experience suggests that in some cases horizontal dissemination is possible with very low levels of, or even no, direct program support.
Replacing research and training “services” with more sustained “partnerships” as key to this
demand generation is another idea gaining prominence.29 A service-based approach is more “one-off”,
focusing on technical transfer within a short time period. A partnership approach, in contrast, begins
with the assumption that the right methods do not necessarily exist at present and may have to be
developed. It also begins with the assumption that partnerships need to be long-term. A key lesson is
that methods development itself warrants major attention, not just the technical dissemination of what
methods and formulae already exist.

Fiscal issues

*Rigorously link fiscal and administrative decentralization.*

One of the most typical failings in decentralization is to decentralize administrative
responsibilities without a realistic sense of how resources sufficient to meet minimum standards can be
mobilized for said purpose. Another is to fail to ground decentralized planning in reality, such that
local plans amount to little more than “wish-lists” of assistance from above.

Planning must be grounded in reality. Links between plans and resources must be made
structurally, in terms of the plans themselves, the planning process followed, and in the assumptions of
central-level stakeholders.

Two powerful tools for doing this are *formula-based transfers* and *indicative planning figures*.
Both attempt to provide some regularity to expectations about what kind and level of funding upper
levels of government (and/or donors) may be supplying to lower levels and communities. Use of
formulas has the added advantage of boosting the perceived legitimacy of resource transfers by
building in objective – or at least transparent – criteria for the distribution of expenditure.

*Fiscal commitment and local contributions are possible even in very poor places.*

Cost-sharing and use of local resources are vital to boost accountability. One justification for
external infusions of funds is that they will boost the efficiency of locally mobilized resources. Yet
many outsiders legitimately worry that attempts to mobilize local counterpart funding – either from
communities or local governments – will be regressive, i.e. will have the effect of punishing relatively
poor communities.

Experience from donor-assisted projects confirms that it is possible and desirable to use locally
mobilized funds and labor even in the poorest communities. However, attempts to impose a fixed
percentage requirement will indeed be regressive. Instead, use of a flexible scale, e.g. after having
divided localities into different wealth-ranked classifications, can help ensure mobilization with equity.

But the basic principle remains. In even the poorest communities, hand-outs should be avoided
and use of some locally derived resources – typically part fiscal and labor-based – is essential.

Democratizing local development

*Powerful local organization is the key to successful institutionalization of participatory methods.*

Local organization is the key to that demand being articulated by the grassroots. The
effectiveness of local organization, often sponsored or strengthened by projects, stems from several
factors working in combination:
**High local demand.** The major theme of this paper is that institutionalization will occur only when demand for it can be organized and articulated by major stakeholders involved. Demand in turn depends on the selected project interventions, perceptions of the role of the project – one-off or long-term – and the design of project implementation (how participatory in practice).

**High local social capital.** The higher the existing social organization (i.e. prior to project intervention) the greater the chances, and the lower the costs, of locals articulating this demand.

**A facilitative environment and commitment to transferring resources and decision making.** No decentralization is meaningful without some degree of local control, which exists within carefully delimited parameters.

**The design of participatory processes.** While there are no hard and fast rules, the most relevant seem to be: making participation relevant, not only in the planning process but beyond (particularly into implementation); establishing ground rules for what is expected from the project and local partners, as well as conflict management mechanisms; and transparent and efficient flows of information about project performance and expected resource transfers, to all involved.

**Specific efforts are necessary to reach out to disadvantaged communities.**

Project experiences consulted amply demonstrate that participatory methods need to be tailored to make the participation of women, the poor, the geographically isolated and other vulnerable groups possible.

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**The problem of buy-in**

Technical issues surrounding decentralization and how to structure a participatory planning process are difficult enough. But no matter how sophisticated the system designed, whether it works or not will depend to a great extent on whether major stakeholders are behind it, or at least not actively opposing it. It is for this reason that the paper has argued that the primary concern of those interested in institutionalizing participatory methods should be on demand creation (or facilitation) on the part of major stakeholders. The following principles help back up this point.

**Clarifying roles rather than giving up power as the way to understand decentralization.**

Decentralization, it has been argued, must to some degree underline community participation for the latter to be meaningful. A major conceptual shift that is needed is to begin to focus not on decentralization as involving central and provincial stakeholders ceding power to the grassroots. Rather, their roles have to change in order for currently expressed ideals regarding community participation and the desired impact of national programs on poverty to be fulfilled. While some central-level roles may be weakened, others – such as quality control monitoring, facilitating learning experiences, information transfers and overall strategic management – will presumably be enhanced.

**The single most crucial variable for the long-term success of institutionalizing new approaches is the quality and persistence of government leadership.**

This leadership is necessary at all levels, right down to village leaders. But to be more precise, the case studies suggest that provincial level leaders occupy a particularly strategic position. They are in a position to translate grassroots pilot projects into improved bureaucratic performance within a geographically limited and thus manageable frame. They are the leaders who, if persistent, can push
through changes in a reasonably short period of time in order for results to be demonstrated. They are the key interlocutors who translate central policies into local outcomes and practices. That being said, provincial leaders also face numerous structural constraints. Most relevant of these, for the poorest mountainous localities, is the extreme fiscal dependence on the central government.

*Donors need to think long-term, with flexible funding linked to performance and with a coherent vision for institutionalization, to have any possibility of making a difference.*

Donors have their own strengths and weaknesses – their own stake – in institutionalizing participation. A cursory glance at the donor community projects reviewed for this chapter suggests there are a huge variety of approaches being attempted; and their impact ranges from the extreme local, with objectively speaking no chance of having a wider impact, to fairly large and diffuse multi-sectoral projects whose influence may very indeed but hard to pin down, as they merge with local bureaucracies and broader institutional problems. In between are a number of sectoral interventions of varying scale and success.

What seems to separate successful from the routine projects? First, long-term projects that start small but *aim big* (i.e. have a vision of institutionalization from the beginning) seem to be doing by far the most interesting work. These projects typically go through several phases – they don’t begin working in a huge number of localities, but their aim is to *learn* something that can be institutionalized, typically at least at the level of a province, often with the hope of multi-provincial impact.

These projects also tend to employ *flexible yet coherent funding approaches*. Typically, it becomes clear the kinds of things that the donor will and will not fund, and these are related coherently to its final objectives. (This is not as obvious as it sounds; several negative examples are also found in the small survey.)

Successful projects *involve multiple stakeholders* at different levels of government – at least up to provincial level by the end of the project, but often national as well – in program delivery and assessment.

Finally, major investments are made in facilitating institutional learning. This can be in the form of documentation, but more often involves periodical stakeholder workshops focused on specific themes.
5. RECOMMENDATIONS

This final chapter lays out basic recommendations relating to institutionalizing participatory planning. It seeks to help establish a framework for the much analytical and practical work that remains. It is divided into four sections: an overall vision for changes; recommendations for improving the enabling policy environment; a framework for improving national program performance; and a look towards a donor agenda for capacity strengthening.

Overall vision

What kind of long-term vision for institutionalizing participation do the following recommendations aim for? It is one marked by three basic transformations.

*From “xin-cho” to local mobilization, creativity and accountability*

The problem itself was described well by one senior government official participating on the team:

Allocating capital of national programs based on the theory of “helping the vulnerable” has in practice reinforced the “psychology of poverty”: passivity, dependence and pessimism… localities and individuals actually wish to stay or get on the list of the poor to receive subsidies. This, of course, is at odds with the spirit of helping oneself.

The “beg-give” syndrome in Vietnamese public administration is rooted in organizational culture, the design of intergovernmental fiscal arrangements and the lack of an adequate framework of accountability. The challenge is to move towards a system in which local governments have a stake in mobilizing local resources; in which they are not punished, but rather encouraged, to innovate in solving local problems and meeting local demands; and in which basic set of minimum standards are in place for the most crucial areas of national importance.

*From top-down to partnership and horizontal relationships*

Decision-making, resources and information are at present increasingly concentrated as one goes up the bureaucratic ladder. The way these resources are then employed is often ineffective, particularly when judged from the view of the grassroots, to which far too little filters down to maintain minimum standards set by the central government itself and by local peoples’ expectations.

Partnership implies mutual accountability between levels of government, and roles that do not conflict, but rather complement each other. Horizontal relationships are both between line services and People’s Committees of the same level, as well as between local governments themselves, that (whether these are communes or provinces) have much to learn from each other. Making this happen would depend on a reorientation, or even reversal, of attitudes and values at the center, something that is very difficult to achieve, as the next part of the vision suggests.
From condescension to capacity strengthening

It is not going too far to say that many officials at upper levels of government systematically undervalue and underestimate the existing capacities and motivations of lower levels. At its worst, this under-valuation can often take the form of condescension, even when it is coupled with the good intention of supplying resources and inputs that would help address such shortages. The problem tends to be more pronounced when dealing with the poorest areas and with ethnic minorities at the grassroots.

A coherent, long-term capacity strengthening program for grassroots administration in the poorest areas is what is most urgently needed, as the opposite of a supply-oriented or condescending approach.

From service delivery to participatory governance

An approach to community participation dominated by the concerns of service delivery would see this participation as functional – participation in order to boost the effectiveness of a pre-defined package of inputs. The main concerns regarding participation are technical: how to coordinate and amalgamate an imagined “10,000 PRAs” of lower levels into upper level resource packages.

Such a technical approach is certainly necessary and useful, but fails to address wider questions of governance. There can be a tension between the attempt to strengthen vertical service delivery channels – often outside of local government control – and wider local socioeconomic development planning, which itself should be participatory, broadly-based and hence reflective of local priorities and concerns. The reluctance in some cases of many international organizations to use existing local government structures may reflect a wariness regarding their institutional quality and responsiveness to local concerns. But unless these local governance institutions are strengthened it is hard to see how a capacity building approach can go to scale or be sustainable.

Thus, this final vision foresees the strengthening of such local institutions as the People’s Council and the improvement, in terms of participation, of existing local development planning, such as the annual and multi-year creation of Socio-Economic Development Plans (SEDP), currently an all-bureaucrat undertaking.

Recommendations for an enabling policy environment

Towards effective decentralization

It was argued above that institutionalizing participation meant strengthening or establishing effectively and appropriately decentralized systems – of both service delivery and governance.

Keep eyes on the overall reform environment.

One prerequisite for doing so is to look beyond specifically social policies towards the broadest context of development in Vietnam. Deepening overall economic reforms are likely to be the single greatest thing Vietnam can do to alleviate rural poverty and to prevent other sectoral reforms from
being undermined. On another level, it is important to ensure that current cutbacks in social spending and regressive taxes, fees etc. do not actively disempower such groups.

Consider launching a high-profile policy committing the government to meaningful devolution of power and resources.

Vietnam at present does not have a clear policy of decentralizing functions or resources to lower levels of government. By adopting a clear, broad-ranging new policy direction – presumably at the forthcoming Party Congress – Vietnam could signal to donors, local governments and communities its intention to back up its participatory philosophy with serious public-sector reforms to make it work. For it to be successful, such a policy would have to be clearly linked to a major capacity strengthening effort and a long-term mandate for change. Essentially, it would involve the transfer of greater policy responsibilities to provincial level, while strengthening central-level oversight role.

The means by which decentralization can boost both service delivery and local governance need to be clarified.

Priorities analyzed above include the following:

- Move towards performance-based systems. This implies that upper levels do not simply transfer funds, but rather force local governments to meet minimum conditions. These might include:
  - Ensuring basic standards of financial accounting.
  - Demonstrate that functional intersectoral / coordinating committees are in place, and are capable of steering investments.
  - Report periodically on outcomes.
  - Underpin performance with incentives. Positive incentives should be in place for localities that meet high standards on the basis of mutually agreed criteria.
  - Facilitate local demand for good performance. Boost demand from constituents for good performance via information and communication campaigns and participatory monitoring and evaluation.

Apply good practice principles to tap into benefits of decentralization and avoid easily foreseeable pitfalls.

A number of decentralization principles could be applied in order to do this:

- Decentralize functions to the lowest possible level consistent with efficiency.
- Ensure that decentralized functions are adequately funded, particularly from the perspective of the fiscally weakest localities.
- Apply fiscal reforms, including flexible co financing, to ensure that external resources boost the efficiency of locally mobilized resources while avoiding any negative effects on equity.
- Decentralize to different degrees in different areas (asymmetrical decentralization), appropriate with local capacities; avoid a “one-size-fits-all” approach to decentralization.
- Build in flexible funding while instituting participatory planning methods into government systems, so that local governments and line services are in some position to actually address non-anticipated, but probably highly effective, local initiatives for attacking poverty. To do
this would require reorienting government fiscal planning systems away from their present vertical orientation.

**Towards a facilitative framework for local organizations and participation**

A second key approach echoed throughout this paper is to facilitate the contribution of local organizations to making participation an institutional reality. The importance of doing so stems from a recognition that government performance in this regard is not only a reflection of internal government operations, but rather to a large part is “produced by an organized, educated and vigilant society”.31

Strengthening the grassroots is also the thrust behind Vietnam’s grassroots democratization initiative, which serves as one important “anchor” for participatory approaches within Vietnamese laws and institutions.32 The necessity is to strengthen this anchor, building on the democratization decree by emphasizing its effective dissemination, application and concretization. At the same time, other anchors will be necessary – hence the advocacy above for a specific national policy supporting decentralization.

In strengthening local organizations, the following points can be helpful:

- Look at ways for states to improve social capital. Strengthening norms of trust and cooperation is likely to be extremely effective way to increase capacity for community participation.
- Reinforce the legal standing of local organizations, like user groups and credit associations. These provide a more voluntaristic point from which to approach community participation.
- Recognize that different types of localities may have widely different capacities, which may not be obvious on the surface. Mountainous localities, for instance, are not simply waiting for the government to deliver the goods. There is strong evidence33 that most communities are engaged in a range of small-scale infrastructure development and maintenance with no reference to any government program. The point is to support, not undermine, this kind of local effort.

**Reforming national programs: Some initial considerations**

With the overall goal of moving towards more performance-based systems, with local accountability and high local demand for national programs to adopt participatory methods, the following recommendations fall into several areas. The recommendations are basically similar for each of the national programs investigated (133 and 135), since they focus primarily at the systems level.

**Planning and design features**

Certain planning systems reform and design features can make national programs more facilitative environment for participation of lower governments and communities. Several steps include the following:

Emphasize coordinated packages of assistance for poorer areas, and planning framework for local resource mobilization in richer ones. Thus the mix of planning responsibilities will vary. To help do this, one proposal recently advanced in the context of national program support makes sense.34
It classifies mountainous communes into the following groups according to their resource endowments and types of capacity prevalent, e.g.:

- very remote communes
- all upland minority communes
- in-migrant communities
- communes with no vehicle access
- communes inhabited by both recent in-migrants and indigenous groups.

Whatever the classification system adopted, the challenge is to be able to differentiate between areas both for the purpose of conducting social assessments and impact monitoring (since, by definition, these areas are likely to have similar experiences in program implementation) and to ensure that cost norms (for planning, infrastructure etc.) are set at an appropriate level and are sufficiently flexible.

This point is emphasized for the 135 program. Upper levels have resisted driving program planning functions down to the commune level. But different communes even within the 135 program mandate fall into these significantly different capacity categories. There is no one rule as to whether it is possible to devolve to the commune level that can be applied. Flexibility is thus required in order to avoid bottlenecks and to seize opportunities for local levels to take on a greater role where these do exist.

For better-off localities, it may be possible to aim for the kind of program exemplified by the early Taiwanese Joint Commission on Rural Reconstruction (JCRR). It employed a “sponsoring agency approach, under which projects were proposed by local associations and, if approved and funded nationally, left to the original sponsors to manage, with such help as they themselves requested.”

Elements of such an approach could probably be incorporated now into the 135. The key point is to move away from a capacity building focus on inputs, since these tend to reflect external perceptions of what is viable and locally required.

**Focus on pilot activities.** The framework for selecting representative villages for pilots should be systematic. Pilot activities could include in-depth participatory planning (since clear models and cost norms for doing so are still being developed), and monitoring and evaluation reviews.

**Invest in planning and ensure sufficient recurrent costs.** One major weakness identified in the reviews of provincial experiences was the extremely low allocations under existing national programs to program planning and other implementation and coordination costs. Combined with the already low levels of funding for general administration, this virtually ensures that process details will be neglected.

**Focus on experience transfer.** Lowering the transaction costs involved in gathering and disseminating information is an important role of the central level. Experience transfer here is meant, not in a vague sense, but to include specific methods to improve national program implementation.

For instance, one challenge facing the 135 program is how to organize technical assistance for designing local infrastructure so as to lower the costs to the commune level. In one province visited, it was proposed that regional companies be formed which could act as fast-acting consultants to commune-level governments with relatively “off-the shelf” generic models for certain types of infrastructure representing best practice. An intriguing idea: but one needing the kind of attention that can be given in pilots.

**Boosting local government demand for participation**
A key diagnosis above was that local government coordinators (People’s Committees) currently have low demand for institutionalizing participation or for coordinating multi-sectoral activities across multiple sectors. To strengthen horizontal coordination requires:

- the devolution of resources;
- technical strengthening of local governments; and
- political skills of bargaining, compromising and building coalitions for participatory reform at the local level.

The first criteria is crucial to bringing out local demand for participatory processes, which in turn is the prerequisite for the other two. It demands a structural solution that additionally addresses the pitfall of decentralizing administrative functions without transferring financial responsibility. That solution is to shift wherever possible towards non-categorical, central-to-local grants coordinated by local governments with broad flexibility.

“Even modest improvements in the local level decision making process (better informed, more transparent) should be critical enough to justify a commitment to decentralized planning practices.”

Accomplishing this is a matter of making available to local decision makers some basic planning and technical information and simple techniques to evaluate projects against commonly agreed multiple criteria.

For the 133 program, it is critical to move towards a 135-like experimental block grant application. Provinces should be made responsible for both quality and output, and for the distribution of funds.

For the 135 program, devolution would involve moving towards formula based transfers, the provision to communes of indicative planning figures with local control over allocations, and a long-term capacity strengthening approach focused at the commune level.

Moving towards block grant-based national programs addresses another organizational reform noted several times in the study reports. It is generally thought desirable to move away from an organizational arrangement in which line agencies coordinate other line agencies, over which they have no credible (i.e. mutually acknowledged and enforceable) administrative responsibility. If resources are actually devolved with substantial local discretion over their use, local People’s Committees will naturally take a leading role in their allocation, no matter what technical agency is assigned the lead in any standing committee.

**Improvements to organizational culture**

Participatory methods must be institutionalized within the context of existing organizational culture, with its attendant strengths and weaknesses. This section looks at the most commonly recommended ways to strengthen public-sector organizations, focusing on organizational culture. The argument here is that a major way to make national programs more viable and effective with regard to participatory methods is to imbue officials who work within them with a sense of organizational mission and to improve the overall organizational culture within which they work.

*Upgrade recruitment and personnel management* within national programs in particular, and civil service generally. Steps would include:

- Greater autonomy to hire and fire personnel, based on general standards.
Recruitment procedures and norms that confer status and identity on public servants and that allow organizations to monitor, evaluate and enforce such standards. This implies moving away from patronage-based merit criteria.

Making rules and performance standards straightforward and consistent, while allowing some local flexibility in their application.

Opening up recruitment for national program-specific responsibilities to outside officialdom, giving it high standards and hiring with special high-profile teams. In this context, it has been persuasively suggested that community facilitators – recruited broadly from within and outside of the bureaucracy – could play a key role in national programs such as 135.

Emphasize improved inter-organizational coordination. The challenge is to promote and create active mechanisms for interaction and coordination, both formal and informal, high-level and otherwise. These might include: high level and technical level coordination committees; interlocking boards of directors or advisors; joint workshops and seminars; oversight committees that bring high-level officials together; joint training activities among technical staff; and more intense visiting back and forth between field offices and ministry headquarters. Such aim at making communications more “multidirectional and dense, and focused on task performance and problem solving”.

Adopt reforms to make national programs high-profile, attracting a more elite group of local officials. Several reforms may considered to improve organizational culture and specific accountability of officials, an accountability shored up by monitoring and information systems.

The key is to try to organize national programs in a way that sends the message that “performance counts”. To do this involves emphasizing a problem-solving orientation; a commitment to mission and results-oriented performance; and funneling non-monetary rewards (such as training, being singled out for praise, opportunities to study abroad) for those who perform well in national programs.

Advancement within the civil service (or Party) could be made, in some cases, a function of performance related to national program assignments.

High commitment to specific national program missions can also be cultivated by such means as: performance reviews; induction training; carrying out work in mobile teams that sometime travel together to see how national program tasks are done in other localities; or even forcing upper-level managers to spend some time in the poorest, most remote localities for “immersion” training.

Funding success, encouraging competition

The question is how to reward local initiatives and risk-takers – both individuals and different levels of government – while linking performance to results. A fair, workable system for doing so is needed. Two ways of accomplishing this are to target officials themselves, and national programs:

One year special contracts for national program responsibilities.

Within the national program civil service, establish a system of officials working on competitively awarded one-year renewable contracts (for work specifically on national programs), remunerated at a higher rate (in addition to non-monetary incentives). Renewal would be clearly linked to annual performance reviews.
Competitive block-grant transfers to local governments, dependent on prior round implementation results.

One could establish a 3-5 year funding cycle, with more less ‘equal’ (i.e. worked out on some formula basis) funding to local governments in the first two years followed by a ‘competition’ for funding in the following years. Local governments judged – by some agreed measures to include easily measurable physical outputs as well as process variables like participation – to have implemented the program well would be eligible for further funding through the program for an additional year, followed by progressive reductions etc. After some years, and with a comprehensive evaluation of local government performance (along the lines of the Vietnamese tradition of thi dua, which can accommodate different classifications of provinces / localities according to similar capacities, to make the competition fair), the whole cycle could repeat itself.

Obviously, the success of such a scheme is linked to a fair, mutually agreed and objectively implemented set of evaluation standards being put into place. Establishing a special unit for such evaluation, with participation from outside the bureaucracy (e.g. inviting international NGOs and mass organizations to take part), is recommended.

To address potential worries about the equity effect of such transfers, non-program-specific transfers to provinces can be made to balance out any significant funding shortfall for certain areas.

Reinforcing accountability

Reinforcing accountability is another pillar of reform. Potential reforms include the following:

- Evaluate both use of inputs and process of involving local government and communities in decision making from the bottom-up and reward high-performing provinces based on this. Make quality, process and citizen feedback a key consideration (in contrast to typical monitoring, which looks only at inputs). Formally involve international and local NGOs, and the Women’s and Peasants Union, in these participatory reviews, in order to make them as objective as possible.
- Use participatory poverty assessments with international assistance as part of the long-term evaluation of impact of national programs.
- Formulate disaggregated targets and indicators (including quality- and participation-based ones).
- Identify key individual stakeholders holding high positions in government at each level who take personal responsible for implementing national programs effectively. At the central level, this would underline the need for central-level accountability to local levels and the role of the central government as one of a change agent and guarantor of minimum standards.
- Review and enforce minimum standards regarding bidding procedures. Consider establishment of an anti-corruption unit specific to selected national programs like 135.

Developing, strengthening and better utilizing capacities

Capacity strengthening is an obvious priority for institutionalizing participatory methods within national programs, given that the field reviews found little familiarity with specific participatory methods at local levels. How best to accomplish this, and what are the priority areas? Two approaches
are needed: one focused on training itself, the other on direct incentives to bring out the best capacities currently existing.

Approaches to training include the following:

- Focus on inculcating skills for improved interaction between levels of government. Many of the recommendations above focus on improving the relationship between levels of government. Skills in negotiation and conflict management will be crucial for this. Changing incentive structures alone does not imply that people will be quick to act if they do not possess relevant skills in change management, or the relevant information about how to resolve ambiguities and conflicts.

- Gender training and analysis is vital. The reviews found a huge gap between the theory of equal participation and the reality of women’s participation in national program decision making – almost entirely absent from the localities visited. This is a complex area deserving special, detailed attention as to how best to proceed. The same is true for involving residents of more remote areas and some ethnic minorities in national program decision-making.

Direct incentives for national program performance may also be necessary. These include:

- A policy of paying higher salaries to people working in mountainous areas; and

- An expansion of the policy of transferring and subsidizing the pay of officials to work as HEPR staff at district and commune levels of government. The key here, of course, is to better utilize these existing staff as well, for which structural reforms are necessary.

**Boosting demand and organization from the grassroots**

This final category looks at how local demand to participate can be bolstered:

Build up grassroots demand for participation in specific programs through certain design and implementation reforms. For the 133 program, emphasizing the integration of program inputs at the village level should be considered a prerequisite for boosting demand for participation at the grassroots; failing this, the multi-sector program will be invisible, seen only as a collection of non-integrated, vertically-implemented sectoral reforms. The 135 program needs to adopt a strong capacity building element, involving communes and communities in substantial planning and management responsibilities.

Develop basic ground rules – i.e. rules for upholding minimum standards of community consultation and participation – tailored to each of the national programs.40

Consider reforms to taxes, fees and local contributions (including labor contributions [lao dong cong ich]) in poor localities. In the first instance, it has been widely reported that these can amount to a substantial percentage of the discretionary income of households, and that the structure is regressive, i.e. the impact falls hardest on relatively poor households.

Beyond that, there is an urgent need for these contributions to be used with greater transparency, and in a way in which they could simultaneously boost local demand for institutionalizing participation. One radical solution would be to consolidate all such contributions into a single, high-profile “national program fund”, which could include both fiscal and labor contributions. The details would warrant close attention, but the basic idea is to link local contributions to a high-profile national development policy benefiting residents in their own communities. This is one structural way of approaching the ‘dependency trap’ mentioned earlier and of boosting local demand for accountability in resource use.
Support grassroots organizations in taking on a range of specific functions within national programs. Within the 135 program, for instance, ground rules should surely include the establishment of local monitoring and implementation boards, as well as user groups to ensure consistent operation and maintenance of infrastructure works. At present, these are allowed – even encouraged – as a formal policy, but, as the review found, there is no consistent implementation.

Finally, develop an integrated information, education and communication strategy targeted at the grassroots to boost people’s knowledge of their rights (e.g. under the democratization decree), and of the national programs being implemented in their locality (see below).

**Priorities for a results-oriented capacity strengthening initiative**

This section looks at how donors and government can work together to develop a results-oriented capacity strengthening initiative. It seeks to sketch out in the broadest terms an approach likely to have a maximum effect. Its purpose is primarily to stimulate discussion on the overall aims of government-donor partnership in this area, by presenting one possible approach, consistent with the principles laid out in the above analysis.
**Five overarching principles**

This paper, and chapter four in particular, has offered a number of general principles underpinning participatory approaches. Five stand out as particularly important for capacity strengthening for institutionalizing participation.

1. **Reexamine assumptions** about what is needed. Without a shift in mind-sets, it is unlikely capacity strengthening will get far, particularly if structural public-sector reforms (ambitious even given thoroughly convinced and committed government leadership) are less than successful.\(^{41}\)

   Is it supply-oriented training alone? Clearly not: there is a need both to examine the broader determinants of public-sector performance, and to better utilize existing capacities.

   What about the set of direct positive and negative incentives facing service providers? Are administrative structures and monetary rewards effective determinants of capacity themselves? Here again the answer is: not alone. Without restructuring public sector management systems to be performance and results oriented, reforms to boost material rewards to service providers and planners – even to community members in the form of ‘incentives to participate’ – are unlikely to go far.

   Is strengthening of administrative control the answer, to make grassroots reality better mesh with (admittedly progressive) administrative policy? Clearly not by itself. Instead, comparative research on capacity strengthening suggests clearly that organizational culture is just as important, particularly regarding such a process and quality-oriented variable like participation.\(^{42}\)

   What is needed to successfully institutionalize participation, then, is a combination of the above types of recommendations. At the risk of an overly convoluted sentence, one can break down the requirements into the following elements:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Pre-requisites for change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bureaucrat skills</td>
<td>1. A core group of people,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. who have sufficient skills,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. attitudes,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bureaucrat motivation</td>
<td>4. and the right incentives…(^{43})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bureaucrat capacities</td>
<td>5. who are working within a basically facilitative administrative and legal framework,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. with access to sufficient cost norms and other physical and fiscal resources…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community demand</td>
<td>7. in interaction with an organized, capable, confident and motivated grassroots that will demand accountability for bureaucrat performance,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process outcome desired</td>
<td>8. are likely to go beyond status quo “ceremonial participation” towards meaningful local government and community participation,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact outcome desired</td>
<td>9. which in turn will enhance the equity, efficiency and sustainability of interventions, and boosts community confidence in central and local governance structures,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. Stress cognitive and demand-driven changes. Within the above table, of the seven key attributes that have to be in place, it is undoubtedly numbers three, four and seven – all relating to the demand of various stakeholders for change – that tend to be under-rated and ignored in practice. These tend to be the most difficult areas to reform. Evaluating all proposed changes for what they are likely to do in this area is thus crucial. It is thus important to not emphasize inputs – which donors are in control of and feel comfortable talking about – at the expense of a focus on what will actually drive participatory outcomes.

3. Manageable and incremental changes are more realistic. This principle helps keep the first two in perspective. In other words, don’t aim in short order at the wholesale replacement of existing ways of working. It is advisable not to aim for overly complex systems or quick results.

4. Maintain conceptual link between participation, decentralization and improved performance along the proposed impact criteria, which include both process and end-goal outcomes. If this focus is lost, there is a danger that talk of participation may seem vague and donor-driven, given competing priorities on the government’s attention. The high level of government commitment to the ambitious structural reforms underpinning participatory development can only be achieved by focusing on practical impact on overall goals – improved equity, efficiency and sustainability of impact, together with improved community confidence in local and central governance.

5. Move from equality of funding to more strategic use of regular fiscal transfers. The context of this report has been the national programs, as an extremely important plank in Vietnam’s development strategy. But it should be emphasized that in the long run determinants of poverty reduction have as much – probably more – to do with overall center-local relations and the complex set of development functions and tasks assigned to each. National programs are a convenient starting point for institutional reform, but fundamental constraints have to be addressed within the wider public-sector reform effort and at the level of Vietnam’s overall socioeconomic development strategy.

Towards a capacity strengthening agenda

This section describes the outlines of a long-term, demand-facilitating training approach implied throughout this report. This approach is in addition to policy advocacy and the deepening of public-sector reform efforts suggested earlier as critical to the success of decentralization and adoption of participatory methods.

In its most ambitious form, government and donors would establish a strategic center (not necessarily funded from entirely new resources) focused on the dissemination of participatory approaches with multiple applications. Such a center might adopt the following basic approaches:

Partnership orientation with multiple applications. This center would become a high-profile, think-tank-like operation with the capacity to support both national programs, donor projects, and contribute to the learning experience within even the democratization initiative itself.

Regional / local support units; decentralized structure. Support units – perhaps regional, perhaps eventually provincial – linked to this center would be established and expanded throughout the country. The task would be to make the program operational down to the local government level, to base its own learning experience in local governments and the grassroots.

Flexible, demand-driven training approaches. As suggested in chapter four, the center would further develop flexible and innovative training designs that have been pioneered by some programs in Vietnam, such as vertically integrated participation in training and program development, and horizontal dissemination of methods.
The following are the types of functions and characteristics of the training capacity needed (which could be supplied in one coordinated effort, or – less desirably – attract piecemeal donor support):

**Political and organizational skills.** Training would cover skills sets for facilitating and implementing participation.

**Strengthening technical capacities.** Making available to local decision makers some basic planning and technical information and simple techniques to evaluate projects against commonly agreed multiple criteria is seen as a fundamental task.

**Learning orientation.** There is a need for efforts specifically directed at design of national program efforts and patterns of community participation. This involves applied action research with a diagnostic orientation.

**Grassroots demand.** An integrated “information, education and communication strategy” would underpin participatory communication. This could be implemented in diverse ways, using working groups and nation-wide campaigns focusing on capacity development for the production and delivery by the people of key messages, i.e. for the democratization campaign.47

**Donor reform**

Donor reform will be essential to pursue a coordinated approach to capacity building. Three areas stand out.

**Internal reform.** Donors need to strive to achieve organizational cultures that reinforce the aims of participatory development.

**Support national-level decentralization policies** rather than just specific programs or projects. This report emphasized the importance of an enabling development policy framework for decentralization and community participation. Donors should support this orientation in a much more direct and high-profile way.

**Cross-sectoral approach.** The challenge is to operationalize this policy support across sectors with a coordinated donor response across sectors to decentralization issues.

Donors should devote scarce resources to supporting, or helping the government to establish, local planning processes that emphasize intersectoral and horizontal coordination. Within the social sectors, a good example of this is Unicef’s support for the decentralization of the government’s National Program of Action for Children. Within a more limited area of small-scale infrastructure development, the Rural Infrastructure Development Fund supported by UNCDF and UNDP in Quang Nam province provides another example.

The point is to forge links to locally articulated plans. Efforts to do so could benefit from the kind of intensive experience sharing, comparative analysis and joint donor-NGO-government policy analyses that are just beginning to see fruitful application in Vietnam over the past few years.
## ANNEX: PROJECT CONTRIBUTIONS TO STUDY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization / Project</th>
<th>Type of contribution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam Sweden Cooperation Program – Vietnam</td>
<td>Interview, documentation, manuscript *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden Mountain Rural Development Program</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnamese-German Technical Cooperation / GTZ – Social Forestry Development Project - Song Da</td>
<td>Interview, documentation *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Save the Children – Ha Tinh Programme</td>
<td>Interview, documentation *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oxfam Great Britain – Ha Tinh and Tra Vinh programs</td>
<td>Interview, documentation *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNCDF – Rural Infrastructure Development Project</td>
<td>Interview, documentation *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IFAD / UNDP – Participatory Resource Management Project in Tuyen Quang</td>
<td>Documentation *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danish Red Cross – Lao Cai Primary Health Care Project</td>
<td>Interview, documentation, survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red River Program – the ‘Hills’ experiment</td>
<td>Manuscript</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNDP – Capacity Development for Poverty Elimination Programme in Ben Tre (VIE/96/005)</td>
<td>Documentation, survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAO – Participatory Watershed Management Project in Hoanh Bo District, Quang Ninh</td>
<td>Documentation, interview, manuscript</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIDSE – Primary Health Care Programme in Phu Luong district, Thai Nguyen province</td>
<td>Interview, documentation, survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAO – Programme for Community IPM in Asia (GCP/RAS/172/NOR)</td>
<td>Interview, documentation, survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDC – MARD Cooperation Programme – Social Forestry Support Programme</td>
<td>Interview, documentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNICEF – Ethnic Minority Development Program</td>
<td>Interview, documentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ActionAid</td>
<td>Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oxfam Hong Kong</td>
<td>Interview</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
KEY WORKS CONSULTED

Other study outputs:


Paul, B. (no date) Scaling up PRA – Lessons from Vietnam, mimeo

Shanks, E. and Bui Dinh Toai (2000) Field Based Learning and Training in Participatory Approaches to Rural Development: A Decade of Experience in PRA from the Vietnam Sweden Cooperation Programme and the Challenge for Formal Education, Research and Donor Organisations, manuscript


ENDNOTES

1 MoLISA, MARD, CEMMA and MPI
2 Director of CERUPAD.
3 Social Forestry Support Program, Xuan Mai University
4 (need to check university)
5 The World Bank Community Based Infrastructure Project (detailed in Pairaudeau, 2000) provides one example of a good format for doing so.
6 Of the National Agricultural University No. 1.
7 Fritzen, 2000b; Nguyen Dinh Khoi, 2000
8 “The mobilisation of local people’s participation in road building was a pure form of working contract, but not having a participation meaning.” (Nguyen Dinh Khoi, 2000)
9 Nguyen Dinh Khoi, 2000, p. 22
10 That person is in mountainous localities not infrequently the wife of the People’s Committee head, as in two communes visited by the team.
11 Pairaudeau, 2000
12 It is worth remembering that HEPR originally sprang from the locality in the country with the most discretionary expenditure, Hochiminh City. (Nguyen The Dzung, 1999)
13 Fritzen, 2000a
14 Fritzen, 2000a
15 World Bank, 2000
16 Nguyen Ba Ngai, 2000
17 Nguyen The Dzung, 1999
18 Detailed in Nguyen Dinh Khoi, 2000
19 The two districts visited were wildly different in their distribution of 135 funds among communes. (Nguyen Ba Ngai, 2000)
20 Thanks to Dr. Elke Forster for this observation.
21 That is, it is relatively uncommon for commune-level leaders to advance to the district level; for most, the head or vice-head of the commune People’s Committee is the highest job they can realistically aspire to.
22 Migdley, 1986
23 However, this may be less of a problem that is commonly thought. Khoi finds that in some midland communities there are several trained graduates in practical sciences. In addition, availability of trained staff at the district level is at times shockingly low, given the distribution of responsibilities for such a broad areas with difficult implementation conditions. (Nguyen Dinh Khoi, 2000)
24 Nguyen Dinh Khoi, 2000
25 Fritzen, 2000a
26 This is certainly true for the 135 program. The 1,700 poorest communes contain only a small fraction (less than 10%) of Vietnam’s poor households.
27 UNCDF, 1999
OECD, 1995; similar point made in Shanks and Bui, 2000

A key lesson in Shanks and Bui, 2000; also cited in Social Forestry Support Program experience.

Thanks to Edwin Shanks for this point (personal communication).

Hilderbrand and Grindle, 1997; p. 6

Thanks to Bardolf Paul for this point (personal communication).

Pairaudeau, 2000

Pairaudeau, 2000

Migdley, 1986

UNCOF, 1999

Section draws on Hilderbrand and Grindle, 1997

Pairaudeau, 2000

Hilderbrand and Grindle, 1997; p. 48

See ground rules developed in Pairaudeau, 2000.

Stephen Woodhouse, Unicef’s former country representative to Viet Nam, once remarked that when people in organizations or lower levels of government appear to be chronically under performing, training is usually not the answer. As former director of Unicef’s world-wide Training Division, he should know.

Hilderbrand and Grindle, 2000

I.e. a process perceived to be in the interests of protagonists. A perception on the part of managers that participative decision-making will bring them some professional or personal advantage must be promoted. (Migdley, 1986)

Brinkerhoff, 1995

UNCOF, 1999

This scenario is admittedly unlikely; support would probably be channeled through mass organizations, instead.

A similar approach was followed successfully in the Gambia, as reported by Migdley, 1986.