

# 1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The present mission was organised in October 2009, in order to implement the mid-term evaluation of the 4-year Quang Dien Local Development Project located in Quang Dien District of Thua Thien Hue Province. The mission, commissioned by Lux-Development and sent by AGRER, was composed of Mrs Anne Pirotte, M.Sc. in Agricultural Engineering, Post Graduate in Rural Economy and Mrs Nguyen Thi Kim Nguyet, Agricultural Engineer and M.Sc. in Agricultural Extension and farmer organization. Although two financial audits (internal and external) already were organised, this is the first technical and global project evaluation.

The project overall objective is to “achieve sustainable trends of poverty reduction and socio-economic development in Quang Dien district, Thua Thien Hue province”. The project specific objective is “to improve living conditions through (i) strengthening of local governance capacity, and (ii) supporting basic production and social infrastructure including related service delivery”.

To reach these objectives, the project pursues the three results below. The project is relevant. Since the M&E system is not fully operational yet (all activities are registered but not their effects, some indicators need to be reviewed and quantified, goals set and the baseline situation completed), it has not allowed the mission to objectively assess neither the project impact, effectiveness nor efficiency. Therefore, the mission has been working more on a qualitative basis, taking into account the methods, achievements, budget spent and providing recommendations for improvement when it was possible.

Result N°1: Local authorities’ governance capacity in planning and budget management strengthened and public administration reform (PAR) accelerated.

Achievements. At mid-term, PAR has been supported, the local authorities’ planning capacity has improved, the local participatory planning process (LPPP) has been officially adopted at District level. A Local Development Fund (LDF) has been set up and is fully operational. Only the planned project support to assess and improve the District budget management stays behind.

Coming from a top-down approach, the planning process in the District is now a mix of top-down and bottom-up approaches, which is good and provides a balance between a necessary vision from high level and perceived needs by the population (mainly infrastructure needs currently, possibility to go deeper into agriculture related needs). A process of changes is on-going but still a lot is to be done before local authorities and partners are ready to master them, especially the participatory planning and technical training targeting poor households. Appreciate the approach does not mean automatically adopt it in the long term. The mission recommends to increase consistency of undertaken activities and to enhance a multisectorial approach into the District Development Plan highlighting the project contribution. The last chapter provides other practical recommendations to improve the planning process and methods, looking forward to sustainability (planning cost, human resources).

Result N°2: Basic production and social infrastructure reinforced in alignment with the environment (Hardware component)

Achievements. Huge concern and interest for infrastructures has been noticed at all level (District, communes, population). Infrastructures have been built, according to PRA expressed needs (mainly roads and schools with clean water, including kindergartens). While the impact of road construction is difficult to assess, it is clear that the number of pupils per class has decreased. Since budget is available for additional teachers, new classes have been opened, which should support the quality of education. The project did not invest in irrigation and water supply as announced in the project document, because the District received a substantial budget from the Central Government (hardware only). The link between infrastructure and O&M is currently building, with the setting of an O&M fund and operational guidelines to use it (O&M manual). Insuring sustainability should now be the major focus for infrastructures. A link should be further developed between R1 and R2, including maintenance concerns into the District Development Plan and annual budget.

Result N°3: Enhanced quality of “service delivery” related to basic production and social infrastructure

Result 3 includes three components: health, agriculture and vocational training. The too vague “school education scheme” has not been implemented. Both agriculture and vocational training directly address provincial top ranked priorities: livelihood and employment. Software components are behind schedule (especially vocational training), which in part reflects a Steering Committee Decision to give priority to an operational LDF. The project’s operational mode (through institutions) contributes to delays, too.

Here again, the current output oriented M&E system does not allow assessing the project outcomes and impacts on health, agriculture and vocational training services. Isolating the project contribution to health will remain problematic since the project represents a limited part of the total funding only. In agriculture and vocational training, major impacts could be expected as results of the project support.

Health achievements. Activities have been planned by health specialists. We consider that to be fine and will not debate whether participatory planning should influence (or not) health activities. Initially, health support was clearly oriented on birth control and maternity health care. Later on, various additional support has answered to health division proposals: struggling against malnutrition, training for health village workers, providing basic equipment to commune clinics. These proposals are based on the Vietnamese Development Goals (VDG) and hence on the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs). The mission however recommends setting up a new frame for the cooperation in health, given that (1) QDLDP will remain a rural development project, and (2) keeping in mind the project specific objective. Enhancing a multisector approach taking into account agriculture, food processing and environment will provide added value to the health activities.

Agriculture achievements. Agriculture, already quite intensive in the District, provides 100% of the income in the poor families. Therefore, agriculture extension offers opportunities to target the poor, but other wealthier groups too. A new agriculture extension service station (AES) has been created at the District level 6-7 months ago. Before the establishment of AES, extension officers working with the project belonged to DARD. An agriculture specialist began working in the project one year ago only. SWOT analysis has been recently organised with AES staff. Capacity building began for extension workers (improved teaching techniques, very practical compared to previous lectures, technical training); on-farm farmers trainings were implemented (demo, farmer field schools). Community groups as foreseen in the project document, have not been created. Collaborations have been developed with some existing groups (cooperatives) and some new “interest groups” (IGs), bringing together people interested in the same activity. The project M&E does not systematically assess the impacts of training on farmers productivity and production. However, it is sure that the project budget has allowed extension services to train much more farmers than the approximately 100 farmers/year (announced by AES). Recommendations appear in chapter 5 to enhance the pro-poor approach, effectiveness and efficiency of demonstrations, sustainability of training effects and to support farmers organisations maintenance.

Vocational training achievements. Migration of youth, mainly to HCMC and Hanoi, results from a lack of employment opportunities within the District. Develop off-farm employment locally is a very challenging but needed activity. Increased skills through vocational training are also a condition to access more qualified and better paid jobs, in the District or anywhere else. Off-farm income will contribute to reduce poverty too.

Vocational Training Centre (VTC) currently turns into a vocational middle level training school for 3 Districts. This on-going change will allow the school to provide long term and short term training. Up to now, the vocational training has included many different employment opportunities, including agriculture production. The centre meets difficulties to attract poor trainees, especially for long term training, since they prefer to work and get cash. Few current links exist between job seekers and providers. Perspectives: a study has been planned for 2009 to get a clear picture on employment offer and demand. Although the annual Plan is clear, the VTS has not expressed its willingness to implement this study. Based on market needs highlighted, a development plan should be developed for the VTS (identifying the training content, strengthening of human resources...) in order to enhance its reputation and turn it into an example.

**General recommendations** are summarised below. Please refer to chapter 5 for further details.

- a) For further similar projects, the mission recommends to continue -like here- supporting governance not as an “empty box”, but together with activities pushing the project effects down to the population.
- b) Strengthen the stakeholders capacities is not only an initial condition to implement activities, but also a continuous process during the project implementation.
- c) For any type of training, adjust the duration and content of the training courses according to participants’ specific needs (different for the head than for the person in charge of implementation).
- d) Setting up a systematic follow up will help to identify the factors which positively and negatively impact the adoption of proposals (true for institutional changes as well as for new techniques). If needed, provide further support and adjust the project approach.
- e) Develop an “objective oriented” spirit, working with heads of divisions to change the staff attitudes.
- f) It is time to pay a special attention to agriculture and vocational training, as tools to enhance living conditions, bringing adequate technical solutions for agriculture intensification, diversification and for the development of off-farm employment opportunities.
- g) Reinforce the pro-poor approach.

A second phase will be needed to insure sustainability. The Vietnamese Authorities have expressed their willingness to continue and are ready to contribute financially. Extension and possible expansion to Districts with similar constraints and opportunities have been discussed. If so, adjustment regarding the institutional arrangement is needed, e.g. transferring the project to DPI at the provincial level.

In the future, the Commune’s responsibilities might evolve, according to official texts to be issued on further decentralisation. Legislation to this end is under preparation.