

MID-TERM
EVALUATION

VIE/036

Wise use of water and agriculture
(WUWA)

PROJECT SUMMARY DATA

Country	Viet Nam
Long project title	Wise use of water and agriculture
Short project title	WUWA
LuxDev Code	VIE/036
Version of the Report	March 2018

RATING OF THE PROJECT BY THE EVALUATION MISSION

Global rating (Effectiveness)	3 On a scale of 1 (excellent results, significantly better than expected) to 6 (the project was unsuccessful, or the situation has deteriorated on balance)
Rating using other evaluation criteria	Relevance: 2 Efficiency: 2 Sustainability: 3

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The intermediate evaluation of the “Wise use of water and agriculture” project VIE/036 was undertaken by Stewart Pittaway and Pham Tan Cung in January and February 2018. Objectives of the evaluation were to undertake an evaluation with particular reference to the following:

- analyse the results and the specific objectives reached at the time of the evaluation, compared to what had been anticipated in the project document and/or the inception report;
- analyse the results achieved in terms of capacity strengthening;
- analyse the project’s management and monitoring;
- analyse the project using the following evaluation criteria taking into account cross cutting aspects;
 - relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability,
 - governance for development, gender equality and environment and climate change;
- analyse in particular four specific questions (outlined in the terms of reference);
- establish the lessons learned and give recommendations for the continuation of the project.

Specific objective and results

VIE/036's specific objective is: *to improve effective natural and financial resource management focused on agricultural production while meeting the needs of ethnic minorities and other population groups with difficulties*. Natural and financial resource management were identified by the design mission as priorities from Cao Bang’s provincial 2011- 2015 socio-economic development plan. Tackling ethnic minority poverty is also a provincial priority. Reorientation of the project to align with the Cao Bang agricultural restructuring plan, however, modified the project direction to the support of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development to implement Cao Bang agricultural restructuring plan’s market led safe food theme. Activities and tasks in two of the three results areas were modified as a consequence of the reorientation. The re-orientated project is still aimed at meeting the needs of ethnic minorities, but there is a much-reduced emphasis upon improving effective natural and financial resource management focus on agricultural production. Assisting with the development of market led safe food production and modern value chains featuring Cao Bang specialities is now the main project objective.

Result 1: Agricultural productivity achieved some initial safe food and market connectivity results. Eleven safe food products that have the potential for value chain development in provincial and national markets have been identified and some of these have been safe food certification. A Cao Bang market outlet has been established in Hanoi and a selection of local official and agribusiness sector members have been learned about what is needed to develop market relationships with retailers in Hanoi. These Hanoi market linkages include several safe food fruit and vegetable marts. Establishment of a functional certification and traceability quality assurance system is a very positive achievement. Traceability still needs some development but safe food certification provides the basis for Cao Bang value chain integrity.

The commune development fund mechanism (also Result 1) was used in the four pilot communes and featured the use of community planning processes to decide upon the use of the project funds. Community decision-making involved both women and men and the communities in all four communes decided to use the funds to construct village roads. The communes were the project owners for the roads with construction of the roads by the community. Benefits of the village roads are better access to farm production areas and also vehicle access to beneficiary homes. Farmers have responded to the better access by investing in machinery to improve their production methods.

Result 2: Access to water features the upgrading of small-scale irrigation schemes to improve water use efficiency and to enable the farmers to grow more profitable crops. There have been 143,45 ha of irrigation schemes upgraded that benefit 659 households by the end of 2017. The improved water efficiency from these upgraded schemes has yet to be realised in more diversified and profitable cropping activities. The Cost Sharing method was effectively used to upgrade some of the village irrigation schemes. Cost sharing irrigation upgrading featured the villagers constructing the irrigation canals, making it quite cost efficient. Community participation through the local investment appraisal team was successfully used to identify and plan the irrigation upgrading.

Result 3: Improved process has capacity development at its core and aims at building the results-orientated competency and knowledge of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, and other staff. Department of Agriculture and Rural Development staff have learned and applied new professional skills and knowledge in their work; senior Department of Agriculture and Rural Development staff have noticed some improvement in staff performance. Department of Agriculture and Rural Development staff capacity in market led safe food production and modern value chains, however, is low and needs to be addressed over the next two years. Farmers have also learned new production skills and knowledge and applied these, but this is at a limited scale as yet. Assisting the provincial policy advisory board to develop its policy capacity is an innovative feature that has included assisting with tourism sector development plans and policies. Outputs have included a booklet and a video promoting the unique cultural and natural attraction features of Cao Bang. The policy advisory board has also initiated some policy activities to support Cao Bang agricultural restructuring plan implementation.

Evaluation scores and comments

Relevance is scored at 2 because the reoriented project is very well aligned with the objectives for the development of a restructured agriculture sector as defined in Cao Bang agricultural restructuring plan. The project also has a strong poverty reduction and food security focus through the support for Cao Bang agricultural restructuring plan.

Effectiveness is scored at 3. The project has made some progress to achieving the reorientation objectives and targets, but many of these are still evolving. A sound platform has been laid but improvements are needed to capitalize upon the effort made over the first two years.

Efficiency is scored at 2. Implementation efficiencies have been achieved by the use of commune systems and processes through the commune development fund programme. Cost efficiencies are a feature of the community construction of roads and for irrigation upgrading.

Sustainability is scored at 3. Although there is quite a good awareness of sustainability the project is slow to put any measures in place. This especially applies to operation and maintenance for the commune infrastructure works.

Main conclusions

Results are satisfactory to mid-term but a number of challenges must be addressed if the project is to successfully assist Department of Agriculture and Rural Development to implement Cao Bang agricultural restructuring plan and achieve its objectives. The project has steadily laid a foundation for Cao Bang agricultural restructuring plan implementation within Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and the emphasis over 2018 must be to quickly capitalise upon this. There is still a lack of understanding by Department of Agriculture and Rural Development divisions over their Cao Bang agricultural restructuring plan roles and responsibilities related to the market led safe food theme - leading to slow implementation of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development led project activities. This constraint needs to be effectively and quickly addressed, and there is just over two full years for this to occur - a short time in capacity development terms.

Re-orientation of the project to align with the Cao Bang agricultural restructuring plan has increased the scope and increased project complexity. This has also increased the technical services demand across a wider range of discipline areas, increased the workload of the technical assistance team, and stretched their capacities. The technical assistance team must be more focused and targeted in the decisions over what Cao Bang agricultural restructuring plan aspects to support over 2018 and 2019.

Pilot commune development has been successfully implemented and the next step must be to use the funds available for commune development fund activities to expand the number of communes.

Recommendations

The recommendations focus upon what is needed to be done over the next two years of the project to ensure that support for Cao Bang agricultural restructuring plan implementation is highly effective.

Immediate strategic actions

1. VIE/036 technical assistance and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development leadership to identify the critical Cao Bang agricultural restructuring plan objectives and prioritise these for support over the second half of the project.
2. The 2018 Department of Agriculture and Rural Development divisional plans for project support are much more strongly based upon the Cao Bang agricultural restructuring plan responsibilities of each division.

The project scope is too wide and to achieve better progress the Cao Bang agricultural restructuring plan objectives that are to be supported must be prioritised. Aligned with this action the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development divisions must have much clearer responsibilities that the project supports.

Other strategic actions

3. Department of Agriculture and Rural Development to establish an agri-marketing unit to support agricultural sector development.
4. Department of Agriculture and Rural Development to establish a Cao Bang agricultural restructuring plan monitoring unit.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development lacks both market orientation and value chain expertise and has no formal monitoring and evaluation processes in place. Cao Bang agricultural restructuring plan is a market led initiative and its sustainability requires Department of Agriculture and Rural Development to have a much-enhanced market orientation and value chain capacity across the whole organisation. Cao Bang agricultural restructuring plan implementation must be monitored to assess results and better inform policy.

5. Revise the project logical framework to be consistent with the Cao Bang agricultural restructuring plan alignment.

The logical frame must be revised to provide a better and more consistent direction for the Cao Bang agricultural restructuring plan implementation support by the project.

6. Cao Bang agricultural restructuring plan support activities must have a more definite pro-poor focus.

Cao Bang agricultural restructuring plan must be supported by the project to have a more inclusive pro-poor approach that provides the opportunity for the poor and near poor value chain traders and farmers to be included in market orientated value chain developments.

7. Define specific gender equality objectives for the Cao Bang agricultural restructuring plan support.

Greater definition and clarity are required for gender equality in VIE/036 and to provide a basis for the gender mainstreaming approach.

8. Contract the preparation of an agricultural sector climate change plan.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development does not have sector climate change strategy and the project must assist to prepare a strategy and plan that is aligned with Cao Bang agricultural restructuring plan.

9. Formalise the agreement over the extension of VIE/036 to 30 June 2020.

No agreement over the extension creates uncertainty over the VIE/036 programme over the final 30 months of the project, and may limit project achievements.

Critical action (Result 1)

10. Prioritise up to four products for market led safe food support by the project over 2018 and 2019.

Aligned with Action 1 above. The scope of the safe food product value chain development activities must be narrowed and concentrate upon a smaller number of potential products. This will provide a better opportunity for the project support to develop a small number of exemplar safe food value chains over 2018 and 2019.

11. Department of Agriculture and Rural Development to establish a private sector agri-enterprise contact group to strengthen private sector linkages.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and the policy advisory board to continue to initiate regular agri-enterprise dialogue to better inform sector policy and enhance Cao Bang agricultural restructuring plan implementation.

12. Extend the commune development fund infrastructure programme to more communes.

The pilot four-commune commune development fund programme is assessed as being successful and should be expanded.

13. Plan and implement an advocacy programme to promote best practice lessons for adoption by other projects and national programmes.

The project should start in early 2018 to identify and document cases of best practice that can be applied in other projects and national programmes.

Result 2: Access to water

14. Expand the community construction irrigation fee cost sharing model to other communes.

Levering off the irrigation user fees funds from the government has proven to be a successful pilot in the four communes. The project should advocate for the project people's committee and other projects to follow this approach.

15. Assist farmers to plan and implement diversified cropping systems on upgraded irrigation schemes.

The project and the irrigation division have concentrated primarily upon the construction aspects of irrigation development.

16. Irrigation division and contract management office to apply project lessons for irrigation development.

There are several important lessons from the project support for irrigation development in the four pilot communes. The irrigation division, with support of the project, needs to be proactive in promoting and replicating these lessons beyond the commune development fund communes assisted by the project.

Result 3: Improved process

17. Modify the capacity development programme to build, and institutionalise, within the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development skills and knowledge required to support a modern market led agricultural sector.

Capacity development undertaken so far has assisted the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development staff to learn planning and management competencies under the results-orientated competency and knowledge focus. But the "market led safe food approach" skills and knowledge gap is large and there must be the core of the ongoing programme of formal training and on-the-job mentoring.

18. Actively engage on an on-going basis with the policy advisory board to enhance its Cao Bang agricultural restructuring plan policy role.

Initial engagement with the policy advisory board has been successful but must be capitalized upon and deliver useful policy outcomes, more quickly, for the agricultural sector.

19. Assist the policy advisory board to prepare a better coordinated tourism sector strategy and development plan that links with rural livelihoods.

The tourism sector support currently being provided by the project is muddled and needs to be much better coordinated if there is to be any cohesive tourism sector strategy and plan.

20. Ensure that the innovation grant programme is well implemented, grantees supported, and is inclusive.

After the first round of the innovation grant it should be reviewed (by September 2018) and a decision made over the number of grant rounds that will be made until the end of the project. Following the award of the grant the recipient may require technical and financial advice to ensure that the business plan objectives are achievable. The project will need to work with Viet Nam union of science and technology associations and policy advisory board to ensure that the grantee recipients are able to access useful support and advice.

Technical assistance team actions

21. Develop a small targeted specialist technical assistance support team.

The technical assistance requirements for the re-orientated project are technically more advanced than was envisaged at inception. To better address the gaps in technical knowledge and experience in the technical assistance team some short-term specialist support should be contracted from 2018 until mid 2020.