

FINAL EVALUATION

VIE/036

Wise Use of Water and Agriculture

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	December 2020

RATING OF THE PROJECT BY THE EVALUATION MISSION

Global rating (Effectiveness)	2 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: 1 Efficiency: 2 Sustainability: 2

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction and Objectives: The Final Evaluation of the Wise Use of Water and Agriculture Project (VIE/036) was undertaken from 31 August 2020 to 30 October 2020. Because of Covid-19 the evaluation fieldwork was completed by a Viet Nam based team of two consultants in coordination with an international consultant working remotely. Objectives of the Final Evaluation were to evaluate VIE/036 with particular reference to the following:

- analyse the results and the Specific Objectives reached at the time of the Final 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, Coherence, Effectiveness, Efficiency and Sustainability;
 - Governance for Development, Gender Equality and Environment and Climate Change;
- analyse five specific questions (outlined in the terms of reference);
- establish the Lessons Learned and give Recommendations for future projects in the same sector.

Specific Objective and Results

VIE/036's Overall 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. Reducing ethnic minority poverty was also a provincial priority for the 2016-2020 Socio-Economic Development Plan. Reorientation of the project in 2015 to align with the Cao Bang Agricultural Restructuring Plan, however, modified the project direction. The Cao Bang Department of Agriculture and Rural Development was the main provincial agency responsible for implementing Cao Bang Agricultural Restructuring Plan's market-led safe agricultural products objective.

Revision of the Logical Framework was a recommendation by the Mid-Term Evaluation, and this was completed in early 2018. The purpose of the revision was to achieve a better alignment between the Cao Bang Agricultural Restructuring Plan programme and the Logical Framework Objectives and Objectively Verifiable Indicators. A revised set of Objectively Verifiable Indicators was included on the Logical Framework that better reflected the VIE/036 priorities for each of the three VIE/036 Expected Result areas.

VIE/036's emphasis upon reducing ethnic minority poverty was not changed in the revision: the targets and activities to achieve poverty reduction through a market-orientated programme (Cao Bang Agricultural Restructuring Plan) were more clearly defined. The revision of Logical Framework assisted VIE/036 to have a clear direction for the second half of the project.

Overall Objective: Cao Bang's provincial poverty rate fell during VIE/036 from 43.5% in 2017 to 32.6% in 2019. While the two Final Outcome Objectively Verifiable Indicators were not fully achieved, there was sound progress with the improvement in Cao Bang's Provincial Competitive Index ranking. VIE/036 made a definite contribution to the improved Provincial Competitive Index ranking. The agriculture sector growth rate target was not achieved. It is difficult for a relatively small project like VIE/036 to have significant influence upon growth across the whole agriculture sector.

Specific Objective: Two of three Objectively Verifiable Indicators linked to the Specific Objective were achieved. These two achieved Objectively Verifiable Indicators relate to irrigation development and safe agricultural products and are evidence that the Cao Bang Agricultural Restructuring Plan programme did achieve some results. The target for the third Objectively Verifiable Indicator related to the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development's Department and District Competitiveness Index ranking has not have been achieved. But the VIE/036 activities assisting Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and the other departments to improve their ranking have led to an overall improvement in the services delivered to the public. This is a positive achievement

Expected Result 1 – Agricultural Productivity: There are four Result 1 Agricultural Productivity Objectively Verifiable Indicators and they have all been achieved. One of the Objectively Verifiable Indicators measures the village access roads funded through the Community Development Fund. The three agriculture-related Objectively Verifiable Indicators measure what the organic and safe crop production activities have achieved. While these are successful, the scale is small.

In contrast the village access roads have had a much wider impact and have provided both social and economic benefits to women and men in the community.

Expected Result 2 - Access to Water: The infrastructure investments were made for the upgrading of the irrigation schemes. The four Access to Water Objectively Verifiable Indicators have been achieved and reflect the success of the VIE/036 rehabilitation of irrigation scheme. Cropping intensity has improved due to the scheme upgrading leading to increased farmer income. The area of each scheme that can be irrigated has also increased. VIE/036 assistance has also contributed to improved procedures to support the sustainable management of the irrigation schemes.

Reduced farmer vulnerability to climate change has been a notable result of the rehabilitation of the irrigation schemes. Water use efficiency has improved and the climate change achievements are consistent with the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development's national irrigation policy.

Expected Result 3 - Improved Processes: While only one of the four Improved Processes Objectively Verifiable Indicators has been achieved, this is not an accurate measure of the success of the Result 3 activities. Through the VIE/036 support for the Policy Advisory Board role governance became an influential intervention. VIE/036 assisted governance activities, supported the Provincial Competitive Index and Department and District Competitiveness Index improvements, and the development of the Linking-the-Leaders initiative. Improved governance has led to better services by the provincial departments that have contributed to reducing Multi-dimensional Poverty – the main VIE/036 objective.

Linking-the-Leaders has been a successful innovation where the VIE/036 support has played a leading role in its successful development and implementation.

Overall: The extent to which VIE/036 has achieved its objectives is assessed as quite satisfactory. 11 of the 17 Objectively Verifiable Indicators have been achieved, three more are partially achieved, and four were not achieved. But such an assessment is somewhat mechanical and does not fairly reflect some of what has been achieved as a result of the VIE/036 intervention. This is further discussed in the main report.

Evaluation Scores and Comments

Relevance is scored at 1. Design of the project was well targeted at the poverty reduction, and the Cao Bang Agricultural Restructuring Plan reorganisation contributed to VIE/036 being better aligned to national agriculture sector policy. While climate change was not an explicit design factor, the rehabilitation of the irrigation schemes has contributed to improved water use efficiency: this is now a high priority national irrigation policy.

Coherence is scored at 2. VIE/036 has been consistent with the initiatives of other projects and programmes. This is especially for the poverty reduction focus where the National Target Programme - Sustainable Poverty Reduction is the main government poverty reduction intervention. The VIE/036 scale infrastructure and agriculture development activities are similar to what is included in the National Target Programme - Sustainable Poverty Reduction.

Effectiveness is scored at 2. Effectiveness is somewhat uneven for the VIE/036 interventions. The commune small-scale infrastructure activities have been highly effective, leading to better community services (access roads) and increased farmer income (better irrigated farms). Governance results have been quite satisfactory, while the Cao Bang Agricultural Restructuring Plan results are moderate.

Efficiency is scored at 2. Excellent efficiency has been achieved by the infrastructure intervention through community and counterpart contributions. This is a VIE/036 feature. The VIE/036 infrastructure investment, coupled with the community contribution, has enabled more communes to benefit from the small-scale infrastructure sub-projects.

Sustainability is scored at 2. Sustainability of the hard VIE/036 infrastructure investments is assessed as very likely. Construction quality has been very good. The works constructed in the first two years of the project show no signs of deterioration and maintain their level of services to the community users. Sustainability of the governance initiatives is riskier, as they rely upon the funding from the provincial budget. Cao Bang Agricultural Restructuring Plan sustainability is less certain, as is the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development capacity to deliver market-led safe agriculture product services to the agriculture sector.

Covid-19: VIE/036 has complied with the Government of Viet Nam's Covid-19 and LuxDev instructions. Covid-19 has had limited impact upon implementation, as it occurred late in the life of VIE/036.

Lessons Learned and Recommendations

Lessons Learned: There are six VIE/036 Lessons that can be applied to improve future rural development projects, especially those with a market-orientated and safe agriculture products theme.

Lesson 1: *Small-scale infrastructure community development provides significant benefits to commune members.*

Lesson 2: *Enhanced governance can be successfully achieved by projects in partnership with provincial leadership.*

Lesson 3: *Provincial sector strategies, like Cao Bang Agricultural Restructuring Plan, need to be directly integrated into departmental and divisional annual workplans, with defined outputs, and accountability for delivery- to better achieve their objectives.*

Lesson 4: *Much greater emphasis upon a "market-led" approach and a high level of engagement with the agribusiness sector members is required for agriculture restructuring programmes, such as Cao Bang Agricultural Restructuring Plan, to be successful.*

Lesson 5: *Provincial Competitive Index and Department and District Competitiveness Index ranking improvement activities directly contribute to improved departmental performance that enable better poverty reduction services to the rural and urban community.*

Lesson 6: *Project design should not be too fixed and ensure there is some flexibility to respond emerging opportunities to better achieve the project objectives.*

Recommendations: These are targeted at four separate levels:

Level 1: Other rural development and poverty reduction projects in Viet Nam

Recommendation 1: *Prioritise village access roads in commune development infrastructure investment programmes and projects to achieve more inclusive benefits for women and ethnic minorities.*

Level 2: Provincial People's Committee

Recommendation 2: *The Provincial People's Committee should make sure that the Linking-the-Leaders activity is maintained.*

Recommendation 3: *The Provincial People's Committee should continue its support of the provincial departments to keep making the improvements and lift the Provincial Competitive Index and Department and District Competitiveness Index rankings.*

Recommendation 4: *Future commune infrastructure development programmes should use the Community Development Fund modality building upon the VIE/036 experience.*

Level 3: Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Recommendation 5: *Department of Agriculture and Rural Development should implement the key recommendations that were made in the Mid-Term Evaluation report and apply them to strengthen implementation of Cao Bang Agricultural Restructuring Plan II.*

Recommendation 6: *Department of Agriculture and Rural Development should continue to develop Irrigation Division and Construction Management Office's capacity to manage irrigation Operations and Maintenance to sustain community benefits from small-scale infrastructure investments.*

Recommendation 7: *Department of Agriculture and Rural Development should more actively promote higher value market connected crops on upgraded irrigation schemes.*

Level 4: Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs and LuxDev

Recommendation 8: *Project formulation must identify how climate change impacts upon the project beneficiaries and include practical design measures to mitigate the negative impacts.*

Recommendation 9: *Women's role and participation in the planned project activities must be clearly identified during the project design. This includes the analysis of factors that influence their ability to be involved in the planning and implementation of the project activities.*