

MID-TERM REVIEW OF

THE CIVIL SOCIETY

AND PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION

Funded by NORAD



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On behalf of the consultant team

HA HOA LY

ABBREVIATION

CV	Community volunteer
GDD	Grassroots Democracy Decree
DOI	Department of Interior at provincial level
DPC	District People Committee
FF	Fatherland Front
FGD	Female group discussion
FA	Farmer Association
NGO	Non governmental organisation
MGD	Male group discussion
PU	Program Unit
PUM	Programme Unit Manager
YU	Youth Union
WU	Women Union

Executive summary

This is the report of the mid-term review of the Grassroots Democracy Decree (GDD) project carried out by Plan, financing by NORAD. The project has been launched in the end of 2004 *in 8 provinces and one city in Vietnam including Thai Nguyen, Phu Tho, Bac giang, Ha nam, Nam dinh, Quang binh, Quang tri, Quang ngai and Ha noi where Plan-supported projects are in operation.* Given limited time and resources, the review focused on information collection in 4 provinces of Thai Nguyen, Phu Tho, Quang Tri and Quang Ngai and studying further data in Quang Binh and Hanoi.

The GDD project implementing by Plan aims to support Vietnam to establish civil society, promote participation of people in decision-making as clearly specified in the project proposal that “Plan recognizes the right of participation in implementation and design of development plan as an important right that enables the recognition of other rights such as right of health care services, education and other social services. Promotion of implementation of Decrees 79 and 88 is important to promote fulfilment and protection of right of participation, especially with respect to the poor, in **implementation and design of development plan**”.

The Plan-supported GDD project enables government officials and people to improve their knowledge on GDD, their responsibility and right in decision-making in their localities. Plan’s Program Units have actively implemented various copious and interesting activities in line with the project objectives. Government officials and people have more access to GDD-related information.

Government officials, especially at commune and village levels, being provided trainings on GDD and participation in implementation of Plan-supported projects in communities, have partly changed their perception on approach and have mobilized people’s participation in socio-economic development and infrastructure building. People have better consciousness toward their community and more actively involved in socio-economic development in their areas.

Grassroots democracy spirit in some areas is likely more open. Government authorities more respect local people’s voice in doing activities in communes and villages. More village meetings are conducted, in many places people’s meetings in village became popular, meetings are organized for discussion on any activities going to do by the authorities.

In fact, it’s very difficult to assess impact of the GDD project to evolution of civil society in localities as the project has just been implemented for one and half year while GDD is not new to other areas. GDD has been implemented in most of the areas in last few years..

It is obviously that if Plan GDD program at the stage of development was designed with clear direction set for activities based on practical survey results, clearer objectives, outputs and performance monitoring indicators, assessment of the project impacts would be more well-founded. However, it should not ignore a fact that

assessment of project impacts, especially to civil society, is extremely complicated, requires longer time and more diversified data sources.

One should not be denied is a contribution of the project to GDD implementation in the provinces. But the most important is participation, sharing and contribution of the project management boards and program units to the project activities during the last period to find new solutions for better and more effective activities of the project in coming time.

Summary of recommendations

The below are summary of main recommendations to the project in localities in coming time which will be analysed further in more detail in the section of “recommendations”.

Expansion of project’s coverage:

- Continue to implement activities to strengthen existing areas and scale up into new areas

Diversity project activities

- Activities of the GDD project should be comprehensive including training, communication, capacity building and model development; Multi-dimension influence including government authorities at commune, district and provincial levels; system of mass organizations such as women’s union, farmer’s union, youth union, etc.; policy makers at province and district to officials at commune and village; and local people.

Continuation of training on capacity building – improvement of training contents and methods

- Continue training on GDD to officials and people
- Should differentiate training to people from training to officials: (1) GDD training to officials must integrate training on skills of management and mobilization of people’s participation in. Participatory method is applied. (2) training to people should have legal education and communication integrated in. Training method should combine with appropriate communication methods.
- Improve training design, training needs should be analysed in advance;
- Develop standard training courses to be commonly applicable for many areas.

Improvement of communication quality, paying more attention to ethnic minorities:

- Make IEC materials more simple and attractive to people. Where possible, translate IEC materials ethnic languages and make them relevant to their cultural context.
- Provide more communication means, especially loud speakers for village cultural houses.

- Integrate GDD communication into activities of communities and mass organizations
- Improve contents and forms of panels, posters to be more attractive and vivid
- Build up legal bookshelf in the areas that don't have it yet
- Improve competition festivals to broaden people's participation, making use of sport and cultural activities relevant to local context and transferring this activity to mass organizations to mobilize larger participation by people of different groups.

Achievement of project sustainability - Development of the Grassroots democracy models

- Integrate grassroots democracy into specific models or programs or on-going government's projects and programs in the areas such as models of "building cultural village", "building child-friendly environment", "developing village code/regulations having people's participation", etc.... or integrate grassroots democracy into new project activities such as Community development fund, infrastructure building, etc.
- Develop process of specific models, where participatory approach and people's involvement should be clearly reflect in all stages like beneficiary identification, planning. Implementation and contribution, monitoring by people.
- Provide trainings to officials and local people on process development and implementation. Support people in entire process, monitor and drawing lessons.
- Focus effort to develop pilot model then draw lessons learnt for replication
- Increase exchange activities, information and experiences of implementation and model development among communes in one province, between provinces and partners and mass organizations.
- Integrate grassroots democracy into other Plan's projects in local areas; integrate grassroots democracy communication and implementation into other project activities like such as infrastructure building, education, community health, etc.

Enhancement of impacts and behaviour changes – policy advocacy and increase of involvement of mass and social organisations

- *Comprehensive influence on policy formulation at all levels from provincial, district and grassroots.* Continue supporting policy makers to access project activities: survey, monitoring and experience sharing.
- *Strengthening policy advocacy:* create advocacy activities like "Farmer Forum in policy advocacy on agriculture with government authorities (at commune, district and province levels)".

Promote people's participation in implementation of Plan's projects in general and GDD project in particular.

- Increase people's participation in the GDD project, more attention should be paid to women's and children's participation. Develop appropriate approaches and forms for women and children to participate in. Grassroots participations can be integrated into programs on gender equality, domestic violence prevention.
- Improve the way of provision of Plan's project-related information to people. Conduct training on project process to enable active participation by local people.
- Publicize project activities to ensure monitoring by all stakeholders.
- Publicize financial statement of welfare infrastructure.
- Strengthen people's participation in project activities, particularly in project monitoring.

Improvement of project proposal and management:

- The Country Office should design orientation for the GDD project based on practical researches and surveys in local areas.
- Develop consistent participatory concepts and approaches with specific indicators for evaluation of those activities
- Survey should be conducted prior development of project outlines to define project objectives more practical as the project objectives will be a basis for assessment of project impacts and changes.
- Exchange and share information, best practices and failures between provinces are necessary to improve efficiency with lower cost
- Full time staffs are needed for regular and long-term monitoring. They should have sufficient time for learning, drawing lessons and experiences to initiate more practical proposals.

Diversification and increase of cooperation effectiveness with partners:

- Local partners should be diverse and suitable to local context
- Partners are selected depending on specific project activities
- Flexible in partner selection and relevant to context-based.

1. Project context

Transparency and community's participation in local socio-economic development planning and budgeting and implementation are critical factors to improve effectiveness of provision of public services and economic growth, making equal benefit to all people. Importantly, improvement of people's effective participation and enhancement of publicity and transparency of the development plan at all levels have been paid attention by Vietnamese government and become the theme of recent decisions and legal regulations, such as Decree 29 (issued on 11 May 1998)

amended to Decree 79 (on 7 July 2003) on implementation of democracy at grassroots commune/ward level, and Decree 88 on regulations of establishment of associations from central to local levels. These two legal documents are important basis for democracy implementation, especially at commune/ward level, in which specific guidances are reflected to guide how local people can take part in decision making process.

At national level, key partners will be:

- The Ho **Chi Minh Political Academy (HCMPA)** is the main policy and training arm of the Government of Vietnam (GOV). Within government it has taken the lead in training government officials and staff on GDD79. It has three (3) main training centers located in Hanoi, Hue, and Ho Chi Minh City.

At the provincial level, the following are the main local cooperation partners:

- Decree 88 assigns to the **Provincial People's Committee (PPC)** presidents the responsibility of promoting and regulating associations operating within their respective provinces. In practice this responsibility is given to **provincial Department of the Interior (DOI)**. Therefore, the PPC and the DOI will be the major partners at the provincial level. They are expected to support/train districts and communes.

Key partners of non-governmental organisations

- The **mass organizations**, specifically the Fatherland Front and two of its members, the Women's Union and the Youth Union, are the main local cooperation partners. The Fatherland front and its member organizations play an important role in informing and mobilizing the citizens in the implementation of grassroots democracy.¹

- **Local NGOs (LNGOs)** have been a fairly new development in Vietnam. Most of them were set up by academics and researchers within the last ten (10) years. A number have been set up to provide training services to NGO staff on participatory approaches to development. Among these is LERES (Legal Research Study Center) of the Law Faculty of Vietnam National University. LERES and other LNGOs will be tapped to define and promote the role of non-government actors in expanding grassroots democracy in the country. They will also be tapped to provide training to the sector.

- **Academic institutions**, such as the Hanoi University Institute of Economics, have been doing researches assessing the implementation of Decrees 79 and 88. They will also be local cooperation partners.

- Communication organisations play an important role in promoting GDD implementation. Therefore, multi-task communication approach will be used in this project.

Enhancement of people's participation and building an equal and democratic civil society by promoting accountability and transparency of public institutions and decision making process are the one of Plan Vietnam commitments. Plan has

¹ Articles 6, 8, 9, 11, 14, 17, 18, 24, Decree No. 79/2003/ND-CP, Government of Vietnam, July 7, 2003

received a grant from Norwegian development organization – NORAD to stimulate this process in communes of 8 Plan-supported provinces including Bac giang, Ha nam, Nam dinh, Phu tho, Quang ngai, Quang tri, Quang binh and Soc Son district of Hanoi since the end of 2004.

The project expects to create a link in the national system from central to local level. Government agencies from central level (Ministry of Internal Affairs) to local level (including all levels from provincial down to commune and village), research and academy institutions, social organizations (both government organizations such as Father's Front, Women's Union, Farmer's Union, Youth Union and local non-governmental organizations) will work together to promote the development of equal and democratic civil society.

Objectives of the project at national level

Long-term objective of the project:

The long-term goal of the project is to **strengthen grassroots democracy and civil society in the country**. Plan sees the **right to participate** in development planning and implementation as a **pivotal** right that enables the attainment of other rights, e.g. the right to health, education, and other social services. The promotion and implementation of Decrees 79 and 88 are crucial to the promotion, protection, and fulfillment of the right of people, especially the poor, to participate in **development planning and implementation**.

Concrete objectives that the project is expected to achieve during the project period:

During the project period the main aims are

- to develop an **approach** to building democracy and civil society within **Vietnam's unique context** which can be replicated and scaled up throughout the country
- to **strengthen** people's participation and civil society at the **commune, district, and provincial** levels in the eight provinces and one city where Plan works

Expected project achievements: the project will

- Respond to immediate requests from partners;
- Conduct a Needs and Resource Assessment Study,
- Assess and identify the specific local cooperation partners to work with, and
- Develop focused and detailed project directions and plans for the succeeding years

The **needs assessment** will examine the capacity building needs of both partners and target groups in building democracy and civil society. The capacity-building needs of marginalized groups such as **ethnic minorities and women, and children** will be given special attention. The needs assessment will also include a rights analysis of the **status of people's participation and awareness of their rights**.

To strengthen the participation of people and civil society at commune, district and province levels in 8 Plan-supported provinces and Hanoi.

At local level, depending local practical situation, through researches and surveys in local areas, Plan Program Units in those areas will develop their annual programs. It might be slightly different between areas but in general, the starting points of the GDD project in all areas are:

- Dissemination of the GDD was not widely with low progress, especially in remote and ethnic areas.
- The implementation results were still limited, lack of practicality while documents were emphasised.
- Grassroots officials and people did not fully understand their respective responsibilities and rights in decision making process. Community spirit among people was limited and they did not actively involve in decision making process. Officials did not virtually facilitate people's participation as of officials' poor accountability and poor qualification and skills, information were not in public and transparent, etc.
- Weak participation of community in development process of their areas, especially that of women and children. Weak monitoring by local people.
- Village code and regulations are important document as they are a legal framework, where community values are reflected. However, local people were not actually encouraged to involve in development of village code and regulation, mostly in imposingly manner.

Objectives of the project at local level

To strengthen capacity on implementation and knowledge on GDD for government officials, specifically at district and commune levels

To facilitate villages to develop their village codes and regulations applying participatory approach

Village heads and village development boards understand their responsibilities and roles and be capable to organize and manage community affairs.

To encourage village heads and communities to involve in grassroots democracy by building cultural villages.

Project activities in local areas all are focusing on:

- Needs assessment in local areas
- Exchange visit to learn best experiences of GDD implementation at commune/village levels.
- Raising awareness on GDD through training, communication on GDD for government officials and local people
- Developing some demonstration models to realise grassroots democracy

2. Purpose and objective of the mid-term review

Purpose of the review is to assess effectiveness and impact of the NORAD project to evaluate the achievement of 1.5-year project implementation and to propose recommendations and solutions for improvement of the project activities in left time of the project life.

Objectives:

- To review the project implementation, a relevance between project activities and required outputs, and project objectives
- To decide on what activities should the NORAD project continue to promote community's participation in the remaining duration of the project.

Requirement of outputs of the review:

- To assess achievement of the project corresponding to purposes based on project design
- To identify successes and limitations of the project
- To assess significant successes and impacts of the project
- To assess effectiveness of cooperation with local partners
- To assess effectiveness of project investment corresponding to proposed purposes and objectives
- To define particular areas to be achieve sustainability
- To assess quality and level of people's participation, particularly women's and children's participation
- To propose recommendations for improvement of effectiveness of project activities in coming time.

3. Research methodology

The participatory method with participation of stakeholders is applied in this review. Qualitative and quantitative data are used in this review as well. Plan offices in project areas provided support to conduct surveys in communities and meetings with project stakeholders to ensure information is collected and results of the review are mutually shared.

Main research tools used in this review are as following:

- Review all project relevant materials: including initial project design, survey report, periodical project progress reports such as annual and quarterly reports. Those documents will be provided to the research team in 10 days prior to the commencement of the review
- Conduct group discussions with local people including both male and female
- In-depth interviews with key stakeholders

4. Key findings

4.1. Level of achievement of the proposed activities²

The project oriented activities help to raise community awareness on GDD. Involved staff to some extent have increased skills in mobilizing people's participation in socio-economic development activities in their localities. The project also has provided opportunity for training participants to practise what they learnt. Program Units conducted numerous activities like extensive and intensive communication on GDD via mass media (radio) and IEC materials, survey on the GDD implementation, study tours to share and learn experiences and good models between PUs, workshops for information sharing etc...

Collected information from planning and implementation reports and discussions with project staffs in Thai nguyen, Phu tho, Quang Binh, Quang tri, Quang ngai and Hanoi show that GDD activities are diverse and closely followed the initial orientation of the project.

<i>Expected results</i>	<i>Main activities</i>	<i>Implementation areas</i>	<i>Implementation period</i>	<i>Achievement</i>
Raising awareness, understanding rights and responsibilities	Training on GDD	Thai nguyen, Phu tho, Hanoi, Quang binh, Quang tri, Quang ngai.	2004-2005	Completed as planned
	Leaflets	Thai nguyen, Phu tho, Hanoi, Quang binh, Quang tri, Quang ngai		Completed as planned
	Competition festivals on different topics	Thai nguyen, Phu tho, Hanoi, Quang binh, Quang tri, Quang ngai		Completed as planned
Learning experience in the project implementation	Study tours to learn experience	Quang tri, Quang binh....		Completed as planned

² Program Units please help to fill up the table with necessary information

	Workshops for information sharing	Quang ngai...		Completed as planned
Understanding current situation to develop appropriate activities	Surveys in local areas	Quang ngai		Completed as planned
	Provision of communication equipments	Quang ngai, Quang tri, ...		Completed as planned
Applying GDD into practice	Develop demonstration models	Quang tri, Phu tho,		Completed as planned

- *Training*: PUs conducted training courses on GDD for local government officials, mostly at commune and village levels and some at district level. Phu Tho and Quang Tri conducted training for local people with a limited number.
- *IEC materials*: mostly are leaflets on GDD
- *Competition festivals* on different topics (**TN, PT, QT, QN**) were undertaken under various forms. For example: Thai Nguyen organised the competition festival on the best village heads; Quang Tri and Quang Binh organised the competition festival on good farmers of commune etc.
- *Study tours* for learning experience and demonstration models (Quang binh, Quang tri and Quang ngai, etc.): study tours were organised for local partners and Plan staff.
- *Surveys* of GDD implementation: Ha Noi and Quang Ngai did small surveys to identify the needs for GDD implementation in their areas.
- *Establishment of demonstration villages model*: focus on model of cultural village, development of village code and regulations (in Quang tri and Phu tho)
- Communication equipments for village community houses were provided in some areas (Quang ngai).

However, a general evaluation of project activities has not been fully reflected the reality due to unavailability of official reports of one and half year of project implementation from Program Units (by the time of the mid-term review). Hence, this review report may not analysis more in depth the project achievements. In order to get more comprehensive and realistic final evaluation, the Program Units are recommended to make reports on the project implementation against planned activities, in which comments, explanation of achievements and failure or deviation should be reflected. The reports should be sent to the evaluation team at least 7 days prior to the commencement of the evaluation.

4.2. Successes and limitations

In general, the GDD project helped to warm up the GDD implementation, which some how were sluggish after 6 years of launching Decree 79. The project expanded in remote and more disadvantaged areas. However, the project implementation is still at desultory and disconnected. Most projects focused on some activities, which were not able to scale up to GDD movement in some areas.

Training

Success

- More knowledge on GDD was provided for local government officials and people. Officials and people understand better government institutions, their rights, roles, responsibilities as well as their own in decision making process., Latter on they have chance to refresh their knowledge and understand better through competition festivals (according to information from District officials in Phu tho). During GDD implementation, through training people know better what they have to know on decision made by local authorities (according to opinion of Vice chairman of the Farmer's Union in Quang tri).
- Satisfaction of people's expectations: people are very happy of being involved in the GDD training courses, people know their rights set in the law (according opinion of residency head of Tho Van commune, Tam Nong district, Phu Tho province).
- Meet training demands: in Thai Nguyen, after the People's Council election in April 2004, many district and commune staffs have changed their positions, therefore training courses provided by Plan were in time and highly appreciated by the provincial authorities (according to opinion of Vice chairwoman of the Women's union, Dong Thai commune, Thai Nguyen).
- In some areas, skills training were incorporated in GDD training to improve trainees' capability on mobilization of people's participation. Practical exercise was incorporated in the training programme such as conducting village meeting to mobilize people to participate infrastructure construction or development of village codes. The exercise was very useful for trainees (Thai Nguyen). Many training courses applied participatory methods: raising questions, discussion, writing feedback report. Thai Nguyen has developed a training materials, which are easily understandable, clear in contents with illustrated pictures (according opinions of Vice chairwoman of the Women's union in Dong Thai commune and official of the provincial department of internal affairs in Thai Nguyen).

Limitations:

- The scope is still limited. Number of trained people is modest. For example, although Phu Tho paid attention to training for people, only 30/300 households(where residential density is low) were trained per each residential cluster.

- Many key local leaders and staff have not attended training yet such as Chairmen of the Commune People's Committees and People's Council and heads of mass organizations.
- Training contents:
 - Not intensive: many government's documents are disseminated in one training resulting in delute main topic (opinion from District Fatherland's Front, Thai Nguyen).
 - Difficult to understand and not relevant to local people. There were some comments on the training contents: the training content is still not close to people's concerns (Farmer's Union in Cam Lo, Quang Tri), is rigid, dry, poor contents that only narrowed within Decree 79 , inadequate illustration examples, poor discussion (Chairman of People Council of Van Ninh commune, Quang Binh district), (staffs of mass organization in Vinh Chap, Quang Tri).
 - Theory occupied most sessions, and it lacked practice for government officials, which made trained participants puzzled in applying trained knowledge in practice (Head of residential cluster No.2 in Huong Lung, Cam Khe, Phu Tho; staff of the district Father's Front in Thai Nguyen).

Box 1: GDD training for local people

I did attend such a training but forgot everything right after the training as I had no chance apply in practice. I prefer training on livestock and cultivation techniques as it's very practical and I could apply new knowledge right after training. For example, in the past I just let my cows wander for eating by themselves, but after training, I know how to feed them with planted grass and starch supplementary. My cows visibly grow very fast" (Mrs. D, female group discussion Huong Lung, Phu Tho).

- *Training methodology:* according to participants, there are some limitations in training methods:
 - Dogmatic, lack of participatory
 - Lack of case studies
 - Insufficient dialogue
 - Insufficient practical examples, lack of convincingness
 - Lack of appropriate training method to level understanding of people: they were mainly in forms of meetings, listening to the new information, which were not attractive. For example, in the GDD training for local people the trainers only read out training materials (male group discussion in Vinh Chap, Quang Tri).
- *Short time training duration:* Training duration was too short and materials were insufficient thus constraining people to thoroughly understand (Chairman of the commune People's Council, Phu Tho). As the current qualification of

staff is at modest level, such short time training constrained them to remember the provided knowledge. By the time they would forget all (Deputy director of the provincial department of internal affairs in Quang Ngai).

3 day training is not sufficient for participants to gain necessary skills. In deed, training for people was too short only 3 hours (Farmer's union, Quang Tri).

- Trainers: most of them are officials (propagandists, from DOI or from Farmer's Union) who lack or have inadequate pedagogic methods. Therefore, they use their own experience in transferring knowledge (Phu Tho_trainer - official of DOI).
- Training organization/others: poor input for training is limited, lack of research. There were no standard training program, no scientific assessment. Training courses had little improvement. Insufficient budget for training affected to quality of training programs and training materials. According to Quang Ngai DOI, training budget were small, 17.4 million VND for province, 3.4 million VND for district and 2.9 million VND for commune (Quang Ngai DOI,), which did not encourage trainers to well prepare the training materials, resulting in less motivation to conduct training.

Box 2: Training method

Trainers have inappropriate training methodology. Lectures are not linked to practice and difficult for people to understand, remember and apply into practice (Chairman of the commune PC in Phu Tho). Training was one way, but not two-way communication and no discussion in the training, Sometimes trainers only read -out the materials, therefore trainees cannot remember (Group discussion with village heads in Vinh Chap, Quang Tri), (staffs of mass organization in Vinh Chap, Quang Tri), (Vice chairman of Farmer's Union in Quang Tri).

- *Training materials:* In general, training materials, even for government officials, are very poor, mainly including theoretically government's documents. Training materials are not suitable to people (printed from the government's Decrees and policies) (Chairman of Van Ninh commune, Quang Binh district). Training materials are not enough to distribute to all participants (Fatherland Front in Cam Lo, Quang Tri), and in poor quality (Deputy director of DOI, Quang Ngai), and difficult for trainees to remember. Although village heads paid attention to listen, he didn't remember anything as no material in their hands, "perhaps it's about family planning" (Village head of Nghia My village, Tu Nghia).

Communication

Success

- Leaflets on GDD in all areas are printed with nice and varied formats.
- Posters on GDD: in good location easy to see, impressive, easy to remember. However, posters are still not done in some provinces (Thai Nguyen, Phu Tho).

- Quang Tri: bookshelves of legal documents are established to meet people's demand
- Attention was given to the ethnics (Quang Binh, Thai Nguyen). For example, GDD communication has been conducted in 3 villages of Van Kieu ethnic. The village heads read out in Van Kieu language (Mr. D. Head of the district department of Culture and Information, Quang Binh).
- Competition festivals were organised with various topics thus attracting active participation of government officials and local people. Thai Nguyen organised the competition contests on good village heads (Plan staff).
- In Quang Binh - people integrated GDD contents into forms close to the public such as poems, chantey, etc. (Quang Binh PUM).

Limitations

IEC materials

- Limited scope: Not all households received leaflets (in most of areas). In some places, there were no leaflets (Thai Nguyen; Commune chairman, Quang Ngai)
 - Ethnic people: There were no GDD documents and leaflets in ethnic language (Thai Nguyen).
 - GDD documents and leaflets are not suitable to people. There are too long (included full content of GDD), font size is small, no attractive illustration pictures.
- Lack of communication means, even unavailable in some areas (Thai Nguyen, Quang Ngai).
- Posters, panels: not available in some areas, or they are in poor content and display
- Unavailable bookshelves of legal documents in many areas (Thai Nguyen, Phu Tho, Quang Ngai).

Limitations in competition festivals:

- Participation coverage is limited: It did not involve large participation by people. In Phu Tho, there was few number of participants, only 3-6 people were appointed from each residential cluster: "there were 6 people from my cluster to participate in the competition festival including me, the village head was a team leader. As other members had inadequate capacity, the team leader almost had to self performe all the time" (Head of the residential cluster No. 2, Huong Lung, Cam Khe, Phu Tho).
- Poor content, there were mainly in form of questions and answers without integration of games or art performance.
- Lack of organizational experience. In many places, rigid organization makes the competition environment stressful. In some areas, inexperienced facilitators made the competition festivals stressful and happened in strong rival spirit (village head, Quang Ngai).



Slogan on malnutrition prevention



Slogan on GDD

Models of grassroots participations

Successes

- Initially established the demonstration models: village code was build up with people's participation.
- Build demonstration villages with criteria of transparency, accountability and expansion of people's participation

Limitations

- No demonstration models are really successful
- The models did not really engage with livelihood models so it's not attractive to local people (Farmer's Union, Quang Tri).
- Study tours: in some areas, study tours for learning, sharing lessons and experiences were not fully explored (Quang Ngai).
- Lack of sharing and learning between Plan PUs and other institutions/organisations In Quang Tri, GDD is also implemented by other organizations but no workshop to share experiences and information was officially organized (Quang Tri, Program Unit).
- Lack of coordination between GDD project models with other models in Plan-supported areas.

4.3. Impact and changes

It's really difficult to assess the GDD project's impacts and changes because the project has been implemented for 1.5 years, initial project design and proposals of provinces did neither define concepts nor criteria for assessment of people's participation. This report tries to reflect the initial changes in communities though might be not significant, after a certain years of implementation of Plan-supported projects and one and half year of GDD project implementation.

The GDD project

Successes

Local people

- *People's awareness on their rights and responsibilities towards community:* people understand their rights and responsibilities and are more accountable to community's works, reflecting in their active participation in mobilization of contributions, high number of people participating in community meetings (Mr. Doanh, Head of the district department of cultural information in Quang Binh; Official in the provincial department of internal affairs in Phu Tho).
- *Increase of people's knowledge and capacity:* People became more capable to raise questions what they are concerned as now they understand functions and responsibilities of government's authority. Once people understand government's works, they challenged the officials if the officials do something wrong (staff of mass organization in Vinh Chap). People understand that in the past, they were just informed, but now they have a right to be provided information, to be involved in community agenda and monitoring (Commune chairman, Thai Nguyen).

Officials, local authorities

- The project activities influenced provincial officials: local authorities helped provincial policy officials to better understand *actual situation at grassroots levels* especially in situation in remote and mountainous communes. Provincial officials have more chances to take field visits, to attend commune meetings and monitor project activities etc. Higher-level officials can obtain and listen to people's opinions, their concerns and expectation through direct dialogues with local people (Plan office, Quang Ngai; Director of DOI, Thai Nguyen).

An official of the Phu Tho DOI said being a GDD trainer, he had chance to interact with participants and better understand challenges that the GDD project encountered. They are (1) GDD itself has no sanction therefore no measures will be taken if GDD is not implemented, (2) people have low awareness on GDD, being unmindful of politic and Resolutions of the People's Council, decisions of People's Committee (3) village heads have undertake multi-jobs but receive little allowances (it is now proposing to the People's Committee to increase allowance to 180.000 VND/per one village head).

- Capacity building changed working manner of grassroots officials: local government officials directly obtain information that enables them to address issues properly. As a result, people's belief to the local authorities has been increasing (Mr. D, deputy head of the Department for District People's Mobilisation, Quang Binh). After training, village code and regulations were developed with supports from the local officials. The information is more open and widely provided, more meetings are conducted by local leaders and grassroots officials. (Commune chairman, Quang Ngai). According to an official of Quang Ninh district (Quang Binh), GDD implementation enables the government authority to understand how the decision making process should be taken (Quang Binh).

Strengthen capacity for Plan staff in Program Units:

Plan staff and local partners also can increase their qualification level as well as and practical capacity to mobilise and get people involved in community activities (Plan Program Unit Manager). Plan staffs themselves also have opportunity to understand community better and know how to work better with community (PUM in Quang Ngai).

Limitations

- **Grassroots democracy** is still formalism. *GDD implementation is still at formalism level and government authorities haven't specific actions yet.* (Vice chairman of Vinh Chap commune, Quang Tri). *"Learning new knowledge, but, the local authorities did not thoroughly addressed issues of the commune and residential clusters. They just only inform people related information, commune decision etc, but did not really involved people in commune, village agendas so people had no chance to raise give their voices"* (Male Group discussion in Tho Van, Tam Nong, Phu Tho).
- Working style and manners of local officials towards people did not really change; there was no difference prior and post training and GDD communication. People's Council had not significant change; there were a number of issues related to People Council's deputies. For example, Fatherland Front mainly focused on its structure, therefore the deputies' education is at low level (People's Committee, Thai Nguyen). The local official did not change much (government official in Tam Nong, Phu Tho). There no significant change was observed in Fatherland Front's activities after training (the Fatherland's Front in Thai Nguyen).
- Commune staffs are not really open, "Normally, they are not able to define to what extent the rights and responsibilities of local people are. To invite people to attend People's Council meetings was not thought of" (Director of DOI – after monitoring GDD implementation in commune, Thai Nguyen).
- **Local people awareness** on GDD is still limited, majority do not fully understand the GDD, their rights and responsibilities. Grassroots democracy has not yet become practical and attractive to them. Observation of meeting on GDD dissemination showed that many people did not remember the GDD contents, some even did not know what GDD is. All people in group discussions have attended training, but when being asked, they said that they did not remember anything because training covered a lot of contents (Mrs. C & H, FGD, Tho Van, Tam Nong, Phu Tho), (MGD, Quang Ngai, Thai Nguyen). Although being participated in the GDD competition festival organised by the Farmer's Union, some women still answered that GDD content is family planning, pig and cow raising or 10 hygienic tips for diseases prevention such as hand washing before eating, etc. (FGD, Quang Ngai). Main reasons are given by majority as due to poor economic condition, people are busy to earn their lives, people's education is limited; and to certain extent training method is inappropriate to people's education level, which led to limited result (FMD, Tho Van, Tam Nong, Phu Tho; Quang Tri).

Other Plan-supported projects

While it is not easy to assess impacts of the GDD project, impacts of other Plan's projects are significant, particularly on the community awareness and capacity.. The Plan projects' impact are appreciated by many people, especially government officials, staffs of mass organisations, and those who are directly involved in projects' activities.

Positive impacts

- Capacity building: increase of knowledge and management skills
 - The project activities helped to strengthen management capacity and working skills for local staffs. Capacity and qualification of government official are improved (Group discussion of village heads in Vinh Chap, Quang Tri; FF,Cam Lo, Quang Tri). Staff are more confidents to participate in meetings (Secretary of YU, Nghia Hanh, Quang Ngai). In the past, meeting contents were general, now staff know how to make meetings more specific, raise specific requirements for each tasks and milestones for set activities (Vice chairman of the People's Council, Tu Nghia, Nghia My, Quang Ngai). They have more skills to work with people in community, particularly with children (CV, Nghia Duc, Nghia Hanh, Quang Ngai). They learnt facilitation skills, which helped them to run meeting consistent and , clear from the beginning to the end of the meeting (Phu Tho; Vice chairman of Vinh Chap district, Quang Tri; Secretary of YU, Hanh Duc, Nghia Hanh, Quang Ngai). Working methodology and working manner, of government officials are improved (Commune chairman, the People's Committee in Cam Lo, Quang Tri).
 - The local staff have opportunity to learning Plan's experiences in project management and they can apply in their daily work, especially in monitoring and supervision of infrastructure construction. Most of commune staffs appreciated Plan's project management of infrastructure construction: strict, transparent, cross checked. Therefore the quality of construction is ensured, while losses are minimised. The local staff expressed that they wanted to apply this model in the commune construction works (Commune chairman, People's Council, mass organisation in Cam Lo commune, Quang Tri, Phu Tho, Quang Ngai).

The Plan's supervision model is very good. Selected members of the supervision board by local people will be trained on supervision methodology, process, etc. Therefore that quality of supervision is strict and effective, particularly in supervision of implementation stages, materials control prior being used. Through supervision, people's capacity also is improved (Commune chairman, Secretary of YU, Nghia Hanh, Quang Ngai).

However, the supervision is not easy to apply due to the government management mechanism, top-down planning and pressure of private relationship (Chairman of the People's Council, Tam Nong, Phu Tho). For

example, the commune bid for infrastructure construction also was strongly influenced by personnel relationship, relatives of the local leaders. Therefore selection of contractor was not objective. The contractor was responsible for all stages, from purchasing materials to construction, hence supervision board found it difficult to discover any fault. Another limitation is the hand over key mechanism. The district directly contracted with contractor, which constrained people's participation and quality of work (Cam Khe district, Phu Tho). However, Plan management model was successfully applied at village level, in mobilization of people's contribution to build cultural houses of residential clusters No. 2, 3, 5. People participated from the beginning to the last stages of the construction. They were involved in the house design, decision of its aspect, supervision and management, which resulted in good quality of the work. Each member of the supervision board had different tasks" (Chairman of the People's Committee in Tam Nong, Phu Tho).

- *Local authorities have improved in their working manner. They paid more attention to people's opinion and people's participation.*

Village staffs: *All community businesses are being discussed by people.* Their common opinions then will be translated into commune resolution (Group discussion of village heads in Vinh Chap, Quang Tri; The FF, Cam Lo, Quang Tri). All People's Council businesses are informed publicly to and opened for discussion by local people. In the past, all were decided by the Party Secretary. (Vice chairman of the People's Council of Vinh Chap, Quang Tri).

Government officials *are more accountable to people. Localism has been reduced* (Vice Chairman of the People's Council of Vinh Chap commune, Quang Tri). For example, in the past, the officials decided construction site, thus often resulting in disputes among villages about it. Now criteria for selection of construction place are clear and people are consulted. Poor villages are always prioritized and chosen for construction site.

Demonstrated villages: all activities must be consulted with people and *village heads are not allowed to make decision by themselves* (Group discussion of village heads of demonstrated villages, Vinh Chap, Quang Tri). The more people's opinions are being taken into account, the more businesses are implemented smoothly (Group discussion of village heads, Vinh Chap and FF in Cam Lo, Quang Tri).

"Involving into Plan's project activities, I thought that even other countries can care and support our people, why not us can do so?" (Commune Chairman, Nghia Hanh, Quang Ngai).

Plan's working manner enables government officials *to quicker grasp people's demands and expectations* in addressing specific issues (Commune Chairman of Tam Nong, Phu Tho). To prioritise a stretch of road's consultation was taken during the village meeting, where people discussed the level of contribution for building the road and agreed contribution proportion of 60%-40% from project and people respectively (Vice chairman of the People's Council, Quang Ngai).

Approach to people: *no imposing. Priorities are made should be based on people's.* Everythings are publicized with people consensus (Vice Chairman of the People's Committee, Chairman of the People's Council, Vinh Chap, Quang Tri).

All construction works are consulted with people therefore daily work is going smoother (Staff of mass organization, Vinh Chap, Quang Tri).

Construction options are based on beneficiaries' needs (Commune Chairman, Cam Lo, Quang Tri).

- There's a change in people's attitudes towards **women, especially children.** Children's activities are more effervescence (Vice chairman of the People's Council, Vinh Chap commune, Quang Tri).

Change of attitude towards children: Commune staff pay more attention to children and better understand children-related laws and children's rights (Commune staffs in Phu Tho, Quang Ngai, Quang Tri).

Commune staff are more aware of how child care important is (Commune Chairman of Tu Nghia, Nghia My, Quang Ngai)

- Improve community awareness among local people: attending village meeting, discussion community business and community development become practices and routines, such as in infrastructure construction, livelihood, education and health. People know their benefits and duties. Therefore they are more concerned in community's activities (Group discussion of village heads in Vinh Chap, Quang Tri). Normally, 85-90% of people attend commune, village meetings (Commune Vice Chairman of Vinh Chap, Quang Tri).

Lessons learnt to increase change and impacts

- **To achieve real GDD implementation and avoid formalism tokenism,** specific models play a critical role. They may be project activities, on-going programs in the areas. By applying GDD approach, increase of people's participation, promoting local government's accountability through specific management methods will bring about vivid, realistic and highly convinced and best practice.

4.4. Extent level and quality of participation

The GDD project

- Not all officials are involved, especially grassroots staffs, volunteers in the project. Many key staffs at grassroots level and of mass organizations have not been trained on GDD yet (Vice Chairman of the Farmer's Union in Quang Tri).

In some communes, key leaders such as Commune chairmen, Chairmen of the People's Council, Heads of core groups, leaders of mass organizations have not attended GDD training (Quang Ngai).

In Hanh Nghia commune: volunteers, commune staffs know nothing about GDD.

The Chairmen of Nghia My and Tu Nghia commune attended a training course, but not commune staff.

Number of local people attending GDD training is limited. The training participation rate is very low against total population in the area (Chairman of the FF in Phu Tho). For example, in Phu Tho, GDD training was conducted for local people, but there was only one training of 30 people per one residential cluster. Only capable participants were selected.

In Thai Nguyen, GDD training just only reached to village heads and higher level but not to local people (Group discussion, Lien Co village, Song Cau town, Thai Nguyen). People have no idea about GDD. They were only provided with legal information from the People's Council (MGD, Cam Tuyen, Cam Lo, Quang Tri).

- Little attention was given to women and ethnic minorities through GDD leaflets dissemination and training (Division head of DOI, Thai Nguyen).
- *There were no integrated programs to encourage women's and children's participation. It is a limitation of the GDD project's proposal.*

Other Plan's projects in supported areas

- **High participation of local people. They are encouraged to participate in all stages of project cycle from planning to implementation and monitoring.** A general observation is found in all MGD that all of them know very well about activities of on-going Plan's projects in their villages/communes. Both people and village/commune staffs informed that number of people attended village meetings related to Plan's projects is very high. "Compared to other activities of the village, number of people attended meetings related to Plan's project is highest (about 70-80% in average, even 90% in some places against 30-40% of other kinds of meetings" (Chairman of the People's Council in Tam Nong, Phu Tho).

People themselves decide the priority of community's constructions, that never happened in the past (Vice chairman, the People's Council of Vinh Chap commune, Quang Tri).

However, quality of people's participation is not equal cross areas.

Selection of beneficiaries: most of projects strictly follow the agreed process to ensure objectiveness. However, some problems are still occurred as people lack information and not really participate in.

Although the project is implemented methodically and follow the designed process (meetings to consult with local people, etc.), unfairness is unavoidable, leading to complaints among people (Department of Public Relations, Quang Binh). There was a sponsored case that a household was not selected due to budget shortage and when budget was available, their child was grown up and out of the project's age. This household complained (Chairman in Cam Lo commune, Quang Tri).

In Quang Tri (Cam Tuyen, Cam Lo), village meetings were organised, where people could discuss on selection of beneficiaries. Those meetings are usually very attractive and tense. Although the meeting minutes was recorded and submitted to the commune level, some people were still not satisfied. Because some households became better-off but did not removed out from the list of beneficiaries (MGD in Vinh Chap, Quang Tri).

In Quang Ngai, the beneficiary selection was strictly followed the process, but people still complained. Random selection of 5 people named in the top of the list per each group is not objective (FGD, Quang Ngai).

In Huong Lung commune, Cam Khe, Phu Tho, all local people are invited to meeting to decide the final list of the beneficiaries on mutual concession manner. For example, a poor household was selected for building a new house according to criteria of a poor household but could not make contribution. This household then ceded it to Mrs. Chung who had 36 million VND in hand prepared for building new house (FGD, Mrs. Chung, Huong Lung, Phu Tho).

But in other places, people reported they are not informed about the final list of beneficiaries of Plan's project, there was unfairness. For example, "an old aged farmer Khue is very poor, living with his mentally disable son Tan and a grandson, who is at the age of grade 1, but was not selected to the list of beneficiaries. While some better-off families having employment with salary of of 600,000-700,000 VND/month and some assets are included in the beneficiary list. As too many complaints from people, by the end of 2005, Mr. Tan's family was included additionally in the list but no available support was given to him" (MGD, Tho Van, Tam Nong, Phu Tho). In the FGD of the same village, the same issue was discussed. People think that village and commune staffs have done well, but "it's photographer's fault. He selected a wrong angle which affects the selection result". Some people, who were not provided adequate information, when they complained, they got answers from the head of residential cluster that "If anybody complains and disputes, their children's benefits will be cut off by Plan". Therefore, people's concerns existed for years but they kept silent and dared not share as they were afraid of affecting project benefits of their clusters, communes.

Contribution

People are only involved in construction which they have made contribution to, but they have no idea about the other construction works (MGD, Phu Tho).

People are just informed about the amount of contribution but are not involved in discussion about it. For example, they were informed about contribution for construction of concrete road is 10,000 VND for old person and child, 50,000 VND for man or woman (MGD and FGD, Quang Ngai).

Normally, communes have to make to counterpart fund. This state budget is informed to members of the Party Cell only but not to local people (Residential head, Huong Lung, Cam Khe, Phu Tho).

Only government officials know about the total budget of the project, only contribution made by people is publicly informed. All people in the village are convened for a meeting to discuss on their contribution but once project is completed, financial statement is not publicly informed (MGD Vinh Chap, Quang Tri).

Project cost details are not publicly reported, how much project budget is, how much people's contribution is.

To build a commune cultural house, people contributed 20% of the total cost. The selected contractor through bidding process must have legal entity, so people have little opportunity to be involved in, even as simple workers (FGD, Chap Dong; Vice Chairman of the People's Council of Vinh Chap commune, Quang Tri).

Participation in supervision of project activities

To those construction works which have contribution from local people, 5 of 6 members of the supervision board are local people and they are selected by local people.

For those works which have no people's contribution, members of the supervision board are appointed by the commune after consulting with local people (through meetings). Normally, they are heads of residential clusters, and people who live there for better supervision.

However, there is a limitation that reputation of members of supervision board is not always complies with their experiences and qualification. Therefore their supervision roles are not always brought into full play (Village head of Huong Lung, Cam Khe).

For the works in village, supervision board comprises of 5 people, among whom 2 are commune staffs, 2 village staffs (Party's secretary and village head) and 1 local person. Therefore, the supervision is formalism as local person lack supervision skills. He/she can not fully perform duty (FGD; Vice Chairman of the People's Council of Vinh Chap commune, Quang Tri).

For the work of commune, meetings are conducted without attendance of local people (group discussion with male in Vinh Chap, Quang Tri).

In Cam Lo, Cam Tuyen in Quang Tri, the supervision board includes 7 members selected by local people and they are paid an allowance of 30,000 VND/day. If there's no cash their contribution will be deducted for compensation. Police and Party secretary are not involved in the board.

Supervision of Plan's projects is still limited to some extent only. In some cases, project manager is president of the Commune Women's Union and she is responsible for the implementation of all project activities. Other women have little opportunity to raise their opinions. If yes, they would not be allowed to involve further in the project. For example, in the activity on building model of nutritious kitchen for children, those who attended nutrition training course are not allowed to cook meals, but those who didn't attend such training course are invited to cook. Those who commented on quality of meals for children and project's expenditures were removed from the project participant list by the project manager (FGD, Mrs. T, Quang Ngai).

- *Women and children are encouraged to participate and are respected*

In the Plan's project areas, participation of women and children is paid significant attention. In many places, women's participation rate is more than that of men, both in the project activities and meetings. The reasons were men are working far from home (Phu Tho); women are keen on learning and know what they need (Staffs of mass organization in Vinh Chap, Quang Tri).

Women are encouraged to participate in project activities (Vice Chairman of the People's Council in Vinh Chap, Quang Tri). Their management & facilitation capacity is improved. For example, female volunteers know how to calculate and record project's financial stuff (President of the Women's Union in Huong Lung, Cam Khe district, Phu Tho).

Children actively participate in group discussion, to summary come up needs. Many children give as utterly sensible as making adults surprising (Commune chairman of Hanh Duc, Nghia Hanh, Quang Ngai).

Children also involve in separate group discussions to share their points of view, then to present them in adults' meeting for acceptance and further reporting (group discussion with male, Huong Lung, Cam Khe).

4.5. Project sustainability

It's not easy to assess the sustainability of the project activities as the duration of project implementation is not so long and impacts are still limited. In most of the areas, people appreciated that if there were not Plan's support, GDD would be still implemented by local government but it would be in slower progress and its coverage is more limited.

However, the GDD project's results in combination with the impact of the participatory approach of Plan's project to some extent have made change in awareness and working manner of local government officials, in the way they mobilise people's participation in decision making. This is a real factor to contribute to the project's sustainability.

The GDD project has neither virtually introduced a successful model nor created a GDD movement in the local areas.

An issue the local government staffs shared is that to respect and encourage people's participation, allowance is given by the Plan's project for those who attend meetings. This actually has an initial impact as a motive for people to attend meetings. However, it also results in a bad habit that people will require allowance when attending any meeting and this would make a burden for local authority in future when Plan phasing out. Local government officials will have difficulty in calling people's to attend meeting.

4.6. Project cooperation and management

Cooperation with partners

Selection of appropriate partners is very important to ensure project quality. Each partner has their own advantages and disadvantages.

In fact, some Plan Units have faced difficulties in finding appropriate partners as GDD is considered as a sensitive issue in localities.

The provincial department of internal affairs (DOI): Three PUs like Thai Nguyen, Phu Tho and Quang Ngai have selected DOI as the provincial department of internal affairs as Plan's key partner.

Advantage: this department has some advantages for GDD implementation thanks to its power and functions

- It has a function of GDD implementation. They can make guideline and organisation for GDD implementation; assisting the People's Committee to implement it. Therefore the involvement of the DOI will influence to the policy designing, as DOI can make orientations and policies more democratic. DOI has more information and knowledge on GDD implementation at grassroots level.
- It has in its hands all positions of government officials in the province, districts and communes, so it has more advantage in implementation, coordination and making direction to districts and communes (staffs of DOI, Thai Nguyen).
- As being in charge of training for local government officials, it can easier to convene participants for the trainings, especially from government officials.
- As Grassroots Democracy is still a sensitive issue in many areas, managing the GDD project by DOI will make the lower authorities more secure in the implementation of activities at grassroots rather than if it is taken by Plan (Commune Chairman, Hanh Duc, Nghia Hanh, Quang Ngai).

Limitations::

In general

- In general, DOI is still a bureaucratic body in the local government structure, where top-down approach is strongly in operation due to the nature of organizational and human resources work in the government system. Therefore, its working manner is still dogmatic, where their reports mainly focus on good things and by pass limitations (Plan Quang Ngai).
- It is a department having a lot of works related to the People's Committee therefore it finds more difficult to get the Committee's permission for project implementation than other technical departments (staffs of DOI, Phu Tho).

Poor capacity in training and communication

- Poor capacity in communication results in low pervasive influence (Plan Quang Ngai).
- They lack training skills. Normally they run training in form of document dissemination and thematic reports (Quang Ngai, Phu Tho).

Difficult to approach local people

- Due to its nature as an administrative body, DOI find difficult to approach local people, mainly through local government system.

Resources (human and time)

- Lack of human resources: DOI has quite few staff, while it is too busy with other activities and projects, which constrain them to gain higher quality of training and the training is still formalism. Its staffs have to take plural jobs in one time and are busy with daily multi-tasks. For example, in 2005, the DOI of Thai Nguyen had to organise 7 examinations for civil servant recruitment (6 official and 1 additional recruitments). So its staffs had to devoted most of their time for preparation, organisation of and monitoring those recruitments. According to a leader of Quang Ngai DOI, there are more than 800 decisions out of 1,000 decisions of the People's Committee issued which related to DOI. That is why the DOI is always placed at the same building with the People's Committee. Most of DOIs are coping a challenge in assigning permanent staff to be charged of project work. therefore, the project implementation (from meetings to supervision of and monitoring) has to be integrated into other meetings and activities (Deputy director of the Quang Ngai DOI).
- It is also difficult for permanent staff of DOI to follow up the project from the beginning to the its completion because of staff turnover. For example, person who prepared the project proposal is moved to other section and the project activities are then taken by new person, which affects to the continuation and monitoring of the project (staffs of the Thai Nguyen DOI).

Difficulty in Horizontal cooperation

- It's not easy to make horizontal cooperation with other department, mass organizations of the province. For example, WU, FA, etc. are under supervision of the provincial Party system, therefore DOI can only horizontally cooperate but cannot direct them (Thai Nguyen DOI).

- Normally, if the project is under supervision of the commune People's Committee, then it will be implemented through the People's Committee system. It certainly lacks cooperation with mass organizations in communication activities, weakening the project impacts on larger population. For example, training on GDD for people is conducted by the commune People's Committee only (Phu Tho).

The District People's Committee (DPC): Quang Binh PU chose DPC as its key partner

Advantages:

- As it is close to the commune, it easier to supervise and urge commune than the provincial level. The provincial political school is strong at theory but weak at practice and does not adhere to the administrative system, thus it's difficult in the project implementation.
- DPC has a power to make decisions on some policies within its district, e.g. the process of development planning, etc.
- It is capable and competent in finance thus easy to arrange counterpart fund.
- It has strong voice to the commune authorities and it has a comprehensive supportive apparatus including subordinate departments, mass organizations and technical department of the district.
- It can coordinate project activities within its district.

Limitations:

- It has limited influence to the province level.
- Its staff are also very busy with their daily administrative works. High rate of staff turnover affects to the continuation of the project. For example, in Quang Ninh district of Quang Binh province, 50% of district staffs who are in charged of Plan's project were replaced after the Party Congress at all levels, including most of members of the management board even the head or deputy head. It's really an obstacle for project implementation, especially for GDD project.
- Lack of detailed professional guidance from the district (with respect to GDD implementation) (Commune Chairman of Van Ninh commune, Quang Binh district).

The provincial FA: is the key partner of Quang Tri PU

Advantages:

- It's the big mass organisations with the biggest number of members that has high possibility to approach local people and wide influence.
- It has rich experiences in communication work and training for local people. People feel more freely to open their problems with the FA rather than with government officials (Vice Chairman of the People's Council in Quang tri).

- It has wide network from the province to district, commune, to villages, which enables FA to implement project.

Limitations:

- The FA is the first time working on this project so they don't have much experience. FA had to spend a lot of time to complete project documents (Vice Chairman of the FA in Quang Tri).
- Lack of time. FA staff have to take plural jobs (Vice Chairman of the Quang Tri FA).
- Staff turnover happens all the time. Qualified staff are usually moved to other places, making shortage in human resources (Vice Chairman of the Quang Tri FA).
- Influence of mass organisations to government authorities usually is weak. It's difficult for FA to convene commune staffs to training. Also, there is a gap in relationship between mass organisations and local government authority. A question is what the role of the FA local development is and how it links with other mass organisations? In case if local people share their problems with, is the FA capable to influence to the local authorities for actions? (Quang Tri).
- Lack of cooperation between the DOI and the FA (Vice Chairman of Quang Tri FA). The FA also face challenge in taking lead in cooperation with DOI.

Project design and management

- Plan's Program Units have made significant efforts and initiatives in implementation of the GDD project and made it relevant to local context. Some of them received significant and responsible support from local authorities (such as Thai Nguyen) whereas others faced difficulty in selection of appropriate partners (Quang Tri).
- Due to lack of common understanding some concepts, e.g. participation (Plan Quang Binh), indicators for assessment of participation, etc., the project proposal design lacks outputs and assessment indicators to measure quality of activities. This reduces the effectiveness of the project activities. For example, training is taken place in most of areas but practicaly application-based training evaluation is not introduced so the training courses are still theory-based and lack of guidance on application.
- Even Plan staffs themselves also have poor understanding on GDD and related issues as well as poor experiences as they are young. They face difficulty in developing proposal, guiding and cooperation with partners. Meanwhile guidelines from the Country Office at the starting point is not detailed, lack of orientation thus making localities confused in developing project proposal. In addition to that, pressure of other projects' activities and lack of staff (Quang Ngai) is a big obstacle for Plan Program Units in the project implementation.
- Lack of information sharing between GDD projects among PUs. Even in Quang Tri where many other organisations supported by Finland or Sweden have also

implemented the GDD projects, no official workshop for sharing information and experiences was conducted.

- Rigid financial rules (3 quotations for materials compiling) have constrained promotion of new initiatives, like the case of developing materials for ethnic minority (Staff of Plan Thai Nguyen)

5. Recommendations and solutions

5.1. Advantages, limitations and lessons learnt in the project implementation:

In order to have a comprehensive and more sufficient overview on Grassroots Democracy, foundation to propose recommendations, it is needed further to analysis the advantages and limitations as well as challenges in the GDD implementation process in project areas. Grassroots Democracy is a broad topic and sophisticated issue, which not only relates to local people, but also government mechanism and management from central to local levels. In past time, the development trend of the society is moving towards more democracy thus creating favourable conditions for project activities. However, challenges and difficulties still exist, not only limitations of poor infrastructure but mainly in term of the government's mechanism and policies which do not really create conditions to realise grassroots democracy. .

Advantages:

- In general, local people are more knowledgeable owing to impact of mass media, as radio broadcasting and television are widely popularised.
- Owing to the democratic election mechanism, majority of government officials in some areas, mainly in Quang Tri, is very young (Vinh Chap), who are eager to learn (Vice Chairman of the People's Council, Vinh Chap commune, Quang Tri). In Vinh Chap, the eldest person among 8 people of village heads in the group discussion is 45 years old, and most of them are just working in the first term. They were virtually elected in a ballot by local people.
- In some areas, particularly in Thai Nguyen, the GDD project received great support from the provincial and DPC, DOI. Staff of this department are really concerned on GDD implementation, therefore the project implementation is going .in favourable condition.
- In Plan-supported communes, owing to the positive impacts of projects which already involved active people's participation over years, the implementation of this project become more advantaged (Head of the District Department of Culture and Information, Quang Binh).

Difficulties, challenges

The GDD does not really penetrate into people daily life. It still is formalism and pervasively influenced by "movement" trend. Main reasons are:

People

- have different level awareness of grassroots democracy and low community sense. In many places, people participated in meetings to receive allowance

(Vice Chairman of the People's Council, Vinh Chap commune, Quang Tri; Commune chairman in Quang Ngai).

▪ People lack faith upon government:

- A general observation in most of group discussions is that people lack faith upon local government (Quang Tri, Quang Ngai, Phu Tho, Thai Nguyen). In Quang Tri, the commune invested radio FM, but people unplugged the radio wire as they did not want to listen to (Vice chairman of the People's Council in Vinh Chap commune, Quang Tri)

People do not actively participate because some of their cases are not definitely solved and are not met their expectation, thus. their trust to the government is reduced. However, in practice, many cases are beyond the commune authority to higher level to solve as to district and province (Commune Chairman, Hanh Duc, Nghia Hanh, Quang Ngai)

- Only 20% of total area population attended the meeting between elected delegates with voters, because people did not trust. Only those who have certain responsibilities or who have complaints attended the meeting (Commune Chairman of Van Ninh commune, Quang Binh district). In most of the group discussions, people informed that meetings with voters have least number of local people attended. Local people only know about the voters meetings of the commune, but not other voters from higher level. Only local government officials are informed about it (MGD, Quang Tri). People dislike most the voter meetings because "the delegates only read out 5 - 6 pages saying about commune budget, bank transfer, debt collection, etc., nobody understand anything therefore they do not want to listen to" (Group discussion, Commune chairman, Phu Tho).

- People think that meetings have nothing new and they are not their concerns, so they don't come to the meetings (FF in Cam Lo, Quang Tri).

It's meaningless to attend the meeting or raise opinions. Discussion with local people is very formalism. All issues are prepared in advance in writing and informed to people just only to "pass", people's consultation does not happened (Group discussion, Mr. H, Tho Van, Tam Nong, Phu Tho).

▪ The content is not practical to people's lives

- Most of people are poor and more concerned in their living existence, while the meeting discussion is about resource mobilization. It's really difficult to mobilize people's (Village head in Cam Tuyen commune, Cam Lo, Quang Tri).
- The issues people concern to are not timely informed them. For example, people want to listen to realistic issues such as planning, policy of key projects, seasonal information. In meetings to disseminate laws, only 50% of people attended (Commune Chairman of Van Ninh Commune, Quang Binh district). Regarding selling residential land, people were informed only when land was sold (MGD, Phu Tho; MGD, Quang Ngai)

- People have no opportunity to really express their own opinions: people's ownership right has not yet fulfilled. They have little opportunity to talk to commune officials (MGD, Quang Ngai).
- The GDD itself does not reflect what people expect because its implementation at grassroots does not follow the enacted regulations (GDD).

Officials/Government

- The election mechanism is not really democratic
 - *Election of village heads*: except Quang Tri and Quang Binh that applied direct election of village heads by ballot many years. Other provinces conducted election that is very formalistic. The candidates are recommended by the FF, Election 1 from 2 candidates made up 70-80%, selective election (only one candidate) is 20-30% (Commune People's Council, Phu Tho). In Quang Ngai, village heads are assigned but not elected therefore they are not supported by local people and have poor prestige and sympathy from people. They have great difficulty in building up relationship with people (Plan Quang Ngai).
 - *Election of commune staffs*: a current popular situation is that "cycle election" and "endless working duration" (FGD, Thai Nguyen). It means that Chairman Commune People's Committee will take a position of chairman of the People's Council after his tenure finished and latter on will come back again to be a Commune PC Chairman. The same process is applied to the People's Council. Therefore, in many communes, there virtually have no change in the leaders although after several elections.
- Government staffs at grassroots levels lack motivation to work for community and people. They do not create favourable conditions for people to participate. There is a gap between government staffs and local people that constrains people from contact with the government staffs. As the result, the staffs cannot grasp information (Director of Thai Nguyen DOI). Voter meetings are just formalistic. "Candidates only contact people shortly before election, but after that, none of deputies of People's Council attend people meetings to apprehend people's opinions" (Group discussion, Mr. L, Huong Lung commune, Cam Khe district, Phu Tho). Normally, only commune voter meetings are conducted and people are invited to the meetings with the commune people's council, but not to meetings at district and higher level. Only some of them are individually invited (MGD, Vinh Chap commune, Quang Tri).
- Since village level is operated, the distance between commune staffs and local people seem to be bigger. Activities are gradually given to village staffs (MGD, Huong Lung, Cam Khe, Phu Tho)
- Government's mechanism does not encourage or create opportunity to mobilise people's participation.
 - Authorities at grassroots are not allowed to self-control finance. Even if they want to mobilise people to participate, they cannot because plan was already set by higher level (Vice Chairman of the People's Council in Vinh Chap commune, Quang Tri).

- Insufficient time. Due to short notice from higher level about the project and preparation time is too short to gather people's opinions. Only representatives of people are consulted (Commune Chairman, Thai Nguyen).
 - There is a trend that all commune activities are transferred to village making village head under high pressure from financial management, collection/expenditure, mobilization of people's contribution, to addressing people's issues (marriage, birth registration), while allowance for them is very small. Their 2.5 year tenure is too short to apprehend practical situation and draw lesson. It new tenure comes, when they become experienced.
- It's not simple to realise grassroots democracy, which requires legal basis as well as knowledge and skills. Many staffs considered that "it's difficult to realise GDD into people practical lives" (Official of DOI).
 - Government staffs have been put under higher pressure by people's requests when people actually participated in development process. They have to receive more people and attend more meetings (Commune Chairman of Tu Nghia commune, Nghia My, Quang Ngai).
 - Capacity of local staffs at grassroots does not reach to satisfactory level. They lack skills in communication and grasping people's opinions, e.g. they are not competent to conclude the meeting. Many staffs stutteringly speak in front of people (Provincial staff, Thai Nguyen).

Mass organizations

- Their limitations: they are not fully represented for benefits of their members. Even if policy given to the mass organizations, it only attracted some active members (Phu Tho; Vice chairman, People's Council, Vinh Chap commune, Quang Tri).

Women village meeting
 Women are most afraid of attending women village meeting because they receive no benefit, whilst the meeting aims to mobilizing their contribution (FGD, Quang Ngai).

Poor infrastructure

- Local population are scattered (Group discussion with government officials, heads of residential clusters). Administrative area is large and people living scattered (Phu Tho; Vice chairman, People's Council, Vinh Chap commune, Quang Tri). People are too busy to participate in daily meetings whereas evening meetings are not comfortable for them because of far distance and inconvenient transport. Therefore, government's documents do not fully reach to local people (Vice chairman, People's Council, Vinh Chap commune, Quang Tri).
- Poor facilities and investment in loud speakers system consumes more costs because due to characteristics of area (large ...); not available (staff of mass

organisation; Vice chairman, People's Council of Vinh Chap commune, Quang Tri).

- There's no venue for meetings. In case it is available, it's too small for all people. For example, 5 out of 17 villages have no cultural houses, while some have cultural houses which are too small to those villages with about 200 households (Commune Chairman, Thai Nguyen).

Lessons learnt succeed the implementation of grassroots democracy

- To achieve the project objective of "building a democratic civil society", the implementation of grassroots democracy requires a comprehensive and multi-dimensions. Results depend on efforts of government authorities, local people and social organisations. People can not achieve real ownership without government's support and encourage. The grassroots authorities hardly can fulfil a task of mobilization of people's participation **unless** the bureaucratic and top-down manner of higher levels still exists.
- Promotion of grassroots democracy in the condition when the local government is incapable to meet people's demand is the reason of a germ of "stimulation of sedition" (Plan Quang Ngai). Should strengthening of GDD at local level be combined with building capacity and raising awareness for government officials, especially local staffs at grassroots level.
- Implementation of grassroots democracy is a complicated exercise as if only it exist in isolation from other, it will lose practical meaning and easy to fall into tokenism "talk only, no action". Should it integrate into other programs, but not put it in isolation, and put it in other socio-economic development models in localities.
- For the government authorities, changing their awareness on mobilization of people's participation should go along with management and problem solving capacity (at grassroots level), with more open and democratic vision in decision and policy making process (at district and provincial level).
 - Building people's trust to government authorities. GDD implementation must be translated into practical activities avoiding tokenism (MGD, Vinh Chap, Quang Tri). What was talked must be done. Staffs must be capable to address people's issues. Efforts should be made to meet people's needs, leading to less complains by people "you just talk without doing anything" (commune staff_Quang Tri). Provide essential information that people are concerned. Information must be provided in time, avoid to inform what have been done. Land planning and welfare construction works must be put in publicity (MGD, Tam Nong, Huong Lung, Phu Tho).
 - Improve the election mechanism in grassroots government, i.e. the positions of commune chairman and chairman of the People's Council, apply the democratic election process for village heads. It should start from village level, where people actually vote for those who has prestige. People can directly elect their village heads (MGD, Quang Ngai).

- Improvement of tenure mechanism to village heads. Extent working tenure village heads as long as for commune staff and conduct annually trustful voting. The current tenure of 2.5 years is too short (Interview with women village heads, Quang Tri). Improve the incentive mechanism to village heads: health insurance, allowance, etc.
 - Improve clear assignment of responsibilities between village and commune to avoid a bureaucratic administration of commune once responsibilities are handed over to village, which put commune at the risk of keeping distance from local people. Commune staffs must pay more visits to grassroots people, at least twice a year and attend people meetings to listen to their voice³.
 - The government mechanism itself must be changed too, (at least at district and provincial levels) in planning, allocation of investment budget to enable the commune to mobilize people's participation.
- People should engages grassroots democracy with their practical needs in their daily lives. They should be confident in participation in socio-economic development and strengthening government
 - Social organisations should also be supported to build their capacity and extent of their influence, to become reliable organisations for their own members, a place to collect voices and expectations of different groups of people.
 - As each region, area has diverse characteristics of cultural and socio-economic development, each commune should localized GDD by a separate program based on characteristics and conditions of their commune.

5.2. Improvement of effectiveness of project implementation:

Extent of project's coverage:

- Expanding the GDD project to other communes in the Program Unit area or continuing the implementation in remaining villages of the commune based on lessons learnt and experiences from other communes implemented GDD. It should incorporate improvement of communication training, application of specific models, implementation of advocacy activities and improvement of preparation of project proposal, etc.

Diversity of types of project implementation: while in the past, the project only focussed on (poor and tokenism) discontinuous, impractical training and communication, **project activities in coming time should be further improved in terms of quantity and continuation.** Beside training and communication, **it needs to intensively promote the establishment of demonstration models, advocacy and improvement of participatory approach of all project activities (integration).** Instead of focussing on only one partner such as DOI or FF, now **it should cooperate with more partners, making project activities more diverse,** such as:

³ Group discussion with male in Huong Lung, Cam Khe, Phu Tho, group discussion with male in Vinh Chap, Quang Tri

- Combine various types of implementation to fit different target groups. Conduct training, communication, demonstration models and advocacy, etc.
- Integrate GDD into other activities of other projects and programmes either supported by Plan or government etc.
- Integrate grassroots democracy into mass organisations activities For example, cooperate with the FA to organise contests, forums for farmers for advocacy of agriculture policies, etc.
- Integrate grassroots democracy into policy-making programs of government authorities at all levels, e.g. making policy for village head, improvement of planning process, etc.

Continuation of training on capacity building – improvement of training content and methods

- Continue the grassroots democracy training, as it is a requirement of many government officials and local people⁴; however, it should not conduct training massively, quickly, but should examine lessons learnt before further expansion.
- Should clearly differentiate between training for local people and training for government officials.
- GDD training for government officials must be included training on skills of management and mobilization of people's participation. To ensure training to be close to reality, should integrate needs assessment into identification of themes and objectives of training courses to make it relevant to current context of each area.

More attention should be paid to village staffs because the government is planning to train for commune staffs in coming time, although it is slow progress. Training courses should focus more on practical skills and defining specific output requirements for each course (what they can do after the training).

- Training for local people should combine with education and communication on legal issues such as the Law on Marriage and Family, Land and Civil Code to enable people to “live and work according to the law”⁵
- Improve training course design, training needs assessment should be taken in advance. Develop standard training courses with standard training programs and materials.
- Training method for people should combine with suitable communication forms. For example, combine the grassroots democracy training with legal forum, competition festivals, contests, repeated broadcasting in the commune and village loud speakers, even in handy loud speakers.
- Expansion of the training to cover not only government officials, staffs of mass organizations but also local people including young people of 13-19 years old (Quang Tri, Quang Ngai)

⁴ Phu Tho, group discussion with men in Vinh Chap, Quang tri, Chairman of the commune People's Committee in Quang Ngai, Chairman of the commune People's Committee, secretary of youth union, volunteer in Hanh Duc, Nghia Hanh, Quang Ngai; Thai Nguyen, etc.)

⁵ Group discussion in Lien Co village, Song Cau town in Thai Nguyen, interview with village heads of Cam Tuyen commune, Cam Lo, Quang Tri.

- Improve the training content. In addition to knowledge, practice skills should also be paid attention. At the end of the training, discussion on action plan should be conducted.
- Training method. Should apply participatory method, using case study exercises, questions for discussion, etc. Should use open-ended questions, games, and increase time for questions and answers, etc⁶.
- Increase duration of training courses but should not exceed 3 day training for village staffs and 5 day training for commune staffs.
- Trainers. It should conduct TOT for local trainers who will facilitate trainings in latter on when project does no longer exist. Training for local people: should use local government staffs, select the capable participants from training courses for commune and village staffs and intensify training and communication skills⁷. Cooperating with the district training centre (Chairman of Commune People's Committee, Phu Tho) or communicators of the Communist Party, judicial staffs and FA (Quang Tri) to build up local trainer teams on GDD to ensure that regular training is conducted.
- Evaluation of training course is critically important. Should develop some criteria and discuss with trainees to improve training quality.
- Organization. Should be flexible and responsive to practice. Training for commune staffs should not be conducted in the provincial cities. Many people suggest to conduct residential area-based training for local people as village-based training is too big. *Number of participants* should be limited at 20-30 people for training for government officials and 40-50 people for training for local people. Allowance should be given to local people who attends the training to encourage their participation.

Improvement of communication quality and more attention paid to ethnic minorities:

- IEC materials
 - Continue to distribute and disseminate grassroots democracy materials to households. Develop materials for ethnic people: in ethnic languages with illustration picture appropriately to their culture and customs
 - Compile materials for ethnic people, which should be appropriate, big letters with illustration pictures.
- Provide more communication means, especially loud speakers for village cultural houses. Integrate grassroots democracy communication into commune and mass organizations activities..Integrate grassroots democracy communication into village ctivities such as health club, agricultural extension club⁸; meetings of mass organizations⁹. Establish legal clubs in villages¹⁰
- Improve the content and forms of panels, poster to be more attractive and vivide.

⁶ Chairman of the father's front, Phu Tho, Vice chairman of the People's Committee, People's Council of Vinh Chap commune, Quang Tri

⁷ Group discussion with local people and staffs_(Phu Tho)

⁸ Father's front in Cam Lo, Quang Tri

⁹ Commune chairman, secretary of youth union, volunteer in Hanh Duc, Nghia Hanh, Quang Ngai

¹⁰ Group discussion with village heads in Vinh Chap, Quang Tri; Thai Nguyen

- Build up bookshelves with legal reference in the areas where it is not available

- *Improvement of the competition festivals*
 - Should organize at village level to mobilize more participation
 - Content: rich and integrated into activities of mass organizations. Hand it over to mass organizations, expand people's participation, more attention should be given to women and young people.
 - Forms: combine with other cultural activities such as poem, chantey, games with gifts to make the competition festivals more comfortable and attractive.

- Organization: improve facilitation skills for facilitators, questions should not be too rigid and could be accidental to enable participants to show their knowledge, should not be too stick to defined answers. Should small awards to be given to encourage and promote participants (Village head, Phu Tho). Competition festivals should be organized in residential areas (village) to expand participation coverage.
- Produce grassroots democracy-related programs to be broadcasted on provincial radio and television station to introduce effective models and good practices, etc. in villages and communes.
- Should launch "emulation" movements to inform grassroots democracy implementation between hamlets in village, villages in commune, communes and between districts, etc¹¹.

Strengthening and continuation of project sustainability - Development and improvement of the grassroots democracy models

- To ensure GDD implementation to be close to reality and to avoid the tokenism, *development of grassroots democracy models should be the first prioritized*. By applying grassroots democracy approach, expansion of people's participation, promoting accountability of government authority through specific management methods will help to make the project implementation more practical and persuasive realistic. This will bring many benefits:
 - sensitive issue in the locality that "grassroots democracy" has difficulty in seeking partner and poor implementation performance can be avoided;
 - risk of having knowledge and awareness but no action that will reduce people's trust is avoided;
 - both local people and government staffs are able to participate and gain more sufficient experience in the grassroots democracy implementation through which their knowledge, awareness and practical capacity will be improved.
 - Combine with improving knowledge and capacity for people and local officials through grassroots democracy training and project management.
 - People. Promote community spirit by participating in planning and monitoring, etc.

¹¹ Head of a division of the provincial department of internal affairs, Thai Nguyen

- Change awareness toward women and children through specific activities and their own participation
- Establish good model of participatory community management so that officials can learn and apply skills of management and mobilization of local people as well as improvement of their working style
- Each locality should select the appropriate model. Combine grassroots democracy with other specific models and programs of the government or on-going projects in the localities, e.g. model of “building cultural village”, “building a child-friendly environment”, develop village codes and regulations with people’s participation, etc. or programs of “hunger elimination and poverty reduction”, “good farmers in livelihood development”, etc., hobby club, legal assistance club, etc. Should integrate with livelihood and income generation and poverty reduction models. Make grassroots democracy models more practical and attractive.
- Plan can develop new models such as “Community development fund” or “infrastructure construction fund”, etc. Participation of local people, especially of women, children and poor people in planning and resource mobilization must be appreciated. Should pay attention to the mechanism of people’s participation in beneficiary selection, contribution, supervision and planning. It should also combine with improvement of management mechanism of local government in information provision, transparency of budget, accountability of government officials in implementation process.
- To ensure successful implementation of the models, should develop outputs and have clear and detailed participatory process, emphasized on people’s participation in stages of beneficiary identification, contribution, monitoring. Implementation staffs and people both must be trained on the process, especially who directly implementation. For example, with respect to application of grassroots democracy into development of village convention and regulations, the commune justice staffs and village heads must apprehend the process of participatory development of village convention and regulations which includes many stages and people will participate in what stages, and they also must have community consultation skills with different groups (at least including children, women, youth, etc.)
- Strengthen exchanging relations and sharing information and experience on implementation and design of models between communes in province, between provinces, and with partner institutions, mass organizations.
- Each province should focus on developing pilot demonstration model to be scaled up after drawing lessons learnt. However, during the implementation, it should consider specific characteristics of locality for suitable design and avoiding imitating.

Enhancement of impacts and change – policy advocacy and increase of mass and social organisations

- *Comprehensive influence: to policy-makers at provincial, district and local levels*
Continue create opportunity for policy makers to learn practical experiences by field visit, project monitoring and experience sharing to improve policy and facilitate local authorities in mobilization of people’s participation.

Strengthening advocacy

- Adding advocacy activities such as the program of “Forum of farmers for agricultural policy advocacy to government authorities (at commune, district and province level) (FA should be key partner). Forum will be a space, where for farmers can express their difficulties, obstacles and expectations to government authorities at all levels. Plan will provide counselling and technical assistance. Or it can support government authorities to develop and finalize government’s policies (e.g. policy for village heads), or conduct counselling, participatory assessment of existing government’s policies, socio-economic plans, health insurance policy for children, etc.
- Locality with favourable conditions and support of government authorities at all levels should be selected for implementation of advocacy policies as the basis for expansion to other areas. For example, in Thai Nguyen, it should take advantage of support of the Provincial department of internal affairs to promote advocacy, strengthen research/studies and dissemination workshop of experience sharing with other provinces.
- *Integrate grassroots democracy into other projects and mass organisations activities*

Integrate communication on GDD with other programs and activities of Plan’s project in local areas, such as the programs of gender equity, prevention of domestic violence, child abuse prevention, microfinance, infrastructure construction for the village, commune, etc.

The project can support mass organisation to develop grassroots democracy programs suitable to activities of each organization (FA, WU and YU, etc.)

- *Support infrastructure:* timely provide communication facilities to reach people including loud speakers, venue for meetings to people and facilitate such that people will be informed and discussed. Support to set up legal bookshelves for people¹².

Improvement of approach to promote people’s participation in implementation of Plan’s project in general and GDD project in particular: it is integrated the GDD project with other Plan’s projects in the locality ***in forms of improvement of types of participation in Plan-supported project activities in local areas in the grassroots participation of GDD***, as in fact GDD means participation in terms of people know, people discuss, people inspect. Conduct communication and training for people on types of participation in project through re-disseminate the whole GDD or only spirit of the GDD. Improve women’s and children’s participation through appropriate means and activities in order to encourage their participation.

Diversification and increase of cooperation effectiveness with partners:

- Local partners should be diverse and suitable to local context
- Partners are selected depending on specific project activities
- Flexible in partner selection and relevant to context-based.

¹² Group discussion, Mr. T, Lien Co village, Song Cau town, Thai Nguyen

Group discussion with local people in Phu Tho, group discussion with women in Quang Ngai and with men in Quang Tri

Strengthen the participation in GDD project, especially people's participation

- Involve more people into the GDD Project in different approaches of training, communication and demonstration model and focusing more on women and children. Seeking for appropriate form and models that enable women and children to participate in. For example, integrate the GDD project with programs of gender equality, prevention of domestic violence, building a child-friendly environment, etc.
- Improve the process of reporting of project-related information to local people
 - Publicize project activities to all local people and should not be limited to beneficiaries
 - Regularly provide clear, sufficient and accurate information on what people's benefits and what they should contribute¹³
 - Publicize selection criteria and list of beneficiaries to the whole community to be known and provide inputs. Improve the regulation on time cycle for beneficiary. Improve the process of beneficiary selection toward more regular turnover and should not be fixed during many years. It is a comment by many people in the group discussions and commune staffs (the People's Council, Commune chairman) in Quang Ngai, Quang Tri and Phu Tho.
 - More attention to be drawn to publicly liquidate expenditure of construction and project activities, especially people's contribution in appropriate means such as displaying in public areas and informing by loud speakers.
- Provide training to local people on project implementation process to enable them to actively participate in
- Promote community-based project activities to attract more participation and promote community spirit.
- Promote the involvement of people in execution of infrastructure projects, for example, allowing manual labour of the village/commune to work for infrastructure construction in local areas as really in the areas people are in need of jobs, they are poor and desire of income improvement by involving in construction¹⁴.
- Strengthen monitoring of beneficiaries in project activities
 - Improve the selection process of the monitoring board towards people are really allowed to select their representatives and increase people's participation in non-people-contributed constructions in order to enhance the transparency.
 - Provide training on monitoring skills to local people, especially for monitoring skill of infrastructure constructions. Involve more local people in the supervision board and provide them knowledge and skills to avoid token participation.

¹⁴ Group discussion with male in Vinh Chap, Quang Tri

- Create feedback channel on people's monitoring (such as giving feedback in monitoring meetings, suggestion box, etc)
- Combine the publicizing of project information to monitoring activities, such as information on beneficiary, contribution, liquidation, etc. as an important basis for actual monitoring of local people..

Improvement of project proposal and management:

- *The Country Office should*
 - give clearer direction to the GDD project in terms of focusing more on communication, demonstration models or advocacy.
 - Develop concepts and approach on participation and make available specific criteria: more focusing on people's concerns such as beneficiary identification, contribution, monitoring, etc.
 - Take a lead in cooperation, information and experience sharing between Program Units, developing standard training courses, etc.
- Improve the process of project proposal development in Program Units:
 - Should be based on actual survey and situation
 - Topics should be flexible and appropriate to avoid sensitive issues of the locality and should be consistent with specific models.
 - Define specific outputs. Indicators for quality assessment of activities should be available. Logframe can be used for developing project proposal to ensure the link between objectives, outputs and activities of the project
- Strengthen the cooperation and sharing between Program Units on:
 - Select issues and develop proposal
 - Select and collaborate with local partners
 - Success and failure of project activities
 - How to select and implement demonstration models
 - Develop standard training courses
- Financial management mechanism should be flexible and more focus on output assessment to empower the Program Units
- GDD is a difficult issue, relating to many aspects and partners, hence for a successful implementation, the project office should assign fulltime staff to monitor regularly and for long time, should have long time enough for him to learn lessons and experiences and developing proposals close to practice.
- Improve the monitoring of project management to ensure the fulfilment of expected objectives. PU's Project officers should have a close monitoring on project activities and make appropriate guidance when needed.

Diversification and improvement of cooperation effectiveness with partners:

- Selection of appropriate partner is the most important action in ensuring quality of the project activities. But actually, hardly ever available any partner qualified enough to implement effectively all those activities. Each partner should be selected for one type of activity. The Provincial DOI is more appropriate to

“advocacy” than conducting training and communication, especially than training for local people. **Hence, each activity should be conducted by proper partner. For example, the development of village code and regulation should be in cooperation with the Provincial Department of Justice rather than the provincial department of internal affairs. Conducting communication and organising contests should be in charge by mass organisation such as FA, WU and YU, etc. Plan Program Units will play a role of coordination of activities and partners.**

- *Each partner should be selected for some of activities. For example:*

For the Provincial DOI

- Coordinate advocacy activities: survey, research, forum, workshop on GDD, models, policy (can help to develop policies of the province), conduct assessment of project’s impacts, forum on models of GDD implementation, etc.
- For training: can combine GDD-thematic report and enhancement of government authority and local officials: make clear requirements on training courses for government officials
- Types: workshop, etc. and advising on specific tasks.

For FA

- Collaborate to implement communication activities: organising contests and forums for farmers to talk to policy makers at all levels, etc.
- Combine GDD with models of livelihoods, poverty reduction, good farmers, etc.

For the DPC

- Can be assigned for project implementation but in need of being supported to establish cooperation network with the province
- Consider to select appropriate departments
- Should take advantage of having certain right on decision some policies for advocacy work, collaborate with other district departments
- Work with other existing projects in the district

For the Commune People’s Committee

- Can become project partners but should be provided assistance on technical issues and capacity building for commune and village officials
- Should cooperate with the district and province

- *Plan’s Program Units should be proactive in working with partners.* One of the popular limitations of the political system in Vietnam is the poor cooperation between institutions, especially among those on the same level such as provincial departments and organisations. As the GDD program requires the participation of many partners from different systems such as government authorities (the People’s Committee), representatives of local people (the People’s Council), mass organisations, professional department (the

department of internal affairs), etc. so it's an obstacle for one partner to be in charge of the whole project. It also prevents the project from implementation and expansion of the project coverage and impacts.

- Implementation methods can be flexible through turn key transferring project or consultant contract, etc.

After more than one year of implementation, the GDD project has made certain impacts to the localities, refreshed GDD implementation activities in some areas which have been "cooled off" after 6 years of the movement. Local people and government staffs have opportunity to apprehend the GDD content. Both local people and government staffs understand more about their functions and power in community development. Particularly, impacts of the Plan's project in community have changed a practice of local people's participation in the socio-economic development. In coming time, by focusing on development of GDD demonstration models together with more efficient communication and building capacity for government, officials and local people, hopefully Plan GDD project will be improved, more realistic and sustainable.