

“Civil Society and Grassroots Participation” NORAD funded Project



Final Evaluation report

Hanoi – June/2007

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ACRONYMS & ABBREVIATIONS

GDD	Grassroots Democracy Decree
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
VDP	Village Development Plan
NA	National Assembly
IEC	Information, Education and Communication
PPC	Provincial People Community
WTO	World Trade Organization
PU	Project Unit
CO	Country office
INGO	International Non Government Organization
LNGO	Local Non Government Organization
DPI	Department of Planning and Investment

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Executive Summary

The report will reflect GDD project's implementation results and the civil society consolidation in Plan's targeted regions sponsored by NORAD, which has been implemented since the end of 2003. The program has been implemented in Plan's eight targeted provinces. However, the report has been based on study visit's result in 4 provinces including Phu Tho, Thai Nguyen, Quang Binh, Quang Tri.

Plan's project "Increase people's participation and Civil Society" aims to assist Vietnam in developing a civil society, expanding people's participation in decision-making process. This has been stated in the project proposal "Plan considers the participation right in development planning and implementation as an important right to further implement other rights such as right to receive healthcare, education, and other social services. The enforcement of Decrees 79 and 88 are important factors to enhance, protect participation right, especially with the poor, in the "**development and implementation of development plan**".

The Project's activities were designed based on actual needs of people, community and local authority; therefore they attracted active participation of local authorities. The project addressed limitation of previous projects at grassroots level, which did not directly reached local people and not really contribute to promotion of people's participation. PUs has implemented the project creatively making used of government policies and their good relationship with locality and community.

The project initially provided grassroots democracy decree information to the local people and grassroots staffs via dissemination forms appropriate and easy to people to understand.

Although 3-year duration is not much to the program, which is related to not a simple issue - Grassroots democracy and civil society, it is certain that the project has contributed to changes in people's participation in the local socio-economic development recently. Most importantly, people and local staffs have been aware of the Grassroots democracy's impacts on the people's participation in the socio-economic development and local poverty alleviation and hunger elimination.

Local people are more enthusiastic, open to development projects, programs' participation. In the Plan project areas, people actively participate in community development, as they clearly understand their responsibilities as well as interests through GDD decree. They also have opportunity to exercise grassroots democracy in practice via the NORAD project and other Plan community project activities. Participation of women and children has been positively changed. They are more confident and open to community's activities. People better demonstrated their self-control in development programs; they actively take part in the demand assessment and monitoring on community's welfare works.

Local Government officers found motivation to increase local people's participation in community development as a lever to mobilize resources and increase local socio-economic development and governance quality. Grassroots staffs become more responsible and transparent which demonstrated in the way of information provision to people, grasp of people's opinion and their responses to people's requirements become more responsive, making significant change in their working manner.

In addition to this, with the meaningful and active contribution from Plan intervention project, local economic development has been improved in terms of poverty reduction, health care, education, and childcare. By involvement of people to project activities, local people and authorities at different levels become more confident. They recognized the important role of grassroots democracy development process.

However, the project scope is still limited to address local needs and mainly narrowed at the Plan's project supported areas. Even in Plan supported area, the GDD project has not covered all yet, focusing just only in a number of pilot villages. Also, due to time and technical inputs restriction as well as limitation of GDD dissemination, local people staffs' understanding on grassroots democracy is not really thorough. There were some models, which initially apply GDD, therefore, lessons learned could not draw so far. Thus, seeking for local GDD models is needed to continue.

In general, there is a big potential to continue the grassroots participation project, as it is also the task of local authorities, associations, and organization currently. However, to improve the project sustainability, more attention should be paid to the development of commune communicator team as well as integration of these activities into other Plan and government projects, programs in the area.

However, to evaluate precisely and specifically the impacts of the NORAD project on the people's participation is not easy work and not simple. Over the past few years, along side with the impacts of NORAD project and other Plan supported, other impacts of government's policy environment, and roles of local authorities and associations have been made to increase democracy and responsiveness at grassroots level, bringing about positive changes in the localities. Issued Decrees 79 and 88 by government are clear evidences for the above mentioned statement. Although Plan's program is not the first revolution in this area, it can contribute in making democracy process faster, more profound and practical via implementation of various activities such as increase of people's awareness on grassroots democracy and opportunity creation for people. However, the result is still at modest level compared to local needs in promoting grassroots democracy. Implementation of Grassroots democracy and enhancement of civil society are big and complicated issues to Vietnam, which require significant change in people's awareness and actions in long term and solid process.

Besides, the PUs program design is not solid to the project logical framework. Base line information of localities of the grassroots democracy and civil society was not concrete, clear, or, in other words, there has been no clear picture before the NORAD project implementation. This factor constrained the evaluation to measure the project impacts

and changes in grassroots democracy process as well as participation of local people. NORAD project design covered only main features and lacked concrete targets and outputs requirements that constrained the evaluation work and comparison. However, findings from evaluation shown that activities implemented after Mid-Term Review were varied and diversified among PUs with better objective features.

This is the final evaluation report of the NORAD project, thus, we will try to identify PUs' in program implementation and as well as project's impact on local people and local authorities in promotion of grassroots democracy and people's participation. In fact, the GDD project is implemented in the areas that Plan supported for many years, impact of other Plan supported projects, therefore, on people's participation should not be excluded. This report also examines achievements and constraints, lessons learnt as well as recommendations to improve the quality and effectiveness of the GDD project in particular, and of Plan development projects, in general in the coming time.

Summary of recommendations

The below is a summary of recommendations towards the GDD implementations, which specifically addresses in the Recommendation part and Conclusion of the report.

Improve quality of IEC

1. Expand the scope and target people involved in communication

Expand the GDD project scope to non-supported areas, and to those who have not been involved yet in the IEC activities. Continue approaches implemented in the GDD project, where priority is given to broader communication to local people, whereas special attention should be paid to women, adolescents, ethnic minority people and other vulnerable groups in community. Continue to improve communication modes such as training, GDD competition festival appropriate to people. Currently, the government Ordinance No 34 on Grassroots democracy has been issued and takes effect since 1/7/07. In the coming time, Plan is encouraged to disseminate this Ordinance in Plan supported areas under different forms like workshop, training workshop on new points of the Ordinance, opportunities as well as challenges in the implementation of grassroots democracy after enforcement of the Ordinance.

2. Continue communication on grassroots democracy on regular basis, combining the Ordinance on Grassroots democracy (No 34, which is effected since 01/07/2007) with other legal documents and related issues such as child protection, environmental protection, gender, etc. or integrating in other relevant issues of mass organizations (Women's association, Youth's Union, and Farmer's association etc.)

3. *Implement simultaneously different modes/forms of communication.* Each communication form has both advantages and disadvantages. Therefore, combination of various modes of communication like training, GDD competition festival, leaflets, and panels will bring about good result. For example, leaflets can be distributed after the training, or before the GDD competition festival. It will help to gain better results rather than distribution of leaflet in isolation.

4. Take into account the technical support and methods of implementation. This is a relatively new approach to most of localities especially at commune and village levels. Therefore, Plan's support by providing professional consultants, expert network is strongly needed. Also, Plan should pay attention to the development of core communicators group in localities, increase of their knowledge and especially skills and methods so that they can continue regular and broaden communication on grassroots democracy to local people.

5. Incorporate communication with a specific model

To make communication on grassroots democracy more attractive and richer, different topics should be introduced and incorporated in other programs and projects being implemented in the localities, for instance, development of village regulation should be combined with the grassroots democracy dissemination to create tight linkage between the GDD and the development and implementation of village the regulation.

6. Provide support for local authorities and mass organizations with capacity in people mobilization.

Support for capacity building for commune and village staffs should be paid attention to combination of grassroots democracy and people's participation mobilization skills such as presentation, meeting organization and negotiation skills etc. and some basic knowledge on development (participation, gender and child rights etc.).

Guide local authorities and local people how to apply the participatory approach in the community development process by applying CMP (Community Management Project)¹ into commune Socio-economic development plan.

7. Review, share experience in project implementation within a PU among PUs

Experiences indicated where the review and exchange of experiences are paid attention to, the grassroots democracy programme will gain more effective outcomes. Regular review of and experiences from the project implementation should be done better implementation in the future. If the review is undertaken well, it will bring multiple outcomes. In addition to experiences and lessons learnt for the project's implementation in the future, the review also serves as a forum to advocate local authorities and where both Plan and partners can share, exchange objectives and common interests better and smoother implementation of the project.

Increase effectiveness in investment in infrastructure and information equipment.

Synchronous and relevant investment of locality Information infrastructure plays an important role in the mobilization of people's participation, which helps to provide better quality of information and improve quality of people's participation. Therefore, continuation of supporting media equipment and information system is necessary. However, the investment must be synchronous and comprehensive to ensure

¹ Staff_Plan_ Phu Tho

effectiveness, e.g. investment in media equipment with building common house. In this connection, Plan may consider to support in building common house for those villages, which are allocated in remote areas with difficult situation with media equipment.

Continue support in investment in village book-shelves. In addition to legal books, books on agricultural techniques should also be provided as they are critically necessary to the rural areas².

Design and develop good models of people's participation

1. *Continue to develop and multiply models of people participation.* In fact, there is a bit difficult to modernise people's participation to all areas as each locality has its own social, economic and cultural features. Models of grassroots democracy application are differed from various areas, which enable to create specific approaches and different topics to meet the actual situation to mobilise people's participation.

To successfully apply models, the following factors should be taken into consideration:

2. *Provide technical and methodological supports in initial procedures* play an important role to ensure that objectives and efficiency of the models are met. External support is the one of the key factors that brings about the programme success.

3. *Integrate grassroots democracy into existing Plan supported areas* has a critical meaning in improvement of people's participation as well as improvement of sustainability of the grassroots democracy program and other Plan supported projects in community.

4. *Build and maintain activities of common house* present a relatively practical model, which can meet the demand of people's participation. In the mean time, it can serve as a good mean to improve the people's participation in the community.

5. *Seek for opportunities, especially new State's policies to improve policy implementation at grassroots level* is a good condition to facilitate people's participation in policymaking to achieve effective, direct influence to the local authority.

6. *Organize forum to review and discuss models with lessons learnt* as well as organize study tours and exchange visits to learn each other models in application participatory model.

Improve the project management

1. Improve the design of the project in term of integration grassroots democracy into other Plan supporting projects and other programs are being implemented in the community, aiming to improve community's participation in Plan projects and State's

² Phú Bình- District, Hamlet's leader_Luyen, Binh_PVP Le Thuy

programs. At the same time, through the grassroots democracy project, promote people's participation in the State's policing process by enabling them to participate in forums, researches, etc., from commune to provincial levels, from the policy making to implementation and impact assessment stages.

2. Provide knowledge and skills on grassroots democracy, policy advocacy for PU staff, who is responsible for the Grassroots participation project; support them to enrich knowledge and experiences through information exchange, lessons learnt, training courses or workshops.
4. Improve and reduce the financial payment procedures for the project activities.
5. Plan should have longer-term plan so that the commune can be proactive in development of its plan for mobilization of people's participation.

1. Background

Publicity and transparency and people's participation community development plan as well as budget planning are critical factors to increase effective provision of public services as well as economic growth, where all citizens can benefit from.

The importance of improving people's participation and enhancing transparency in economic development planning is recognized by the Government of Vietnam. It is included in the 5 year SEDP -Strategy for Socio-Economic Development (2001-2010), as well as in the Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy in 2002. This is the subject of a number of government decisions and decrees, most notably Decree 29 (May 11, 1998) and later on Decree 79 (of July 7, 2003) on the implementation of the grassroots democracy in the communes. In particular, Decree 79, which replaces Decree 29, provides more detailed guidance on people's rights to directly participate decision-making process. Along side with the Decree No79, 2003, the government enacted Decree No 88/ ND-CP on organization and management of associations, which laid a floor for development of civil society in Vietnam.

Strengthening people's participation and building civil society at the grassroots level by increasing the transparency and accountability of public institutions and decision-making processes is a commitment of Plan Vietnam. Plan Vietnam received a grant from Norway Development Agency - NORAD to contribute its part in this process (started from Oct. 04) with the committed grant income of \$363,510 (total GAD expenditure \$ 403,900).

Project objectives

Long term: to **strengthen grassroots democracy and civil society in the country**, particularly 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.

Short term

- 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

In order to assess to what extent the NORAD project has achieved in realization of grassroots participation in the past one and half year, last year Plan in Vietnam have conducted Mid term evaluation (MTR) of the project implementation. A numbers of findings and recommendations were raised by independent consultants. Follow up the recommendations, a 2nd strategic considerations to realize grassroots participation has been issued by Plan CO and distributed to all PUs. By the end of 2007, the project will be terminated according to designed plan. Lessons learnt as well as experiences in mobilisation of people's participation will be examined in this report. Therefore, a comprehensive evaluation is important to help Plan to access the achievements, lessons learnt as well as to implement coming projects, which will have appropriate design, relevant actions for more effectiveness and sustainability in the coming time.

1.1. Vietnam's renovation policy and its impacts

The Decrees 79 and 88

In 1988, Vietnam has developed the legal framework to extend local people's direct participation in local authorities. This decree has created new scheme that people have the right to be informed on authorities' activities that impact them; right to discuss and contribute to the development of several policies; right to participate in local development activities and to monitor authorities' activities. Beside the decree on grassroots democracy, several relevant legal documents have been issued over the past 10 years to improve governance, including the Public administration reform program, a decentralized state budget law, new Law on complaints and denounce of citizen, and especially, for the first time ever, the Ordinance on anti-corruption. Viet Nam also reforms elected bodies and electoral systems, reforms Departments and Commissions within the Communist Party, and to strengthen the role of mass organizations.

At the same time, in 2003, Decree No 88/2003 NĐ-CP on association management was issued to replace the long-term existing document, No 258/TTg issued in 1957. Compare to the old document, the Decree 88 further specifies the obligations of the associations and the state responsibility in association management. While the Decree on grassroots democracy (29 &79) is considered as a big shift towards people's democracy, decree 88 presents the government's caution in developing civil society in Vietnam. The government is confused in confirming professional association's independent right, whereas the government still administrates associations' operation. It is regulated that overseas Vietnamese are prohibited from joining public associations as their members.

Since last two years, especially after Viet Nam joint the World Trade Organisation (WTO), there have been more discussions on Vietnam's PAR towards democracy promotion, responsibility and transparency improvement.

To further promote grassroots democracy, a number of discussions on upgrading legality of Decree on grassroots democracy to Ordinance have been taken placed. In January 2007, standing National Assembly discussed for approval of the Ordinance on grassroots democracy. The draft Ordinance on democracy implementation in commune, ward, town consists of new regulations: more publicity on land planning, inhabitancy and resettlement; clearer defining responsibility and functions of individual staffs at commune level and people's roles in monitoring activities of commune authorities, including vote of confidence and procedures to grasp people's feedbacks and opinions, etc., and the implementation process of works, projects locally invested by higher government level. The Ordinance on grassroots democracy was approved and was enforced on July 1, 2007. Legally, the Ordinance on Grassroots Democracy has higher legal effect than Grassroots Democracy Decree (GDD) as the Ordinance was approved by the National Assembly Standing Committee, while the GDD was approved by the Government. Regarding to information publicity, the Ordinance focuses more on important issues that people are concerned, such as plan for land and inhabitants adjustment and resettlement; responsibilities and functions of individual commune staff; results of the vote of confidence for chairperson of People's Council as well as chairperson and vice chairperson of People's Committee; results from people's feedback etc. These contents can belong to responsibility of commune authority (commune socio-economic development plan, commune budget) or may belong to higher authority (investment projects implemented in the commune area). Before, according to Decree 79, the things people know are responsibility of commune level; detailed issues that people participate in policy making, ranging from preparatory step, approval process and to approval contents that people will be informed later on. However, the Ordinance more specifies concrete forms as well as responsibilities of agencies, individuals in the commune authority system in the implementation of the grassroots democracy. For example, the information publicity or consultation meetings with people, the Ordinance more specifically defines responsibilities of organizations, individuals, Commune People's Committee, Chairperson of People's Committee, head of village etc. In deed, the Ordinance also regulates the "enforcement value" of people's decisions and votes, such as what the authority should do with people's decision (in meetings) and opinions³.

In general, the Ordinance on Grassroots Democracy basically has not addressed limitations of the Decree 79 in its implementation. For example, it does not regulate responsibilities of higher level authorities in monitoring, and evaluating the implementation of grassroots democracy by commune authorities; there is no specific sanction for those (organizations, individuals) who fail to comply with the Ordinance. Also, the Ordinance does not mention resources to implement grassroots democracy like resources for support and improvement of information infrastructure system, or for building capacity of staffs that have key role in the ordinance enforcement, like chairperson of People Council, village leader, head of associations etc. It is needed to

³ Report of PPWG 5/2007

have further guidance issued by government and other related bodies with the aim to translate the Ordinance into practice.

The birth of Ordinance on Grassroots Democracy has confirmed the democracy trend in Vietnam, provided a stronger legal tool to foster improvement of transparency in people's participation in Vietnam; created more opportunities for civil organizations, local NGOs and INGOs to participate and promote democracy process in Vietnam broader and deeper.

Resolution No3 of Central Party, section 10, March, 2007 has clearly define Party's leadership role, concrete steps to eliminate overlapping system in terms of organization, from communal, district to central levels, among ministries, sectors and between Party and government. Currently, the Party has leadership over People's Committee and Ministries' Executives, but its responsibility is not clear enough. A question is raised on transparency of Party's budget and whether the Party has to submit this budget to the NA? Whether if this issue does affect to transparency requirement of WTO on budget, including individual income tax, corporation income tax, foreign investment enterprises, grant fund or not etc.?

Examination of responsibilities of People's Council representatives defined in legal articles and documents shown that People Council has really represents for people's rights and power. The Law on Organisation of People's Council and People's Committee defines that the People's Council is the local power agency, which is elected by people and being responsible to them (as a legislative agency). In the mean time the People's Council is under supervision and guidance the NA standing committee for its operation; it is also guided and inspected by the Government (as an executive body- lower body under the government) in implementing state documents defined by the NA Standing Committee. Besides, Deputy's structure in the People Council does not reflect social representation whereas most of Deputies are authority leaders and officials (executive body). The percentage of deputies who are from associations, private sector - who has been called for upholding democracy recently – is really low, making up less than 10% of the total deputies.

The Ministry of Home Affair is undertaking widen discussion and public consultation on the direct vote for chairperson of Commune and Ward People's Committee to ensure more direct democracy and increase operational quality of executive bodies at local level.

The GDD can be much better implemented if there will be more space for civil society, who can particularly take part in monitoring and supervision. Promoting civil society development has significant meaning in the implementation of grassroots democracy as the civil society plays a 'righteous mediator' between people and government. In practice, partnership and linkage between the government and civil society is growing faster via provision of social services for poverty alleviation with better quality.

Nevertheless, the legal framework system for development of civil society has not reached to distinct change yet. After 13 years of drafting (from 1993 - to 2006), the Law on Association is unlikely being approved by NA due to critical debates on fundamental issues such as its targeted group and especially on the issue of putting associations under ministries and sectors' management.

Impacts of GDD and new policy environment⁴

The introduction of Decree 79 has marked a break-thought in direct democracy in Vietnam. In fact, positive changes have been made in term of people's participation, however, there haven't been distinct achievements in all areas including transparency improvement and accountability and participatory approach. Obviously, a range of issues should be addressed and improved in the implementation of grassroots democracy in Vietnam.

Different local government sectors and bodies have not yet met increasing needs of people's participation. Commune still financially depends on the district and province; big service sectors mostly focus at central level; the legislative sector is basically weaker than executive one and it has less contact with voters. So far, the commune's staffs do not fully and clearly perform their accountability to people; voting for confidence and election are naturally at formalism procedures, which lack accountability system.

In many sectors, people lack "sense of confidence in themselves and the authorities". Participation is still at formalism. Their economic participation and participation capacity in decision making that influences their own livelihood is far to achieve, while a key field like use of land and natural resources lacks people's participation and self-control in Vietnam and is mainly controlled over by the state.

Opportunities to response or feedback to authorities by people are limited causing persistent "formalism" in people's participation. Regulations to grasp people's opinions mostly are based on the village leaders and mass organizations, which are responsible for this. It is lacked forum, where people can express and raise opinions and needs. Current approach to grasp people's feedback and opinions like letter - box, letter to the general editor, etc are not sufficient enough to reach policy makers. So far, there is no official system which requires feedback.

Although having a role as a channel where people can express their opinions, the activities of Fatherland's Front and other mass organizations are still limited; they unlikely well handle the tasks defined in the Decree on Grassroots Democracy. One of features can be seen in Vietnam is although mass organizations are parts of the Party and state, they have limited role in decision making compared to other bodies of the state's apparatus. In fact, no association or organization can really play a role as a bridge

⁴ UNDP Viet nam policy dialogue paper 2006/1

between the government and people. In the mean time, formation and development of the civil society, professional associations are still restricted due to unclear legal framework.

Women's voice is not seriously heard in the public policy making process in Vietnam. Women normally play inferior role in decision making authority at grassroots levels, and their participation in the community is restricted, which leads to the common perception that women are not as "extrovert" as men..

The participation of ethnic minority groups in public life is still restricted. It is a common belief that ethnic minority groups have "poor capacity" and "poor knowledge". This belief of higher authorities is a big obstacle against the decentralization and promotion of people's participation in ethnic minority areas. In fact, the ethnic communities have tight and equal relationship; people's participation can be proactive if they have sufficient support. Many ethnic communities have closed and equal relationship; they have good tradition of mutual support and interdependent networks, though, these are not officially recognized.

Besides, grassroots democracy implementation depends much on capacity and willingness of local staff in planning, decision making with participatory approach and to promote people's opinion reference. In regions where local staffs are not willing to do these tasks, the grassroots democracy implementation is not successful. In regions where there are lack of contact between people and staffs, people's participation in state administration is also restricted.

Viet Nam's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) will accelerate reform and exert profound effects on all sectors of the economy. This can increase the risk of instability and turbulence. Grassroots democracy improvement creates a basis for the restriction of potential economic turbulences, helping Vietnam develop faster and further.

1.2. Plan in Vietnam: Country Strategic Plan 2005-2010 and its impacts

Plan in Vietnam's Country Strategic Plan for 2005 -2010 is dedicated to supporting the poor, marginalized and ethnic children of Vietnam. The basic demands of their families and communities will be met and their social participation, beneficiaries' right will be promoted. To achieve the goal, Plan's approach is engaging partners at all levels including social organizations, state, local authorities, etc working together for child – centred programs

One of 7 key issues affecting children in Vietnam is that children and poor women and men are not fully involved in decision making process that affect their live (both in family and wider community). The country strategic plan 2005 -2010 thus addressed the issues by promoting children, poor women and men that can be fully involved in decision making process affect their lives and exercise their right to participate actively in community's activities.

This approach has become a principle for all Plans' community development projects, affecting its specific activities in the project cycle, from its starting, planning stages to monitoring and evaluating stages. In all project's steps, Plan tried to create opportunities for children and community, including men and women to participate.

The coordination with social organizations, local authorities in trying to archive its children community development objectives has been clearly shown. Plan projects are implemented through its local authority partners. Therefore, it is necessary to raise awareness and capacity of local social organizations for the interest and the right of children, and to make local authority and people be closer and to develop the participation environment for people and children.

The GDD project has been also influenced Plan's program principles and approach in working with communities in the respective projects and with other projects it supported and promoted the community's participation including that of children (girls and boys), women, and men to make it more comprehensive and practical.

1.3. Grassroots participation and civil society (GDD) project funded by NORAD

Basing on institutional environment analysis in Vietnam, Plan considers Decrees 79 and 88 as an important foundation for democracy implementation, civil society promotion as they provide detailed and concrete guidelines on people's participation in decision-making. Promoting the implementation of the Decree on grassroots democracy No 79 and Decree 88 aims to ensure people's participation especially the poor in development planning and implementation. Therefore, the GDD project has been supported for implementation of grassroots democracy.

Plan's GDD project aims at creating coordination among the national system, from central to local level i.e. Administrative system from central level (Ministry of Home Affairs) to local level (provincial, communal, hamlet levels), research institutes, teaching organizations, social organizations (both state, such as Fatherland front, Women Union, Farmer Union, Youth Union, and Local Non-government Organization) to promote an equal, democratic civil society.

At national level, the **Ho Chi Minh Political Academy (HCMPA)** is the main policy and training agencies of the Government of Vietnam (GOV). Within government it takes

the lead in training government officials and staff on GDD 79. It has three (3) main training centers located in Hanoi, Hue, and Ho Chi Minh City.

At provincial level, its main partners are: **Provincial People's Committee** (PPC), Departments of Home affairs, who are responsible for the implementation of Decrees 79 and 88. They are expected to support/train district and commune officials.

In the **non-government sector**, the followings are the main potential local cooperation partners: **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. These organizations play an important role in disseminating and mobilizing citizens in the implementation of grassroots democracy

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. 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 can provide training services to NGO staff on participatory approaches to development.

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.

Media agencies will also play an important role in promoting democracy and building civil society. Thus, multi-media dissemination approach will be used in the project.

Out comes

- Meet partner's requirements
- Conduct a local need assessment
- Identify appropriate local partners
- Develop the project orientation and action plans for years.

The **needs assessment** will examine the capacity building needs of both partners and target groups in promotion of grassroots 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**.

The target groups of the project at the local level are the communes in the **eight provinces** where Plan operates – Bac Giang, Ha Nam, Nam Dinh, Phu Tho, Quang Ngai, Quang Tri, Quang Binh and Thai Nguyen, as well as wards in the **city of Ha Noi**. Basing on situation analysis, as well as study and research on grassroots democracy implementation, local people's participation, PUs had developed the annual action plan.

1.4. NORAD project in Plan's regions

In Plan's project areas, the PUs will develop an annual GDD proposal based on the actual situation analysis, and need assessment of people participation promotion. Despite of several differences, in general, the starting conditions of localities at the starting of grassroots democracy project were as follows:

- GDD dissemination had not been wide spread and the progress has been slow, especially in remote, ethnic areas.
- Grassroots democracy regulation had not actually reached people, or in other words, people's awareness on the regulation had been limited.
- Awareness and skills of local staffs at commune, and village level on mobilizing people participation had been restricted.
- It was difficult to seek a suitable participatory model which the local can apply in the practice after the project's stage of raising awareness and skills.
- Plan's project in the community had faced some difficulties in mobilizing people participation.

Objectives of the project at local level

- Raise awareness of Grassroots democracy Degree for people and local staffs
- Improve competence in mobilizing people's participation for commune and village staffs that support to Plan's projects in the community to be better people's participation.
- Develop typical model, which is suitable to the actual local condition for Grassroots democracy implementation.
- Create better conditions to improve participation in terms of both quantity and quality.
- Increase women's participation through awareness raising and gender integration skills.

Local project's activities have been focused on these issues:

- Widely disseminate grassroots participation approach and spirit by different forms to people and local staffs.
- Capacity building commune and village staffs in people participation's mobilization
- Provide information equipments
- Develop good models of people's participation (such as village regulation development, hamlet development, etc.)
- Promote experience and learning lesson's exchange in participation's mobilization among localities.

By the date of evaluation, most of local GDD projects activities have been completed as planed, the rest ones (1-3 activities) will completed in the last 6 months of 2007 (further information can be referred in the table of listed GDD project's activities in each province, part 4.1).

2. The evaluation goals and objectives and outcomes

2.1 Goals

- To highlight the gap between the Decree 79 on Grassroots participation and its' application.
- The report will be used by Plan's Country Office (CO), PUs and local partners for improvement of people's participation at commune level.
- The report will be used to advocate with concerned government agencies and organizations for sharing and making used of the report to realize people participation in planning and decision making at commune level.
- To propose solutions for narrowing the gap between the policy and the reality implementation in the Plan supported areas.

Objectives

- Assess how far **objectives have been achieved**
- Review past interventions supported by Plan within the NORAD project and check if these interventions are **relevant** to the Goals of the project and the Vietnamese context.
- Measure the extent to which the project has been **efficient** in achieving its objectives.
- Assess in how far the project has been **effective** in achieving its objectives in Plan supported communities.
- Measure **impact** of interventions on all related stakeholders, people and children.
- Find the factors that determine the **sustainability** of the project and any lessons learnt.
- To make **recommendations** for improvement and follow – up actions to strengthen **people's and children's participation and civil society in at the commune, district and provincial levels** in the Plan supported areas

2.3 Outcomes:

- Assess the level of progress made *towards achieving Project Goal* based on the current design; (*If the current design lacks proper indicators or objectives, the consultant team will work with the PUs to draft one log frame based on the annual action plans for the evaluated period*).
- Identify the **key strengths** (including successful innovations and promising practices) and **weaknesses** of the program (factors impeding progress);
- Determine the **impact and/or potential impact** of the program (effectiveness);
- Determine whether **resources** have been wisely and appropriately used in trying to **achieve the Project goals and objectives** (efficiency);
- Identify specific areas of **potential sustainability** of benefits;
- Assess the **level and quality of participation** by women, children, and the poor;
- Assess the status of stakeholders (PUs, Province, District, Commune levels) to design, implement, monitor and evaluate activities;
- Assess progress made with regards to Plan Country strategy and Government development policies (Degree 29, Degree79);

- Provide specific and practical recommendations for the next phase.

2.4. Indicators

Due to the GDD project design lacks of indicators, to assess the project properly, the evaluation team discussed with the PUs team to draft indicators based on the annual action plans which reflect the efforts of GDD project in Plan regions. The indicators are following bellow:

- Whether GDD project is suitable to community and local context
- Whether GDD project had reasonable activities, and GDD project was participated by local people actively;
- The awareness of local people and staffs of GDD basic content;
- The interaction between GDD project and other Plan project that show whether the GDD intervention promoted local participation including Plan Project.
- The ownership of local people at finding solution to community problems;
- How local people participate in the Plan project process
- The changes in awareness and attitude of local people to participation ;
- The support of local authorities to GDD project in the Plan regions;
- Whether local authorities give opportunities to people participation / or models
- Transparency of local authorities
- Whether children get benefit from public participation
- Project management including partner cooperation
- Assess the SEDP of Quang tri: Impact on the local capacity building and encouraging public participation including women, ad ethnic.

3. Methodology for the evaluation

As was the case for the Medium Term Review (MTR) conducted last year, the final evaluation was undertaken by participatory approach which focused on creating a learning environment for PUs and partners. It was hoped that through working and participating in the evaluation, partners and field staff would come to understand more clearly and learn from the successes and weaknesses of the Plan GDD project experience how future interventions could be implemented for maximum positive impact.

The evaluation used both quantitative and qualitative analyses of achievements. PUs prepared communities and stakeholders in advance of the field work, making them aware of the evaluation's objectives in order to facilitate their maximum participation.

The qualitative information has been collected through focus group discussions with people and comprehensive interviews with related staffs such as commune, hamlet's staffs, partners of the program, such as District People's Committee (Thai Nguyên, Quang Binh), district Farmer's association, Department of Planning and Investment (Quang Tri), direct staffs and Plan's office management staffs.

Quantitative information has been collected through questionnaires to both people and staffs. However, due to time constraint and resources, the numbers of samples on quantitative information are not sufficient, for people: total 149, on average, there are

about 27-28-people/ 1 province; for staffs: total 84, average about 20-21 people/ 1 province.

Thus, to increase the confidence in evaluation statements, collected information have been double and triple checks among different informant's sources. Besides, the evaluation team has also used secondary documents, which are project's reports, basic information of communes, selected for the survey. Besides, in the field studies various methods can be applied and combined such as questionnaires, interviews, focus group discussion, observations etc.

3.1. Evaluation tools

The evaluation team utilized a range of methods and sources to collect information as indicated below:

- **Key Program Document Review:** Prior to the fieldwork period, the Evaluation Team was provided with the project Design (including proposal), MTR, guidance papers of Plan country, annual reports. The relevant reports were also provided during the Evaluation.
- **Secondary Data Review:** Presentations of commune statistics were made by various staff on the commune authorities during the Evaluation, and brief excerpts from official documents such as the documents were provided during the field work period. Secondary data: Recent relevant researches conducted by research institutes and government bodies at all levels; related information and reports from provincial, district and commune levels.
- **Focus Groups:** To obtain detailed qualitative comments on the success of GDD program and identify areas to improve, including recommendations, focus groups of men, women, children participating in the GDD program were undertaken.
- **Key Informant Interviews:** To gain stakeholder perspective on particular elements of the program. Interviews were conducted with project partners at district and commune level, Pus staffs, PUM, and commune staffs.
- **Unstructured Beneficiary Interviews:** To provide community perspective on activities conducted, where possible and appropriate, interviews with community members were conducted as site visits were undertaken to project activities.
- **Data processing:** Excel is used to synthesize and analyze data

3.2. Field visits and stakeholder involved

- **Field visits:** To verify activities and outputs delivered and their quality, as well as assist in developing detailed recommendations, visits to various activities conducted under the Plan project regions were undertaken. Four provinces, such as Thai Nguyen, Phi though, Quant binh, Quang tri were selected to conduct survey. Two communes for one province can be selected as representatives, such as Cap Dan, Van Luong (Phu Tho); Ban Dat, Nga My (Thai Nguyen), Van Ninh, Mai Thuy (Quang Binh), Cam Nghia, Trung Son (Quang tri).
- **Stake holder involve:** To gain perspective on the GDD project, relevant stake holders were involved in the conducting survey such as local people (women, men, and

children), local authorities at district and commune level, local associations (women union, youth Union, Farmer union,...), PUs staff and manager.

3.3. Scope of information

Evaluation focuses on result and impact of the GDD project to the localities. However, the actual information was influenced by the following factors

- Information is not much due to time conditions and scope of evaluation. However, it still reflects the representative character thanks to cross checking of independent information of the various informants and the combination of qualitative and quantitative information.
- Although PUs made the great efforts to arrange communities and stakeholders in advance of the field work, the informants involved in the evaluation did not always meet the initial evaluation requirement because of conditions of project areas. For example: the participants in the focus group discussion sometimes were not really local people, some of them were village or commune staffs, etc.
- The comparative of quantitative information among provinces was not high because of differences in the time and the ways of project's implementation. The areas, where the project had undertaken for longer time, GDD could be disseminated many times. In those areas the GDD awareness of local people must be better compare to the areas where the project had just implemented for short time. So it was not exact to conclude that the newly implemented areas were not good.

4. Key Findings

Compare to project activities of the MTR period, the project activities in this time (including training, popularization, leaflets, good models, etc.) have been better diversified and more clearly oriented.

4.1. GDD projects in Plan's regions

Phu Tho

Base on assessment of Plan project in Phu Tho, people participation in the project activities is still restricted. Normally, only 1 or 2 people raise the idea in the village meeting. The reason of not actively participating of people, especially women, the poor, children, were partly caused by a lack of awareness and feeling not confident of participating. Combine with the survey report on GDD implementation carried by independent consultant, Phu Tho's PU discussed directly the weakness of participation's promotion with targeted communes. Capacity to mobilize the people participation of commune and village staffs was identified as a main reason. At the same time, Phu Tho PUs consulted targeted communes about local's needs and expectation of participation's promotion to develop an annual GDD proposal.

Objective:

- Improve people awareness and behavior participation and GDD implementation
- Capacity building for people via their understanding on rights and responsibilities
- Capacity building for commune's key staffs, local association representatives
- Provide opportunities to put GDD into the practice by increasing people's participation in Plan's project process

Table 1. GDD project's activities in Phu Tho

N o	Activity	Unit	Quantit y	Number of participan ts	Targeted group
I	<i>Phase 1 (end 2004 - 2005) / 2170</i>				
1	Training on Decree 71 for district, province's staffs by Politics academy's teachers and provincial department of internal affairs' staffs	Course	3	90	Staffs in Tam Nong district, Cam Khe, Phu Ninh
2	Training on Decree 79	Course	3	90	Heads of commune's areas
3	Training on Decree 79 for people (10 communes/3 districts) 5 courses/commune	Course	50	1500	People
4	GDD competition festival	competition festival	10		People and representative of areas in 10 communes, 1 GDD competition festival/commune
5	Leaflets distribution to 10 communes	Piece/commune	600-1000		Number of households in the commune
II	<i>Phase 2 (from 2006 until now) / 2171</i>				
1	TOT in provinces (4 days)	Course	1	32	Commune' leaders' representatives, head of areas in 3 districts
2	Trainings at commune level (average 30 persons/course) 3 days, organized in the commune	Course	7	210	Key staffs, representatives of head of areas
3	Direct grassroots democracy trainings for people of 7 communes	Course	28	840	Selected by people, 4

					courses/commune
4	TOT on gender, gender equality (7 days)	Course	1	30	Commune staffs
5	Trainings on gender, gender equality for 3 districts	Course	30	900	Selected by people, mainly area's staffs
6	Trainings on integrated socioeconomic trainings for people	Course	2	60	People
7	GDD competition festivals in 7 communes.	Competition festivals	7	490	Selected by the area, mainly communicators. Besides, there are heads of areas, people, etc. 7 people/team x 10 teams/commune x 7 communes, GDD competition festival between commune's areas,
8	GDD competition festival on best area's heads	Competition festival	3		Heads of areas, being implemented in the rest 7 areas
9	Provide communication facilities for communes: radios, loudspeakers, magnifiers	Radios and loudspeakers	10		For 10 targeted communes
10	Village regulation	regulation	3		Hamlet's people
11	The project's program is continued until December				

In general, the Phu Tho project selected activities were consistent to the local situation and addressed the weakness of participatory capacity, especially women and children, even in Plan projects. Thus, project activities have been focused on raising GDD awareness not only for hamlet's leaders, who are directly responsible for mobilizing people's participation, but also for local people, through the combination of training and GDD competition festival, have fruitful results. The integration between GDD and gender equality including raising awareness and being competent in project's implementation, to improve women's participation in the development process. This is a focal point of Phu Tho and it will be implemented for the rest duration of the program. In the period 2006 – 2007, as the targeted partner has been moved to the commune, Thus,

GDD community volunteers at the commune has been formed. This can be a factor for maintaining GDD popularization after Plan ends. However, Phu Tho GDD project has mainly focused rather on popularization than developing a good applying model. This has been shown in the fact that only three village regulation development programs have been carried out in three pilot villages.

Thai Nguyen

Phase 1: before NORAD

In Thai Nguyen, GDD project has been carried out early, since 2003; Thai Nguyen PU has cooperated with the local authorities in the implementing GDD pilot programs in 4 communes: Tan Long, Van Han, Minh Lap, Nam Hoa, Dong Hy district. Main program activities were Decree 29 dissemination via trainings for commune, village's staffs, etc. After more than 1 year of implementation, the program review workshop has organized by Thai Nguyen PU to evaluate the program's activities the first phase and find out lesson learnt for the next phase. The program had much success in raising awareness of the responsibilities in GDD implementation for local authorities at all levels and supporting effectively technical assistance of Plan. This is the first time Plan has developed popularization documents such as leaflets, guideline handbook, which is considered as very useful to assist the participants to consolidate the GDD knowledge after training.

The weakness of the phase was that GDD dissemination was not widely and deeply enough, as the trainings have just been provided to staffs of 1-2 communes. The PU had further cooperated with the Provincial Department of Home Affairs to extend the program to the entire 37 communes of Dong Hy and Phu Binh district, including communes that were in or not in Plan's projects. The lesson learnt is that it needs to be added new content of Decree 79, and to support social associations in promotion of 88 Decree implementation. Priority given to second phase is to improve training and popularization in terms of both quantity and quality. IEC documents have been developed with experience and lessons learnt from other mountainous provinces such as Ha Giang, Tay Nguyen, Tay Bac, etc. In which, the issue of people's understanding, discussion and monitoring must be clearly analyzed with vivid image illustration.

Phase 2: GDD project sponsored by NORAD

With GDD project sponsored by NORAD, Thai Nguyen is one of the pioneering provinces in implementing and discovering new approach by combining GDD dissemination and good participatory model to improve the effectiveness of the project. GDD training combined with improving implementation skills such presentation skill, planning skill, negotiation skill, communication skill, etc. and law dissemination: budget law, law on complaints and denounce of citizen etc. The pilot village has been selected to more comprehensively disseminate GDD and relevant regulations on rights and responsibilities. The participatory model was applied in pilot commune to assists people to practice GDD. Phu Binh and Dong Hy PPCs were selected to be GDD project's partners.

Objective

- Community members including men, women, and the poor has involved in the community's activities.
- 80% hamlet's people understand and exercise the participation right.

Output requirements:

- 41 communes, towns of districts Phu Binh and Dong Hy will use GDD training guideline for performing their functions;
- 50% key farmers in eight pilot villages understand Plan's project, Budget law, Law on complaints and denounce of citizen. Members of Village development Board will be provided with necessary skills: negotiation, communication, etc to be able to make village development plan;
- About 3360 people have basic knowledge and skills to apply rights to participate, and can be able to participate in building and monitoring Village development plan;
- All issues related to children will be paid attention, and the solution to these issues will be identified in this plan or others.
- Eight model hamlets will develop their village regulations in which, children's rights will be seen as indicators in accordance with child-centred community models;
- Eight model hamlets use commune radio system to further disseminate grassroots participation approach and spirit in the next 3 years.

Table 2. GDD project's activities in Thai Nguyen

No	Activity	Unit	Quantity	Number of participants	Targeted group
	PLAN_NORAD				
1	Application implementation: participate in hamlet's development plan making process.				8 model hamlets/ 8 communes
2	GDD competition festival on best hamlet's leader – hosted by Department of Internal affairs	competition festival	2		Hamlet's leaders
3	Project review workshop on GDD project implementation from 2003-2005 – hosted by Department of Internal affairs	competition festival	2		District
4	Review workshop for the	GDD	1		Heads of sectors,

	period of 2003-2005 in province, discussion on implementation plan	competition festival			departments, districts, 41 communes
5	Trainings on leadership, negotiation, participation mobilization skills	Course	1	40-50	Key group: several heads of sectors, departments and hamlet's development board, representatives of eight communes
6	Training on Law on budget, Law on complaints and petitions of citizens (about 40 people/course), 3 courses/commune	Course	24	960	Key staffs and people, teachers are district's staffs
7	Training on basic planning, monitoring knowledge, skills	Course	1	40	Key staffs: hamlet's development board: Hamlet's head, BT, veterans, women, key farmers)
8	Training on communication, presentation skills	Course	1	40	hamlet's development board: Hamlet's head, BT, veterans, women, key farmers)
9	Training on local socioeconomic development skills, 1course/commune	Course	8		Hamlet's development board
10	Training on Gender awareness raising	Course			The expected date of training is early May, 1 course/province for the hamlet's staffs
11	Training on Law on budget, Law on complaints and petitions of citizens for communes	Course			The expected date of training is early May, 2 course/commune for people

12	Support practicing in hamlets (hamlet's meeting on basic issue identification and hamlet's development plan making)	Hamlet's plan	8		Eight model hamlets' people, Eight model hamlets' development plan making, subprojects. Subprojects will be chosen for implementation
13	Popularization forms	Set	8		Eight model hamlets
14	Leaflets	1000 pieces	15		Distributed during trainings & for the whole commune, 41 communes in 2 districts, Dong Hy and Phu Binh (?)
15	Popularization campaign	campaign	46		Will be completed in June
16	Village regulation	Village regulation			Not started yet. Expected starting date is early May for all eight hamlets.
17	Quarterly meeting	competition festival			Held by Project's management board. Participants are hamlet's staffs
18	Provide stationeries (clothes, pens, etc) to the hamlet				

One of successes of Thai Nguyen GDD project is its creativeness in implementation. First, this has been shown in the name of the project, i.e. "People's participation promotion", well reflecting the program's native, and avoiding direct mention to grassroots democracy, which is still a sensitive issue and difficult to attract authorities' active support. The second, Thai Nguyen GDD popularization has been very diversified, in which GDD dissemination has been combined with legal dissemination and education (Law on Budget, Law on complaints and petitions of citizens) and the improvement of community participation mobilization capacity (planning, monitoring skills, etc) of Hamlet's development board. Building a participatory model for people applying, practicing GDD can be seen as one the most impressive in Thai Nguyen. Although the program has not completely succeeded (for example, it is needed to have more time to improve capacity for developing village project budget for the Village development board), but the focus on interaction between GDD dissemination and applying

participatory model is an appropriate and effective way. However, the limitation of Thai Nguyen is big difference between localities having and not having invested in people's participation, even between two neighbouring hamlets (such as Bai Phang and Thai Hoa hamlets, Nga My commune). In other words, the extended impact of the project is limited, just in the invested villages only.

Quang Binh

Plan Project has just been implemented in Quang Binh for 3 years. Before this, the local authority had already implemented GDD in Quang Binh. GDD project in Quang Binh has been originated from the leadership training program with the objective to improve people's participation according to Decree 79.

Before submitting the project proposal, a review of GDD implementation has been done by the independent consultants, combination with lessons learnt from Quang Tri projects. Quang Binh's PU has organized workshop to discuss on GDD project proposal in Quang Binh.

Objective:

To improve people's participation in the civil society according to Decree 79 (GDD)

- First year: GDD re-popularization, improve GDD awareness for the local (including people and government staffs)
- Second year: GDD application: people's participation in village regulation development

Table 3. GDD project's activities in Quang Binh

No	Activity	Unit	Quantity	Number of participants	Targeted group
<i>II</i>	<i>First year (from 4/05)</i>				
1	Evaluation workshop	competition festival	1		Steering committee of 2 targeted districts and 6 communes
2	Developing a group of TOT communicators trained by QB Politics academy for commune and hamlet -> and these group will be trainers for 7 courses/6 communes (5x1+2x1)	Course	1	45	Members of hamlet's and commune's Fatherland's Front
3	Training for hamlet's, commune's staffs	Course	7	210	
4	Study tour to Quang Tri	Tour	1	50	5 people in the province+ 8

					people in the district x2 + 6 people in the commune x 6
5	Posters in the commune 30 posters/ 6 communes: attached in the electric pole	poster	30		
6	GDD competition festival on best communicators in grassroots democracy regulation in 6 communes + 1 district	competition festival	7		Mainly Front's members, Youth's association's members and hamlet's party cell
7	QB TV's report on grassroots democracy activities	report	1		
II	<i>Second year: from 1/06-5/07 (ACTIVITIES IMPLEMENTED UP TO DECEMBER 2007 ARE HIGHLIGHTED IN YELLOW COLOR)</i>				
1	Printing leaflets on Decree 79 and distributed to households in 9 communes 500-600 pieces/commune	Piece/commune	500-600	5400 pieces	Households in 9 communes 500-600 pieces/commune
2	Loudspeakers (37 sets/ 9 communes)	set	37		Hamlet's culture houses: 1 set/Hamlet's culture house (most of hamlets have Hamlet's culture house, except two ethnic minor communes Truong Xuan and Truong Son)
3	complaint box in village culture house	box	37		Assist hamlets in culture village development
4	Bulletins at Hamlet's culture house (20	piece	20		Depend on commune's

	pieces)				proposal and culture house's condition
5	Legal bookshelf (87)	shelf	87		For hamlets of 9 communes
6	Assist in village regulation development and adjustment – after the village regulation is approved by district, each household is distributed with one village regulation document // one large size village regulation document is hanged at the Hamlet's culture house (87 village regulations for 87 hamlets of 9 communes) – to be completed soon	village regulation	87		
7	Monthly disseminate on grassroots democracy in the district's radio (40 programs for 2 districts by 12/07)	program	40		

GDD project activities in Quang binh are diversified, suitable to the province's condition. The project has utilized the local advantages, for example, make use of existed community houses in most of commune. The project supplied sufficient information equipments (loudspeakers, radios, legal book shelves, bulletins, complaint box, etc.) to improve quality of people's participation: information dissemination, meetings organization, etc. The village regulation development has been done largely in 87 hamlets of 9 communes. However, by the evaluation date, most village regulation development in the villages has not completed, thus, not many information on this issue is reflected. The common limitation is that the project activities have not been comprehensive; people have not chance to participate much in the project activities such as GDD competition festival and training. The grassroots democracy learning competition festival has been done with the targeted group mainly was members of Fatherland's front and hamlet's staffs. The GDD project in Quang Binh has been focused on the training on trainers (TOT) who are hamlet, commune's staffs and then these staffs will provide training for people. Develop a communicator group to disseminate GDD to people, in fact, is a creative way to increase the program's sustainability. However, to ensure sufficient popularization to people, more monitoring scheme is needed, at least for the initial time.

Quang Tri

Before GDD project, Plan has implemented projects in Quang Tri for eight years. Before Plan's GDD project, GDD issues had been implemented by 2 international organizations in several districts, communes. The Public Administration Reform (PAR) had been implemented by SIDA for ten years, including GDD project in three communes, i.e. Cam Thanh (Cam Lo district), Hai Thuong (Hai Lang district) and Ho Xa (Vinh Linh district). SIDA project has distributed books, leaflets to households, trainings had been provided to key staffs and hamlet's heads.

Finland had also implemented GDD project in several areas of Hai Lang district, (phases 1 and 2), and currently it was being implemented in Dakrong and Cam Lo (phase 3), on training for hamlet's staffs, party cells, providing information equipments, leaflets, poster at the People's committees (people know, people discuss, and people monitor).

The limitation being identified from Finland, Sweden's projects in their MTR are that people were not fully getting access to GDD, the scope was not comprehensive. To solve these restrictions, Plan GDD project has implemented in areas that had not covered in Finland, Sweden's projects. It has focused on GDD disseminating directly to people. Provincial and district Farmer's Union have been selected as its partners. GDD project's duration in Quang Tri is three years, but in fact, each hamlet, commune has carried out for more or less one year, thus it is not easy to assess the project' impact.

One component of GDD project in Quang Tri is the integration of GDD in the community consultation with Socio-economic development plan 2005-2010 (SEDP). The Provincial Department of Planning and Investment was main partner and the Agricultural and Forestry University of Hue was technical advisor. The objective of SEDP community consultation was to increase public participation in plan making process, including gathering opinions and recommendation of communes' leaders, hamlet's leaders, people and children (total above 3,000 people in 18 communes) on the provincial and national 5 year socioeconomic development plan, from 2006 -2010. SEDP has been evaluated as a successful component of Quang Tri, which has made changes the planning approach of provincial government toward more people's participation in planning process. Currently, this component is continuing dissemination of the approved development plan to people.

Objectives:

- Mobilize people and children's participation in local community development activities on the basis of Grassroots democracy regulation.
- Improve awareness of staffs, people and children on GDD, develop typical democracy hamlet model
- Expand people's participation in local socioeconomic development plan.

Table4. GDD project's activities in Quang Tri province

No.	Activities	Unit	Quantit y	Number of particip ant	Targeted participants
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	Phase 1 – May – June 2006 (2005 fiscal year)				
1	Training commune's staff on gender, implemented by Provincial female staff	class	19	419	All agencies, bodies, boards, unions of 6 communes of Cam Lo District, 5 communes of Vinh Linh District, 8 communes of Gio Linh District, 1 class for each commune
2	Training hamlet's staff on gender, implemented by Provincial female staff	class	28	1014	Hamlet's staff of 6 Plan communes of Cam Lo District, 5 communes of Vinh Linh District, 8 communes of Gio Linh District
3	Gender dissemination to local people - implemented by Provincial female staff	Time	8	1436	Both male and female people of Cam Thuy, Vinh Son, and Trung Son commune.
4	Developing happy family club	Club	3	90	Married couples at Cam Thuy, Vinh Son, and Trung Son commune
	Phase 2 – 2006 fiscal year				
I	Community consultations on socio-economic development plan				
1	Developing consultation content	Person		5	Experts of agencies, bodies, boards, departments.
2	Training at Dong Ha on consultation technique and developed consultation content	Person		44	18 representatives (9 districts), 8 provinces, 18 communes
3	Consultation at commune, ward, and hamlet level	Person	18 times x 7 groups	126	2 groups of children, 2 groups of farmers, 2 groups of laborers, and 1 groups of commune leaders
4	Consultation at district and town level		10 persons x5 groups x 8 districts	450	District leader, Social, economic, trade, and agricultural sections, representative of businesses
5	Consultation at Provincial level	group	3	70	Provincial leaders and experts of departments, agencies, boards

6	Seminar for reporting result of consultation.	group		36	1 day, consist of 18 commune representative + 9 provinces + Quang Ngai, Quang Binh Province, MPI
II	GDD project				
1	Training key staff of communes at district, 2 days: 1 day for training, 1 day for disseminating	Class	3	120	TOT: Major is farmer association
2	Training	Class	6	240	Commune's staff
3	Training on improving TOT capability				
4	Training for executive board of farmer's sub-association of hamlets	class/c ommu ne	6	240	
5	Dissemination on grassroots democracy		52 times	2362	People of 6 communes: Cam Tuyen, Cam Thuy, Gio My, Trung Giang, Vinh Long and Vinh Chap (both people and staff)
6	Competition festival for 24 hamlets at 6 communes	Hamlet	24	120	people (and additional of 850 supporters)
7	Competition festival at district level	group	8	40	2 participation districts: Gio Ling and Cam Lo (330 supporters)
8	Distributing leaflets at 6 communes	Sheet		4000	Leaflets printed first time in 2005 # Leaflets printed second time
9	Developing typical democratic hamlet	hamlet		6	Xuan My (Cam Tuyen), Cam Vu (Cam Thuy), Quang Xa (Vinh Long), Chap Dong (Vinh Chap) Thuy Khe (Gio My) Thuy Ban (Trung Giang)
10	Common bookshelf (Law, Science and Technology, agriculture with 352 books) and developing regulations on book controlling and using	books shelf		6	
11	Loudspeaker, micro, amplifier	set		6	One set per hamlet
12	Posters on grassroots democracy hang on central area of hamlet and	poster/hamlet	10	60	At 6 hamlets

	communal activity center.				
13	Slogan as above	Slogan		120	At 6 hamlets
14	Information center // Developing regulations on assigning responsibility to executive board of the hamlet to manage and use in order to utilize it to serve the people	Information center		6	
	Phase 3: 2007 fiscal year				
I	GDD				
1	Training on grassroots democracy (2 days)	District	3	90	Commune staff of 3 districts: Vinh Linh, Cam Lo, Gio Linh
2	Training on grassroots democracy implemented by District farmer association			550	Hamlet staff of Vinh Son and Vinh Tu commune (Vinh Linh District), Cam Chinh, Cam Nghia Commune, (Cam Lo District), Trung Son, Gio Quang Commune (Gio Linh District)
3	Dissemination on grassroots democracy to the people	Time	45	3150	Organizing at commune's meeting hall in accordance with the developed TOT
4	Establishing typical democratic hamlet	hamlet		6	Criteria/hamlet: 10 posters, 1 information board, 1 loudspeaker at 6 above – mentioned communes
5	Competition Festival for 17 hamlets at 2 communes: Vinh Son and Vinh Tu	Hamlet	55	275	Choosing 4 groups to compete at district level
6	Competition Festival at district level	group	12	60	
II	SEDP sharing Dec/06-Feb/07				For 36 hamlets and quarters, 18 communes and wards, 9 districts and towns
1	Seminar at Dong Ha			26	8 people of provinces + 18 people (9 districts) -> Key staff go for sharing
2	Disseminating the plan at hamlets and communes	Commune	18	900	Mostly key staff of communes

3	Disseminating the plan at district	District	9	540	Judicial and financial staffs, District people's committee,
4	Disseminating the plan at province			50	Representative of province, district
5	Final evaluation report				Send to grassroots level

SEDP can be seen as the most success of Quang Tri in implementing the GDD project. The community consultation had created opportunities for people including women, ethnic people, and children to directly take part in the planning process. Also, it has increased awareness as well as improved capacity for planning staff system from provincial to communal levels in mobilizing people participation. The program can be considered as a revolution on planning process and other Government project in term of increasing a tendency towards strengthening people's participation in policy making process.

Besides, Quang Tri GDD project has also gained success in GDD dissemination to people such as trainings and competition festivals, which had attracted a large number of people's participation. Women's participation has been paid attention via gender communication and the "happiness club" development. People participated in the policy-making process. The staffs' awareness and skills on people's participation mobilization have increased through community consultation implementation. Quang Tri GDD project's restriction is that the GDD specific model applied in the community was not clear with weak influence on the authority system. The main reason is that partner – Farmer union – did not have strong influence on local government in general.

4.2. Strengths and advantages

Strengths

4.2.1. Project's activities have been identified from needs of local people, communities and authorities and circumstance

Basing on the examination of people's participation in the community activities and project process as well as solution to weakness of local participation which was found out by group discussions, meetings with local authority, the project's activities have been identified. The project's design therefore met the needs of community, local people and expectation of Vietnamese government - comments of Thai Nguyen, Quang Binh partner staffs. The project has helped local staffs and local people in understanding and implementing GDD as well as provided opportunities for local people's participation⁵.

4.2.2. Plan's PUs has carried out the project creatively basing on the Local advantages and context

As description of part 4.1, most GDD project activities in the provinces were undertaken creatively based on local circumstance and opportunities. The title of Thai Nguyen project: "Promote the local people's participation", as well as interaction with capacity

⁵ Staff_ Thai Nguyen, Quang Tri

building for the local including government staffs and local people in rising GDD awareness that were suitable to local circumstance, while still reflects the nature of content and avoids sensitive issues. Phu Tho has incorporated GDD with gender program, GDD competition festival with capacity building for village's staffs. Quang Binh has promoted information equipment diversification for the hamlet's existing cultural house network. Quang Tri has supported the "Community consultation of national and provincial SEDP 2006-2010", which mobilized the local people's wide participation and contribution to the State and provincial socio-economic development plans.

4.2.3. The program has addressed limitation of local authority on GDD implementation.

Although GDD has been undertaken by the local government for many years, the local people had limited chance to get GDD, just the key staffs in the authority level, even foreign projects, can be seen as the biggest restriction. Sweden SIDA project, which has been implemented for many years in Quang Tri, is an example, training targeted group includes mainly grassroots staffs, and people have only been distributed with leaflets⁶. The needed condition of GDD implementation such as information equipments and local staff's skills in mobilizing people were not paid sufficient attention, as a result, in fact, the implementation is just like formalism. "Previously, this has been implemented in provinces but the formalism has been the most constraint"⁷.

4.2.4. Women participation in the GDD project

Women participate in the GDD project via trainings, dissemination activities for staffs and local people. There were more than 80% is women (Quang Binh, Phu Tho, Thai Nguyen) who attended training for local people and partners. Information from group discussions has shown that, women participants understand well the information and the program implemented in the community such as training, GDD competition festival, leaflets, etc.

4.2.5. Good interaction of project activities between GDD popularization and local people participation promotion

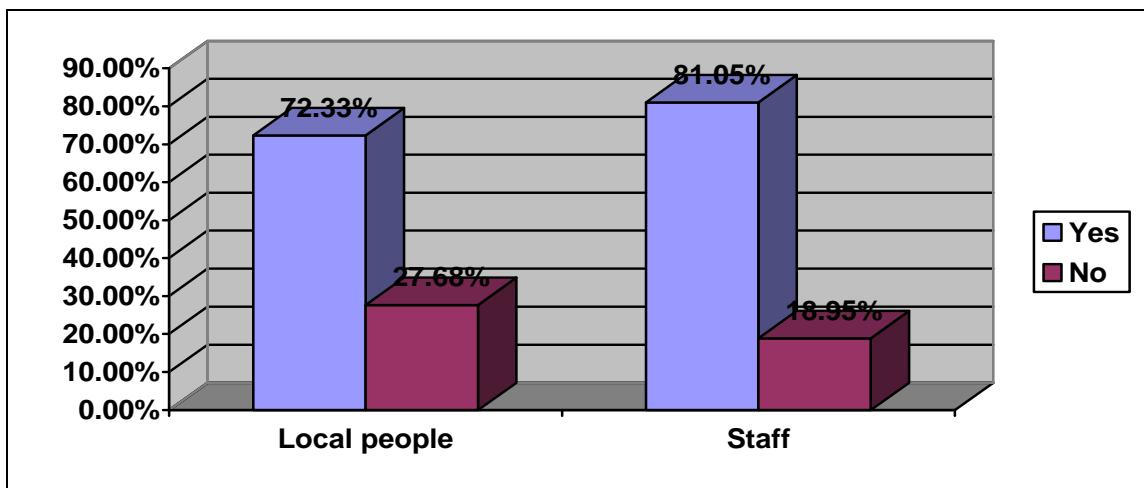
Training is to understand GDD and then the competition festival is a good way to review, consolidate, and understand deeply. Information equipments were facilities for better promoting people's participation by providing timelier information. Thus, many informants including staffs and local people found hardly to decide which project activities are the most useful. According to the qualitative information synthesizing, 25.43% of the local people and 9.3% of the staffs raised the idea that they like all project's activities as they complement each other to implement GDD in the community. "Training, leaflet, GDD competition festivals have made people well understand Grassroots democracy regulations, and information equipment creates better condition to

⁶ Staff_ Phú Thọ, Quảng Trị, Quảng Bình

⁷ Staff_ Thai Nguyen

promote participation”⁸ or “All activities are relevant, which complement for one another, thus, it is difficult to tell which activity is the most favored”⁹. Moreover, IEC activities assisted local people more confident in participating. Awareness of men and women about gender were improved by gender training. Men had more respected for women. At the same time women were more confident at raising their voices in the community issues. Women’s participation in Ban Dat (Thai Nguyen) Community Learning Centre was a good example.

Table 5. Knowing the GDD



4.2.6. Initially provided information and knowledge on GDD to the local people and local staffs

This is shown in the synthetic data of questionnaire that most of people asked, including local people (73.33%) and staff (81.05%) (See table 5) have known about GDD. This factor has contributed to increase people’s understanding on the government policies, their rights that create changes in people’s participation in the community’s development process over the last three years. However, this rate has not really reflected the deep understanding, awareness of people and staffs on GDD (refer to part 4.3.1).

4.2.7. GDD IEC is suitable, easy to understand and attractive to local people

Training

GDD training and IEC have reached local people, which haven’t happened before
Training and dissemination has reached local people as many people have taken part in these activities¹⁰.

⁸ Staff_ Thai Nguyen, Quang Binh

⁹ Staff_ Quang Ninh, Le Thuy

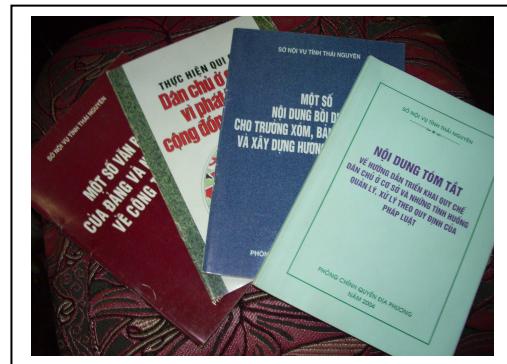
¹⁰ Staff_ Thai Nguyen, Quang Tri

The content of GDD training and IEC are simple and easy to people to understand. Trainers and communicators simplified the GDD contents, making them easier to understand. Through Grassroots democracy training and varied IEC forms, local people have opportunities to understand better and more comprehensively their rights and responsibilities to the community. “The IEC content is suitable to the people, creating two-way discussion opportunities for them so that they can understand the issue better”¹¹; “Without training, we would not understand and pay attention to, as we ourselves do not think that it is necessary to know. Being trained and listening to the comprehensive analysis, we can understand the issue quicker”¹²; “We like the GDD training as we can meet and directly raise questions to the Government staffs”¹³, these are common opinions of staffs in Trung Son-Quang Tri, Ban Dat-Thai Nguyen.

GDD competition festival

GDD competition festival is a dissemination activity that is highly appreciated by both local people and staffs, because:

- It has a higher number of participants than that of the training. The highest number of participants in one training is 50 whereas the number of participants in a GDD competition festival can reach up to 330 (Quang Tri), or 350 (Thai Nguyen)¹⁴. A GDD competition festival attracts many people to participate, and has a good dissemination effect. It has two-way discussions, thus the participants can catch the information. The listeners themselves can also participate in the competition festival by a part for audience, which allows both young and elder audiences to join¹⁵.



- It is easy to understand, attractive, realistic, and useful. It is also a chance to consolidate trained knowledge, extend the impact on wider range of people. Local people were creative in integrating GDD into local cultural and art forms such as chantey, drama, etc. to make it more lively and attractive¹⁶. Local people's opinions raised during group

¹¹ Mr. T_Staff_Phu Tho

¹² Ms. S_Cam Nghia, Quang Tri

¹³ Mr. Q_GROUP DISSCUSSION_Cam Nghia, Quang Tri

¹⁴ Grassroots democracy project activities summary table – Nguyen Thi Thuy, Gender Advisor (Matrix table _GDD, Grant project – VNM 0159)

¹⁵ Opinions of Staff and local people (Phu tho, Thai nguyen, Quang binh, Quang tri).

¹⁶ Cam Nghia, Le Thuy

discussion “taking part in the GDD competition festival can bring about knowledge, chance to watch dramas, and communicate (with audience) during the practicing for the drama as well as chance to consolidate knowledge for better understanding”¹⁷; “I like watching the GDD competition festival very much as it has both funny plays and audience participation chances”¹⁸. The preparation and participation in the competition festival have promoted actively people to discover the GDD content. Through the GDD competition festival, not only the GDD knowledge has been improved, better relationship among people in the hamlet also increase though communication

- Local authorities in hamlet, commune levels are attracted to participate in the festival as they play the role in supporting, preparing for their hamlets, communes’ teams. Many people said that: The GDD competition festival has drawn participation of all people from different sectors from communal to the hamlet level. If we want to take part in the GDD competition festival at district level, we must win in the festival at communal level. “If we want to organize the GDD competition festival, we must have training and provide leaflets before, thus, this is a synthetic solution¹⁹”.

Leaflet

GDD leaflets are provided to the households, which extend the impact of GDD IEC to people who cannot join the training. Besides, leaflets also help audience to remember better and know GDD information²⁰. The leaflets have been provided to every household in different forms, depending on specific situation: via hamlet’s meetings, commune’s meetings, or they were distributed by village staff directly to the households. In general, the leaflets have simple forms, in which, issues that people are allowed to know, to discuss, to decide and to monitor as well as responsibilities of local authorities for putting these issues in the practice, are clearly identified.

Panel on GDD

Panels and slogans on GDD are hanged along the roads and visible in public places so that all people can see and be reminded of GDD content²¹.

4.2.8. Media equipment provided by the project has contributed to improve the local people’s participation

- Loudspeaker, amply systems provided by the GDD project to hamlets is good facilities to provide information to local people such as announcing the meeting invitation so that more people can join the meeting²²; meeting’s quality has been improved as participants were clearly announced with meeting information²³.

¹⁷ Mr. T_ GROUP DISSCUSSION _ Trung Son, Quang Tri

¹⁸ The child named N_Cam Nghia, Quang Tri

¹⁹ Staff_Thai nguyen, Quang Binh, Phu Tho

²⁰ Opinions of local people (GROUP DISSCUSSION_Nga My, Thai Nguyen), Staff (Ms. V_Staff_Le Thuy district, Quang Binh).

²¹ Mr. T._ Staff Quang Ninh, Quang Ninh, Staff_Cam Nghia

²² Hamlet’s leader_Phу Thо

²³ Ms. V_ GROUP DISSCUSSION_Thai Nguyen

Thanks to the loudspeaker system, information and news from the government can reach people fastest, and authority staffs do not necessarily come to every household for information dissemination. The system has also helped people who are not able to read newspaper, watch TV can get information while working. From the gender equality perspective, thanks to the loudspeaker system, people who are lack of time, mainly women can get access to the information.

- Information board is very useful for information provision to hamlet's people. Local people can come to the Hamlet's culture house to see concerned information if they could not listen to the radio or participate in the meeting. Publicised information on the information board has better effects with information of financial issues of infrastructure projects and local people's contribution, etc. If these issues are only informed via radio, people normally do not pay attention to and they may forget easily²⁴. Information boards are easily accessible , and support for information announced during meetings or via radio system, as many people, who do not intend to listen, or even if they listen, they can forget easily²⁵. These also shows clearly the transparency of authority level, contributes to the development and consolidation of people's trust to the authority. According to Mr. H, hamlet's leader - Quang Binh, the information board is very suitable to announce updated news of the hamlet; he has to update the information within maximum15 days (this is regulated in the hamlet's regulation). However, it is still unclear that who have chance or condition to read the bulletins most? Women or men? Do men mostly read the bulletin? According to the research on "Plan project impact on the gender perspective", men have more time than women (women have to work at the rice field or do the housework). And it can be said that, women have less time to read the bulletin than men. An alternative way to dissemination of information is provided via media, public loudspeaker, radio, etc.



- Legal bookshelf is very necessary for hamlet's people and staffs for legal information reference²⁶. A hamlet's leader - Phu Tho said "the legal bookshelf has provided me with various useful information on legal policy, knowledge that I have not learnt before that is

²⁴ Hamlet's leader_ Thai Nguyen

²⁵ Hamlet leader_ Thái Nguyên

²⁶ Hamlet's leader_ Mai Thuy, Le Thuy, Quang Binh

very useful for a hamlet's leader. I have applied several law regulations in the book in the hamlet's activity implementation". It can be seen that staffs have sense of understanding and learn more knowledge to apply new knowledge to their specific jobs. However, it is still unclear how do people use the library? May be the borrowing books have not been recorded the frequency of people's borrowing. This, however, has been done very well in Ban Dat, Thai Nguyen. Ban Dat's people normally borrow agricultural books for their cultivation job.

- Hamlet's culture house (or community learning center) is a very important institution in supporting, promoting local people's participation. Although the GDD project has no support construction of community learning center, Thai Nguyen has, however, combined with other programs to partly support community house in some pilot hamlets. Hamlet's people in group discussion are really proud of their "community center" works. That is their dream, which has been long time to achieve. A number of people said that the local people's contribution has been changed remarkably since having community house built. They have more seriously joined meetings, raised their ideas, which have not happened before. Previously during the meeting, especially women just stood outside the meeting's house and did not pay attention, etc.²⁷. This is one of the big changes of local people life, in which particularly women status is improved a lot. These will be examined in detail in part 4.4.1.

4.2.9. Draw participation of the authority levels

The GDD project implementation has been done with various partners, i.e. provincial sectoral staffs (Department of Investment and planning, Quang Tri), District People's committee (Thai Nguyen, Quang Binh), provincial, district Farmer's Union (Quang Tri).... The project has really made local government and mass organisation involved into GDD implementation in hamlets and communes. District's staffs (Thai Nguyen), district Farmer's Union (Quang Tri), etc., become active trainers for the project. Quang Tri Department of Investment and planning's staffs enthusiastically participated in the community consultation SEDP (2005-2010)²⁸. At first, Quang Binh staffs were hesitate to the project. For the time being involved in the project implementation, they themselves recommended that the project should be further implemented in the coming time²⁹. It proofs that GDD project met the needs and demand of local authorities in the GDD implementation. In addition, there is a big change in local staff's awareness on mobilisation of people's participation.

GDD provided a legal framework to promote people participation at grassroots level. GDD project have been undertaking in all PUs, where the participatory approach is a key principle for all project activities. These are good initial bases for the GDD project. Besides, local institutional environment proves positive change toward democracy in last few years.

²⁷ Bàn Đạt_men and women focus group discussion_Thai Nguyen

²⁸ Staff_Quang Tri

²⁹ Staff_Quang Binh

Advantages

4.2.10. Participatory approach of Plan projects at the communities

The GDD project is implemented in the Plan project areas. People's familiarity to participatory approach presents favourable conditions for project activities. They were involved in different stages ranging from needs assessment, planning to the monitoring and evaluation, which are principle of all Plan projects. In this connection, GDD project is a really good opportunity for people to realise democracy in community.

Plan's projects have really drawn high attention and participation of local people. As mentioned above, Plan has considered the participatory approach as its working principle. This is shown by the high attendance percentage of people in Plan's meetings in the community, up to 80-90% of total people. Moreover, the creative combination, coordination between the project and hamlet's community activities has been applied. Thus, the hamlet's staffs and Plan staffs combine the hamlet's meetings and the Plan's project meetings to reach full participation of people³⁰. Therefore, this combination and coordination should be maintained to best enhance people's participation. This will be clearly explained in the recommendation part.

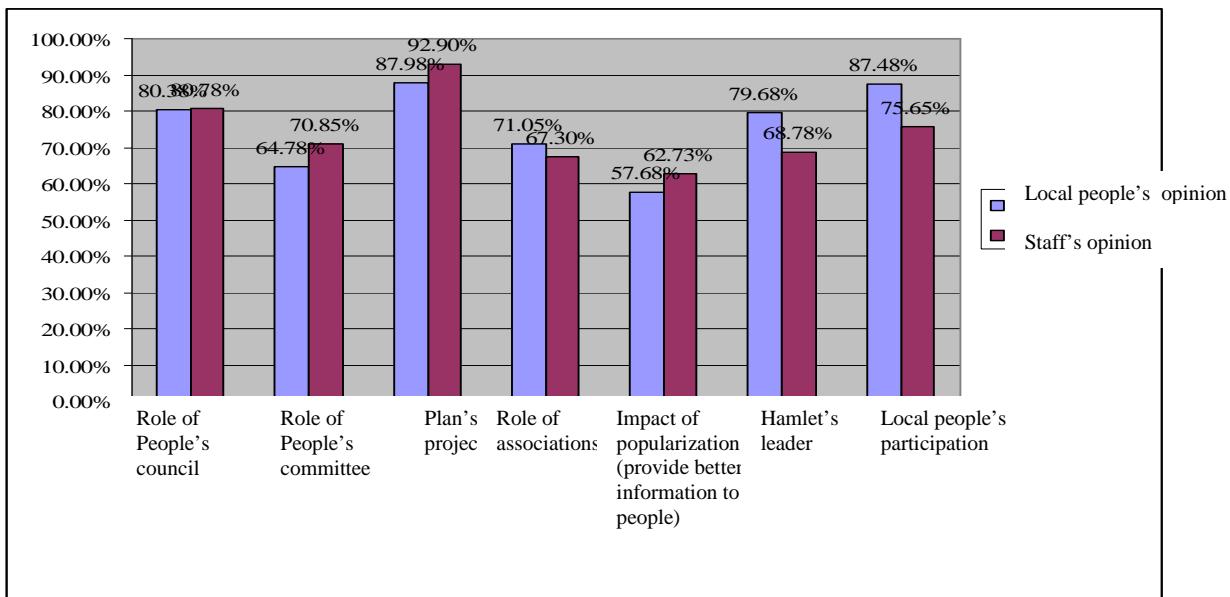
Demand assessment and planning

- People's consultation to identify their needs in community development plan

Most of people in the focus group discussions, including staffs and local people, said that local people were involved in the project identification of needs, for example discussing with local people to decide 3 priorities (Quang Binh), consultation with children in school building (Children group- Phu Tho), or local people discuss to decide location for building up irrigation and monitoring and contribution fee (female group and mixed group discussion in Quant Binh), or priority for welfare construction works in the hamlet (mixed group Van Ninh commune/Quang Binh). The GDD project has also applies this process. Most of activities are being consulted with people. For example, consultations with people were made for loudspeakers installation so that that people can listen clearly (mixed group Van Ninh commune/Quang Binh); installation of information board (female and children group, Quang Tri). The SEDP created the opportunity for all groups of people (women, men, girls and boys) to participate and reflect their needs as well as expectations. This is the equal opportunity for all people. Thus, the SEDP has contributed, more or less, to the strengthening of gender equality in localities.

³⁰ Staff_ Phu Tho

TABLE 6. REASON FOR CHANGES IN LOCAL PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION



Implementation and Monitoring

Local people participated in the monitoring process as members of monitoring board. However the level of monitoring participation is varied depending on the situation. For hamlet's welfare construction works, which is made mainly by local people's contribution, they can take part directly in the monitoring process and the monitoring quality is very high. For example, in Ban Dat commune - Thai Nguyen, in the construction of the community learning centre, which were contributed mostly by local people, the members of the monitoring board were elected directly by local people. They were all prestigious, responsible despite their jobs are unpaid. Local people have shared their monitoring experience such as number of cement packages provided in the morning must be equal to number of cement packages collected in the afternoon³¹. The responsibility of local people for monitoring process is very high. According to community activities, gender equity is improved. Men share and sympathize with their wife more. The staff of Women Union observed and commented "Normally, the wife is responsible for cooking. But when she has to monitor, the husband will prepare the meal early so that the wife can do the monitoring task in time"³². Moreover, local people showed a sense of responsibility for the community and felt more confident to protect their right "Many construction contractors have said that they are afraid of monitoring by Ban Dat local people. For example, in the contract of school building, there is a component of restroom, the constructors intended to ignore, but three, four women came and objected, thus the constructors must follow the contract"³³. In some places, although,

³¹ GROUP DISSCUSSION_ nữ và hỗn hợp, Thái Nguyên

³² Chị A, cán bộ phụ nữ xã Bàn Đạt, Thái Nguyên

³³ Cán bộ_ Thái Nguyên

there have been no direct participation of local people in the monitoring board, they have still reflected issues related to construction quality. For example, the hamlet's common house construction in 2006, workers have used too small purlin for the roof thus it is unsafe. Local people raised their ideas and then small purlin has been replaced with larger ones, which were safer³⁴.

For welfare construction works funded by Plan, the monitoring board has worked effectively; it has addressed limitations during constructing works. "The management board has detected that yellow sand was replaced by black sand in the kindergarten construction, the constructor must adjust"³⁵, or "The monitoring board has commented on the kindergarten's toilet leakage, the constructor must repair it."³⁶. Obviously, if people participate in monitoring well, the construction quality must be improved.

4.2.11. Some changes by grassroots local authority towards responsibility strengthening and transparency enhancement

Changing working manner of grassroots staffs, especially at hamlet and communal levels in promoting and encouraging local people's participation has been clearer. This fact is confirmed by the data from the table 6, both local people and staffs appreciated highly the role of local authority in people participation mobilization, including Commune People Council (80% informants of local people, and 81% informants of local staffs), next village leader (79.68% informants of local people, and 68.78% informants of local staffs), then People's committee (64.78% informants of local people, and 70.85% informants of local staffs). The role of Commune People Council is considered as the biggest change, specially monitoring and supervising functions. The impact of Parliament innovation and trend of increasing public participation are cause for that change. Some illustrations are following below:

Better transparency and disclosure. These are shown in providing information and encouraging local people to take part in socio-economic development plan and programs in village and commune; Support local people participation in supervising and monitoring the investment process to have better construction quality³⁷; Information to local people has been better disseminated³⁸. Particularly, commune staffs often consult local people as carrying out the commune's policy/ program³⁹.

- *Accountability:* the changes by commune staffs in their responsibility to provide information and respond local people's opinions. Commune's staffs give local people feedback on their comments more quickly⁴⁰. Commune people's committee has higher responsibility in planning and commune budgeting⁴¹. Local people seemed to be more

³⁴ GROUP DISSCUSSION_nữ_Chi C_Quảng Trị

³⁵ GROUP DISSCUSSION_HH_Quảng Bình

³⁶ GROUP DISSCUSSION_HH_Quảng Trị

³⁷ Bình-STAFF Văn xã

³⁸ STAFF_Văn Lương

³⁹ STAFF_Quảng trị

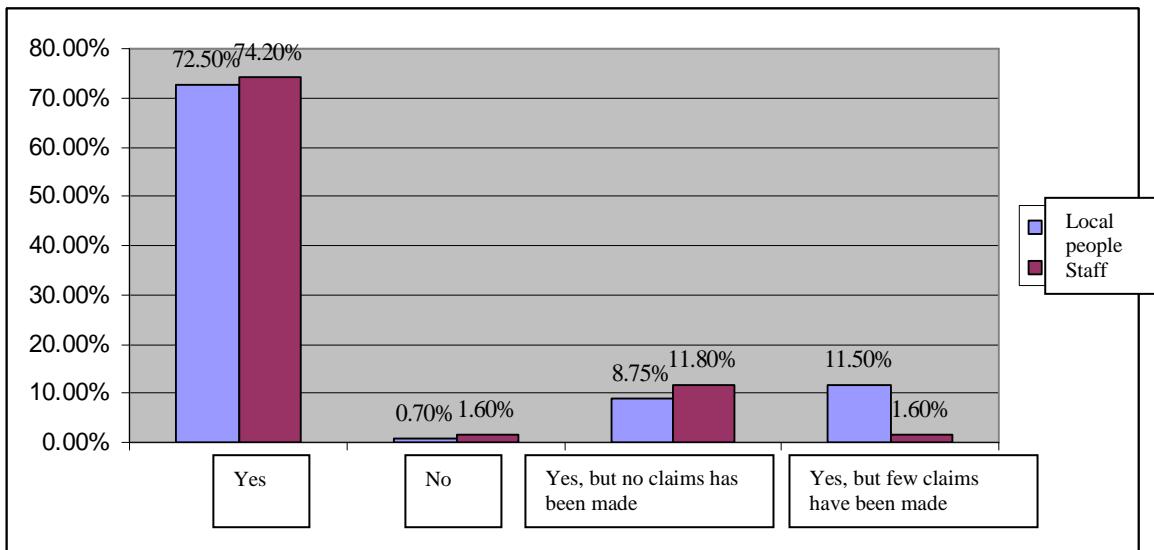
⁴⁰ Staff_Van Luong, Phu Tho

⁴¹ Staff_Quang Binh

active participation as their opinions were responded by commune authorities quicker than before⁴².

Quantitative information summary, 72.5% of local people and 74.2% (see table 7) of staffs said that grassroots authority has made some changes after local people comments; against 11.8% of staffs said no change and 11.5% of the local people said only few changes. Many examples show that local authority has accepted local people's opinions, such as the case in the Nga My commune of Thai nguyen, commune authorities was planning to put peanut into list of commune production. However after local people had made comment that the soil feature was not suitable, the commune authority changed their decision⁴³; or the case that local people claimed they paid irrigation fees but they were not supplied sufficient water, then the commune authority had changed the irrigation fee to be relevant to the irrigation service⁴⁴. The road design had some changes as local people had claimed that the sewage design was not modified to be suitable to the local condition⁴⁵. Local people contributed their ideas to improve the hamlet development plan. For example, in Thai Nguyen, the hamlet' staff gave the first priority to annual development plan in 2007, which is to construct canals. However, after discussing with hamlet' people, this priority was given to the rice plant cultivation⁴⁶. The positive changes can create more opportunity to people participation that leads influence on the community development process.

TABLE 7. CHANGES AFTER THE LOCAL PEOPLE MEETING



4.2.12. Several GDD applied models have been initially developed

⁴² Ms. T._Staff_Thai Nguyen

⁴³ Vice president_ People's Committee, Phu Tho

⁴⁴ Commune's president_Nga My, Thai Nguyen

⁴⁵ Vice president-Cam Nghia, Quang Tri

⁴⁶ Staff_Thai Nguyen

The core value of GDD implementation is to mobilize local people's participation in socio-economic and local community development. During GDD project implementation, several applied modes have been discovered to promote local people's participation successfully. Besides, with participatory approach, other Plan program has identified several local people's participation in impressive mobilization models. For example the model of Community Learning Centre in Bai Phang, Ban dat, Thai nguyen, where local people participate actively in building and maintaining the village learning centre. It can not be sure which models are the most successes due to the short implementation. However, useful experience and lessons are drawn from these models to implement the GDD project better in the future.

Commune based clubs (Phu Tho)

One of the interesting ways to promote people participation in the community is based clubs of specific subjects.

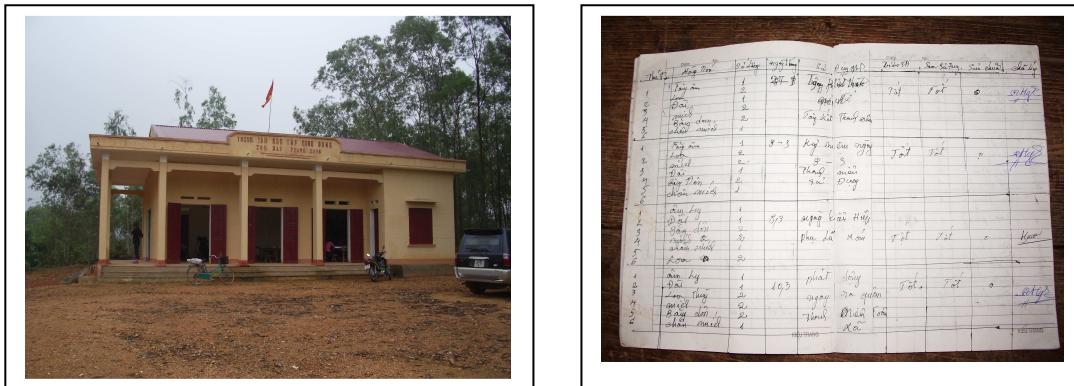
This is the popular participatory model in Phu Tho communes. In Phu Tho, a lot of Plan's projects and the

GDD project's information is known to women through meetings in commune based clubs. Women do like the commune based clubs form and they have recommended being supported for this model development. Currently, the community has many commune based clubs such as Family happiness club, Reproductive health club, Farming promotion club, Pupil's Parents' club, cultural activities club, etc. Members of these clubs are mainly community's people regardless of their positions. The common interests, objectives or special ability (such singing, dancing,...) are the most important for them attending the club. The commune based clubs is a good model, and in fact, it plays an important role in environmental creation and helps promote local people's participation. Commune based clubs are not only places where people can improve their knowledge, share information, knowledge, experience but also are places where people can gather into one group to be more confident in their participation in the community. Therefore, commune based clubs are good way to improve capacity and practice the local people's participation.

Development of "Community learning center" institution

Community house is a very important institution to mobilize local people's participation. In poor, rural and remote areas with limited information and knowledge, community house is a needed institution, which is expected by local people. In Thai Nguyen, the GDD project does not have activities to support the community house, but it has cooperated with the economic development project, and Plan's project office in Thai Nguyen to partly support specific hamlets for community learning center developments.

Community learning center development in Ban Dat hamlet is an example of successful people's participation mobilization. Local people directly take part in monitoring, inspecting the instruction and their participation were showed effectively and responsibly as the monitoring board were voted directly by local people. The member of the board included responsible people who were unpaid for the task. For example: The community learning center was constructed for three months, the quality was so good. Then the center's regulations were developed by hamlet's people to manage and maintain it.



Community learning Centre, Bai Phang, Thai Nguyen and record book

Local people's participation has been improved in terms of both quality and quantity after the community center's development, in which women and children's participation must be considered. Previously, children's activities were mainly done in the road, because they had no place for playing in the rainy weather. Now, with the community center, they can have common activities twice a week. A suitable location for community centre is a good condition to encourage local people in participation; they like to go to meeting. Local people have demands for common activities since the community center is built. Local people's participation's quality has been changed dramatically, they have taken part in the meeting more seriously and actively raise their opinions. Via community meetings, women feel more confident and active. They can positively tell their opinions for the community's plans. Through that, people in the community can understand and evaluate women's capacity and role in the community. Women's position has been gradually improved.

Thus, local people are willing to contribute to the community center's maintenance and they also take part in maintaining job. They hire the guarding service 24/24 hour and pay salary (from local people's contribution).

Village regulation development

Village regulation has been implemented mostly in Quang Binh and several places in Phu Tho. Village regulation is the rules of the community's common behavior standards, which is documented, reflecting traditions, customs and good cultural features of locality. A feasible regulation must ensure the state legal regulation's compliance (it must not regulate illegal issues and it must reflect rights and responsibilities of all groups in the community). Thus, one important factor of regulation development is the participation of local people in discussing in order to decide for an implementation and monitoring of the implementation later. The Village regulation development procedures are really a forum that local people take part in deciding their community's issues, show their opinions and initiatives to develop the community. Thus, this is a good practice of the grassroots democracy. Previously, although many places had regulations but it was formalism because of a lack of the people's participation so it was not feasible. Plan has supported to improve regulation development processes, reflect the local people's participation; especially attention has been paid to women and children. The children protection issue has been integrated in the regulation. According to Quang Binh's staffs, the regulation

development was successful since it has mobilized local people's participation in the process and integrated many children protection issues into the village regulation. In some places, the regulation has not been approved by local people and still brought into application. However, in some other places, "local people just listen to the regulation development discussion, no opinion has been contributed"⁴⁷. For that reason, it is necessary to support locality in developing and adjusting the regulation on the basis of participatory approach. Promote people's participation in the regulation development process will bring the regulation to life. People's voice and need will be reflected in the regulation, ensuring the equality in the community.

Participatory budgeting

This model is applied to practice the Grassroots democracy in Thai Nguyen. Develop the hamlet's budget plan with local people's participation is the model that reflects people's participation in the planning, deciding priorities and allocating resources.

Members of village's development board were trained on skills at making village development plan (VDP) (such sub-project). Then they play key role to facilitate the hamlet' people to identify priorities and develop a budget plan for their hamlet's development program. This is a grassroots democracy exercise of hamlets in Thai Nguyen. However, the training duration for village's development board was limited, while village staffs had not experience of making plan, thus they are not able to making the plan well. Therefore, if the NORAD project will continue in next coming year, training of VDP for members of village development board should be paid attention.

Water usage group/ Quang Binh: "Sac Tu pumping station's self-management team"

Sac Tu station belongs to Van Ninh commune, Quang Ninh district, Quang Binh province that was supported by Plan to solve the irrigation water needs for two hamlets, i.e. Don and Nam Hai. To make the pumping station work effectively for the water supply for these two hamlets, Plan Quang Binh has cooperated with the Economics University of Hue to supply technical support for the development of model "Sac Tu pumping station's self-management team" including water usage teams with the objective to ensure the harmonized benefits among teams and water users of the pumping station. Local people took part in development of working rules for the team, working methods, contribution levels, and maintenance by themselves. Team leader was elected by public vote, he has a two-year working term and he has committed to be responsible, open and transparent in the management of water supply service to farmers.

This model can mobilize the community's participation and practice Grassroots democracy. Local people can participate, implement and monitor activities, as well as gain equal benefits. Although this model has just carried out for short time, management teams said that: local people have had better sense of construction protection, for example if it needs further maintenance, it would be easier to mobilize people's contribution. Hopefully, these teams will work well and bring real benefits to farmers.



Taking part in the community consultancy for the five year plan 2005 – 2010

This model is being implemented successfully in Quang Tri. Decree No 33/CP in 2004 of the Government has set up a new direction for planning i.e. the socioeconomic development plan must be public, and consultation of various social groups. Quang Tri province is still a poor province, with complex terrain, and diversity of local people including the Kinh and ethnic minorities. Many targets, direction and plans of this province are not practical to its features. The Government's decree has set up a new chance for the province to renew planning activity, consults grassroots opinions, and local people's opinions on the State and provincial the five-year plans 2005-2010. To meet the demand of the province, Quang Tri's PU has provided technical and financial supports for provincial Department of Investment and planning to consult the community's opinions. The community consultation program was very successful and met both local authorities and people's expectation. The plan was consulted in 36 villages of 16 communes with participation of 2.195 local people. The SEDP of Quang tri met the demand of both local authority and people. The five year plan 2006-2010 reflected voice, needs as well as priorities of different local groups (such as women, men, children, boy, girl, and ethnic).

The success of SEDP is, a new planning method, which is effective, persuasive to local authority from provincial level down has been introduced. (1) Closer coordination in plan designing among the provincial Department of Investment and Planning and other agencies, sectors has been created through the establishment of planning consultancy group with representatives from province's major sectors (agriculture, education, health, etc). Coordination in long term planning is still one of the most constraints of Vietnam's planning process. (2) New practical information, which is very useful, has been found out for plan adjustment and revise to meet the local practical situation. (3) Awareness of leaders from provincial level to commune level has been changed, i.e. they understood the importance of people's participation in the national and local development policies.

“Local

people contributed useful comments as they have practical experiences. I have really understood the importance of local people's opinions in the state development policy”⁴⁸.

⁴⁸ Quang Tri Department of Planning and Investment's head

More importantly, they understood the National socioeconomic development plan. The province, who wants to achieve success, must gain contribution by the entire society, particularly critical roles of local people. (4) Capacity building should be provided to provincial planning staffs, Department of Investment and planning staffs first, then commune and local planning staffs. There is a state by Department of Investment and Planning's staff: "In fact, planning staff's capacity is very weak, they have never approached the planning method with local people participation. Thanks to technical support and on-the-job training practice during consulting process, planning staff's capacity has been improved significantly, they can provide consultancy to the community in the province's programs, plans in the future".

The local people's needs partly have been met through SEDP. They are very excited and they provided support for research group during consulting process⁴⁹, and local people's awareness and capacity have been improved in local and national development programs. Plan Quang Tri has been providing supports to Department of Investment and Planning in dissemination of approved plan to local people.

Quang Tri Department of Investment and Planning is recommending that the Provincial People council need to approve budget to consult the provincial key policies and programs officially. And it is also recommending that the community consultancy's economic-technical development plan content should be added as an issue of Planning Laws. This can be considered as one of the program's sustainable features. However, at present, the Department of Investment and Planning said, without Plan's support, it cannot have enough budgets for the community consultancy implementation of annual development plan. Currently, the community consulted Socioeconomic development plan has been approved by Quang Tri Provincial People Council the.

This can be considered as a successful model of policy advocacy which creates, mobilizes local people's participation in the local and national socioeconomic development planning process.

4.3. Weakness and challenges

Weakness

Democracy implementation and participation promotion is a long-term process, including the awareness raising and behavior changes. Up to the time of this evaluation, the GDD project has been implemented just for three years, some project's activities have not been implemented thus it is hardly to say that these are program's weakness. These comments should be taken into consideration in the following activities.

4.3.1. Restricted scope compared to local actual needs

⁴⁹ Staff _ Quang Tri Investment and planning department

“Even with our break-through, new program is still like “a glass of water pours into the desert” - Thai Nguyen Plan staff’s compares the three-year Grass roots democracy program with the local actual needs.

- Due to short duration, the GDD project has only focused on *several places, and has not covered widely yet*. Most of provinces have selected one pilot site for implementation, even in one commune the only village was selected as a pilot one. Therefore, within the project scope, especially with local people, is not comprehensive. In Quang Binh, Grassroots democracy training and popularization has not reached people “The targeted group for dissemination has not been expanded to local people, only focused on staff”⁵⁰. “Number of project participants is small”⁵¹.

In fact, the regulation training and IEC are not popular, only one per hamlet/village in some places. Thus, local people understand the Grassroots democracy roughly and not comprehensively⁵². As a result, a little change in all local people’s grassroots democracy awareness has been made⁵³.

Training and IEC has not been widely implemented to local people i.e. not everybody can take part in⁵⁴.

The GDD competition festival scope has been restricted, with the representative feature only. At commune level, one GDD competition festival has seven participants per hamlet, at district level; one GDD competition festival has 40-50 participants per commune. The GDD competition festival is not comprehensive, and it cannot disseminate widely - that is the common opinion on the GDD competition festival constraints given by most of group discussions and staff interviews.

Table 8. UNDERSTANDING GDD CONTNENT

Local people	Staff

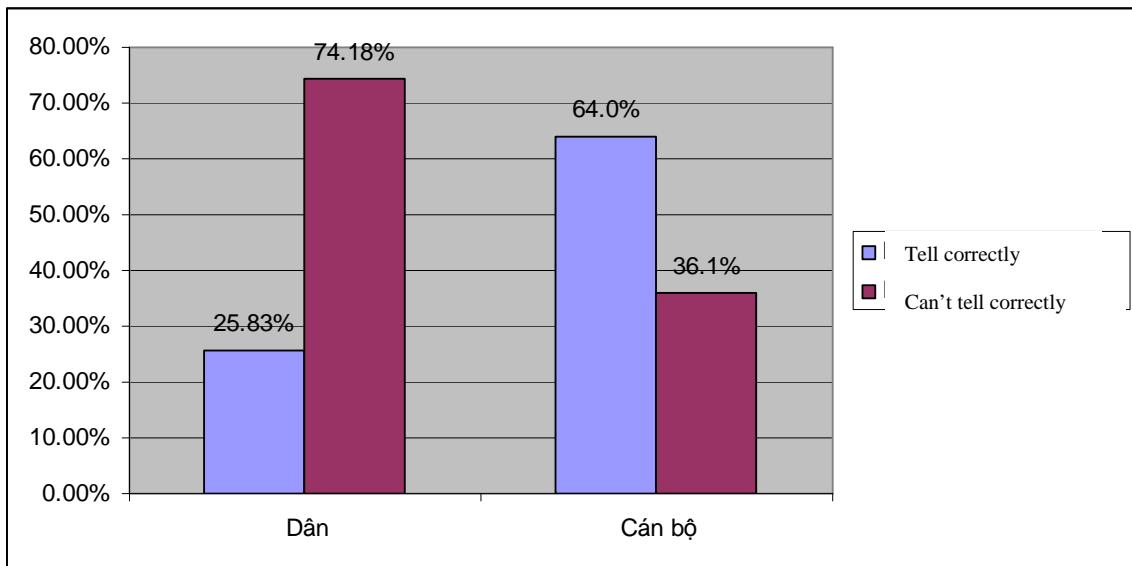
⁵⁰ Staff_Van Ninh_Quang Ninh

⁵¹ Common opinion of Phu Tho, Thai Nguyen, Quang Tri Staffs

⁵² Mr. B._Staff_ Quang Tri

⁵³ Staff_ Quang Binh

⁵⁴ Nga My - Thai Nguyen, Cam Nghia - Quang Tri, Cap Dan - Phu Tho



4.3.2. Non-synchronous and insufficient understanding on the grassroots democracy

Actual focus group discussion observations and questionnaires have shown that, most of asked people said they knew grassroots democracy but they did not understand the specific issues. For example 73.33% respondents of local people and 81.95% respondents of local staffs (see table 5) answered they knew GDD decree, but 74.18% respondents of local people and 36.4% respondents of local staffs (see table 8) can not remember any specific content when they were asked.

Grassroots democracy understanding is non-synchronous in even GDD project implementation communes. In Nga My - Thai Nguyen, IEC has been implemented in one model hamlet (Thai Hoa) many times per year, leaflets have been delivered, etc. the hamlet well understand the Grassroots democracy issue and relevant legal documents, while its neighbor hamlet (Ngoc Ha), the Grassroots democracy is almost unknown⁵⁵. Main reason is most of local grassroots democracy activities for each project's area have not been covered to all objects and done regularly. According to the commune staff's comment: "grassroots democracy is a difficult issue, to make grassroots staffs and people understand, it must be communicated for many times, again and again"⁵⁶. In places such as Cam Thuy, Vinh Son, Trung Son, Quang Tri, the GDD project has been implemented for less than one year, by the date of final evaluation.

4.3.3. IEC method and technique are restricted

No sufficient investment has been made to IEC and training method, thus the result was restricted. Some local people and staffs, who attended the GDD project, did not understand deeply the main content of GDD decree is a result of this. It also was commented by staffs of Ha Noi and Thai Nguyen Plan.

⁵⁵ Thai Hoa and Ngoc Ha hamlets, Nga My, Thai Nguyen

⁵⁶ Staff of Van Ninh commune _Quang Binh

There lack of communicators who have been trained and provided with communication skills⁵⁷. Several people said due to the short training, they cannot understand it comprehensively⁵⁸.

Leaflets would be not very effective if we do not combine it with popularization and training. It is said that, if the leaflet is delivered after the training, then they will read. If not, they will throw it away and regardless illiterate people, they take the leaflet and throw it away⁵⁹. “If they do not understand the leaflet meanings, then they will not read it, even they are keeping it”⁶⁰.

Panels, slogan : some panels on grassroots democracy are not popular and impressive. So it cannot draw people’s attention⁶¹. And some of them, due to severe weather, have collapsed after one year (Quang Binh).

4.3.4. Some of media equipments did not bring into full play

- Complaint box: in fact, only Quang Binh has just provided a “comment” complaint box for the hamlet’s cultural house for the past two months. Therefore, the complaint box provision’s restrictions can’t be assessed, however, to enhance their effectiveness; other supporting activities should be further added.

Providing the hamlet’s cultural house with complaint box is a good idea, creating a good channel for people’s comments, however, as this activity is new and lack of guidelines, thus it has not shown its best effectiveness. “Since installation, the complaint box has not been used as all claims have been answered in meetings, no mail has been sent to the complaint box”⁶². “People have not familiar with the complaint box, thus not many people use it. Whenever claims happen, they go to discuss with the commune’s staffs”⁶³. Loudspeakers and radios provided by Plan have good quality, but the capacity is small, cannot meet the hamlet’s information dissemination needs⁶⁴.

Challenges

4.3.5. Local people’s participation in Plan project is not widely and synchronous

Although Plan projects have not closely implemented the local people’s participation promotion principle, and remarkable success has been archived, however, in fact, as the population is too high, thus local people’s participation is only representative, not widely and synchronous.

⁵⁷ Women Staff, Van Ninh

⁵⁸ GROUP DISSCUSSION_mixed_Thai Nguyen

⁵⁹ Ms. T, Quang Ninh, Quang Binh, Ms. S_STAFF_ Quang Tri

⁶⁰ Hamlet’s leader_Thai Nguyen

⁶¹ Staff- Quang Binh, Quang Tri Hamlet’s leader

⁶² Mr. L. hamlet’s leader_Quang Binh

⁶³ Mr. D._Staff_ district Quang Ninh, Quang Binh

⁶⁴ hamlet’s leader_ Thai Nguyen, Quang Binh

Needs assessment and planning steps have been done with representative groups only, having no conditions to get wide opinions from local people⁶⁵. The project's activities are mainly focused on direct beneficiaries, but not the entire population⁶⁶. Needs assessment has been made but mainly on area's leaders and several hamlet's associations. Not many people have been asked for the opinions. The project has mainly announced the information, but not consultation with people⁶⁷.

Local people took part in monitoring construction: It was not very synchronous, and dependent on the selection of participated people and individual commune's operation scheme. In many places, monitoring board is mainly appointed. Or in other cases, the monitoring board was selected and followed right procedures but does not effectively work due to having inappropriate feedback channels.

Even in Thai Nguyen, in non - model hamlet, the informants of mixed group said that, most of them haven't been joined selection of the monitoring board. Ms. H, a member of group discussion, was announced as the member of monitoring board, but she did not know what she has to do⁶⁸. Many monitoring boards have been elected basing on the Party cell's suggestion (Quang Tri), Executive board (Phu Tho), Commune people's committee (Quang Binh) or representatives of hamlet, commune's mass organisations such as women, farmers, father's front, and the Help age association, etc. are selected, only one to two representatives for local people (Thai Nguyen, Quang Binh). Thus, quality of management board depends on the selection process and operating regulations of the management board in specific commune, hamlet. However, in fact, it is common that "local people can only select their monitoring board for constructions financially contributed by them, or else it will be appointed by the Executive board" ⁶⁹. Obviously, people monitoring participation has not encouraged in the project which people do not have to contribute. This is an evident that the awareness of local authority of people participation still limited.

4.3.6. Participatory models have not been completed yet and not enough time for implementing in order to draw sufficient lessons learnt and evaluation

Most of models mobilizing people's participation in Plan projects have just been implemented and not completed yet. For example, VDP application to support hamlets in doing the project budget planning for the first year, hamlet's staffs are not familiar to it, thus, they are not skilful to new method application and calculation, further technical support is needed; the model " Sac Tu pumping station self-management team" has been just developed, it has not been tried for the first rice cultivation season, thus no evaluation can be made; the Village regulation model is also under development (the final Village

⁶⁵ Group discussion_ Quang Binh, Quang Tri, Thai Nguyen

⁶⁶ Group discussion Phu Tho, Thai Nguyen

⁶⁷ GROUP DISCUSSION _Phu Tho

⁶⁸ GROUP DISSCUSSION_HH_Nga My, Thai Nguyen

⁶⁹ GROUP DISSCUSSION_Phу Thо

regulation has not been approved yet); the model hamlet pattern has just been developed for less than one year, therefore, this is not known to all local people⁷⁰. For those reasons, the model pattern development with local people's participation is still at the kick-off stage and it can't be evaluated comprehensively and sufficiently.

4.3.7. Transparency of state's investment project in grassroots levels is still restricted. Implementation of local authority's grassroots democracy is still at formalism level.

State's investment projects in grassroots levels have not enhanced local people's participation since it is lack of appropriate schemes and channels for local people's participation. "The state's construction works have had no local people's contribution, thus their participation and the budget transparency are restricted"⁷¹. This has led to the result that "for State funded projects, local people and communes mostly have no opportunity to take part, thus, the construction quality is limited"⁷².

Democracy implementations in some places have had formalism features, local people have not been informed and have no chance to fully discuss. For example, when the road is under construction in a given locality, people were not informed and have no chance to discuss. Instead, they were only required to contribute 5,000VND/person/season. Finally, this amount was not fully contributed since local people thought that they were imposed by local authority⁷³.

This is one of barrier for increasing people participation in the community development process stably.

4.3.8. Functions and benefits of hamlet's leaders are not equivalent to their responsibilities and roles

Many current activities of the commune have been assigned to the hamlet such as fee collecting, contribution collecting, document confirmation, etc. Therefore, responsibilities of hamlet's leader have been increased. While, the State benefit scheme for them do not meet their basic need: no salary and insurance are paid. They are only given an allowance. Hamlet's leader is selected directly by local people through voting. Hamlet's leader's working term is 2.5 years, annually, a local people's vote of confidence is held. This creates more pressures on hamlet's leader position. Therefore, "many localities find it's difficult to select a hamlet's leader as nobody wants to take that position"⁷⁴. Besides, some localities, prestige of hamlet's leader is not high. It has negative influences on the IEC activity (Phu Tho).

⁷⁰ GROUP DISSCUSSION_Quang Tri

⁷¹ Staff_Quang Binh

⁷² Opinions of Staffs in Mai Thuy commune, Quang Binh.

⁷³ anh T. _STAFF_ Cap Dan, Phu Tho

⁷⁴ Hamlet's leader_Phу Thо, Quang Tri

Hamlet's leader plays an important role in enhancing local people's participation, who directly implements IEC activities to involve people to participate. Therefore, if the hamlet leader lacks enthusiasm, the mobilisation of people participation in the community activities will be affected.

4.3.9. Limited knowledge, awareness of local people affect quality of participation

Local people's knowledge and awareness are restricted, especially the monitoring skills. This has negative impacts on their participation and monitoring for the project. In order to monitor local people must have a certain knowledge on monitoring skills and knowledge on the specific professional field, which are, in fact, very limited. Several local staffs said that, the most difficulty of Grassroots democracy regulation is the local people participation in monitoring.

In some localities, people do not fully believe in the local authority, and a part of local people's economic situation is poor, their attention is mainly paid to economic development, not meeting or community activities.⁷⁵

4.3.10. Infrastructure and information facilities are insufficient both in quality and quantity

Due to large commune with different removed population centre, the popularization has met many difficulties the radio system has not gained its best effectiveness. For example, Nga My commune (Thai Nguyen) has the population of more than 10,000, 2,200 households, 26 hamlets, and each hamlet has an average of 100 households, but it has no community common house. Meetings are held in local people's house, while radio equipment is lacked, and this has many negative impacts on participation's quality. There is no community learning centre in most communes of Quang tri and Phu tho. The commune meeting has to organize in the family, that has not good influence on public participation both quantity and quantitative.

4.4. Impacts

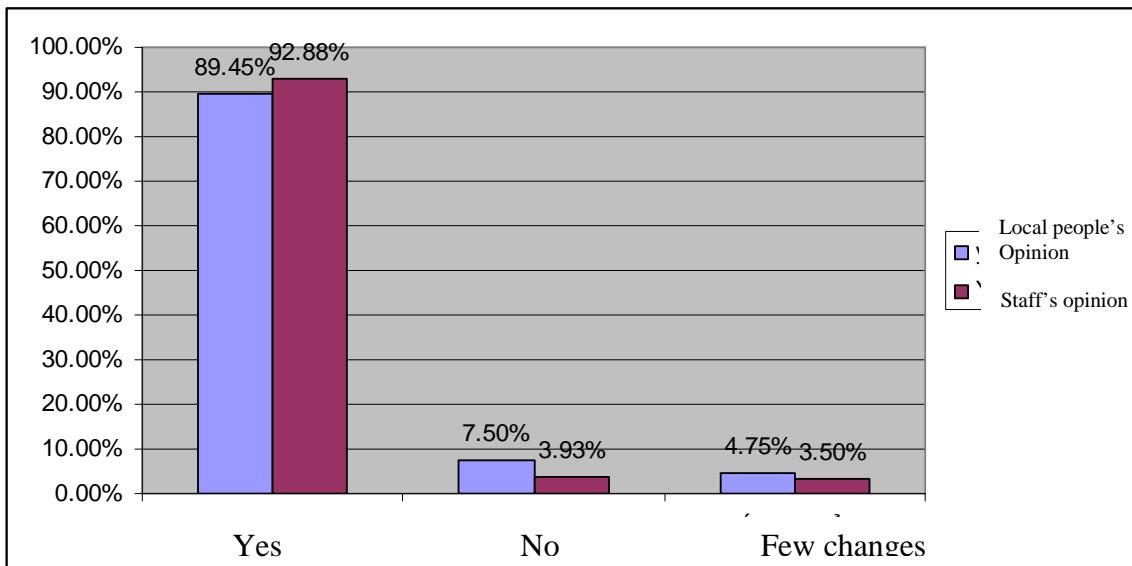
Changes in local people's attitudes

4.4.1. Local people's participation has had many changes over the last few years i.e. active, openness and more responsible

Most of opinions said that there have been a lot of changes in local people's participation over the last few years. 89.45% of local people and 92.88% of staffs said that there have been changes in local people's participation over the last 3 years, while, 7.5% of local people and 3.9% of staffs said that there has been no change (see table 9).

**TABLE 9. CHANGES IN LOCAL PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION
OVER THE PAST 3 YEARS**

⁷⁵ Opinions of people, Staffs of Phu Tho, Quang Binh, Thai Nguyen.



Local people have actively participated in the community development, this is shown by the higher participating rate, more various meeting topics. Many local people's and staff's opinions showed that, number of participants in the common meeting now is higher than those before. In the past, actual number of participants was only 30% of total expected number, and now this has increased to about 70%⁷⁶. Number of meetings has also increased, and meetings' topics are more various. Before, meeting topic was mainly agricultural issues, now the topics are expanded to infrastructure construction, economic development, planting and livestock renovation.⁷⁷

Local people participated more openly, actively and contributed more opinions. In meetings "before, local people dared not to raise opinions as they were afraid of being not right. Now, they can raise their opinions, they even strongly discuss with commune's staffs"⁷⁸, "Before, the opinions were limited only, now they can be raised more freely"⁷⁹. That is also the common idea of local people in group discussions, for example "Local people now are more active and self-aware"⁸⁰, "Local people give more questions and raise more ideas during meetings."⁸¹; "Before, they are afraid of raising opinions, now they are not. Before, in the meetings of People's council, local people did not attend, now they attend and raise ideas"⁸²; "Local people are willing to join, especially in Plan's meetings"⁸³.

⁷⁶ Ngoc Ha/ Nga My, Thai Nguyen, Staff_Quang Binh, Phu Tho, Thai Nguyen

⁷⁷ GROUP DISSCUSSION_Quang Tri

⁷⁸ Mr. H_ -PCT_ HND, Quang Tri

⁷⁹ GROUP DISSCUSSION_Ms. H_ - Thai Nguyen

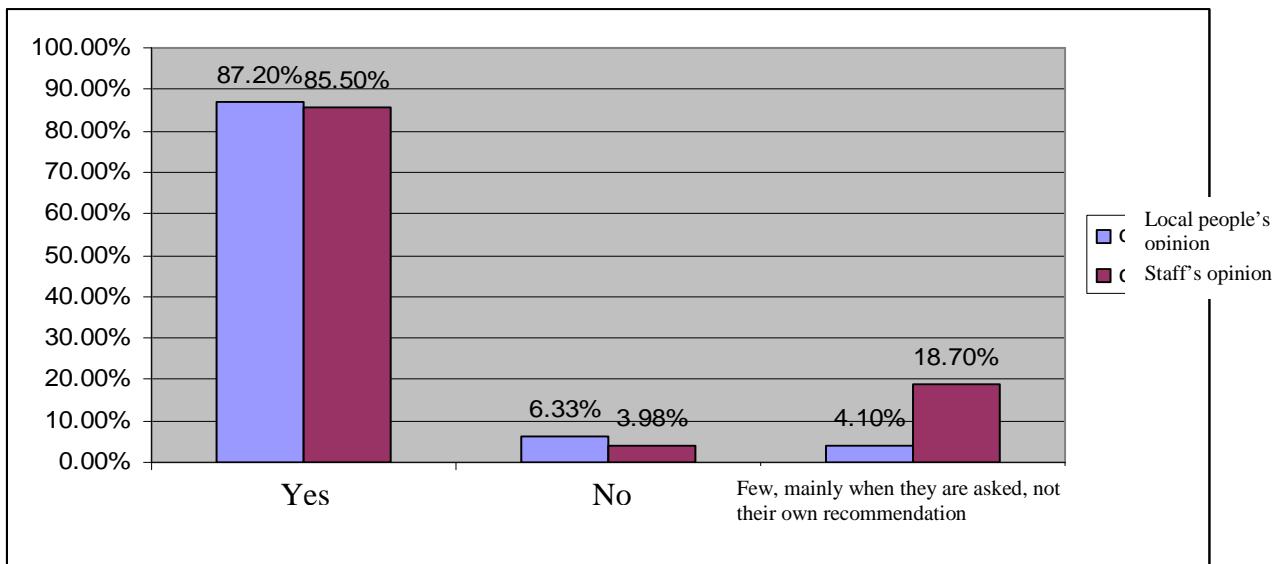
⁸⁰ Mr. L_ hamlet's leader, Quang Tri

⁸¹ Ms. H_GROUP DISSCUSSION_Phу Thо

⁸² Ms. N. Phu Tho

⁸³ Staff_ Phu Tho

TABLE 10. LOCAL PEOPLE'S RECOMMENDATIONS IN MEETINGS



This trend has also been reflected in quantitative information summary of four provinces. 87.2% of total local people and 85.5% of total staffs said that local people always show their points of view, and raise their ideas during meetings, while 6.33% of total local people and 3.98% of total staffs had opposite answers (see table 10). However, 18.7% of total staffs said that, local people raise question to identify information rather than to recommend for adjustments, as the meeting's purpose is to announce information rather than discussion⁸⁴. The reasons for changes are reflected in table 6, including Plan project, local authority, people participation, and media. Plan Project was assessed most highly (92.90% local staff, and 87.98% local people), next people participation (87.48% local people, and 75.65% staff). This asserted the role of Plan project (refer to part 4.4.6), and the changes of public participation for the recent years.

4.4.2. Currently, local people actively take part in economic development and in infrastructure construction.

The most obvious change in local people's participation is economic development and business alternative, in contribution in infrastructure construction. Before, the contribution is only discussed among representatives, now it is expanded to households with more detailed and specific content. Thus, people have more actively taken part in and more responsible. For example, Ha Minh commune, Quang Ninh district, which is not included in Plan project, had 9km rural transportation road construction with the total budget up to 1.8 billion VND, of which 25% is supported by the State and the rest is contributed by the local people. Local people actively contributed and this road has been

⁸⁴ Staff_Phu Tho, Quang Binh

completed now⁸⁵. This is also the common idea of several staffs of Quang Tri, Thai Nguyen, Phu Tho, saying that, the clearest change is in welfare construction works such as rural transportation, culture house, sport grounds, or works related to environmental, medical service, educational issues, etc.

4.4.3. Local people's awareness and sense of community and politics have been changed

Local people are more responsible for their village and commune

They are aware of their responsibilities to the hamlet, commune, and this is shown in their active participation⁸⁶ in the village regulation development, which has not happened before⁸⁷, or their active contribution to the hamlet's community house construction⁸⁸.

For example the local people contribution to construction of commune as well as people participation in plan project process (from design to monitoring).

4.4.4. People activeness in participation is higher, reflecting in their needs and sense of participation in authority's activities

The findings above proved that local people raised more opinions and ideas than before, reflecting in higher number of meetings between local authorities with local people⁸⁹. People pay more attention to the information board and raise questions when list of candidates for election is post too late⁹⁰. Local people have sense of attending the meetings of People's council and ask to monitor, comment on the construction works in the hamlet, with both Plan supported works and non-Plan supported ones⁹¹. Obviously, NORAD project made remarkable contribution to improve quality and quantity of local people participation.

Women participation in community development was improved clearly

- Women have actively participated in community's activities, which are shown in higher rate of women participants than that of male participants. In many places, the women participant rate is about 60-70%, and in one commune in Phu Tho, this rate reaches 80%. The reason for the higher rate of women participant than that of men is men normally work far away from home (Phu Tho, Thai Nguyen, Quang Binh). Another reason is that, women is more responsible than men, thus they like to attend meeting and raise idea, and "men prefer drinking to meeting"⁹². This is clearly shown in women group discussions in the localities, women have actively raised opinions and they have been responsible. Training activities helped people more confident. Training on gender equality has increased women and men's awareness. Men listened to women's opinion. And women are more confident in delivering their opinions and expectations. Women's active participation at the community cultural house in Ban Dat (Thai Nguyen) is an example.

⁸⁵ Mr. H._Staff_ Van Ninh_ Quang Ninh,Quang Binh

⁸⁶ Staff_Cap Dan, Phu Tho; Ban Đat, Thai Nguyen, Van Ninh, Quang Binh

⁸⁷ Staff_Le Thuy_Quang Binh

⁸⁸ Cam Nghia, Vạn Ninh_ Quang Binh; Staff - Quang Tri

⁸⁹ Mr. S._ Staff_ Quang Binh

⁹⁰ Staff_ Quang Binh, Quang Tri

⁹¹ Staff, Quang Binh, Quang Tri

⁹² Phu Tho_GROUP DISSCUSSION

- *Women participation has been changed significantly a lot for the past few years: more confident, active and more ideas raised than before.* That is the idea of many women group discussions (Phu Tho, Thai Nguyen, Quang Binh, Quang Tri) “Before, we did not think that we could speak in a meeting, but after we were trained, we are no longer hesitate as before. We can raise our ideas in the hamlet meeting and ask the hamlet and commune to solve our issues such as social evils, etc.”⁹³. “Before, in hamlet’s meeting, women normally stand outside window of the meeting room, now, they are confident to present their ideas”⁹⁴. Their awareness of various issues was raised, and the people’s democracy rights and activeness in community development were improved⁹⁵.
- *Women are more confident and responsible in communication and advocacy programs,* this is illustrated that women in six eighth of women groups said information of GDD projects and Plan project were provided them via mass organisations and hamlet’s women’s organisation in meetings.

Child participation

Although children did not directly participate in the GDD project, a number of children can indirectly take part in the program via GDD competition festival in the communes. Besides, their participation in Plan’s project in the community has been shown clearly. Children have been consulted on the school construction projects. Rate of actual participation of children in meeting is about 90%⁹⁶. Children’s participation has been changed remarkably compared to that of before. They are more confident in the participation: “Children are now much more confident. Before, whenever they meet strange people, they run away, now they can raise the ideas, speak out their opinions and participate in art activities”⁹⁷. They are more confident and have dreams as they have been trained in the “living value” and “my dream”, “celebration day of creation” training courses⁹⁸.

Children want and wish to participate in community activities. We really like attending meetings. Each month, we have 1-3 meetings with different topics such as traffic safety, environmental sanitation, etc. and then we disseminate the learnt information to our friends⁹⁹. “We want to contribute our ideas, as joint idea of people is better than idea of one person. We want to join so that the adult can better understand us and we can practice to be an adult and decide adult’s issues”¹⁰⁰.

4.4.5. Local people have more information, better understanding legal issues, thus their awareness and knowledge have been improved

⁹³ Ms. Nghĩ _FEMALE GROUP DISSCUSSION_TN

⁹⁴ Hamlet’s leader_PVS_Thai Nguyen

⁹⁵ GROUP DISSCUSSION_Van Luong, Mai Thuy, Quang Tri

⁹⁶ Youth association’s staff’s opinions_ Quang Binh

⁹⁷ staff_ Thai Nguyen

⁹⁸ staff-Phu Tho

⁹⁹ GROUP DISSCUSSION_TE_Quang Binh

¹⁰⁰ CHILDREN GROUP DISSCUSSION _ Thai Nguyen

Opinions during group discussions identified that now, local people have more information as many families have TVs and radios¹⁰¹; they have better understanding of the state's policies and their awareness have been improved. It can be seen in their active participation in meetings with more and more opinions were raised¹⁰².

4.4.6. Plan is an important catalyst that promotes local people's participation

There are many reasons resulted in positive changes in local people's participation like changes in hamlet, commune authorities attitudes, impacts of Plan project, and changes in local people themselves as well as the information dissemination system improvement in localities, etc. Plan supported project were considered by both local people (87.98%) and staffs (92.90%) (see table 6) as a catalyst, which has most influence on local people's participation. Obvious change in active people's participation and activities of Commune people council also can be seen.

Plan projects provided training, GDD dissemination leading to improve knowledge and awareness for local people, or in another words Plan builds participatory capacity for local people as well as creates opportunities for them to participate in project's activities. This was recognized and highly appreciated by local people and staffs, "Nobody has implemented poverty reduction and hunger elimination works as well as Plan did"¹⁰³.

The activities of People's Council have been changing a lot according to the National Assembly's renovation trend, as shown in their better monitoring and accountability responsibilities¹⁰⁴.

4.4.7. An critical change: Local people are aware of the importance people's participation in the development

Most of local people from group discussions considered that the more people's participation in projects the more we will¹⁰⁵:

- Meet the people's actual needs, ensure people's benefits, reduce lavishment, and improve effectiveness and quality of the works; Make used of labor, achieve better quality of work, prohibit fraud, minimise deviation from construction design, making it more useful to local people.
- Improve people's awareness through mutual communication, information exchange, guidelines; people can do as well as monitor; People's have more opportunities to access new scientific and technological knowledge; People can better understand legal policies.
- Ensure social equality, ensure local people's benefits, and reduce conflicts in the community.

However, there are a number of challenges. More local people's participation will make it difficult to select beneficiaries and localities to be invested as people are poor and they have many needs. Too many or controversial ideas will cause conflicts and contradiction. This is reflected in table 11, 79.9% of asked people, and 77.4% asked staffs affirm importance and feasibilities of people participation in community development,

¹⁰¹ Ms. G_GROUP DISSCUSSION_Phu Tho

¹⁰² Staff_ Thai Nguyen, Quang Binh,Quang Tri

¹⁰³ Anh T_Staff_Quang Binh

¹⁰⁴ Staff - Thai Nguyen district

¹⁰⁵ Staff 's opinions_ Phu Tho, Thai Nguyen, Quang Tri, and Quang Binh

compared to those 0% and 2.7%, respectively who consider it is not necessary. Only 16.8% asked people and 4.8% asked staffs affirm importance and less feasibility of people participation in community development. This result showed that most local people and staffs believed the needs and feasibility of local people participation. There is still a small number of local people, which is much higher than that of staff, do not believe in the feasibility of people's participation at grassroots level.

4.4.8. Limitations in people's participation

- Common thought of people in poor areas is still reliance on projects and government. They lack readiness to participate development activities. "We are still poor, we need many things. Every thing is valuable to us. Therefore, it is not necessary to raise questions" ¹⁰⁶. This is also the common idea of many group discussions (Thai Nguyen, Quang Binh) and comments of commune's staffs (Thai Nguyen, Phu Tho, Quang Tri) in terms of local people's participation.

- *Local people's awareness and understanding are still limited.* They are mainly interested in direct, immediate benefits and their sense of community is not high ¹⁰⁷. They are only interested in economic activities, which has short-term benefits ¹⁰⁸. One of the reasons for women participation limitation is that they have to earn family income and neglect their role in community.

The quality of women' participation is still limited as the rate of women in the local authority position has not been improved

Women's participation is mostly to meet short - term needs such as money, foods, clothing and impact of their participation on the authority's decisions has been restricted¹⁰⁹. Unlike women's participation in the community, women's participation in local authority is very limited. Women's participation rate in the local authority is 20-25%, and this rate is even lower in some communes, only 10% (PhuTho) or no female staff in commune authority; only one woman is the president of Commune Women's union.

A commune's women staff said: The reason for the low rate of women participation at grassroots level staff is that women have limited knowledge; they voices are not weighted. Moreover, they are engaged with housework most of the time. They cannot participate in authority activities. In some places (Phu Tho) common idea of "male preference" is a big obstacle to their participation in social activities. They have to opt "either husband or commune's activities"¹¹⁰. Commune's staff said: "In fact, the commune leaders are really concerned in this issue, however, due to limited knowledge and capacity of women as they are busy with housework, therefore they have no time to

¹⁰⁶ Ms. L_GROUP DISSCUSSION-Phu Tho

¹⁰⁷ Staff_Mai Thuy, Le Thuy, Quang Binh

¹⁰⁸ Hamlet's leader_Phу Thо

¹⁰⁹ Comment by President of Communal Women's association Thai Nguyen, Quang Binh

¹¹⁰ CT_HPN_Phу Thо

build up capacity”¹¹¹. This comment of the commune’s staff has partially inhered gender bias towards women’s capacity. They have not highlighted the roots cause of the problem, why women’s knowledge is limited? The problem here is women have no chance or little chance to participate in hamlet’s activities together with men.

Changes in staff’s attitude toward promotion of local people’s participation

4.4.9. They are aware of the importance of local people’s participation in the local socio-economic development

The staffs have found motivation for enhancing local people’s participation as it contribute to better implementation of local authority’s function. 77.4% of respondents said that, the people’s participation in local development is necessary and feasible, only 4.8% of them think that it is necessary but less feasible (See table 11). Results from interviews indicated that local people at district, commune, and hamlet/village levels are fully aware the basic benefits of local people’s participation, as follows:

Resource mobilization for economic development and improvement of infrastructure. This statement was said by most of staffs when being asked about the benefits of local people’s participation. High participation will help to mobilize resource among people better - common idea of staffs of Phu Tho, Thai Nguyen, Quang Binh, Quang Tri. In fact, a significant contribution by local people has been mobilized in terms of money, in kind and, labor in building hamlet’s and commune’s infrastructure such as schools, health station, etc.¹¹².

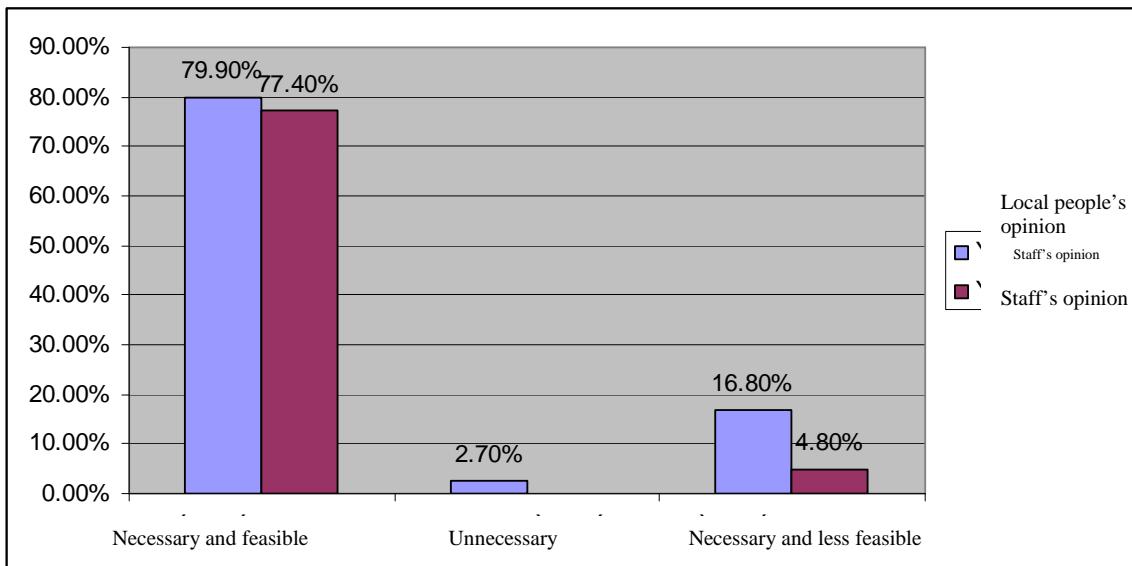
Currently, due to economic difficulties at localities, the budget income of commune is very limited. For example, in Nga My (Thai Nguyen), in 2006, the commune income was only about 35 million VND compared to total expense of 700 million VND, “in 2007, we estimate commune income is 50 million VND, while we don’t know from which resources we can mobilise such amount of budget”¹¹³. For example, Van Luong, Phu Tho so far earned income about 200 million VND against the total 700 million VND expenses, etc. Thus mobilisation of people’s contribution for infrastructure construction and economic development are always considered the first priority. The implementation of grassroots democracy implementation is recognized as the motivation for local people’s contribution enhancement.

TABLE 11. ROLES OF LOCAL PEOPLE’S PARTICIPATION

¹¹¹ CT_HĐND_ Thai Nguyen

¹¹² Staff_Quang Binh

¹¹³ Chủ tịch xã_ Nga My, Thai Nguyen



Implementation of equality and democracy, strengthening community solidarity and stabilization, reducing conflict and claim. Mobilize local people's participation is to enhance their rights of ownership¹¹⁴ and minimise opponents to policy¹¹⁵, increase people's trust and reduce prolonged and beyond levelling claims¹¹⁶.

Increase people's awareness as well as improve capacity for grassroots level staff's. According to many staffs' opinions, people's participation is a critical factor to increase their awareness and understanding democracy, resulting in better implementation of state policies (Thai Nguyen, Quang Binh, Quang Tri). Through that, staff's capacity will be improved, "knowledge and experience of hamlet's staffs will be improved and the quality of working performance will be better"¹¹⁷.

Create motivation for improvement of governance at grassroots levels towards increase of accountability, transparency and participation. "With people's participation, everything can be done" – that is the opinion of V. Quang Binh. This is also the common opinion of staffs in Phu Tho, Thai Nguyen and that enhancement of people's participation will make commune authorities closer to people and community activities easier.

4.5. Sustainability

4.5.1. Being aware of grassroots democracy's impacts on socio-economic development
Authority and local people are aware of how grassroots democracy and people's participation in the local socio-economic development, hunger elimination and poverty

¹¹⁴ Staff_Nga My_Thai Nguyen

¹¹⁵ Staff_Phу Thо, Thai Nguyen, Quang Binh

¹¹⁶ Staff_Thai Nguyen, Phu Tho, Quang Tri

¹¹⁷ Hamlet's leader_Phу Thо

reduction are. These recognition and understanding of people and authority are key factors of sustainability¹¹⁸. This is an important factor to ensure the project sustainability.

4.5.2. Creating practice of needs to participate among people

It can not be denied the role of NORAD project and local authority in creating practice among people to participate willingly in the meeting in order to improve their knowledge, understand issues and state legal policies. The project contributes to enhancement of people active participation. "People like to attend meeting. Their attitude is more serious. They do not bring children to the meeting or chit chat during meetings as now they understand that they can communicate with each others, join art and cultural activities and they can listen to the radio"¹¹⁹. "We do not attend the meeting for money, even if Plan does not give us money for attendance, we still want to attend to have information on health care and plant cultivation"¹²⁰. "We still want to attend to have information on State's policies and other news such as livestock raising, planting and rice cultivation etc."¹²¹.

4.5.3. Improvement of Capacity of local government staff and staffs of mass organisations is a good illustration of sustainability

The commune's staff's knowledge, especially the hamlet's staffs has been improved after trainings of the GDD project: "Working performance and meeting VDP (Village Development Plan) are much improved after training: VDP members' communication with people is clearer; meeting steps are handled more professionally, which bring into positive result"¹²². "Staff's capacity and knowledge level has been significantly improved, especially their awareness on mobilisation of people's participation in budget planning and expense were increased"¹²³. That is the opinion of district's staffs of Quang Binh and district farmer's association of Quang Tri. Awareness of Staff of Quang Tri Planning and Investment's department were increased in terms of people's and community's roles in the socio-economic development plan. They understand and can apply new planning methods with people's consultation. Also, they will be able to apply this planning method in future¹²⁴.

4.5.4. Improvement and maintenance of construction project

As people were able to participate in common activities and community's development, they themselves have good awareness to maintain community's works¹²⁵. "People's responsibilities in maintenance of community work has been changed. In the past, there

¹¹⁸ Staff_Thai Nguyen

¹¹⁹ FEMALE GROUP DISSCUSSION __Quang Binh

¹²⁰ Ms.Mân-Thai Nguyen

¹²¹ Ms Bắp-Phu Tho

¹²² Hamlet's leader_Thai Nguyen

¹²³ Staff_Thai Nguyen

¹²⁴ Opinion of unit's head_Department of Planning and Investement, Quang Tri

¹²⁵ Staff_Van Ninh, Quang Binh

was a common ignorance of common work as if do not belong to them. Now they have clear sense of their responsibility”¹²⁶.

The community learning centre in Bai Phang village, Ban Dat commune of Thai Nguyen is a typical example for people’s awareness of community’s work maintenance and improvement. People are very proud of the works that they contributed. They have strict management rules for the works. Financial contribution was made to pay for the guarding staff’s salary for 24h/day. “The village leader recommended the salary of 120,000 VND/month, but people decided to pay 180,000 VND/month for a person who looks after the work. All activities at the learning centre are monitored and recorded in the book” ¹²⁷.

4.5.5. Feasibility to continue activities of the GDD project

Most of opinions indicated that many GDD project’s activities will be continued without Plan’s support as this is the local authority’s task. The project support made communication and grassroots democracy implementation more profound and substantive. It can be a premise for people and authority to continue the grassroots participation, however the scope and the size would be reduced. Training and IEC activities can be “further integrated in village meetings”¹²⁸. “We have leaflet format. We can print more if necessary”¹²⁹. “Media equipments will be maintained for further use in village meetings”¹³⁰.

Although the GDD competition festivals are favored by most of staffs and people since it is a good way of attractive and IEC, many people said that this model is difficult to continue due to the shortage of budget and organization skills. This has been also confirmed in the quantitative information.

Table 12. Maintaining activities without Plan’s support

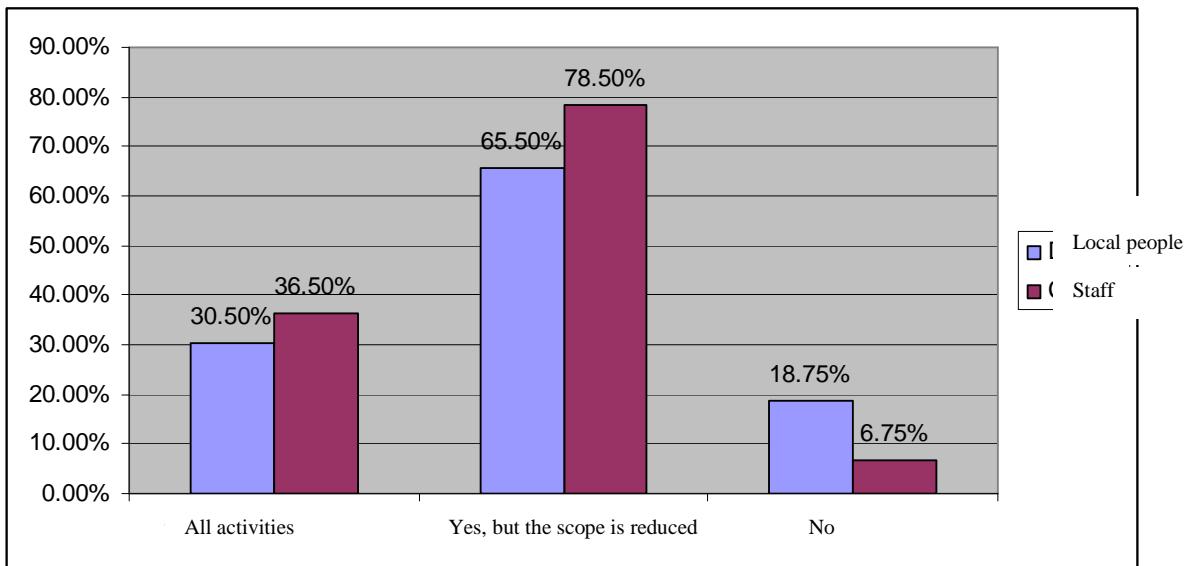
¹²⁶ Staff_Quang Tri

¹²⁷ Hamlet’s leader_Bai Phang, Ban Dat_Thai Nguyen

¹²⁸ Hamlet’s leader_Phу Thо

¹²⁹ Staff_ Thai Nguyen, Quang Binh

¹³⁰ Staff _Quang Binh



According to most of informants, the project's activities can be sustained but at the smaller scope (78.5% staffs and 65.5% people). Beside, 36.5% staffs and 30.5% people thought that all activities can be sustained, compared to those of 6.75% staffs and 18.75% people who said that the activities can not be sustained (see table 12).

Regarding program “Provincial development plan 2005-2010 with the community consultation”, Quang Tri Planning and Investment department (DPI) will recommend to the Provincial People’s Committee that from 2007, the community consultation should be integrated in the provincial planning and budget should be allocated for its implementation. However, the DPI staff said that, in order to implement this task regularly, the consultation for the planning should be regulated in the Planning Law so that it can be applied by all sectors at local level. The Department will officially incorporate this idea in the State’s draft Plan Law in the coming time, and will mobilise people’s consultation for development plans.

In general, there is a high potential of sustaining grassroots democracy activities. For example, community will definitely make used of media equipment after the project ends. The IEC activities maintenance is not difficult, but it still depends on the specific orientation and guidance of commune and district authority. However, communicators group in most of communes are not strong enough to maintain IEC activities. It is a challenge that needs support from higher levels of authorities.

4.6. Project design and management

4.6.1. Project's general design, which have impact on the civil society,

The project objective is too broad to address both issues such Decree No 79 and Decree No 88, thus it is difficult to give direction to local projects at their initial steps of implementation¹³¹. Actually, the 79 Decree was focused and undertaken. Also, at the beginning, the initial project implementation period (2004-2005), local GDD projects lacked guidelines from the National office. It lacked coordination and detailed guidelines. While this is a new issue, the project's framework are not detailed, regional staff and local staffs are not familiar and they find it difficult to identify the specific directions for the program in their localities. In many localities, at first they have to seek ways to implement by themselves¹³². In the next period, this issue has been improved, specifically, from October, 2005 the National office has sent to PUs the guidelines No 1 on the orientation of local GDD project implementation. Several months later, the guidelines No 2 with more concrete guidance was sent. The guidelines No 3 was sent 1 year later, which has reviewed main activities that can be done in PUs, and suggestions for grassroots democracy model application so that the project's activities become more practical and sustainable. And together with the guidelines, the National office and Pus have had meetings, discussions to find out solutions for the program's quality improvement.

Differences in understanding among Plan's staffs and partners on the grassroots democracy made Plan's staffs unconfident in the project implementation cooperation¹³³. Attention should be paid to capacity building for project staff of PUs to improve the quality and effective of the project next time.

4.6.2. Program management via partners

Activities of the GDD project and other Plan's projects, Plan's management agencies in localities have not been carried out directly to local people, but via local partners. Therefore, the program's activities' qualities much depend on capacity and commitment of local authorities, mass organisations or State agencies. Besides, the grassroots democracy is still a sensitive issue of locality, thus, there were many initial difficulties during discussions. This required Plan's staffs to understand deeply and thoroughly this field.

Many informants said that there has been no perfect partner for the GDD project implementation. Each partner has its weaknesses and strengths. For example, the Farmer's association can implement well with local people, but its influence to local authority and other mass organisation are restricted¹³⁴. Thai Nguyen, Quang Binh PUs enhanced their strengths in cooperation with the District People's committee. The selection of commune authority as its partner in Phu Tho will bring about more advantages if it combine project's activities with capacity building for grassroots staff, thus will increase the program's sustainability. However, there are some constraints like

¹³¹ Staff _Quang Binh

¹³² Staff Thai Nguyen

¹³³ Staff_Plan_Thai Nguyen

¹³⁴ Mr. T_Staff - Trung Sơn_ Quang Tri

level of commune staffs' knowledge, skills and the power scope of commune in the grassroots democracy projects.

The question is how to support partners to enhance their strengths and reduce their weaknesses. It can be done through capacity building for partners like provide technical support in combination with monitoring and in the program implementation¹³⁵

5. Expectations and recommendations

Improve quality of IEC

1. Expand the scope and target people, who are involved in IEC

Expand the GDD project scope to non-implemented areas, and to those who have not been involved yet in the communication activities. Continue approaches implemented in the GDD project, where priority is given to broader communication to local people, whereas special attention should be paid to women, adolescents, ethnic minority people and other vulnerable groups in community. Continue to improve communication modes such as training, GDD competition festival appropriate to people. For example, the GDD competition festival should be held at village level with simple, diversified contents which are suitable to the community culture in order to widen the targeted group, especially women and children. Currently, the government Ordinance No 34 on Grassroots democracy has been issued and takes effect since 1/7/07. In the coming time, Plan is encouraged to disseminate this Ordinance in Plan supported areas under different forms like workshop, training workshop on new points of the Ordinance, opportunities as well as challenges in the implementation of grassroots democracy after enforcement of the Ordinance. Target groups should include PUs, local authorities at different level in order to achieve common sense of Ordinance knowledge, and ultimately to discuss new projects and new cooperation ideas.

2. Continue IEC on grassroots democracy on regular basis, combining the Ordinance on Grassroots democracy (No 34, which is effected from 01/07/2007) with other legal documents and related issues such as child protection, environmental protection, gender, etc. or with relevant issues of mass organizations such as Women's union, Youth's union, Farmer's union, etc.

3. *Implement simultaneously different modes/forms of IEC..* Each IEC form has both advantages and disadvantages. Training can provide and explain grassroots democracy knowledge in details, but the effective training (with the participation method) has restricted attendance of participants. Leaflet can be distributed more widely, faster and less expenses. . . However, those, who have not been communicated and do not understand the grassroots democracy, will find it less attractive. They may not read it, as a result the leaflet becomes useless. Therefore, combination of various modes of IEC like the training, GDD competition festival, leaflets, and panels will bring about good result. For example, the leaflet can be distributed after the training, or before the GDD

¹³⁵ Staff _Thai Nguyen

competition festival. It will help to gain better this result rather than distribution of leaflet separately.

4. Take into account the technical support and methods of implementation. For example, participatory training and IEC methods, techniques for organizing the GDD competition festival, or leaflet, panels designing techniques are very important to increase the IEC effectiveness. This is a relatively new approach to most of localities especially at communal and village levels. Therefore, Plan's support by providing professional consultant, expert network is strongly needed. Also, Plan should pay attention to the development of core communicator group in localities, increase of their knowledge, especially skills, methods so that they can continue and broaden IEC on grassroots democracy to local people.

5. Incorporate IEC with a specific model

To make IEC on grassroots democracy more attractive and rich, different topics should be introduced and incorporated in other programs and projects being implemented in the locality. For instance, the village regulation development should be combined with the grassroots democracy dissemination to create tight linkage between the GDD and the development and implementation of village regulation.

6. Provide support for local authorities and mass organizations with capacity in people mobilization. Support for capacity building for commune and village staffs should be paid attention to and combination of grassroots democracy and people's participation mobilization skills such as presentation skill, meeting, negotiation etc. and some basic knowledge on development (participation, gender and child rights etc.). For the village staff, attention should be paid on providing them with appropriate skills, and for the commune staff and staff of mass organizations with basic knowledge on grassroots democracy and other related knowledge. Guide local authorities and local people how to apply the participatory approach in the community development process by applying CMP (Community Management Project)¹³⁶ into commune socio-economic development plan.

7. Review, share experience in project implementation within a PU and among PUs

Experience indicated where the review and exchange of experiences are paid attention to the grassroots democracy programme will gain more effective outcomes. Regular review of and experience from the project implementation should be done for better implementation in the future. For example, Thai Nguyen organized three workshops among projects and local authorities at different levels to draw lesions before and during the project implementation if the review is undertaken well, it will bring multiple outcomes. In addition to experiences and lessons learnt for the project's implementation in the future, the review also serves as a forum to advocate local authorities and where both Plan and partners can share, exchange objectives, common interests (Plan project and each local authority) for better and smoother implementation of the project.

¹³⁶ Staff_Plan_Phу Tho

Increase effectiveness in investment in infrastructure and media information.

Synchronous and relevant investment. Information infrastructure plays an important role in the mobilization of local people's participation, which helps to provide better quality of information and quality of people's participation in terms of better information provision and creating favorable condition for the local people's participation quality improvement. Therefore, continuation of supporting media equipment and information system is necessary. However, the investment must be synchronous and comprehensive to ensure effectiveness. e.g. investment in media equipment with building common house. . Information means like book-selves and information boards should be placed in safe and convenient to use. If media equipment was provided, while the common house is lacked, the equipment is hardly brought into full play. In deed, village meeting (major form of community meeting, where people's participation can be realised), meetings of mass organizations entertainment activities for children... need common house to display. In this connection, Plan may consider to support in building common house for those villages, which are allocated in remote areas with difficult situation with media equipment.

Continue support in investment in village book-shelves in addition to legal books, books on agricultural techniques should also be provided as they are critically necessary to the rural areas¹³⁷.

Design and develop good models of people's participation

1. *Continue to develop and multiply models of people's participation.* In fact, In fact, there is a bit difficult to modernize people's participation to all areas as each locality has its own social, economic and cultural features.

Models of grassroots democracy application are differed from various areas, which enable to create specific approaches and different topics to meet the actual situation to mobilise people's participation. It can be seen that, the implementation of grassroots democracy is varied among areas and it seems hardly to have a common model for all. Types of models are also depended on specific policies of each area, its capacity and actual needs. Importantly, it is needed to facilitate and create favourable conditions, environment and channels for people to really participate socioeconomic development process for promotion of sustainability local governance.

To successfully apply models, the following factors should be taken into consideration:

2. Provide technical and methodological in initial procedures for the initial implementation, which play an important role to ensure that the objective and the efficiency of the models are met. For example, model "Sac Tu pumping station self

¹³⁷ Phú Bình- District, Hamlet's leader_Luyen, Binh_PVP Le Thuy

management team” (Quang Binh), the consultants from Economics University of Hue have provided technical support to the village for months, helped them in building up committed village regulation by village people, ensuring the participation from beneficiaries, benefits of stakeholders and legal compliance. Another example can be seen from SEDP in Quang Tri. Consultant group from Hue Agricultural and Forestry University’s provided effectively technical support for Quang Tri Investment and Planning Department during consultancy time. External support is one of the key factors that bring about the program’s success.

3. *Integrate the grassroots democracy into existing programs in Plan supported areas* has a critical meaning in improvement of people’s participation as well as improvement of sustainability of the grassroots democracy program and other Plan supported projects in community.

4. *Build and maintain activities of common house* present a relatively practical model, which can meet the demand for people’s participation. In the mean time, it can serve as a good mean to improve the people’s participation in the community.

5. *Seek for opportunities, especially new State’s policies to improve policy implementation at grassroots level* is a good condition facilitates people’s participation in policymaking and to achieve effective, direct influence to the local authority.

Improve the project management

1. Improve the design of the project in term of integration of grassroots democracy into other Plan supported projects and other programs being implemented in the community, aiming to improve community’s participation in Plan projects and State’s programs. At the same time, through the grassroots democracy project, promote people’s participation in the State’s policy making process by enabling them to participate in forums and researches etc., from commune to provincial levels, from the policy making to implementation and impact assessment stages.

2. Provide knowledge and skills on grassroots democracy, policy advocacy for PU staff, who is responsible for the Grassroots participation project, support them to enrich knowledge and experiences through information exchange, lessons learnt and training courses or workshops.

3. Improve and reduce the financial payment procedures for the project activities.

4. Plan should have longer-term plan so that the commune can be proactive in actively development of its plan in mobilization of people’s participation. GDD project is an example. After learning commune situation) and needs, a master program should be designed (its duration should be longer than one year and implemented (its duration can be not only one year but several years), in which, the commune’s role and Plan’s supporting role during the project implementation should be identified clearly so that the commune can be proactive in arrange and mobilize its resources relevant to each period.

Some other conditions may enable to implement GDD project more effectively

Further cooperation between Plan and local authorities at different levels is needed for effective implement GDD project. The followings are some suggestions:

Local authority

Further promote people's participation

1. For better mobilize people's participation, Plan in cooperation with local government should focus to provide people more information for local people through different forms such as meetings with people, meetings with mass organizations, radio, information/news boards, etc. Attention should be paid to important information like financial transparency, transparency of local people's contribution and welfare works; the economic and financial issues must be very clear¹³⁸.
2. Broaden scope and target people, who can be able to participate in development project in community. It should not narrow the activities within the beneficiaries. If we do so, more people will have opportunities to participate and discuss in development issues.
3. Diversify participatory channels. In addition to village meeting as an official form for people's consultation, consultation form should be expanded via mass organizations , commune interest- based clubs and other community common activities so that local people will have more opportunities to raise their voices to the project and local authorities at different levels.
4. Improve village meeting. In Phu tho, it is commonly used of the ringing bell for convention of people. However, people said that the meeting convention should be improved by informing people objectives, agenda and contents of the meeting and commune or village staff should invite people directly..

Improve operation of local government for better people's participation

1, Staffs must be closed to people and more responsible to build trust. For example, they should participate in village meeting with people¹³⁹ and exercise their promises to people¹⁴⁰.

- 2, Staff recruitment should be paid attention to selection criteria, who must have good qualification, be responsible enthusiastic to their common task¹⁴¹.
3. Attention should be paid to provision of knowledge, people mobilization skill for staff, particularly for staff at grassroots level. Knowledge and skill to mobilize people have

¹³⁸ Cap Dan- Phu Tho; Nga My_Thai Nguyen

¹³⁹ Staff_Ban Đạt_ Thai Nguyen

¹⁴⁰ Phu Tho

¹⁴¹ Nga My_Staff_ Thai Nguyen

important meaning for staff to well fulfill their task. Local government officials should continue improving knowledge and executing skills as well as meeting organization skill¹⁴² for village staff. These are basic factors to improve information provision and have better and more effective people's participation.

4. *Government should improve policies towards village staffs*, i.e. village leader's responsibilities and authorities should be accompanied by benefits, which often have close relations among each other. Special attention should be paid to the beneficial treatment scheme and capacity building for village leaders. However, training for village leaders faces with a certain difficulty as their working term is only 2.5 years. It goes to the end of their working term, while the training is being still in progress. Therefore, the training program should be brief and more practical¹⁴³.

5. *State's investment policies for grassroots level should be improved in term of more specific regulations on the grassroots participation, particularly the people's participation in project cycle, from the project need assessment to monitoring and evaluation stages.*

Plan supported Projects in community

Effectively strengthen and mobiles people's participation

Plan supported projects should continue to complete people's participation scheme, particularly:

Continue applying people's participatory approach in all Plan supported programs and projects. For regular meeting between Plan and project management team, other local representatives should be invited.

It needs to improve monitoring with people's participation in Plan supported projects in community towards more practical. For example, while taking monitoring in the project site, Plan staff should also check with minute of people's meeting, directly communicate with people and head of resident cluster and representatives of mass organisations¹⁴⁴.

Better mobilize participation of mass organization in the project implementation. For example, for the projects related to children and youth, Youth Union should be involved in terms of project activities management as well as its budget¹⁴⁵.

As the Plan supported project are being implemented in poor areas with economic difficulty, Plan should pay more attention to the livelihood activities. Thus, these

¹⁴² Ngoc – Plan- Quang Binh

¹⁴³ Vice president -Commune people committee

¹⁴⁴ Staff_Phu Tho

¹⁴⁵ Staff_ Phu Tho

activities will contribute to increase people's awareness and capacity to be more proactive and reduce reliance on others. For example, livelihood project will equip them knowledge on science and technology, legal policy and opportunities to participate¹⁴⁶.

6. Conclusion

Right after completion of the evaluation work in at selected provinces, it can be affirmed that though the project has been implemented for only 3 years, it reached its set target in supporting and promoting grassroots democracy and mobilizing people's participation in different localities. Moreover, the project has met people and local government needs in the implementation of grassroots democracy. Nevertheless, some activities did not reach expectations yet, most of reasons of which are beyond control of PU. For example the supported equipment for information system at villages cannot bring into full play due to the lack of institution on "communal activity/learning center", or due to short time of implementation or incomplete activities.

GDD project was implemented creatively by PUs, suitable to the reality of each locality towards improvement of participation capability and to people mobilization of local people and government. The program made people confident in the participatory process by raising their awareness, providing them with knowledge on rights and obligations, as well as really having them practiced participation in each steps of Plan supported projects and in specific models of GDD project such as: development of communal village regulation, design of village development plan, etc. Through this, local staff becomes more aware of importance of people's participation, and more capable in people mobilization, promoting local governance reform towards openness, transparency and accountability.

Common efforts of GDD project together and other Plan supported projects in community have created significant changes in the participation of people in the community development. This was reaffirmed by most staff and people who were asked or interviewed during the evaluation process. People's participation become more active. They are more open to reflect and share their opinions with community and local authorities, noticeably changing in the women's and children's participation in community development. They become more open and confident.

Better participation of local people has contributed to local socio-economic development, hunger elimination and poverty reduction and to increase of life quality of community and family, including children's lives. Quality of welfare, health, and school facilities is improved owing to the community and people's participation in supervision. Schools meet requirements of children better as the children were consultation in school building.

GDD project also brought an impact that local authorities become closer to people and better understand them. People have more opportunities to take part in community development, especially in development of socio-economic development plan. Quant Tri

¹⁴⁶ Staff_Quản g Trị, leader of Youth Union - Sỹ, Vạn Ninh

5 – year SEDP (socio-economic development plan) taken in consultation with People was a clear evidence for this. Different people groups of men, women, children, ethnic minorities were consulted and able to raise their ideas to the socio-economic development plan of the province. There were valuable ideas for supplementation and improvement of the plan, making the plan people friendly and more feasible. Through this process, staff's awareness, capacity and organization ability to develop consultation plan are improved.

Beside the purpose of promoting people's participation at grassroots level, GDD project also expects to extend the participation of civil society. However, this expectation has not been exposed clearly in the project activities. In fact, civil society is a fairly new concept, and sensitive in Viet Nam, especially in localities. In order to achieve this purpose, it is necessary to learn more about this concept and translate civil society concept and people's participation in situation of Vietnam. Vietnam civil society is not popular in reality if it is understood as social organizations operating indecently from state institutions. Most of mass organizations in Vietnam like Vietnam Women's Union, Youth Union, Farmer associations etc. have their network down to village level, which are major means to help local people access to politics and are organizations of the Communist Party and State. However, their roles are limited at promoting people's participation and policy advocacy. It differs in point of view of many international non-government organizations, which consider that civil society to some extent should be independent from the state, help local people better participate, help government better to meet people's needs and may replace ineffective institutions. However, in facts at communities, independent benefit groups exist and develop in communities and have significant role in supporting and promoting people's participation such as interest - based clubs, water usage group ect.

In fact, grassroots democracy has been implemented by local authorities and it is also a concern of a number of international organizations. For example, in Quang Tri province, SIDA has implemented Public Administrative Reform (PAR) for 10 years including grassroots democracy. This presents a favorable condition and also a challenge for Plan when it implements grassroots democracy in localities. There are a lot of good lessons and valuable experiences in the implementation of grassroots democracy as well as a challenge to find new approach and initiatives. Grassroots democracy project has been implemented in 8 provinces and one city. A number of good and varied lessons on grassroots democracy implementation were drawn. However, it has not been fully explored by country office to save as a base for orientation, lessons learnt and best experiences for specific grassroots democracy projects at localities.

Whatever model has been applied, IEC on grassroots democracy is always a necessary activity to all PUs in the implementation of GDD project. In order to improve quality of IEC, Plan should pay more attention to provide technical support for local partner in IEC work, especially for training and communication methods. Country office can compile outline of training program on grassroots democracy including purpose, outputs, contents and suggestion methods etc. or provide guidance on grassroots democracy IEC as an orientation for PUs. Initials consideration papers 1,2,3 have been drafted and sent to PUs as a guidance to implement GDD project.

In order to expand grassroots democracy to various classes of local people and to make it more sustainable, it is needed to integrate IEC programs into activities of mass organizations at grassroots level. For example, some competition festivals on grassroots democracy understanding were organized by Youth Unions, Women's Union, Farmer association, etc. Combination of different forms IEC will bring effectiveness. For example, distribution of leaflet should always accompanied by training and IEC on grassroots democracy.

Application of grassroots democracy model is a very important stage to avoid formalism and it will help translate grassroots democracy into practical life. In addition to applied models, combination and integration of grassroots democracy into other Plan's supported project activities at communities will increase effectiveness and sustainability of the grassroots democracy itself as well as other Plan's supported projects in community. GDD project can be considered as a tool to support and improve the quality and level participation of people in other Plan's supported projects. For example, while mobilizing people to participate in monitoring public welfare works, training on grassroots democracy contents with monitoring skills, or combining grassroots democracy with children saving model in Quang Binh Province etc..

In order to implement substantially grassroots democracy in localities, it always needs comprehensive solutions to enlighten people's awareness and their participatory capability and mobilize participation of both people and officials; improve policy environment, creating favorable condition for people to participate more deeply in policy making process from priority selection to policy design and implementation. This process is much related to policy advocacy at locality. SEDP model of Quang Tri province can be seen a successful model of policy advocacy at provincial level. According to the experiences of the policy advocacy project in Hoa Binh Province (sponsored by ActionAid) and Ha Tinh (sponsored by Oxfarm Belgium Solidarity), policy advocacy can easier achieve effectiveness at lower levels like district and commune with policies appropriate to farmers: irrigation fee, plant protection chemical, breeds and seeds etc. Importantly, people should be provided with opportunities to have direct policy dialogue with authorities at all levels and raise issues to be addressed by each level.

It needs to promote women's and children's participation in all aspects and activities of GDD project and other Plan supported projects in community. Although there are positive changes in women's and children's participation in community activities, women's participation in local government and decision making is still limited. Improve awareness of authorities at all levels on gender based issues and development and participation is necessary. Systemise children's and women's participation in Plan project circle, from design, implementation to monitoring and evaluation is a necessary solution to ensure their equal participation.

To achieve further effectiveness of the program, Plan should improve the design, monitoring stages. PUs should make project proposal more comprehensive with initial background, data and clear objectives to justify and serve as indicators for monitoring

and evaluation. This is not only a base for final evaluation but a base for following up, monitoring and evaluation of whole project process to intervene or amend in time to achieve project objectives.

More attention should be paid to PO point persons in GDD and policy advocacy of PUs . This is a really difficult field, having political sense, which impacts on both government officials and state policy mechanism. Practically in PUs, the full time staff for GDD project is not fully paid attention to as staff change or turbulence, or the point person also have other responsibilities to other projects. To succeed in the implementation of GDD project and policy advocacy, PUs should assign permanent staff, who should be equipped with capacity building and provided with opportunities to learn and exchange experiences in this area on a regular base.

The activities of GDD project of PUs, GDD project activities are improved in comparison to those activities before Mid-term Review (MTR). Increase of quality of women participation is integrated in realization of grassroots democracy, including a number of grassroots democracy models. For example, gender trainings, GDD competition festivals of good village leaders were organized in Phu Tho; In IEC training, Thai Nguyen included budget law, law of denounces and complaints into development of commune house; Building village regulations were implemented in Quang binh; Quang Tri continues expanding community consultation model and SEDP 2005 -2010, Quang Tri widely organized a range of GDD competition festivals from commune to district levels. These are evidences which indicated that the PUs and Country office's efforts to reach the Project goals: increase people's participation and seek for appropriate models to local context. Although the project impacts haven't exposed significantly after one year of MTR, the changes in operational approach with more improvement and initiatives GDD project will certainly achieve in coming years.

In general, GDD project has brought into play in meeting the demand to promote people's participation. Obviously, the supports of GDD project have contributed to more proactive participation of local people to social, economic development plan through improving knowledge on rights and obligations declared in GDD for local officials and people, supporting media equipment to improve quality of meeting and IEC dissemination for people.

Vietnam is now on the way of renovation and international integration. Pressure of integration to change policy and institutional environment towards more democratic, more public and transparent is increasing. State policy and institutional environment have primary changes to better meet people's participation needs. This will help to create new opportunities to forthcoming grassroots democracy program. With more comprehensive design towards: *Utilize advantages of localities; increase experience exchange, improve knowledge and developed good models suitable to localities; integration of GDD into other Plan supported projects at communities and focused on technical support*, the forthcoming GDD project will definitely and more effectively contribute in democratization process of Vietnam.

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