



Australian Government

Australian Centre for
International Agricultural Research

Final report

Small research and development activity

SRA

Targeting crop protection R&D towards social change amongst ethnic minority communities in central Vietnam

date published

May 2008

prepared by

Associate Professor Elske van de Fliert
School of Journalism and Communication, The University of Queensland

*co-authors/
contributors/
collaborators*

Associate Professor Pradip Thomas
School of Journalism and Communication, The University of Queensland

Ms Bronwyn Walsh
Queensland Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries

Dr Pham Thi Vuong (Vice Director)
Plant Protection Research Institute (PPRI), Vietnam

approved by

TK Lim

project number

CP/2006/084

ISBN

978 1 921434 62 4

published by

ACIAR
GPO Box 1571
Canberra ACT 2601
Australia

This publication is published by ACIAR ABN 34 864 955 427. Care is taken to ensure the accuracy of the information contained in this publication. However ACIAR cannot accept responsibility for the accuracy or completeness of the information or opinions contained in the publication. You should make your own enquiries before making decisions concerning your interests.

© Commonwealth of Australia 2008 - This work is copyright. Apart from any use as permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, no part may be reproduced by any process without prior written permission from the Commonwealth. Requests and inquiries concerning reproduction and rights should be addressed to the Commonwealth Copyright Administration, Attorney General's Department, Robert Garran Offices, National Circuit, Barton ACT 2600 or posted at <http://www.ag.gov.au/cca>.

Contents

1	Executive summary	3
2	Introduction.....	3
2.1	Communication and dissemination activities	5
2.2	Farmer-level, community or policy impacts (economic, social and/or environmental)	5
2.3	Training and capacity-building	6
2.4	Intellectual property.....	7
3	Relationship to other activities.....	7
4	Budget	8
5	Conclusions and recommendations	8

1 Executive summary

The proposed project aims at enhancing the capacities of selected Vietnamese Crop Protection R&D practitioners to target their research agenda and outputs towards the needs of ethnic minority communities in the Central Highlands of Vietnam. The specific objectives are:

1. To identify crop protection R&D needs of rural ethnic minority communities in selected areas of the Central Highlands of Vietnam
2. To identify Vietnamese R&D partner institutions and individuals with a potential to specifically target crop protection R&D needs of ethnic minority communities
3. To enhance knowledge and skills of 20 selected Vietnamese CP R&D practitioners as to target the agenda and output of their work towards needs of ethnic minorities
4. To develop a workplan for follow-up R&D targeting the crop protection needs of ethnic minority communities.

Collaborators are The University of Queensland, the Vietnam Women's Union, and Queensland Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries. Activities consist of (a) a needs and opportunity assessment study among ethnic minority communities and community-based organisations working in these communities, (b) a study identifying appropriate research partners in Vietnam for follow-up participatory research, and (c) the design and implementation of a training workshop for R&D practitioners on participatory research and dissemination approaches. The project is expected to culminate in the formulation of a follow-up research and development program applying participatory approaches to target the crop and pest management needs of ethnic minority communities in Central Vietnam.

2 Introduction

While rural development in Vietnam has been truly impressive over the past decades, strategies applied emphasising economic growth have mainly worked for those communities in potential lowland areas where farming is well linked into market mechanisms. Ethnic minorities communities located in remote and marginal mountainous areas have largely been unable to hop on the bandwagon mainly as a result of a communication disconnection with the mainstream forces of development. An estimated 75% of ethnic minority people in Vietnam fall below the international poverty line, as opposed to 31% of the majority Kinh people. Just spreading the same models to targeted poor areas proves unsuccessful, and appropriately tailored interventions are needed to address the specific problems, needs and situations of minority communities.

The SRA team conducted a needs and opportunity assessment study consisting of (1) a literature review of development issues relating to ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands, (2) interviews with 14 leaders and 79 members of 7 ethnic minority communities in Dak Lak and Gia Lai provinces, and (3) a survey among 54 staff and 7 managers of 5 research and extension institutes in the Central Highlands and 1 in Hanoi. The information obtained from these activities primarily served as background material and reality check during a training workshop on "Planning Research and Development Targeted at Ethnic Minorities" for 25 research and extension practitioners, which aimed at preparing them for future collaboration in a planned follow-up project in the Central Highlands applying participatory approaches. The study resulted in a Master thesis of a Vietnamese student at the University of Queensland, and a conference paper/journal article authored jointly by the Activity Leader, the above Master student and the Vietnamese project leader.

The field interviews of the study did not intend to collect a statistically reliable set of data in these communities, but rather to provide an opportunity for project partners to learn from first hand experience what the issues are and how they are perceived by the local people themselves. Despite the fact that selected communes were not amongst the remotest in the provinces and community members participating in the interviews were invited by the commune leaders, probably implying a biased sample selection towards the relatively better off, the results show some important trends. With regard to education and languages issues, it was found that just over one-third of the respondents feel comfortable communicating in Vietnamese, notwithstanding the fact that the large majority attained several years of formal education. Interestingly, commune leaders tend to assess their people of being more proficient in Vietnamese than they do themselves. About half of the commune leaders use Vietnamese in their communications to the community, as a result of which community members complain that language is one of the constraints in dealing with the government, in addition to long distances and difficulties of getting access to government officials.

With regard to farmers' information access, a large majority of respondents in the communities in Gia Lai and Dak Lak (78% and 69%, respectively) expressed a need for information on agricultural topics. They particularly want to know about fertilisation and pest management practices and where they can purchase inputs for a reasonable price, which shows they know about input intensive technologies, but have not received adequate training or information. Most farmers reported that they have never or seldom met an extension officer and their main sources of information are their fellow farmers or the agricultural input retailers. Extension officers interviewed expressed a concern about the knowledge of ethnic minority farmers relating to aspects of marketing, as a result of which they often sell their products for too low a price. When asked about their preferred communication medium, a similarly large majority of respondents mentioned television, which they say is for mere entertainment since most of the programs aired are in Vietnamese language that they claim to have difficulty with. Local language programs, mainly local news, are broadcast only three times a week for 15 minutes in each of the major ethnic minority languages. As a means to improve communication within the local area, 62% and 83% of respondents in Gia Lai and Dak Lak, respectively, suggested to establish community radio facilities broadcasting in local languages.

The survey among research and extension staff revealed that a minority of both Hanoi and Central Highlands based researchers have had little exposure to training (30%) or field work (21%) applying a participatory approach, while almost all their colleagues at the university (80%) seemed to have had more opportunities. A fair proportion of the extension staff (especially in Gia Lai province) claims to have learned about participation but generally does not apply it. The main constraints to implementation of participatory approaches mentioned are budget constraints, language barriers, infrastructure constraints (roads, training facilities), and low awareness and "unfavourable attitude of farmers towards innovation". The last aspect casts some doubts on the understanding some of the respondents may have with regard to participatory approaches.

The training workshop engaged 25 staff from PPRI, WASI, ASISOV, Tay Nguyen University and the Plant Protection Sub-Departments and Agricultural Extension Stations in Dak Lak and Gia Lai provinces in learning exercises, discussions and field work related to rural development, ethnic minorities, participation, indigenous knowledge systems, targeted extension development, Objective Oriented Program Planning, and grant proposal development. Participants expressed high levels of satisfaction and learning achievements with the training workshop, and strong commitment to future collaboration. The workshop resulted in a framework for a follow-up project with the overall goal tentatively formulated as "Increasing income of ethnic minority farmers through improved soil health and land management capacity in marginal agroecosystem systems in the Central Highlands of Vietnam". This project will aim at developing best practices for soil

and crop management through integration of scientific and indigenous knowledge, and adaptation to the agroecological, socioeconomic and cultural conditions of selected ethnic minority groups in three provinces in the Central Highlands. It will develop and pilot farmer participatory research and communication.

2.1 Communication and dissemination activities

A needs and opportunity assessment study was conducted consisting of (1) a literature review of development issues relating to ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands, (2) interviews with 14 leaders and 79 members of 7 ethnic minority communities in Dak Lak and Gia Lai provinces, and (3) a survey among 54 staff and 7 managers of 5 research and extension institutes in the Central Highlands and 1 in Hanoi. The study resulted in the following publications and communication events:

- Masters thesis at the University of Queensland by Ms Do Thi Minh Hien, entitled “Communication and information access for ethnic minority communities in the Central Highland of Vietnam: Challenges and opportunities” (see Appendix 1).
- Paper entitled “Bridging knowledge needs and knowledge generation for ethnic minorities through participatory communication in Vietnam – Way to go or passing fad?”, authored by Elske van de Fliert, Do Thi Minh Hien and Pham Thi Vuong, and presented by Elske van de Fliert at the IAMCR Conference, 23-25 July 2007, Paris, France, (see Appendix 2). A revised version of the paper will soon be submitted to an international journal.
- Seminar presenting the abovementioned paper by Elske van de Fliert at the University of Queensland, Brisbane, 20 September 2007.

A detailed set of results gathered in this study is provided in Appendix 3.

The main activity of this SRA, the training workshop on “Planning Research and Development Targeted at Ethnic Minorities”, produced the following communication outputs:

- A popular article on workshop process and outcomes for the ACIAR Vietnam Newsletter (see Appendix 4).
- A workshop report presenting process, outcomes of discussions and group activities, and photographs for distribution among workshop participants (see Appendix 5; still to be translated into Vietnamese and distributed among Vietnamese partner institutions).
- Once the follow-up project proposal has been formulated, a joint publication on workshop process, outcomes and impacts by Australian and Vietnamese partners is planned for submission to an international journal.

2.2 Farmer-level, community or policy impacts (economic, social and/or environmental)

The immediate target stakeholders of the SRA were 25 selected researchers and extension officers who participated in the training workshop on “Planning Research and Development Targeted at Ethnic Minorities”, which was conducted from 27 August - 1 September 2007 in Buon Ma Thuot, Dak Lak Province. The training aimed at enhancing the knowledge and skills of participants allowing them to more effectively target their research and extension efforts towards ethnic minority communities. Almost all (96%) of the participants believed that this objective was achieved, whereas one person expressed a partial achievement. All but one of the participants (96%) gave an overall rating for the training workshop as good to very good, and 84% indicated that the knowledge and skills learned were very useful for their current work. They envisaged applying the gained

knowledge and skills in ongoing training and research activities with ethnic minorities, future project development targeting poor farmers updating the university curricula, and enhancing their own understanding of community development. It is beyond the scope of this SRA to monitor the training workshop participants for actual implementation of their intentions. However, the SRA resulted in a framework for a follow-up project that potentially involves most or all of the training participants, which will, if approved, allow the participants to further exercise and develop their knowledge and skills, and monitor impact of their practices.

About half of the training workshop participants, particularly those with more senior positions in their organisations, went through an intensive exercise of Objective Oriented Project Planning in which they made a problem tree and a concomitant objective tree. This skill is expected to assist them in more bottom-up planning of research and extension within their own organisations in the future.

The scope of the project did neither allow for any immediate impacts at the community level nor for environmental impacts.

2.3 Training and capacity-building

As indicated above, the main activities of this SRA was the training workshop on “Planning Research and Development Targeted at Ethnic Minorities”. This activity absorbed about 25% of the total ACIAR budget (\$21,300). The training workshop involved the following institutions:

- Plant Protection Research Institute, Hanoi (6 researchers)
- Western Highlands Agro-Forestry Science and Technology Institute, Buon Ma Thuot, Dak Lak Province (WASI; 3 researchers)
- Southern Coastal Central Agricultural Science Institute, Quy Nhon, Binh Dinh Province (ASISOV; 3 researchers)
- Tay Nguyen University, Buon Ma Thuot, Dak Lak Province (3 lecturers/researchers)
- District Plant Protection Stations/Agricultural Extension Centres in Gia Lai Province (4 plant protection technicians and 1 agricultural extension officer)
- Plant Protection Sub-Department Dak Lak Province (5 plant protection technicians).

The training workshop contained sessions on:

- Introduction on ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands
- Contextual constraints in rural development
- Participation in rural development
- Participatory Rural Appraisal
- Indigenous Knowledge Systems
- Extension method and material development (targeted at ethnic minorities)
- Science writing
- Objective Oriented Program Planning (OOPP)
- Grant proposal development
- Research project framework development.

The training workshop contained a mixture of presentations, discussions, group exercises and field work. A detailed report of the workshop can be found in Appendix 5. Section 3.2 has already reported on the evaluation of the training workshop. In conclusion, the training workshop was highly appreciated by participants and provided a unique opportunity for researchers and extension officers from different institutions to collaboratively learn and develop plans for future activities.

2.4 Intellectual property

All materials produced are considered global public goods and are freely available.

3 Relationship to other activities

The SRA was designed as a scoping and preparatory activity for possible future, more elaborate work in the area of crop and pest management in mountainous areas in Vietnam. One of its intentions was to bring stakeholder oriented planning, implementation and dissemination of research, that are more widely practised in the lowlands of Vietnam and in which the SRA Activity Leader was extensively involved in the past through CIP and FAO projects, to the mountainous areas where additional challenges exist due to the multicultural composition of the communities. The second objectives of the SRA (*“To develop a workplan for follow-up R&D targeting the crop protection needs of ethnic minority communities”*) required an investigation into ongoing and planned development initiatives by other organisation in the same geographical areas. An important link was established with the DANIDA Agriculture and Rural Development Sector Program Support (ARD SPS) Program, which is currently being formulated and prepared. This 37 million US\$ Program will be implemented in 5 highland provinces (Dak Lak, Dak Nong, Dien Bien, Lai Chau and Lao Cai) and emphasises bottom-up needs assessment, planning, implementation and evaluation of rural development in the broad sense of the word. DANIDA has expressed interest in collaboration with the current SRA team in a possible future project, which, as envisaged, could provide a model for research and extension development to be scaled up through the ARD SPS Program. The SRA Activity Leader has been invited by DANIDA to do a consultancy for them to develop an Upland Livelihood Research Program, which would provide a unique opportunity to align any future ACIAR funded project within the larger development context in the mountainous provinces.

Due to the geographical location of the SRA, i.e. in the Central Highlands where no other ACIAR funded project are currently implemented, no direct links were established with ACIAR projects. The methodologies applied in the SRA, however, have relevance for other projects that aim at targeting specific groups of stakeholders. One project in particular is CP/2006/112 (*“Improving the skills of women in the safe production, promotion and utilisation of indigenous vegetables in Vietnam”*) and intensive input has been provided to the formulation of this project.

4 Budget

Item	Budget	Expenditure	Balance
A) Commissioned Agent: The University of Queensland:			
Personnel	24,606.86	24,422.51	184.35
Infrastructure cost	3,198.89	3,198.89	-
B) Australian Collaborator: DPI&F Queensland:			
Personnel	6,751.76	6,751.76	-
Infrastructure cost	337.59	337.59	-
C) In Australia (UQ/DPI&F QLD) for PPRI:			
Supplies and services	1,500.00	379.00	1,121.00
Travel	20,700.00	19,002.99	1,697.01
Infrastructure cost	2,886.00	2,886.00	-
D) In Vietnam: Plant Protection Research Institute:			
Personnel	1,700.00	1,700.00	-
Supplies and services	21,500.00	21,500.00	-
Travel	3,400.00	3,400.00	-
Infrastructure cost	1,330.00	1,330.00	-
TOTAL	87,911.10	84,908.74	3,002.36

5 Conclusions and recommendations

The overall intention of the SRA, as expressed through its objectives, was to (a) investigate the needs for and direction of, and develop a framework for a follow-up project related to rural development in ethnic minority communities, and (b) prepare a group of researchers and extension officers for this follow-up initiative by enhancing their knowledge and skills relating to participatory R&D methodologies. The needs assessment study, field work during the training workshop, and an OOPP planning exercise resulted into the formulation of a basic framework for a research and development project around the following general objective: "To increase income of ethnic minority farmers through improved soil health and land management capacity in marginal agroecosystem systems in the Central Highlands of Vietnam". Soil health was perceived to be an attractive focus for future work with ethnic minorities, as it provides a solid basis for combining indigenous and scientific knowledge, and would contain opportunities for improved crop health and hence improved production and income without pushing for high input technologies. It will provide ample opportunities for ethnic minority farmers to learn agro-ecological principles and practices without the need to be literate. The initial consensus was to propose a project in three provinces in the Central Highlands (Dak Lak, Gia Lai and Kon Tum (1-2 districts per province). In each province there would be a focus on one specific ethnic minority group only to allow for specifically targeted research and development considering language, culture and customary practices of the ethnic groups. The following outline was proposed.

	Dak Lak	Gia Lai	Kon Tum
District(s)	Krong Ana Krong Pak	Chu Pah Krong Pa	Sa Thay
Ethnic minority group	Ede	Jarai	Hurai
Characterisation of the agricultural system	Crops: coffee, rice, maize Problems: soil erosion, drought, floods, crop pests	Crops: rice, maize cassava, watermelon, rubber, coffee, cashew Problems: infertile soils, erosion, mono-cropping (cassava), lack of access to inputs and information	Crops: cassava (rice, maize) Problems: eroded soils, low productivity, suspected soil contamination

Considering the opportunities that emerged of linking into the DANIDA ARD SPS Program the scope of the project could possibly be extended to the north-western highlands of Vietnam. ACIAR's interest in funding this project idea will firstly be explored, as it seems to fit in well within ACIAR's overall objectives and strategies in Vietnam, and particularly well suited under the Soil Management and Crop Nutrition Research Program, although it will have some Crop Protection elements.