

## REMOTE VIETNAMESE COMMUNITIES

**to benefit from  
participatory  
development  
research**



**The local communities of the north-western highlands of Vietnam have been identified as suffering from prolonged poverty attributed to a lack of market integration, inappropriate and unsustainable land management, and the limited ability of poor smallholders to absorb risk.**

Associate Professor Elske van de Fliert, from UQ's School of Journalism and Communication, saw the potential for improving the livelihood of this population.

Associate Professor van de Fliert aims to create positive change by increasing the connectedness of farmers with profitable markets and improving land and crop management practices.

This work is made possible through a \$2.2 million grant from The Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research.

"I am passionate about the effects the research process has on all, or at least most, partners involved: it empowers the farmers and local government officials, and it changes the way the researchers plan and conduct research for development in order to achieve impact in farmers' fields and actually make a difference," Associate Professor van de Fliert said.

The research project focuses on farming communities that are currently in transition from subsistence to commercial agriculture and looking to connect with emerging markets while using the natural resource base sustainably.

"The project is expected to result in sustainable technologies for highland cultivation, enhanced market access, increased incomes of farmers, and improved capacity of all stakeholders involved," she said.

"Once farmers have the opportunity to connect to markets and/or to more diverse markets (due to the emerging availability of infrastructure, such as

roads, physical market places, etc), they will be able to sell surplus production and earn (more) cash, which in turn allows them to invest in more profitable enterprises and eventually should help them to get out of poverty."

Associate Professor van de Fliert is a specialist in participatory development communication, which is the approach applied to facilitate this highly transdisciplinary research project. The project team involves a diverse team of UQ and Vietnamese researchers with expertise in agronomy, crop protection, soil science, agribusiness, agricultural extension, social science and communication.

"The core of the project is to do research in such a way that it links directly to the needs and opportunities of the target communities. Farmers, extension officers and local government officials have been actively involved in identifying and prioritising the problems to be researched, formulating the research agenda, and evaluating the various options for feasibility," Associate Professor van de Fliert said.

"This approach tremendously increases the potential of the research actually being beneficial to the people." ○

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**PICTURED, from left: Ms Nguyen Thi Thuy, researcher from the Plant Protection Research Institute, Associate Professor Elske van de Fliert and Mr Giang A Say, leader of Giang Ma Commune, Lai Chau Province**