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1. Overview of the Project

The An Phu Integrated Community Development Project is being co-implemented by Caritas and the Women's Union of An Phu Commune for the period 2000-2005. The project is designed to support efforts to create sustainable livelihoods for people in the five poorest villages of Ha Tay province. The project is jointly supported by Caritas Norway, Caritas Luxembourg and Caritas Switzerland. Caritas Denmark have also contributed to the Agricultural Promotion Programme.

The objective of the project is to "build sustainable livelihoods for the poorest people and communities, with care for a gender-balanced approach". The project has two main components: infrastructure development and community development. Infrastructure development includes five works: two dykes, one school and two electricity lines. Community development includes nine programmes: (1) capacity building for the communes' Women Unions; (2) enhancement of gender awareness; (3) cows and buffaloes for poor households; (4) the Agricultural Promotion Programme; (5) short-term savings and credit; (6) raising public health awareness; (7) micro-initiatives; (8) medium-term credit; and (9) community funds.

As of November 2003, infrastructure development activities are complete. In terms of community development activities, the project has implemented five programmes (1 to 5 as listed above).

2. Basic Information on the Mid-Term Review

The mid-term review was carried out in An Phu Commune from November 6 to 13, 2003. The basic information of the mid-term review are provided in the Terms of Reference (*see Annex 6*).

2.1 The Purpose and Objective of the Review

Purpose:

To assess the project's impact on the lives of the poor from various perspectives in order to enhance positive impacts, learn lessons and share experiences.

Objective:

Recommendations to improve the project's design will be made in the mid-term review by analysing the means of subsistence by people in the villages participating in the project.

2.2 Participants in the Review

The project review team included four members of the Project Management Team (PMT) and 15 representatives from five villages under the project. The representatives formed the villages' core groups, which included members of Village Community Development Groups (VCDGs) and village leaders (see the full list of review team project members in Annex 3). Two consultative experts from the Centre for Community Empowerment (CECEM) acted as facilitators for the project review team.

Participants in discussions and interviews included both people directly involved in the project programmes and those not involved at all, representatives of the Commune People's Committee, representatives of the district Veterinary Centre and representatives of the district Agricultural Extension Station (*see the list of interviewees in Annex 4*).

2.3 Content of the Review

The project review team focused on five programmes: (1) capacity building for the commune's Women's Union; (2) raising gender awareness; (3) cows and buffaloes for poor households; (4) the Agricultural Promotion Programme; and (5) short-term saving and credit. For each programme, the following questions were put forward:

- What were the results of the programme and its impact on the community?
- What difficulties and shortcomings were encountered? What were the reasons for them?
- What are the potential solutions to the shortcomings?

Apart from these main questions, members of project review team worked out checklists for each issue, as a basis for interviews and discussions (*see the list of issues for interview in Annex 5*).

The project review team also examined the macro-issues involved in the whole project, i.e. project management and design. Although the review focused on community development, the project review team also gathered opinions on infrastructure development in the villages. The team also added assessment questions after consulting the list of questions drawn up by Caritas Switzerland to satisfy the needs of all parties participating in the project (*see the TOR in Annex 6*).

2.4 Review Methods

Participatory methods were applied for the mid-term review. Members of the PMT and the villages' core groups were trained in participatory rural appraisal (PRA) by the consultative group. The methods applied included maps, historic charts, semi-structured interviews and observation.

2.5 Review Schedule (*see the review schedule in Annex 2*)

Day 1: The consultative group trained the members of project review team on the concept and content of the participatory method. The group of trainers guided the members on devising the goal of the review, determining the main questions and the specific topics needed to be assessed, and selecting the assessment methods. By the end of the first day, members had completed the assessment plan for Dong Chiem village.

Day 2: The members were divided into two groups to go to Dong Chiem. Each group was managed by one consultative expert. The groups applied the map method to assess the overall impact of the project and of each programme (cows-buffaloes, agricultural promotion and loans). The groups then applied the historic chart method to analyse specific aspects of the programmes.

Day 3: The project review team exchanged experiences on information collection and recording. The group then analysed the information collected in Dong Chiem. The next task

was for the village's core group to make a village assessment plan. The members of the commune's PMT were also requested to work with the village's core groups.

Day 4: The core groups of Bac Son and Nam Hung villages assessed the impacts of programmes within their villages with the support of the commune PMT and the two consultants. The working schedule in these two villages was the same as that for Dong Chiem. In addition, the core groups of the two villages interviewed not only groups of people but also individuals in their households.

Day 5: The same assessment activity schedule was carried out in Roc Eo and Bo Moi villages.

Days 6 and 7: All members of the project assessment team gathered and analysed collected information together. The village's core group implemented three main tasks: (1) collecting opinions in each village on three programmes (cows-buffaloes, agricultural promotion and saving and credit); (2) preliminary assessment by village core groups on three programmes; and (3) combining the opinions and assessments of the village core groups to make the final assessment for each village. The members' PMT made their own assessment on three programmes. This assessment was more comprehensive as it viewed three programmes in all five villages. After discussions in small groups, all members gathered, exchanged views and put forward ideas in order to reach a final overview assessment on the three programmes.

Besides analysing the afore-mentioned programmes, the project review team provided preliminary assessments on the capacity building programme for the commune Women's Union and raising gender awareness. Regarding general management issues, the team discussed project management and design.

The consultative group also conducted three interviews. First, the group interviewed village representatives who were not involved in the project for their opinions on the project and the possibility of expanding it. Next, the group interviewed the PMT and representatives of the commune commission to assess management and coordination among the PMT and other commune authorities. Finally, the group interviewed the representative from the district veterinary centre on coordination between the project and higher-level authorities.

In parallel with the afore-mentioned activities, representatives from some households were invited to work with the group on the afternoon of the seventh day to prepare for the presentation of the final assessment in their village.

Day 8: The project review team and representatives from some households reported the final assessment to representatives from the Commune People's Committee, district and provincial levels and Swiss Caritas. People from two villages reported the overall impact of the project on their villages. Next, the representative of the core group made comments and made additional proposals on the project's impact on all five villages. People from three villages then each presented their villages' assessments of one of the programmes: cows-buffaloes, agricultural promotion, and saving and credit. After this presentation, a representative of the core group made additional proposals and provided an assessment of the programme in all five villages. The core group also presented the macro topics of the projects such as project management and design. The PMT presented the assessment result on the programme on capacity building in the commune Women's Union and raising gender awareness.

3. Findings

This section presented an overall assessment of the project as well as the specific issues in each programme. Local people's opinions are reported in normal typeface. The project review team's opinions are reported in *italics*. The opinions of the consultative group are reported in ***bold italics***. These opinions are not contradictory, rather they generally complement each other.

3.1 Overall Impact of the Project

The An Phu Integrated Community Development Project brought positive results for the poor, the very poor and other groups in the community. Among the current programmes, credit and savings, and the cow-buffalo bank reached most poor and very poor people. Since the Agriculture Promotion Programme has focused on developing models, it has not reached as many poor and very poor households in the first phase of the project.

Impacts on the poor and very poor

The implementation of the project had positive results for poor and very poor households in the five villages in economic, cultural and social terms. In economic terms, the earnings of poor households increased. The surrounding dyke built under the project ensured the possibility of two crops per year, of which at least one is guaranteed to be successful. The rice output in the villages and communes significantly increased. "Since the building of the surrounding dyke, the rice output of Dong Chiem village has increased by approximately 120 tonnes per crop". The saving and credit, cows-buffaloes and agricultural promotion programmes provided increased earnings for poor households. *Many very poor households became less poor. Some poor households rose above the poverty line to become medium-level households.*

In terms of culture and society, the awareness and knowledge of the poor and the very poor improved. Training courses on animal raising and planting technology, and the programme's guiding documents, initially helped raise awareness of the importance of applying scientific technological methods. *The saving and credits and agricultural promotion programmes initially made people more aware of the benefits of fruitful investment.*

The consultative group noted that the project encouraged the people not to "resign themselves to the fate of poor". The poor were supported not only in terms of materials, but more importantly, the poor recognised the support by the community – including the other beneficiaries – the community development group and the village leaders. These physical and spiritual supports are important factors in ensuring the eagerness and confidence of the poor in improving their livelihoods.

In the opinion of the consultative group, the project created significant developments in the five villages under the project, i.e. the establishment and development of social groups, especially in terms of saving and credit. These activities will bring people together, and create opportunities to exchange ideas on issues of concern within their communities. Under the project's activities, the ability to identify problems and find solutions through internal strength and external support such as from village leaders, community development groups, the communes and other sources, was gradually developed.

Impacts on other groups

The afore-mentioned positive impacts benefited not only the poor and very poor households but also others in the five villages. The benefits from the dykes and electricity lines included more stable agricultural development, better transport and communication, improved lighting, and access to cultural and social knowledge through the mass media. In addition to assisting poor households, thanks to convenient procedures and regulations, the savings & credit programme created opportunities for some medium-income and slightly better-off households to access loans for economic development. The lessons in terms of the successes and failures of models encouraging agriculture expansion were disseminated to every household in the villages, rather than being confined to the ones participating in the specific project activity.

The project also had obvious benefits for women. By participating in training courses, knowledge-exchange meetings and planting and breeding programmes financed by the project, women felt more inspired and self-confident in doing business. Women gained greater acceptance from their relatives when involved in social activities and improved their social knowledge.

With all the afore-mentioned effects, the villages participating in the project changed dramatically. According to people in neighbouring villages, these five villages were known as the poorest in the entire locality before their participation in the project. After just three years, however, they achieved the same or even higher levels of development compared to their neighbours. For example, one representative from the Women's Union of a non-participating village said: "Dong Chiem village used to be poorer than Ai Nang village. Over the last few years, the lives of Dong Chiem people have improved. Their living standards now exceed those of Ai Nang people. Dong Chiem people can have two crops per year. Their children can go to the new school. Dong Chiem women have access to loans, so they can invest in husbandry and cultivation"¹. She added: "Similarly, Bo Moi village and Roc Eo village were poorer than Xom Dinh village. Today, they have progressed further than the latter in economic, cultural and social terms. Roc Eo village now has only one very poor household. Bo Moi village has a cultural house. Bo Moi people have started applying scientific methods in husbandry and cultivation – that is why they have better outcomes".

3.2 Capacity-Building for the Women's Union

Results and Impacts

So far, the project has provided training to 48 members of the Women's Union in all villages in An Phu commune. Activities to enhance the capacity of Women's Union officials have made significant steps, especially in terms of programme activities. It is clear to the public, the village and commune leader, and even to they themselves, that female officials have a greater confidence and competence in their work.

More importantly, their knowledge of general issues has been widened through field trips, exchanges, training courses, reading materials provided by the programme, and cooperation with Caritas staff. As a result, they have a better understanding of the Central Committee of the Women's Union, of domestic and foreign organisations, of development and gender

¹ Quoted from the presentation of Ms. Tam from a non-participating village

issues, of project management skills and macro-credit schemes as well as practical scientific and technical applications in raising livestock and cultivation.

With the enhanced knowledge, they have made remarkable progress in their work. Commune Women's Union officials have been more active in planning and monitoring. They also demonstrate more skill in communication, organisation and chairing meetings. They can even train other members in programme activities.

The capacity of village officials (heads of Women's Union sub-branches) has also been upgraded. Like commune officials, they also attend training courses and field trips, and have access to reading materials provided by the programme. Their knowledge of general issues has also been enhanced, especially those of credit-saving schemes. They have shifted from having the village leader do the planning, preparation and reports of their meetings to doing such work themselves to a competent, and even creative, level. Some officials are able to combine cultural activities with enhancing members' awareness of legal systems, child care, and raising livestock and cultivation practices in meetings of credit-saving groups.

As observed by the consultative group, capacity-building activities of the Women's Union have greatly contributed to raising the status of the union (officials and members) in the eyes of the public as well as community leaders. Not only is their capacity enhanced but the roles of the Women's Union members are positively acknowledged as well.

Difficulties, Limitations and their Causes

Due to the management mechanism of the programme, activities of the commune's Women's Union branch were not well coordinated with those of other organisations. Collaboratory skills and the ability of Women's Union officials to mobilise resources from different organisations was also limited.

The commune Women's Union officials, in common with PMT members, did not have adequate agricultural knowledge. Consequently, they had difficulties directing the cattle raising and agricultural promotion programmes. Their financial management capacity was also limited due to a lack of basic education on the issue. In future, therefore, when the programme offers different types of loans, they might have more difficulties.

Of the different project management skills, problem-solving and decision-making were the most difficult for female officials. They had not gained sufficient confidence and usually had to rely on Caritas staff to solve more complicated problems.

As observed by the consultative group, officials of the commune Women's Union were not used to the "bottom-up" mechanism of community-driven development. This was evident in "top-down" decisions made inside the PMT as well as in their organisational style in villages. A sense of teamwork among PMT members was still weak, thus they failed to encourage the participation of all members. When the programme met difficulties, they sometimes tended to use "hard-line" measures to find a solution, when perhaps a solution could have been found by "urging and persuading".

Reasons for capacity limitations include the fact that Women's Union officials did not understand what capacity building was, or how to build their capacity outside training classes.

Solutions

- *Provide more training on decision-making and problem-solving for officials of the commune Women's Union and heads of sub-branches.*
- *Leaders of villages and communes should assist the officials of the Women's Union in programme activities.*
- *Women's Union officials in villages and communes should build their own capacity by identifying their weaknesses and asking for support.*
- *Management skills training for micro-credit schemes should be provided to commune Women's Union officials.*
- *Competent women should be assigned more responsibility in future programme activities.*
- *As observed by the consultative group, Women's Union officials in communes and villages as well as the VCDG need further training on teamwork capacity, cooperation and collaboration.*
- *The capacity of Women's Union officials in communes in management, direction, and propaganda, and information dissemination for the programme and its working mechanism, needs further improvement.*
- *Women's Union officials in communes need training on "community development" and "sustainable development."*

3.3. Raising Gender-Awareness

Results and Impacts

Activities to raise awareness of gender issues contributed to significant improvements in gender equality in An Phu commune. The project trained 190 people from 12 villages. The training courses resulted in positive changes in both action and awareness among women and men in the commune.

Training courses on gender topics consolidated the confidence of members of Women's Union branches and sub-branches in community and social activities. Union members also shared their knowledge of gender matters through the activities of credit groups, therefore promoting a better understanding of gender issues in terms of gender inequality. Generally, women of the five villages were more actively engaged in community activities including weddings and commemorations. They also frequently participated in credit-saving group activities and cultural events in the commune.

Training courses on gender topics also had positive effects on men, particularly the representatives of the commune People's Committee, members of VCDG and leaders of villages. In some cases, they abandoned "backward and unsound patriarchal customs", such as those stating that wives must take a seat of lower rank at parties, or those that state husbands be the sole representatives of their families in meetings, weddings and commemorations. Some even did work that used to be considered a woman's responsibility (e.g. preparing meals and raising animals). They also discussed their concerns with women.

Some men who did not attend training courses also made some changes. Many of them who used not to allow their wives to attend meetings now supported and encouraged the women to

join credit-saving groups since they began to recognise their wives' ability and economic potential.

As observed by the consultative group, the status of women greatly changed in their own perception as well as that of communities, local leaders and their families. This was the result not only of training courses but also other activities such as meetings, credit schemes, lending cattle, investment in livestock raising and cultivation.

Difficulties, Limitations and their Causes

So far, attendants in gender training courses have been core members of villages and communes (leaders of villages and communes, commune Women's Unions, CDG and representatives of other commune agencies). However, these people are not capable of training others in rural areas. As a result, the changes in awareness of gender issues in rural areas are still limited.

Moreover, most of the attendants in such courses are women; only a small fraction are men, who have to raise their own awareness of gender issues first.

According to the consultative group, gender mainstreaming in project activities remains limited since the project organised a training course on this topic only two weeks before the review. The project has not developed a strategy to mainstream gender in programme activities.

Solutions

- *Expand training courses on gender issues and gender equality to villagers.*
- *Encourage male attendants in training courses on gender issues.*
- ***Apart from training on gender topics, the programme should organise information dissemination activities to raise public awareness of gender issues. For example, the programme can collaborate with the commune's Peasant Association and Veteran Association to incorporate gender issues into their agenda and activities.***
- *So far, the project has not implemented gender awareness activities at village level. In the future, the project should organise awareness-raising activities at village level. The project should involve both men and women as communicators.*
- ***In addition to awareness raising activities, the project should develop a strategy for mainstreaming gender in project activities.***

3.4. Cow-Buffalo Bank Programme

Results and Impacts

So far, the project has loaned 64 cows and buffaloes to 64 households. These cows and buffaloes have given birth to 36 calves, of which 10 died during or soon after birth. The cow/buffalo bank programme has significantly benefited the poor. The programme's cattle have provided pulling power for households in cultivating crops. Many households which previously had to hoe ground and pull their own ploughs – or borrow buffalo from neighbours – now have their own ploughing buffalo. Thanks to the cattle, they have been able to cultivate their fields at the right times.

Cattle also provide manure for fields. This is an important source of fertiliser for farmers. Many households who previously had to buy fertiliser can now save on this expense. Some very poor households who could not afford to buy fertiliser can now benefit from this considerable source.

The combination of pulling power and fertiliser provided by the cow/buffalo bank has helped to increase crop productivity and output.

Apart from short-term benefits, the programme also has long-term gains for poor households. When the cattle give birth to a calf or a buffalo calf, households can keep it, which creates a fixed asset of considerable value. At present, 26 households have calves as the result of participating in the programme. They are appreciative of this as for a farmer “a buffalo means the start of a career”.

Farmers’ knowledge of cattle-raising has also been improved through the programme’s training classes and reading materials. Many people have applied guidelines for building breeding facilities, feeding cattle, and preventing and treating cattle diseases.

According to the consultative group, the cow/buffalo programme has been cost-effective for the poor households. Comparing the cost (of building shelters for cows and buffaloes, food, labour and veterinary fees) with the effects (as described above), the poor households have benefited in various ways through participating in this programme.

Difficulties, Shortcomings and Causes

Eight households returned the cattle borrowed from the programme in which they participated. Usually, it was because these households had so little land that they did not need a buffalo, or they did a lot of hired work and thus did not have time to pasture the buffalo, or their children were too small to do this for them. The VCDG had not clearly understood their situation and thus selected households which were poor but did not meet the set standards of the programme.

As regards breeders, there have been many complaints about the quality of the programme’s cattle. There are several reasons for this. First, few experienced farmers in the community were consulted by the programme’s representatives and the target households when they bought the cattle. Second, the programme’s set price for a buffalo (a maximum of VND3 million/buffalo) was too low for high-quality breeders. Farmers complained that the sum was not flexible in line with market prices. Thirdly, in some cases, the programme’s priorities did not meet the target households’ expectations. The programme gave priority to buying buffalo calves in order to lengthen the breeding period of the breeder; however, farmers did not want them because after two or three years it was not certain if the calves would breed. In the case of Bo Moi village, the programme cattle have yet to give birth to any calves because they were too young when supplied.

Some households did not take proper care of the programme cattle. In some cases, their breeding facilities were not built, or built without care and without applying regulations on disease prevention and treatment. The first reason is a lack of experience since many poor households did not have cattle in the past. The second is that they lacked basic knowledge in terms of caring for the cattle, and preventing and treating disease. The programme tried to overcome this weakness by organising training classes, however, the content was sometimes

too complicated for farmers to grasp (especially when some of them were illiterate or could not read and write fluently), thus limiting farmers' awareness. *The VCDG did not often visit households to investigate emerging problems and help them find timely solutions. The third reason is that some households wrongly thought they knew how best to deal with their cattle.*

Some households said that they could not afford to buy food for cows and buffaloes before and after the cattle gave birth. For poor and very poor households, it is difficult to find enough rice to eat, let alone feed the cows/buffaloes and their calves rice and corn.

Many households complained about veterinary services. The Village Community Development Group's veterinarians were not able to intervene in emergency cases. It required too many steps to contact communal veterinarians (first, they had to report to the Village Community Development Group, who would then report to communal veterinarians), so many people chose to call veterinarians who did not work in the programme. Training courses on veterinary issues were too theoretical and used too many medicines with foreign names, which made it difficult for farmers to understand and memorise the training issues. Village and commune veterinarians did not make frequent site investigations and did not provide regular assistance to farmers.

Some households did not pay the 3 percent fee or paid it late. It was unreasonable to stipulate that households had to pay this fee once a year since many poor households could not mobilise this sum of money at one time. *Also, the regulations of the programme were not adequately explained. Many households who did not understand why they had to pay this 3 percent fee in fact did not pay, and even if they paid, they were still doubtful about it.*

Some households did not firmly grasp the programme's regulations (such as that in the case of buffaloes not breeding after three years). Some who did not fully understand the regulation stating that 'when the calf/buffalo calf is 12 months old, the mother cow/buffalo must be passed to another household' argued that the calf was not strong enough to be separated from its mother.

According to the consultative group, the cattle bank programme is suitable for most poor households, but not yet suitable for the poorest households in the community. These households usually do not have much land and do a lot of hired work, so they have difficulty taking care of the cattle. Another fact that should be noted is that the cattle returned by the poor households were transferred to the average or better-off ones because the poor did not want them or because they could not take care of them.

The consultative group believed that a major shortcoming of the cattle bank programme was that the PMT and the VCDG did not raise the initiative and creativeness of the people. Currently, there is little information-sharing and cooperation among the participating households. A great deal of cattle breeding experience of successful households was not passed on to those who lack it. Most households passively waited for the programme's assistance, instead of actively seeking their own solutions. Many interesting ideas and initiatives of farmers to improve the efficiency of the cattle bank programme were not discussed by the group. For cattle-borrowing households, their responsibility to the programme was entirely on a legal basis as the borrowing contract had to be approved by the commune People's Committee. Responsibilities of the community and the group were not taken into account. This was one of the reasons why some households were late in paying the 3 percent fee.

Solutions

- When selecting beneficiaries, it is essential that the VCDG clearly understands their situation before deciding to lend cattle to them, and clearly explains to them their rights and obligations.
- When selecting breeders, it is necessary to invite people with good breeding experience and who are highly respected by local farmers to join the process.
- Training for veterinarians should be enhanced.
- The VCDG needs to work closely with local farmers and conduct site investigations, supervision, and give more regular support and encouragement.
- *The training contents and methods should be adjusted to suit the farmers' levels of education.*
- *The VCDG should explain clearly about the need to collect the 3 percent fee. The fee should also be divided into payments made three or four times a year. The collection schedules should be designed more flexibly to suit the conditions of each village.*
- *Cattle breeding experience and understanding of the programme's regulations should be exchanged among borrowing households. They can set their own regulations, including a cross-checking mechanism for fee payment.*
- ***According to the consultative group, it is necessary to increase group activities of cattle borrowing households. Besides checking with each other on fee payment, they can supervise each other in the breeding process. The main reason why cattle-breeding was not well conducted was because farmers did not fully recognise the importance of disease prevention. With group activities, they would be able to share experiences and learn from each other.***

3.5. Agriculture Promotion Programme

Results and Impacts

So far, 36 households have implemented husbandry models (raising pigs, chicken, geese, ducks, fish and rabbits) and cultivation models (planting rice, sugar cane and taro). These 36 models have been replicated in 185 households in the five villages. The Agricultural Promotion Programme has had a positive impact on many aspects of life for the people in the five participating villages. Through the implementation of livestock breeding models (for pigs, chickens, geese, ducks, fish and rabbits) and cultivation models (for rice seed, sugar cane and taro), farmers have drawn lessons of in applying agricultural science and technology. In some villages, the reading materials for the Agricultural Promotion Programme served as a useful source of scientific knowledge on livestock breeding and crop planting for farmers and, at the same time, encouraged educate themselves.

Together with increased awareness, farmers have also experienced new farming habits, for instance, growing new varieties of rice and raising livestock along scientific guidelines. Low-yield varieties of rice have been replaced with high-yield ones. Many households which previously had no poultry cages have now built cages along technical guidelines. Many households which did not vaccinate their cattle and poultry before are now happy to participate in vaccination periods organised by the programme. In those models that did not have such periods, some households invited veterinarians home.

Many models have been multiplied, bringing economic benefits to villagers. For example, farmers in Dong Chiem and Roc Eo villages have replaced the low-yield rice varieties with high-yield ones. The chicken- and pig-raising models have been replicated in Roc Eo and Bac Son villages, creating a considerable source of income for farmers. Bo Moi villagers have replicated the sugar cane-planting model in almost all households. The programme has created favourable conditions for expanding this model by providing loans.

Beside positive effects for the entire community, the programme has brought about dramatic changes to the households participating in experimental models. These households were trained and instructed along scientific guidelines, which has helped considerably improve their knowledge of livestock breeding and crop planting. More importantly, through implementing these models, they have been able to gain practical experience. *The successful models have created a considerable source of income for many households. For example, a household in Bac Son village has earned nearly VND3 million after less than two years participating in the goose-raising model.*

According to the consultative team, the programme has not only replicated successful models, but has contributed to the diversity of husbandry and cultivation in two ways. First, there has been diversification in role of husbandry. For example, farmers in Nam Hung and Bo Moi villages used to raise geese as a source of food. After participating in the programme, they started raising geese as a commodity to sell. Second, the programme has helped in diversifying crops. Farmers in Bo Moi, who had never planted sugar cane before, have now started planting it to sell.

Case Study: Agriculture Promotion Programme

Ms. Phuong is known in Bac Son village as a hard-working farmer. With VND300,000 from the programme, she decided to buy 42 chickens. Three months later, she sold the chickens for VND1,400,000. She also kept five chickens (valued at VND200,000) to celebrate Tet (the Vietnamese New Year). After paying for chicken feed, she was left with a profit of VND600,000.

When asked about her key to success, Ms. Phuong answered with confidence: “It is important that there is enough chicken feed and that it is of good quality. The chicken coop needs to be kept clean and disinfected with lime. In the winter, I always put warm ash in the coop, so the chickens do not get too cold.”

Ms. Phuong’s success inspired her neighbours and relatives. They decided to invest some capital in raising chickens. Ms. Phuong took the initiative in talking to the people about her experience. She hoped that they would make as much profit as she did to increase their income. However, Ms. Phuong had one complaint: “They accepted all of my advice, except on one thing. When I told them to vaccinate the chickens, they were not ready to do so.”

Difficulties, Shortcomings and their Causes

In some villages, the programme did not select the models that best suited their natural conditions. For example, taros were planted on dry hilly areas or fish were raised in stagnant

ponds without water circulation. *The reason for this was that officials of the PMT and of the VCDG lacked experience in the first stage of implementing Agricultural Promotion Programme models. Moreover, they had not clearly understood the conditions of these villages before deciding to experiment with these models. The existing models of the programme are not diversified. The exploitation of hilly areas – an advantage of each of the villages except Dong Chiem – was not taken into consideration. So far, these hilly areas have been exploited in a haphazard manner and mainly used for growing garden produce.*

In some cases, the PMT, the VCDG and the participating households did not select high-quality breeders for livestock breeding models. Instead of buying breeders from trusted professional sources (such as state-owned companies or well-known agencies), they bought from private agencies. This is because each of the participating parties lacked experience in the first implementation stage of the Agricultural Promotion Programme models. The other cause is related to the small number of livestock bought by the project. Big companies and farms prefer selling wholesale.

While implementing these models, some households did not apply scientific and technical instructions correctly. One reason is that the training provided was too complicated and theoretical. Another is that there were few means of disseminating information. Households implementing the same models did not share their experiences. The Community Development Programme did not stay in close touch with households to instruct them on scientific and technical issues. Many farmers did not have access to other sources of information such as radio, newspapers and television.

In some cases, the communal PMT and the VCDG did not supply concrete guidance on the implementation of models, reflecting a lack of awareness of people's expectations. For instance, the PMT and the VCDG did not mobilise local people to participate in rice sowing in Dong Chiem village. Therefore, without a true sense of ownership, local people did not enthusiastically nurture new varieties of rice.

When livestock breeding models were expanded, timely veterinary care was not ensured in several cases. One reason is that people did not believe in the importance of disease prevention (for example, some did not want to vaccinate their pigs, chickens and geese), leading to incurable cases. *On the other hand, the VCDG did not make frequent visits to households implementing models to instruct and explain to them positive and negative lessons. A further reason is that the professional skills of village veterinarians were too limited to intervene in difficult cases.*

Even if these models are successful, and hence expanded, selling livestock and crops is not easy. For example, farmers in Nam Hung, Bac Son and Bo Moi villages complained that they made little profit from raising pigs because the market price fluctuated (when they sold their pigs, the price often dropped). Farmers did not sufficiently understand market demand to be able build suitable production plans. In addition, due to the relative isolation of these areas and lack of transport, local people could not access markets to sell their products.

As remarked by the consultative group, there were two major shortcomings of the Agricultural Promotion Programme. First, in some cases, households implementing experimental models were not poor but average or even better-off. Since poor households usually have less breeding and planting experience and less capital than average and better-off households, the Village Community Development Group considered them likely

to fail. However, if investment is directed to average and better-off households, it would be difficult to multiply the models for the entire community, especially for poor households who lack implementation capacity. Moreover, the average household received a 30% subsidy to carry out the model. This was not considered rational, but should be only for poor households.

Second, there was not enough sharing of experience between households implementing experimental models and others in the community. Interest groups were not brought into full play so as to create a favourable environment for members to study and exchange with each other and to raise their sense of ownership in these models. The programme encouraged households in interest groups to multiply models themselves by lending them credit. Yet, many of them (both those who implemented the models and those who had yet to gain approval) did not borrow loans, so they did not attend meetings to discuss credit issues. Hence, they did not have the opportunity to share experience and information with other households in the same group or village.

Solutions

- Scientific and technical training for the VCDG and for local people should be increased.
- Knowledge of village veterinarians should be improved.
- Investment capital for seed plants and fertiliser should be increased.
- *Information dissemination should be enhanced through meetings and radio reports on models.*
- *The agricultural promotion programme with livestock breeding and crop planting at the centre can, according to the consultative group, be a connecting point between the Cow-buffalo Bank Programme and the Short-term Saving and Credit Programme. Training activities, meetings for experience sharing and visits to successful models should be organised for people from all three programmes and not separated as at present.*
- *It is necessary to encourage households outside the programme and groups with similar interests to participate in other activities of the Agricultural Promotion Programme. A great deal of experience in livestock breeding and crop planting of these households should be shared in the community (which includes both participants and others). Experience sharing is the key to the success of Agricultural Promotion Programme models, and at the same time, it helps raise the sense of solidarity and mutual assistance in the community.*

3.6. Short-Term Savings and Credit Programme

Results and Impacts

Since its launch in December 2001, the programme has reached 260 borrowers. The outstanding portfolio is VND134.5 million.

Credit activities have brought about dramatic results for poor women and their families. First, women can now receive loans easily at reasonable interest rates and therefore no longer have to borrow from private sources at high interest rates (from 3 to 5 percent per month) as before.

These credits have helped create employment for women as well as their families. They now work in livestock breeding, crop planting and – a few – in small business. Thus they no longer have to earn a living catching field crabs and shellfish, and doing irregular hired work.

Since they can borrow loans to do business, women have become more dynamic and hardworking. As it is compulsory to make a profit in order to pay back loans, most women now know how to achieve capital turnover after receiving their first income. Many women used profits to buy sows, geese, chickens and fish for farming. They have also become more dynamic when calculating sums of money for weekly instalment payments. Some used borrowed capital to buy egg-laying hens and ducks and then sold the eggs to pay back weekly instalments, while others used it to buy pigs for breeding. In this way, they could earn money for weekly principal payments and interest without having to sell their pigs. One woman summed up the feelings of many: “Since we have been able to take out loans, we have become more hard-working and have not let things run their course. Before, in periods of agricultural leisure like this, we just relaxed, but now we have to work to raise money for instalments.” In fact, because they have to pay weekly instalments, they have become more active in doing hired work, catching field crabs and planting vegetables and fruit trees in their gardens for sale in the market. As such, small credits can also help poor women become more dynamic, more industrious and encourage them to learn how to earn a living.

Women have also got into the habit of saving since they began participating in the programme. Since they have to pay weekly instalments, they need to calculate their daily spending carefully in order to save money. As one woman said: “If I earn VND10,000 from the sale of this bunch of bananas, I will spend only VND5,000 to VND7,000 and save the rest.” Said another: “I have reduced trivial spending; now I do not give my child 500 dong for treats anymore.”

Through dynamic use and circulation of borrowed capital, women have created a sum of money for their own families to invest in livestock breeding and production, which has helped raise their incomes and improve their daily lives. From a starting point of VND500,000, they now have much larger sums. Some have earned more than VND2 million.

Since they borrowed loans from this programme, women have learned a lot and gained a sense of solidarity through weekly credit group meetings and training classes. In these meetings they have shared experiences of doing small business with each other. Some women who had never raised sows have gained confidence after listening to the experiences of others. Through training classes and exchanges of experience in group meetings, women have also gained tips on child-rearing and gender equality, as well as breeding and planting techniques. In the process, they have also made many friends.

Credit activities have also helped women in the five villages grow bolder and more confident in social activities. Said one: “Before I did not dare attend meetings, let alone speak.”

According to the consultative group, in some villages, credit capital has been supplied to the poorest households. Thanks to programme credit capital, villagers can now afford breeding and other production activities, which has helped eliminate hunger and alleviate poverty. For example, Ms. Xuyen and Ms. Hue, among the poorest women, used the borrowed capital to buy pigs for breeding and build pigsties. They still do hired work each day in order to have money to gradually pay principal and interest. By the end of the period, these poor households will have considerable capital, in the form of the pigs.

Credit activities have proven to be potentially sustainable for several reasons. First, there is still a great demand for production capital, but only 260 out of 635 households have so far borrowed loans from the programme. Second, borrowing and payment methods are ideally suited to poor households; women expect to be able to borrow from the programme sustainably and are well aware of their obligations, namely to pay back all principal and interest and to inform other women about the programme .

Case Study: Savings and Credit Programme

Ms. Khen's family used to be one of the poorest households in Nam Hung village. Ms. Khen and her husband have many children, but they have a very small area of rice paddies. Ms. Khen borrowed VND500,000 and bought two breeding pigs. A few months later, she sold the pigs and used the money to buy piglets. After repeating the process a number of times, she made VND1.4 million.

Ms. Khen was very happy with her success. She decided to continue investing the capital in husbandry. She used a significant part of the money to buy a sow. A smaller sum was spent on food for her husband and children who were doing hired work. So far, she has a sow, several piglets and two porkers.

Ms. Khen uses the money from her husband and children's hired work to make the weekly repayments to the programme. She said: "I will finish my loan repayments in just a few weeks. I want to borrow VND1 million in the next phase."

During the review meeting, she offered many opinions and eagerly shared her experiences with other participants. Judging by her participation at the meeting, she was no longer one of the poorest farmers. When I visited her home, I saw the frame of a new brick house next to her existing thatched house. Even though the new house was not yet complete, I believed that it would not be long before Ms. Khen's family moved into their impressive new residence.

Difficulties, Shortcomings and their Causes

Many women complained that it was difficult to pay weekly principal and interest payments because they had yet to gain the returns from their breeding and planting investments. ***This is because they had not thoroughly understood the objective of the step-by-step payment system. Borrowers usually want to retain borrowed capital for long periods. They are unsure about using it and do not know how to generate daily and weekly income. Many of them focus on only one source of income – livestock breeding, which requires a minimum of six months.***

They also remarked that it was difficult to arrange their work to attend weekly group meetings. For instance, the women of Bac Son village complained they had to attend not only the programme meetings but also church meetings. ***They did not understand that they were required to attend credit group meetings not only to make principal and interest payments, but also to learn about methods of using the credit to generate income. What's more, the***

content of the meetings did not sufficiently interest the women. Meeting times were often not suitable or they had to wait for the arrival of latecomers.

Many borrowers were unlucky in breeding livestock, which reduced their investment efficiency. Some complained that pigs or breeding ducks died. *The main reason for this is that the borrowers did not apply scientific methods. Nor did they understand how to prevent disease and take care of their livestock. Most of them expected good luck to protect their chickens and pigs from epidemics; only when they were infected did they call for veterinarians or buy medicine.*

Some very poor households could not access credit sources². *This was due to the fact that the regulation requiring groups of exactly five members was too rigid. When poor households could not find enough members to form a new group, they were not eligible for borrowing from the programme despite their urgent needs.*

As remarked by the consultative group, the programme also has other shortcomings such as a lack of investment diversification and experience sharing among borrowing households. Some useful lessons on using borrowed capital as well as breeding experience were not shared between women. The VCDG and credit group leaders did not know how to organise activities aimed at experience-sharing among households.

Solutions

The PMT and the VCDG should offer more thorough explanations of the borrowing-repayment system so that women can clearly understand the benefits of the instalment payment method. The VCDG should invite borrowers who understand this to explain to those who are still in doubt. In addition, the VCDG should advise borrowers on how to use borrowed capital, especially on diversifying investment, and how to create short-term benefits as well as long-term ones. It is also necessary to encourage those who have efficiently used their borrowed capital and returned it, to share their experiences with other people.

- *The PMT and the VCDG should revise credit group meetings in order to make them efficient, effective and attractive to women. Recommended measures include: holding discussions among women in each group on how to organise a meeting, what should be addressed and when. The specific regulations should be formulated by the women themselves; holding short weekly meetings (no longer than 30 minutes each) to collect credit principal and interest. Payments of latecomers should not be accepted; holding monthly meetings (of at least one hour each) on credit issues, in combination with dissemination of technical and scientific knowledge and the sharing of successful experiences; and providing information on the efficient performance of credit takers, paying special attention to investment diversification initiatives.*
- *The project should improve coordination between agricultural promotion programmes and credit schemes. The VCDG should visit and monitor the application of scientific breeding practices.*
- *The PMT should consider a flexible regulation on group size, with at least five members per group and possibly more (e.g. from 5 to 8 members per group) on a*

² in Nam Hung and Bac Son villages

voluntary basis of membership and credit guarantee. In that case, poor households can join groups that already have loans.

- *Improvements must be made to the financial management capacity of the PMT and heads of credit groups so as to devise more flexible regulations on groups and credit levels. In the second phase, very poor households can still get loans of VND500,000 while others in the same group can receive up to VND1 million.*
- *The PMT and the VCDG should praise the best credit performers and arrange meetings to share their experiences.*
- *Improvements must be made to the capacity of the PMT and heads of credit groups to provide consultation and direction to women. In group meetings, leaders should raise the problems faced by those in difficulty in order to assist the others. Heads of credit groups and PMT members should also provide consultation on their difficulties to find suitable solutions.*

3.7. Project Management

Project Management Practices in the Commune

Project PMTs consists of five members: a representative of the People's Committee of the commune as head of the PMT responsible for general issues; the head of the commune's branch of the Women's Union as the director of the five programmes and village monitor; two other members monitoring two villages each, and an assistant. The assistant was hired in October 2003 to work as an accountant. Since she had just joined the project, she started as an assistant to the PMT. This mechanism is village-based and the PMT member will be responsible for all programmes in the village.

One of the major difficulties of the PMT is the lack of close collaboration between the representative of the commune People's Committee and other PMT members. When the support of the authorities is needed, especially in terms of legal support, the commune authority does not fully cooperate with the PMT. Another difficulty is that PMT members do not have sufficient knowledge of micro-credit and agriculture, and are thus unable to give sound direction to the implementation of the project.

Solutions for Project Management in the Commune

In future, the commune's PMT should have six members. Two of them will be responsible for general issues and four other members will be assigned with particular villages or programmes. The responsibilities of each member are as follows:

- *The representative of the People's Committee of the commune will serve as the head of the BOM. His/her responsibilities include directing general tasks in project implementation; assigning other members' responsibilities; solving legal problems; ensuring close cooperation and collaboration, and the participation of other organisations in project activities.*
- *The head of the commune branch of the Women's Union works as the advisor to the head of the PMT. Responsibilities of the advisor include: management of personnel, finance and technical aspects; monitoring daily activities of the project; compiling reports for the head of the PMT on project activities.*
- *Four other members will be responsible for some villages (to be assigned later) and for each programme as follows: one for the agricultural programme (knowledge of*

agriculture required); one for the cattle raising programme (veterinary knowledge required); and two for saving-credit schemes (knowledge of finance and accounting required).

Situation of Project Management in the Villages

VCDGs in villages consist of three members (except for Dong Chiem village with four members): a VCDG head and two executive members (of whom one should be a veterinarian). Assignments of VCDG members differ from village to village. In some cases, they are based on various programmes and household groups, or even on programmes alone.

Cooperation among VCDG members is limited. VCDG usually does not have a regular meeting schedule for members to share information and coordinate their actions. Heads of credit groups are not members of VCDG, which leads to poor coordination between the credit scheme and the two other programmes. Beneficiaries from credit schemes do not receive sufficient information about the agricultural promotion and cattle raising programmes.

Due to its limited scientific and technical knowledge, VCDG confronts many difficulties in its tasks of disseminating information and supporting households in raising livestock and cultivation. Moreover, detailed responsibilities of VCDG members are not clearly defined. As a result, they only participate technically in simple farming matters. Their major roles are to organise community activities and help the community find external resources to solve their problems.

The VCDG structure in some villages does not include the head of village, thus creating difficulties when authority intervention is required. Besides, in some cases, information coordination is limited to those involved in the programmes instead of being disseminated to all households in the village. The exclusion of village heads in VCDG also leads to overlapping use of resources (from both communes and projects).

The consultative team has several comments regarding the merging the cow/buffalo groups with the Agricultural Promotion Groups:

It was a good decision to merge the two groups because (1) the two programmes include many similar activities, such as training and veterinary work; (2) the management team at the village level is not too big; and (3) beneficiaries of the two groups are not divided.

However, the results of the merging have not been as good as expected. According to the consultative team, the three members of VCDG have mainly focused on the activities of the cows/buffalo bank. They have not paid adequate attention to the Agriculture Promotion Programme. There has not been a clear division of responsibilities among VCDG members; the members are not aware of what their responsibilities entail and there is no mechanism for coordination among the members. VCDG of Nam Hung village is the only group that has a sectoral division of responsibilities: one member is in charge of the Agriculture Promotion Programme, two members are in charge of the cow/buffalo bank. Despite this clear division, the team has not been very effective, because of poor coordination among its members.

Solutions

- *VCDG should consist of four people, of whom one should be a representative of village leaders and another be the head of a credit group.*
- *The responsibilities of VCDG members should be clearly defined: the head of VCDG for general issue and the other three members for three sectors: cattle raising, the Agricultural Promotion Programme, and saving and credit.*
- *Detailed responsibilities of the head of VCDG should include: assigning responsibilities to other VCDG members; coordinating the planning of project activities in the village; collaborating with other village officials (including other organisations); holding weekly (or at least monthly) meetings of VCDG to review activities performed and find solutions to problems that have emerged; making regular assessments and reports of project activities in the village; attending PMT meetings to present reports and receive instructions from the PMT; contacting higher authorities if needed.*

As observed by the consultative group, the PMT faces difficulties in planning, implementing, monitoring and reporting.

- *The PMT shows a lack of confidence in making action plans and financial forecasts for each month and quarter. This is partly caused by the limited capacity of the PMT, by the over-detailed instructions of Caritas staff and by the PMT's insufficient understanding of financial regulations.*
- *The PMT fails to make detailed plans for monitoring trips to meet all VCDG members and village leaders. During such trips, the PMT only checks and reminds; it does not analyse the substantive causes of difficulties and offer support to find solutions. For example, when a VCDG fails to make plans for an agricultural promotion programme model, PMT officials only give warnings and fail to identify underlying obstacles to be removed. The PMT tends to work in a top-down manner that does not encourage activity and creativity in villages.*
- *The PMT holds monthly meetings with VCDG and credit-saving groups separately. Separate meetings obstruct the transparency of information at village levels (between VCDG and heads of credit-saving groups). This leads to divisions between activities in villages and among groups of beneficiaries. Specifically, the Agricultural Promotion Programme groups are not aware of the activities of credit-saving and cattle raising groups, and vice versa. In many cases, this also leads to a great waste of programme resources.*
- *The commune's PMT does not actively disseminate project information to other officials in the commune, in particular leaders of commune People's Committee, representatives of local organisations or officials of Women's Union in neighbouring villages out of the project's scope. Therefore, it is their general understanding that the project is "solely owned by Women's Union." As a result, they are not willing to cooperate and join in efforts to work for the development of both the project and the commune. What's more, successful experience has not been widely shared. For instance, other villages want to learn from their credit-saving model but they cannot gain access to the information.*
- *In its reports, the PMT only lists and describes its activities; it does not analyse causes for the strengths and weaknesses of the programmes. Besides, the PMT also has difficulties in producing financial reports.*

To address such issues, the consultative group proposes the following solutions:

- *Continue with capacity building activities of the PMT members concerning project management skills.*
- *Caritas staff should shift from highly-detailed instructions towards self-reliance for the PMT under their supervision.*
- *The PMT, especially the management groups of the Women's Union, should share information on programmes (activities, limitations, successes and obstacles) with leaders of the commune People's Committee and other organisations so that they have a better understanding of the significance of the project and can participate more actively. Specifically, frequent reports to commune leaders including the Chairperson of People's Committee and Party Secretary will help to gain the support of local leaders and other organisations.*
- *Concerning cooperation among villages, the PMT should encourage the active participation of the VCDG. During its supervision trips, the PMT should combine both checking and reminding with joint discussion to find solutions.*
- *The PMT needs training and coaching in report writing and in developing a reporting system as a way of monitoring project activities at the village level. PMT needs to write monthly or quarterly reports for submission to Caritas and for their own information system. The PMT in turn needs to coach VCDGs in writing monthly or quarterly reports.*

3.8. Project Design

In general, the project has an appropriate structure for major activities (infrastructure improvements and community development), specific programmes within each component (cattle raising, the Agricultural Promotion Programme, credit-saving, raising awareness of gender issues and capacity building of the commune's branch of the Women's Union). Such activities have greatly contributed to enhancing the knowledge and skills of both officials and the public. Meanwhile, the project is also to address infrastructure problems (dams, electricity, water pumps and schools) and economic issues (loans and cattle).

The project also has sufficient arrangements for its major activities. Capacity-building activities of officials in communes and villages should be performed first. Then, the cattle-raising programme is implemented to support the poorest households. Next, the Agricultural Promotion Programme is implemented to raise the awareness of different models in cattle-raising and cultivation. Based on Agricultural Promotion Programme models, the project provides loans to the public through credit-saving schemes to help them expand production.

However, the project does not cover the public healthcare programme, which is highly important for community development. The project should provide support in the following issues: clean water, environmental sanitation, building medical establishments in remote areas (Nam Hung - Bac Son), and information dissemination to raise awareness on disease prevention and treatment.

Besides, the project should continue to focus on infrastructure development, specifically:

- *Building of an irrigation canal system for all the five villages.*
- *Building of the surrounding dykes to protect the 12 ha-rice field in Dong Chiem from flooding.*

- *Building of village roads in Roc Eo, Bo Moi and Dong Chiem.*

In the opinion of the consultative group, the project design took into account factors affecting means of subsistence (reasons for vulnerability, assets for subsistence, the policy and institutional environment, strategy for subsistence and result of subsistence). In general, the project's activities impacted factors creating vulnerability, helped build assets for subsistence and affected the institutional environment, leading to good subsistence results. The project's benefits could be further enhanced if the following points are adjusted and supplemented:

- *The project helped partly deal with the factor of natural conditions (flood and drought) by strengthening the dyke system in some villages. However, in order to develop a thorough solution to deal with natural challenges, the project should take into account the need to call for support and commitment from province, district, commune authorities and people. In the near future, the project should pay due attention to market conditions on sale of products.*
- *In building assets or capital to aid subsistence, the project affected human, social, natural, financial and physical capital. Further investment in human capital in both quality and quantity is needed. In terms of quantity, health improvements through community health care should be added. In terms of quality, business knowledge, planting, animal breeding and leadership skills should be improved. Human capital should be accompanied by social capital. The project should enhance the effectiveness of available support networks (credit groups and interest groups) as well as better involve the poor in decision-making processes.*
- *In terms of policies and institutions, the project should reconsider the assumptions made during the project design process. At present, the project focuses on enhancing the capacity of the Women's Union and the community development group as independent organisations/groups from the local authorities by influencing this system from the outside. The project should consider further influencing this system from the inside by involving the commune and village authorities. Apart from frequent reports to the leaders on project activities, the PMT could invite the commune leaders to see the implementation of the programmes in the villages and households. The project could invite commune leaders to participate in training courses and review meetings, especially at village level. In this way, the project would help enhance the leaders' awareness of community development and follow the slogan "people are the root". Changing leaders' awareness is an important sustainable way to deal with factors creating vulnerabilities.*
- *In the next phase, the project should focus on strategies for subsistence. People should be supported to work out strategies for optimal use of capital, knowledge and finance provided by the project in the first phase.*

3.9 Project Sustainability and Potential

Sustainability of Activities, Impacts and Effectiveness

The project's activities are expected to be sustained by people and officials in the commune and its villages. Measures have been proposed to maintain activities with a view to ensuring the sustainability of impacts and effectiveness. Specifically, to ensure the sustainability of saving and credit activities, the debtor should pay the due monthly principal and interest on

time to ensure a sufficient credit source for new loans; as well as exchange views on the use of loans with others who have not yet received loans. Lending cows-buffaloes will be sustained if cows and buffaloes are duly cared for and cow and buffalo calves are rotated to other households.

In order to attain sustainability, apart from the afore-mentioned solutions, the consultative groups noted that the project should focus on factors of sustainability in capacity, organisation and finance.

Sustainability of Capacity (awareness and behaviour) of people and officials of An Phu: see Section 3.8.

Sustainability of Organisation: see Section 3.7.

Sustainability of Finance to cover the expenses:

- ***The project should maintain the interest rate of the credit programme and the 3 percent fee of the cows/buffaloes programme. This income should be used to cover operational costs. A year before Caritas finishes working in An Phu, the project should try to finance all of its operational costs based on this income.***
- ***Commune authorities are requested to commit to maintaining the project. For example, commune authorities could permit to the use of part of the commune budget to finance the annual maintenance of surrounding dykes, bridges and electricity lines. Staff could be appointed (paid by the People's Committee) to participate in activities like cattle and poultry vaccination, dissemination of information on agricultural enhancement and maintenance of infrastructure. A pilot proposal should be implemented before the sponsor withdraws from the project in An Phu in order to gradually ensure the commitment of local authorities.***
- ***People are requested to pay annual/periodical fees for consultants, the organisation of training courses on the Agricultural Promotion Programme and veterinary care.***

Potential: Possibility of Expanding the Project

- ***The project should consider the possibility to expand saving and credit activities to all the remaining villages, especially Ai Nang, Xom Dinh, Goc Bang, Doi Ly and Phu Thanh villages. These villages are at the same level of development as the current participating villages and their residents are in need of loans.³ However, the project should not expand to all the villages at the same time due to the PMT's limited financial capacity.***
- ***When the saving and credit programme is expanded, it should be coordinated with the activities of the Agricultural Promotion Programme as these two sectors are closely linked and supplement each other.***
- ***If the entire project is to be expanded, it would be important to survey the needs in three other poor villages: Goc Bang, Xom Dinh and Ai Nang. Credit activities and Agricultural Promotion Programmes should be a priority for expansion as they greatly benefit many poor households. Cow-buffalo renting should be provided to very poor households that are able to care for them.***

³ This is the opinion of the women from Ai Nang, Xom Dinh, Goc Bang, Doi Ly and Phu Thanh.

- *In addition, the project should encourage communes, departments, agents and unions to duplicate the project model to other villages. After assessing the means of implementation, these agents could run some aspects of the model using their own financial sources.*

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

The comprehensive project on community development in An Phu Commune had positive impacts on the community. In particular, the project improved the social and economic life of poor and very poor households. Since the implementation of the project, the incomes of poor and very poor people have increased. Thanks to the project, knowledge of science and technology in breeding as well as general social knowledge among the poor and very poor people has been enhanced.

Another impact of this project has been to improve the capacity of officials in Women's Unions in communes and villages. By taking part in the project, the staff learned organisational and operational skills. The prestige of the union was increased and the status of the staff lifted in the eyes of the local people and leaders.

In order to maintain the positive impacts of the project, in the coming phase, the involved parties need to consider two basic issues. First, it is necessary to strengthen coordination between the Women's Union and other agents in the commune. At the village level, the Community Development Group should coordinate project activities, and simultaneously coordinate with leaders and representatives of other agents in the village. Second, the top-down mechanism of the PMT, which was partly suitable with the first phase of the project due to the limited project awareness, should be revised in the second phase. The small initiatives programme, or the community fund programme, is a good opportunity for the PMT to implement bottom-up mechanisms.

Finally, in order to obtain the two afore-mentioned targets, the project needs to keep enhancing PMT capacity. This is the key factor to ensure the success of the second phase and the long-term sustainability of the project.