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SOCIAL POLICY ECOLOGY RESEARCH INSTITUTE - SPERI

PROGRESS REPORT - ONGOING MECOECOTRA & SPERI - VN102011
REPORTING PERIOD: July to December 2009

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Contents

Introduction	3
Program description	3
Progress and Achievements Summary.....	4
Problems/challenges Encountered	13
Changes in Requirements	14
Overall Assessment of the Program.....	15
References	117

Introduction

This progress report presents the on-going of the contract MecoEcotra Program (VN 102011) for the extended period from July to December 2009.

The program closure was June 2009 but due to achievements, and new initiatives emerged from MecoEcotra thematic networks to meet practical needs from grassroots communities, the contract was granted extension six months.

The purpose of this report is to describe activities were done; those are doing and the intended doings. Achievements on strengthening OD¹s, ID²s and regional networks in this short phase are an interim step for MecoEcotra to continue implementing in the 2010-12.

The report has six parts: introduction, program description, progress and achievements summary, problems/challenges encountered, changes in requirements and overall assessment.

Program description

Main objective of July - December 2009 program is to strengthen ODs, IDs and human resources of MecoEcotra to meet with higher needs to deal with emerging challenges i.e. working with multiple level actors. The program includes continued activities of four MecoEcotra's thematic networks³ on herbal medicine, eco-farming, customary law in watershed forest management and farmers' field schools (FFSs).

In this period, actors have actively involved with SPERI including Lao Cai vocational College, veterinary officials of Simacai district⁴, Vietnamese Television Cooperation (VTC)⁵, authorities of Luang Prabang province e.g. Provincial Agriculture Forestry Office (PAFO), People's Committee of Luang Prabang district, Regional Center for Social Studies and Development (RCSD), Chiangmai University-Thailand and Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics. At the NGOs level, SPERI works closely with Consultancy on Development (CODE) on consultation and Center for Resource Management and Cultural Identity (CIRUM) through study exchanges for MecoEcotra members.

In the fields of donors, SPERI has co-operated with the Bread for the World to implement a pilot proposal on Enriching Customary Law in Forest Management and Land Use Planning in Phon Xa Vat and Den Xa Vang villages in the 'Phu Sung' watershed areas in Luang Prabang district, Luang Prabang province, Laos. Besides the German partner, SPERI initially communicate with CCFD-French for further Mekong regions-cooperation.

¹ Organizational Development

² Institutional Development

³ See in detailed the MecoEcotra 2006-2009 proposal (July 2006 - June 2009).

⁴ Participating in eco-farm training for indigenous students

⁵ Raising public awareness of community entrepreneurship and development at the grassroots level

Beneficiaries from the project include indigenous students, ethnic elders, farmers from MecoEcotra thematic networks, and also policy makers. The good news is that the number of beneficiaries has been extensively expanding. About 10,000 H'mong people in Luang Prabang district, Luang Prabang province, Laos via the Luang Prabang H'mong traditional Association are involving with MecoEcotra to resolve disputes over land and forest. At the same time, they join efforts in maintaining traditional culture and proposing solutions to livelihoods security.

To support MecoEcotra timely and effectively, SPERI during this interim has focused on strengthening staff capacity through seminars and training courses. Needs assessment study, seminars on eco-farming, training on young leadership and research skills, publication and media have been conducted. Public awareness raising will continue to be a focal area of SPERI in the coming years. On-site shooting on Community Entrepreneurs and Development series have been taken in various field projects including Nghe An, Son La, Lao Cai, Quang Binh, Lang Son, and Ha Tinh. This series is broadcasted fortnightly on national e-TV media VTC1 channel (VTC-Vietnamese Tivi Corporation). Also emphasized in the last 6 months, SPERI has focused on evaluating and summarizing the youth ethnic minorities training activities on eco-farming and leadership through strategic FFSs in the different areas (FFS_Simacai, FFS_HEPA, FFS_Dong Le). This activity aims to get all the lessons learned in training as well as coordination with other thematic networks towards the transformation of MecoEcotra in three years.

Progress and Achievement Summary

MecoEcotra's thematic networks

Laos-Thailand-Vietnam network on herbal medicine

The herbal medicinal network continuously achieved successfully in lobbying for community rights over watershed forests, civil society forum with Thailand activists and researchers, and conduct training courses in using and managing herbal plants for the minority youths at farmers field schools. This period, the network shows a stronger cooperation with eco-farming network and customary law network to meet cross-cutting needs emerged by communities.

A training workshop on integrating cultural knowledge of herbs in ecological farming was held at FFS-HEPA presenting to participants a clearer relationship between herbal plants and eco-farming in terms of flora resources, knowledge transmission and dual benefits. A curriculum was created reflecting shared perspectives of the interrelations between herbs and farming. Herbs are everyday nutrient vegetables, herbs cure common diseases for people, animals and herbs are bio-materials to kills insects. After the workshop indigenous students understood that education is not just about herbal knowledge transmission but also the process of healers transmitting their ethics, belief, cultural values and behaviors towards nature. An advisory board on Herbal Knowledge Education was set up in the FFSs is an

indicator for strengthening OD and ID from MecoEcotra. It also shows an effort in bridging knowledge from community members to level it into areas of practical training.

There is an informal exploration field trip on herbal forest from Simacai district, Lao Cai province, Vietnam. Among the six types of forest management⁶ spiritual forest including herbal forest is protected most strictly as it is kept by belief and traditional regulations of communities. This observation opens potential research to compare different types of forest managements in order to prove and lobby more suitable and efficient policies regarding forests allocating and protecting.

In this extension, the Herbal Network has gained greater legitimate role towards the formal health care system. In Hanh Dich commune, Mr Nguyen Xuan Kieu (former leader of Hanh Dich Health Service Station) has promoted his working experiences with traditional healers to develop a model of 10 standards in Health Service Station, Kim Son town - Que Phong district, Nghe An province.

The number of patients has been increased significantly treated mainly by healers. In 2009 about 300 patients of different sickness in the Lao Cai province were cured succeed by healers of Simacai Herbal Medicine Network. Reputation of the traditional healers also expanded. Thousands of herbal plant species have been well nurtured via community herbal forests, herbal gardens; and these are all initiatives by the network.

Network on eco-farming

MecoEcotra farmers are on the moves towards better engaging with organic farming practices whilst ensure the least income for household economics. A preliminary study on eco-farming development potential in Simacai district, Lao Cai Province-Vietnam was conducted by SPERI staff and international volunteers. Outcomes of this study will become vivid curriculum for young farmers. Household pilots have shown to be persuasive indicators to demonstrate students/learners on how eco-principals work at the community level.

MecoEcotra farmers also start joining the FFSs' practical training. Experienced farmers like Mr. Hoang Huu Phuoc and Mrs. Nguyen Thi Binh from Quang Binh gave courses on making diversity garden on landmine-affected ground and pigs raising by eco-food processing to FFSs students.

⁶ 1) spiritual forests, communal forests (including herbal forests) are respected by villages, communes and communities 2) forests managed by clans of family (e.g. Hoang clan manages forest in Ta Can Ho village, Can Ho commune) is also respected and realized in reality; 3) forests allocated to villages officially 4) forests allocated to communes officially; 5) spiritual forests acknowledged by districts (e.g. Pho Cu forest, Simacai commune) and; 6) forests managed by forestry companies or other organizations.

Farmers of this network have involved with VTC media production team to produce series on the importance of ecological cultivation, integrating local knowledge, local solutions and native species in farming for TV broadcast. At least about 3-4 series have been produced with an aim of public awareness raising.

This interim eco-farming network is continuing to promote its pilots in three levels: a) household level - for example key farmer Hoang Huu Phuoc, Nguyen Thi Binh and Vi Van Nhat, b) community level - through Human Ecology villages (Na Sai village Thai Hanh Dich, Long Lan village of Hmong in Laos), and c) regional level (FFS_Nan San_Simacai_Lao Cai, FFS_HEPA_Ha Tinh and FFS Dong Le_Quang Binh). These models are built on purposes to create live curriculum, live forum for the practical training courses of ethnic minority students in FFSs and for public raising awareness and advocacy.

Eco-farming network in the same time also has initiatives in conjunction with other thematic networks such as customary laws, traditional herbal medicine and handicraft textile, etc to form its self-concept in practice regarding eco-agriculture towards sustainability, autonomy and safety for ethnic minority communities living in the watershed areas.

Farmers Field Schools (FFSs) at HEPA_Ha Tinh and Simacai-Lao Cai province – Vietnam

From July to December 2009, FFSs network organizes two ecological farming courses. Class K6B at FFS Simacai, Lao Cai province with 17 minority students and class K1A at FFS-HEPA with 10 minority students. Both courses organized the graduation ceremony after their two-year study in late November 2009.

FFS- HEPA conducts an independent training program on the foundation of teaching-by-learning and learning-by-doing methodology. Training contents, teaching resources, and planning and management have been all self-designed. Unlike HEPA, FFS Simacai manages to cooperate well with the Governmental education system⁷ in delivering the Agro-Eco-farming training program.

Teaching and training contents are built primarily from students' needs. HEPA received visits from professors and economists who came and gave lectures. Students have had opportunities to share their views and Qs and As⁸ were exchanged between the professors and the students. Leadership skills including team work, role-play was assigned to students in a given real scenario in order to challenge the students' thinking and solutions. Students in Simacai have been fortunate to have MecoEcotra farmers, elders, herbalists to be part of their teaching resources. Simacai field office is active in inviting local experts and other specialists to give

⁷ Like PPP model. PPP: private public partnership

⁸ Questions and Answers

specific training on raising animals, husbandry, and foundation courses such as Laws, plant protection.

Among many topics learnt, the highlights of the Simacai training mainly are students are encouraged in conducting trials to test/examine local knowledge and local solutions in eco-farming practice. Each group of students is tasked to follow a process of very good data recording from the plan and design until harvesting and weighing crops yield. Students are equipped with computing skills in using Excel package, basic power-point presentation, and writing up their plan for home practical projects. In FFS-HEPA, highlights of the training lie more with efforts in getting students developing their independent projects on allocated pilots to self-design the farm, self-explore new findings from everyday observation and also keep a good daily record of continuous activities and improvements for the farms. Learning by doing on independent projects is a good chance for students to approach towards building students capacity in forming independent thinking and learning approach to self-resolve problems⁹. Students are offered to join field studies on Needs Assessment Studies in Laos PDR, exposures to different professorship lectures, and advanced learning tools e.g. SWOT analysis, farm measurement.

Minority students after graduated from FFS Simacai have many employment opportunities. They will become forestry extension staff, district agricultural extension technicians or forestry nursery workers¹⁰. Indigenous students get very well acquainted with hands-on unit courses and other practical skills are another positive effect with regards to training methodology. Students are well capturing the idea of putting learning knowledge on the ground and some have shown commitment in putting trials on their home farms. HEPA class still on training progress and students are offered opportunities to play a role of tutoring the 1st year new comers including Laos students. They also involve in assistant teaching/training, in the form of TOT, in some unit courses such as doing compost, terrace fields, etc. On the research aspect, these advanced students are equipped with beginning level skills by engaging with international advisor¹¹ to do a group research on applied indigenous knowledge into eco-farming.

⁹ Vi Van Toan, in his project, chose to test 2kg of local terrace rice which he brought from home in Na Sai village to his farm at HEPA. Ly Seo Vu and Giang A Su have brought local black chicken from home to HEPA aimed at test them in a new environment using local knowledge. They successfully nursed for 17 black chickens. Ly Seo Vu also brought local corn and cucumber to test intercrop with pumpkin, pineapple, beans, and peanuts in his farm.

¹⁰ Giang A Lu (K6B class), Sung Seo Cu (K6B class) and Giang A Min (K5A class) to do forestry extension. The Simacai district agricultural extension office also shows a great impression that asked all K6B and K5A graduates to join their network of local agricultural extension officers. Giang Seo Che and Giang Seo Trang will be recruited to work on forestry nursery and extension works with the 661 Forestry Station.

¹¹ Ms. Yingshan Lau, Master of Science in Nature, Society and Environmental Policy, 2009-10, Oxford University, United Kingdom. She had been teaching English on environmental issues at HEPA twice.

Simacai staff is gradually working more professionally in designing the marking and evaluation system under supervision from SPERI seniors. This evaluation system is expecting to be applicable for the new class K7, combined with marking from Lao Cai College. Key step in building training contents in FFS Simacai is that it combines both local and modern knowledge i.e. integrating hybrid and local species; exposed students to new technology e.g. search Internet, use online learning resources. After each lesson, students and staff together summarize their learning points and update in the SPERI/FFS form. They share their lessons to other students regionally through the SPERI internal emailing system and website.

Educational equipments were supplied in time for FFSs. Three desktop computers were prepared for FFS Simacai serving computer courses and students' writing exercises.

This period the interaction between FFSs and Eco-farming thematic networks appeared inevitably. Minority students from FFSs have been invited to participate in the training workshops on integrating cultural knowledge of herbs in ecological farming to learn the important of herbs in eco-farming and linkages of herbs, eco-farms and forest management.

Networking on customary law & watershed forest management

Follow achievements of 2009, key indigenous members of customary law network¹² initiate communal issues-based experience exchanges between regions. Traditional elders take co-responsibilities to solve conflicts over land in Long Lan watershed area in Luang Prabang province, Laos. Members of customary law network recognize that only Long Lan could not lonely manage the forest if it's around villages have limited forest lands access. A needs assessment study was organized to study current challenges of the neighbor villages Den Xa Vang and Phone Xa Vat. A key result of the study is that villagers of Long Lan, Xieng Da, Nam Kha¹³ and elders from these two new villages established a Board of Advisors and Board of Coordinators to facilitate whole process of dealing with forest land problems in this territory. These Boards cooperated with H'mong Association of Luang Prabang, local authorities and customary law network to orient and implement development activities in these new villages.

There is an efficient indicators of community-based land allocation program appeared in this extended period. By implementing traditional customary law in forest management Long Lan elders and villagers prevented successfully a deal of renting land to grow coffee plants of Mr.Kenh's private company. Despite the land renting decision had approved by the Luang Prabang provincial officer but Long Lan leaders negotiated strongly with local authorities to destroy the contract. SPERI has learnt that the process of developing communal management capacity through customary law - based land allocation and planning program created opportunities for the locals to improve their self-confidence and self-decision in solving their problems which adapts to official laws and current circumstances.

¹² Elder Jorni Odochao, Yua (Thailand), Xay Khu Yang (Laos), Ha Van Tuyen and Hoang Seo Cau (Vietnam)

¹³ Nam Kha and Xieng Da are beneficiary villages of previous proposals 1999-2009

As the plan of beginning months 2009, traditional healers in Can Ho village, Simacai district, Lao Cai province, Vietnam organized the “Nao Long” traditional ceremony to promote the trend of protecting communal herbal forests in their communities. This is a regional event of H’mong people in Can Ho village because there were some experienced elders of Long Lan village and H’mong Association in Laos participated in this ritual. After discussing with Laos indigenous elders, Can Ho healers initiate to re-plan and develop the place holding “Nao Long” to become a special space for educating religious culture to communities especially indigenous youths in 2010. Mr Di Zi Vang, staff of Luang Prabang Radio Station, Laos said that “Nao Long” in Laos is rarely to organize, I heard that it was held in the past but I do not know how people organize it. Here, I learnt the way Can Ho people prepared and held the ceremony”.

For customary law network in Simacai district, Lao Cai province-Vietnam: Indigenous healers of Simacai in coordination with the other healers in the network have created the movement to restore and maintain the 'cultural beliefs' forests - 'Nao Long' in the whole district of Simacai.

On that basis has created a network of 14 'cultural beliefs' forests in Simacai district with different levels such as “Nao Long” forest of family clans, “Nao Long” forests of villages, “Nao Long” forest of communes and “Nao Long” forests of districts.

The network in Simacai has self-shaped their strategy / concept of 'bottom up lobbying' - do lobby from grassroots. The first is to raise awareness of people about conservation of “Nao Long” forests. Next, by the actions of villagers, commune and district authorities identify the value of the “Nao Long” forests.

For customary law network in Hanh Dich, Que Phong district, Nghe An province-Vietnam: It was combined with the network to organize forums on the local level: customary laws in natural resources management in watershed areas. In which, herbal medicine is priority subject. This exchange has raised the movement to protect community regulations-based watershed forests in Que Phong.

SPERI

Human resource development

Given the higher demand and capacity of MecoEcotra’s thematic networks, SPERI required to also improving its professional and specialized capacity and working positions. A survey on capacity assessment for staff was conducted; so SPERI is in the position to better understand and define strategies for staff training improvement. The focused training are: a) skills of set up research and develop community-based issues, b) skills of coordination and connection between MecoEcotra and its partners, c) skills of organizing practical training

courses in FFSs, d) skills of making news on Communal Entrepreneurs posted on the VTC channel to raise public awareness.

Field staff and indigenous students also have had chance to learn experiences and lessons learned from key farmers on their eco-farm development process by participating in eco-farm workshop at HEPA. The workshop helped them to determine the concepts of eco-farming clearly. The distinguishes between organic farming, safe farming and ecological farming are presented reasonably. Staff understood the reasons why SPERI promotes pilots on ecological farming, because it rooted from human ecology theory of SPERI and 15-year achievements of key farmer network. Thus, students are persuasive that their everyday lessons were set up sustainably between theory and reality.

Moreover, SPERI organized a special opportunity for staff and advanced indigenous students (from FFS HEPA) implementing Needs Assessment Study trip (hereafter called NAS) in two new villages nearby Long Lan watershed area in Luang Prabang province, Laos. This was the first time staff of eco-farm network learnt deeply steps of how to implement NAS in the field. After learning contents of NAS they were assigned to go to the villages with SPERI senior staff and Laos indigenous elders to collect live data. They observed and learned villagers' agriculture planning, local initiates in terms of ecological cultivations, local species as well as challenges villagers met. Having these chances of practical learning, SPERI's junior staff are more confident in working and understanding what farmers have done in practice and they could actively approach different communities to do another needs assessment.

Besides the workable training courses, SPERI held series of meetings/seminars to discuss the updated work positions and personnel structure so that the right capabilities, right interests of staff could meet the new needs and requirements of Mecocotra partner.

Research and Publication

Regarding research theme of SPERI from July to December 2009, there were four case studies carried out adding to the initial exploratory research in Simacai district, Lao Cai province of eco-farming network: 1) Problems - Causes - Consequences - Solutions of the Locals towards Natural Resource Governance and Community Development done by NAS's participants from Thailand, Laos and Vietnam; 2) How do the discourse of indigenous forest users in Vietnam, as represented by indigenous students in FFS HEPA, is not dissonant with the global forest governance discourse emerging from the United Nations Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Land Degradation (UN-REDD) done by Australian National University (ANU) alumni, Masters Oxford: Masters of Science in Nature, Society and Environmental Policy; 3) Soil water erosion - Application of green manure to annual crops to reduce erosion and increase yields in Cay Khe eco-farming model in HEPA followed up from AYAD's researcher by SPERI's junior staff and class K1A; 4) Farmers Field School: The extent of knowledge transfer within farming communities in Vietnam prepared by ANU's student from Fenner School of Environment and Society, ANU. By visiting SPERI, international volunteers could find indicators that linked theories they learnt at Universities with the vivid practice therefore those case studies became one part of practical curriculum in

SPERI and they are foundations to build up future research cooperation between SPERI and partners who have same vision and interests with SPERI.

In October 2009, SPERI based on approach of further 10-year cooperation with Luang Prabang province via Luang Prabang Agriculture and Forestry Office (PAFO), Laos; Regional Center for Social Science and Sustainable Development (RCSD) and Center for Ethnic Studies and Development (CESD), The Faculty of Social Science, Chiangmai University-Thailand and followed achievements of CHESH Lao 10 year reviewing workshop held in March 2009, a Memorandum of Understanding between above partners was signed with the aim of enlivening and socializing pilot on “customary law on natural resource management in Long Lan village, Luang Prabang province, Laos” to larger scale of Mekong region as well as strengthening research and teaching methodology based on local knowledge practice and indigenous elders and youth for staff and students of SPERI/CHESH Lao. Under this MOU, indigenous students after graduation at SPERI’s FFSs have chance to study further in six to eight-month non-degree training program for Young Indigenous Ethnic Leadership Strategy (YIELDS) at Chiangmai University.

Refer to publication, SPERI’s cooperation with Vietnamese Television Corporation (VTC) have made 11 documentary films relate to community enterprise and development of MecoEcotra which broadcasted twice per month on VTC channel. There were 3 films in Que Phong district, Nghe An province, 3 films in Simacai, Lao Cai, 1 in Tuyen Hoa, Quang Binh, 1 in Nam Kha, Nam Bac, Laos and 2 in Bo Trach, Quang Binh and 1 film on H’mong people protect community forest. Audiences have been aware of community entrepreneurs is a new concept who maintain and develop communities’ capitals.

Strengthen working capacity of SPERI office

Head office in Hanoi had finished a plan to move equipments and documents to HEPA for office repair and management but the progress of moving have been implementing to the first six months of 2010.

Internal forum on speri.org for information sharing and enrichment is set up that meet current requirement in communicating among SPERI as well as SPERI with partners.

Library systems at FFSs are maintained. Each FFS has two libraries 1) serving education for ethnic minority students. 2) Serving administrative tasks while library in Hanoi head office also has filing system of MecoEcotra’s thematic networks’ activities.

SPERI-Laos Program

Strengthen capacity building of customary laws network in Laos in resolving obstacles to land, forests in Phone Xa Vat and Den Xa Vang villages in Luang Prabang province, Laos

This period, the customary laws network in Laos had chance to establish Board of Advisors and Board of Coordinators to solve struggles on land and forest management in Phone Xa Vat and Den Xa Vang villages, Luang Prabang district, Luang Prabang province. Voluntary members of these boards are key indigenous elders and farmers. This is a great result of Need Assessments Study in these two villages with participation of multi-stakeholders such as Long Lan - Xieng Da - Nam Kha¹⁴ reputable elders, leaders of H'mong Association of Luang Prabang as well as district and provincial staff. Board of Coordinators was working closely with Board of Advisors in order to build 3-month plan (Jan to March 2010) to resolve land and forest land use overlapping between Phone Xa Vat and Den Xa Vang villages and their neighbor villages. Besides that, a study tour to share experiences on how to build community regulations on using, managing land and cultivation methods between Long Lan - Xieng Da - Nam Kha is also set up as prioritized activities in the first 3 months.

Thus, the highlight of the customary network in Laos in this extended period is that traditional institutions through the Hmong Association in Luang Prabang with the participation of 10,000 members are identified and recognized by local authorities. The Hmong Association has gained a position and role equal practically to the formal system, for example, it could participate with Construction and Liberation Front of the Laos country to implement development activities, social stability and natural resource management of Luang Prabang district. The Hmong Association itself formed the strategy action plan coordinated with other organizations, local governments to solve conflicts of natural resources in the Phu Sung area (Phone Xa Vat and Den Xa Vang villages).

These lessons become the subject of theoretical and policy research of various research organizations and training centers such as the University of Suphanuvong - Laos, Chiang Mai University-Thailand. The scholars worked hand in hand with traditional leaders to write case studies and assigned students to do research proposals deeply via students' master and PhD thesis. Integrating both academic and practical studies brings good indicators for villagers and SPERI to do lobbying for a pilot of customary law-based community development for H'mong, Khmu and Lao Lum in Luang Prabang province. Additionally, SPERI cooperated with Regional Center for Social Science and Development (RCSD) - Chiang Mai University organized a TOT training workshop for ethnic elders and indigenous teachers. Presenters were traditional leaders of Thailand, they shared knowledge in terms of local ethnic context such as customary laws, values in teaching learning and doing community development research. Contents of the workshop are summarized as a manual book for traditional elders, key farmers of MecoEcotra, SPERI's seniors, researchers and coordinators of H'mong Association in Luang Prabang to participate intensively in Young Indigenous Ethnic Leadership Development with approach of teaching by learning - learning by doing.

Cooperate with Farmers Field School Network, Long Lan village is becoming a field school in terms of: a) ecological agricultural, b) resolve conflicts on natural resources, c) training the

¹⁴ Long Lan, Xieng Da and Nam Kha villagers are previous project's beneficiaries

next generation of leadership, d) indigenous knowledge and traditional institution-based natural resources management. To exchange students between FFSs, this stage, Laos Program has been preparing to recruit indigenous youths in Phon Xa Vat, Den Xa Vang, Nam Kha, Long Lan villages to study eco-farming at FFS_HEPA. Currently, they are in progress of making ID, passports and Vietnamese visa procedures. FFS_HEPA intends to open new course for Laos students in March 2010.

Attendance of CHESH Lao staff in English course will be considered in next phase of the project because at this moment Laos and Vietnamese are prioritized.

Regarding fund contribution, this 6-month ending 2009, CHESH Lao program received a new donor - Bread for the World, Germany to implement a proposal of strengthen customary laws in forest management and land use planning in Phon Xa Vat and Den Xa Vang villages. This financial support helps Luang Prabang people to scale up good model of Long Lan's customary law based forest management to other villages to protect Luang Prabang world heritage's watershed area.

Problems / Challenges Encountered

For herbal medicine and customary law thematic networks:

Many places, many communities, customary laws and indigenous knowledge have not been identified and recognized by the mainstream system. Customary laws are being 'legal goods' or 'criminal goods'. This led to loose and decadence of communities' moral values.

The overseas private companies, especially Hong Kong and China i.e. Innov Green Company, lease the land for their long-term economic development of commodity crops in the watershed area - where ethnic minorities are living.

The trend of free trade, exhausted exploitation on herbal resources leads herbal network facing challenges because raw herbs are exploited without re-planting to meet market's increasing needs. For instance, networking with herbal network in Ba Vi has positives aspects regarding enrich herbal knowledge and herbal species between members; but it causes high pressure to herb forests. Another example is a businesswoman in Hanoi visited Hanh Dich's herbal medicine network to deposit for her required collection of herbs. The valuable herbal medicine source is in danger of extinct as herbal medicine plants only grow well under forest conditions so if herbs are planted in the gardens, these plants do not have much pharmacy elements as herbs grow naturally in forests.

There is another difficulty of herbal medicine thematic network in Hanh Dich, Nghe An that is the manager board of the network could not raise funds to maintain activities of the network. In official paper of the commune authority, villagers support rice to help network's members to patrol and protect forest but in fact the manager board did not receive any rice

from that paper. Consequences, members do not want to join the network and forest protection duty is less concerned.

It lacks of person to follow the traditional healer footsteps. The healers want to educate young generation to follow their knowledge on using herbs for curing people and animals but after graduating schools. Minority youths like to go to cities to have more opportunities of employment.

With lessons from cases of the Phon Xa Vat and Den Xa Vang villages, Luang Prabang - Laos, the customary in watershed management network determines some challenges which could be occurred in the process of solving land conflicts between Kho Mu and other ethnic groups in this watershed area. Reducing of cultivating lands to plant mono-trees has changed farmers' position from farm owners to workers. Spaces to practice religious ceremonies are gradually limited. Multi-belief among Kho Mu people living together with H'mong and Lao Lum reminds development workers must research carefully each group's culture towards natures and relationship among groups before advising how to solve land overlapping. Tourists' visit appeared in these villages to have sightseeing on community life and enjoy fresh air of nature. Cultural shocked caused by different cultures do not fit with local belief and taboo. For example, couple of visitors does not allow sleeping together in one room of Kho mu families.

Traditional regulations on land and forest management of H'mong may be upset because of Kho mu and Lao Lum live collectively in a village. Each group has different belief towards natures so its regulation to protect forest is also not similar. This leads to reduce implementing power of the regulations while pressures from outsiders for logging increasing day by day.

For eco-farming thematic network

Awareness of the social to the ecological agricultural products is still very limited. The widespread application of chemical products, fertilizers and pesticides are increasingly more widely.

Growing industrial parks, regional economic development, dam development projects, industrial plants turn fertile lands for agricultural production to retrograde and poor soil. Desert, poverty and dependence are ultimate consequences.

Similarity to the problem of the herbal medicine network, lacking of followers – minority youths do not want to engage in agricultural production. They desire for the city life where could find short-term jobs, easy money for their existence.

Changes in Requirements

There is an important fact merging in this extended period: a thematic interacts with different thematic networks in order to meet its goals. For instance, herbal forest will be protected voluntarily when it's managed by customary laws and people have strong believed in spirits of nature. Herbal vegetables are nutrient plants in eco-farming system. By linkage together between thematic networks, Mecocotra's capacity in coordinate activities and human resources development are strengthened. A significant point alerts that in order to deal with global changes (scarcity of natural resources, impact of global warming, cross-border securities, etc) thematic networks have to actively work hand on hand with another networks from making action plans, implementing to monitoring and evaluating outputs.

There are also some activities have not done yet in this July - December 2009, such as:
Eco-farming network: Need assesment and support for promoting potential community enterprises on handicraft production: This activity was transferred to a later stage because this time focuses on networks' and staff's capacity building. Moreover, public awareness about the concept of communal entrepreneurs broadcasted on the VTC should be made before implementing research assesment to promote these enterprises.

SPERI human resource development: Provide practical training on community enterprise (concepts and criteria) for SPERI's staffs: Same above reasons.

Training courses in intermediate and high levels of English for SPERI's staff is moved to January 2010 after finishing the Needs Assessment Study in Laos.

Strengthen working capacity of SPERI office: Repair the headquarter office in Ha noi is moved to the next phase of the project. As the repaired design needs to be approved in the condition of cost estimation is very much bigger than that of the approved project budget item.

Set up software for human resource management will be done in the first 6-month 2010 because a frame is only established after updating all current documents and profiles of personnel system including contract papers, updated job description, working location, needs of staff, human resource development strategy of SPERI, etc.

Overall Assessment of the Program

The progress of on-going MecoEcotra and SPERI VN 102011 from July to December 2009 has mainly finished its activities as planned. There are three activities of SPERI: English training course for staffs, setting up software for human and asset management and Hanoi head office repairing will be done in the first six months of 2010.

The most crucial achievement of this extended period (July to December 2009) is that the current development activities at communities require thematic networks of MecoEcotra to cooperate with each other in order to deal with multi-actors and global market's involvement in exploring natural resources.

SPERI's coordination, monitoring, evaluation, teaching and lobbying skills are improved by partnering with MecoEcotra to solve problems of communities in Laos and Vietnam. That requires SPERI to looking for more suitable cooperation / partners to meet the higher practical needs as well capacity of MecoEcotra's thematic networks.

Reference

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3. SPERI.Progress report of DAD_Jul-Dec 2009.
4. ICCO. Agenda for change (2007-2010) on ProCoDe.8.2009.