



CENTER FOR HUMAN ECOLOGY STUDIES OF HIGHLANDS (CHESH)

Progress Report Farmer School (VN080121)

June 2006 - December 2006

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Introduction

This narrative report of VN080121 – Farmer School focuses on the period from June to December 2006. From June 2006, activities in HEPA¹ have been mainly focusing on further development of agricultural pilot models, infrastructure construction and providing space for forums, seminars, workshops and study tours of farmers, students, independent experts, authorities and policy makers. The last activity – providing forums, seminars, workshops and study tours – is reported in the VN080111 (National Key Farmers program) and is also included in the MECO-ECOTRA² program of SPERI³ (VN102011) which reflects the reforms taking place within the key farmer's network.

Expected achievement after 3 years (2005-2007)

As mentioned in the proposal the expected achievement of the 3 year program will be the following:

A resource practical training Center in Son Kim I commune, Huong Son district, Ha Tinh province has enough capacity to host practice training courses for key farmers, young generation, community development workers on different topics including agro-forestry, natural resource management, traditional culture, indigenous knowledge in the relation to development. The training center is a space of farmers, local authorities, researchers, policy makers, etc to share development experience, ideas and information from both sides.

Achievements (Jun 2006 - Dec 2006)

1. Having models on a community herbal medicine garden, agro-forestry systems, and a nursery and training station for traditional handicraft.

In this period, experiments with pilot models on household organic farming and nursery were taken place in such a way gradually developing the models.

1.1. Khe Soong area of HEPA

Two pilots in Khe Soong area of HEPA were further developed after the permaculture course in April 2006. A system of a fish-pond, terrace fields and erosion prevention systems (i.e. walls) were made. Acacia trees which are for fertilizing soils have been planted in the pilot.

Detailed activities include:

- 1 pilot model of livestock raising has been established. In the construction of this pilot, the use of local materials has been maximized. The pilot model include a stable for cow and buffalo, a pigsty, a chicken fixed cage and two mobile cages,

¹ Human Ecology Practice Area (HEPA) in Ha Tinh province.

² Mekong Community Network and Ecological Trading (MECO-ECOTRA); this is the new name for the thematic key farmer networks.

³ Social Policy Ecology Research Institute. Towards Ethnic Women (TEW) and Center of Indigenous Knowledge Research (CIRD) merged into SPERI already and CHESH will follow (see for more information the proposal for VN102011).

and a fishpond. Recently a bomb hole has been used to raise duck. The pilot also includes 735 m² for pasture area.

- Designing the pilot model of vegetables, cereal crops, fruit trees and forest trees. The design includes a vegetable garden and an area for an area with trees, including bamboo, banana and some local tea. After two months of experimenting with permaculture approach, an integrated agro-forestry system was set up. For example, it borders the kitchen area, where waste from cooking food is used as fertilizer for short term fruit trees like banana. In November 2006, the pilot produced daily vegetables for 4 to 10 persons.
- Two small scale biogas pilots were developed in Khe Soong pilot and, composting system with manure of cattle has been developed.

1.2. “Cay Khe” – organic farming pilot in HEPA

This pilot is carried out by a farmer’s household (e.g. Mrs Dung and Duyet). The pilot has been designed in accordance with the permaculture principles, for instance:

- ✓ Are for raising animals. It includes two chicken cages and space for chicken pasturing, a buffalo/cow cage, one drainage system around the cage, road for cattle, 1 pigsty and a small area to raise earth worm nearby cow cage. The design includes how to maximize the use of energy source and organic substances. For instance, the place of animal cages designed upper the fishponds and terraces because the fish ponds and terraces can benefit from all substances, or water from the cages.
- ✓ 6 different species of forest trees have been grown around the pilot.
- ✓ 2 fish ponds are made with a diverse system of fruit trees.
- ✓ An area for growing tea and an area for growing medicinal herbs have been set up with supports from the composting systems.

1.3. Nursery garden

Since mid-August 2006 there was exchange of staff between field offices of SPERI, so that two staffs (Mr. Phuong and Mr. Dung) who were originally responsible to take care the nursery in HEPA were moved to work in Quang Binh and Nghe An. Four other staff in HEPA were selected to replace the positions, and they learned how to take care of the nursery. They are able to seed and raise different types of forest trees, fruit trees and growing different types of vegetable in the garden. Their results in last six months are as follows:

- ✓ Successful to nurse 16 types of Acacia tree, 3 type of fruit trees, 4 type of flowers and tea.
- ✓ Planting 1425 forest trees in the bare land area of HEPA, 50 flowers in the 7 rooms houses. Other 4341 trees, including 14 types of forest trees, fruit trees and herbs were brought from HEPA to plant in CCCD-Quang Binh.
- ✓ Experimenting with a new methodology for natural ploughing for 140m of sweet potato and taking care for 50% of fruit trees under Acacia forest.
- ✓ Making 12m³ organic fertilizers, to be used for fruit trees.
- ✓ Growing and maintaining 17 different types of vegetable in the garden. Be able to supply a part of daily fresh vegetable for kitchen.
- ✓ Salvaging bamboo in HEPA to make 120 m² of cover for the roof of the nursery and vegetable garden.

1.4. Forest management in HEPA

Since the HEPA office was moved to the lower area in HEPA, less activity took place in the upper area. However from November 2006, senior staff with some guards protected and developed the upper area actively again. During the whole period, the guards made regular trips to check the forest area and unfortunately 13 cases of forest encroachment were discovered. HEPA staff works together with communal authorities and the village leader of the nearby village to solve this issue. So far, encroachment has been less, but not yet fully stopped.

In the upper area, composting systems for fruit trees were developed. Also 1100 acacia, 14 bamboo and more than 200 fruit trees were planted. Also 40m² of vegetable garden was set up which serves daily food of staff. 225 bamboos, 30 bananas and 40 tea plants were planted, which are all native species provided by Mr. Tien and Mr. Linh who are the members of our key farmers network in Huong Son. Finally staff completed a fence to protect the main house.

2. Building up needed infrastructures including training, working and living houses; water systems; internal roads and facilities for running Farmers' School activities.

In this period, HEPA continued with infrastructure program to conserve the cultural value on traditional designing and building. Those constructions are the place for living, training, exchanging for different training, and seminar and field visit of farmers, policy makers and local authorities.

In this period the following activities took place:

- ✓ The foundation for 1 house and kitchen was completed and the floor in 2 houses was completed.
- ✓ A 300m road to one of the houses was completed.
- ✓ A bamboo kitchen was completed.
- ✓ A fence surrounding the kitchen and nearby house was completed.
- ✓ A terrace was developed.
- ✓ The internal water system has been expanded with 1000m of pipe for different pilots and houses.
- ✓ The electricity system was expanded.
- ✓ Two traditional houses (on stilts) were further restored.
- ✓ Improve sleeping room for staff and experts
- ✓ Finalize main gate of HEPA.

Difficulties and challenges

The rainy season in HEPA is normally heavy, but last six month was bigger than normal. As a consequence, some constructions in HEPA were damaged and need to be repaired.

According to the planning, constructions in HEPA will be finalized at the end of May 2007. Due to requirements from key farmers' network that HEPA need to be practical learning as soon as possible for farmers from different areas, some constructions have been built up quicker than planned.

Communication between Hanoi office and field offices in the provinces has been difficult in the last months, especially between HEPA and the office in Hanoi. Due to changing staff in the Hanoi office and in HEPA, it was not easy to keep up to date with all developments in the field and in Hanoi. Due to the limited communication and exchange in planning, and the push to develop HEPA quickly to be ready for training, actually too many activities were undertaken under the farmer field schools program.

Due to inflation of construction materials of about 15 to 20% CHESH overspent its budget for the farmer field schools.

Solutions

- In the coming years, HEPA has to plan for regular maintenance due to the climate.
- For the difficult communication between the Hanoi office and the field offices, especially HEPA strong improvement is needed. For this several solutions are proposed.
- First of all, Ms. Phuong (former CHESH field staff) has started to work as office manager for the Hanoi office and her work will include regular visits to the field offices.
- Secondly, CHESH proposes to close down this contract early, as per December 31, 2006. In such a way, CHESH will speed up its merge into SPERI. The advantage of it is that the communication and financial planning is easier to link within one organization and contract. For more specific information, please check the financial report for the period up to December, 2006.
- Thirdly, CHESH realizes that communication about activity and financial planning between head and field office needs to be improved to prevent too many activities taking place in the future. CHESH and SPERI will cooperate together to improve the overall financial system.

Conclusions

Although many planning difficulties are to overcome, HEPA has developed into a professional training center based upon human ecology principles. Balance has been found between ecology (organic farming, permaculture design and forest management) and human input via the way of building; traditionally and in harmony with the landscape.

Even more important HEPA provides an inspiring environment to learn, study and research both for farmers, staff, students and researchers. HEPA is receiving more and more attention from international organizations and new collaborations with other programs on organic farming and trading will be set up via SPERI.

However, due to inflation over time and damage in the rainy season not all infrastructure has been finalized. Therefore, the SPERI-budget is being revised to include also the final infrastructural work.