



CENTER FOR HUMAN ECOLOGY STUDIES OF HIGHLANDS (CHESH)

Progress Report Key Farmer Program (VN080111)

June 2005 – May 2006

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Introduction

The period from June 2005 to May 2006 is a critical transforming period of the key farmer network.

In the past 10 years working with key farmers has led to developing a key farmer network between Quang Binh province, Lao Cai province, Nghe An province, Ha Tinh province and Luang Prabang province, Lao PDR and other (former) project sites. The key farmer network has been aiming to increase the process of sharing and exchanging lessons learned in poverty alleviation and development approaches among regions. In addition, skills in social analysis, need assessment, planning and coordination of key farmers have increased. Especially, key farmers involved in lobby activities for household land rights and community rights in forest management. The networking demand among different regions increased, and farmers often seek for the connections by themselves.

The needs of the farmers do not stop at poverty alleviation but they also contribute their voice in policy making, maintaining and developing their cultural identity and sustainable natural resource management. Capacity strengthening and exchange in these issues is becoming more important.

The people and the key farmer network still face difficulties and challenges in the current context. Economic booming and free market, especially currently Vietnam is on the way to access to the World Trade Organization (WTO) has forced grassroots to become more vulnerable. At the same time the social capital within the network and the natural resources should not get lost.

During the last year the key farmers and coordinators discussed in depth about the future direction for the key farmer network. New developments and needs requires the key farmer network (and thus also the development organization - CHESH) to reform itself.

This report will overview the reform of the key farmer network. It includes main achievements that key farmer network has gained during the last year, as well as obstacles and challenges that they are facing and strategies to overcome.

The report is closely linked to the farmers' school report which focuses mainly on infrastructure and pilot development in HEPA (Human Ecology Protected Area; the farmers school in Ha Tinh province).

Expected results after 3 years (2005-2007)

As mentioned in the proposal the expected results of the 3 year program will be the following¹:

1. Members of the Key Farmers Coordination Board and regional key farmers' board have enough capacity to coordinate, organize, implement, monitor and evaluate their own development activities. In addition, they have capacity to carry out action researches at their areas to identify and analyze their problems and find out solutions.
2. A network of sub-practical training centers and farmers' pilots at Quang Binh, Nghe An, Lao Cai, Ha Tinh provinces have enough capacity to coordinate and provide training on strengthening community' capacity development, land use planning and sustainable forest management.
3. TEW²/CIRD³/CHESH staffs are able to facilitate and work with coordinators and key farmers on issues of organizational and institutional development, facilitating forums for the key farmers and academics, policy makers, authorities and development organizations.

Achievements (Jun 2005 - May 2006)

1. National and regional key farmers' coordination board

Coordinating capacity and skills of coordinators⁴ of the networking of key farmers has improved remarkably i.e. coordinating and facilitating forums, workshop and study tours for farmers from different areas. Activities crossed different areas and in HEPA were coordinated by the national coordinators.

The past year has marked a reform in goal, orientation and activities of the key farmer network among regions. Several seminars, workshops and discussion were held by the key farmer network on different levels to evaluate the activities and results of the network and to develop orientation for the coming 10 years. Based upon the participatory approach of TEW-CHESH-CIRD the key farmers have now stepped up their process of exchanging lessons learned and are able to develop their ideas for the future in a context of access to and challenge with the market. The focus of the activities in the past year was thus on the reform - organizational and institutional development - of the key farmer network.

¹ The original second objective - developing the capacity of HEPA - has been separated into a second contract, the farmer school contract, VN080121. Please see this report for information about development of HEPA.

² TEW – Towards Ethnic Women

³ CIRD – Center for Indigenous Knowledge Research and Development

⁴ National coordinators: Mr. Tranh Thanh Tung – head to national coordinator, Mr. Nguyen Nhat Tien – vice coordinators, Mr. Tran Quoc Viet – members.

The coordinators in cooperation with CHESH (and TEW/CIRD) organized 3 workshops in CCCD⁵ (Quang Binh), 2 in HEPA, 2 in Hanoi and 1 in Tam Dao and one large workshop in HEPA and Tay Son town with key farmers, coordinators, staff and local authorities to discuss about the future of the key farmer network⁶.

The workshop in HEPA and Tay Son town was organized during four days for 100 participants who came from Lao Cai, Son La, Nghe An, Ha Tinh and Quang Binh provinces. The workshop was facilitated by national coordinators and TEW/CHESH/CIRD and focused on community-based forest management and land use planning; how to preserve and to develop cultural values through traditional handcraft; how to apply indigenous knowledge in herbal medicine for community health care and herbal medicine products. Key farmers from different areas discussed new strategies for developing a network of key farmers that later on shifted into thematic issue based networks such as networking on customary law and watershed forest management; networking on herbal medicine, handicraft, etc. Some leaders for the networking were selected during this workshop such as Mrs. Ly May Chan as a leader for a networking of handicraft.

Besides smaller informal discussions between coordinators, key-farmers and staff took place regarding the future development of the key farmer network. These workshops and discussion started from August 2005 until March 2006.

The outcome was that networking between regions will be continued to promote learning between different identities and cultures. It encourages marginal people to express their power in a more free and genuine manner. Networking methodology encourages the emergence of new needs and interests in Vietnam and can play that role also in neighboring countries in the Mekong region⁷.

The key farmer network will thus expand to Mekong regional scale. Nowadays the requirements of the key farmers are higher than in the past. They suffer from landlessness and pressure of the free market. Therefore the key farmers wish to learn now how to deal with the market and how to keep and protect their culture and environment.

Mekong farmers' networking will therefore focus on ecological trading with fair social economic values. Fair social economic values include the value of sharing benefits with the poor, respecting culture as well as nurturing the nature via sustainable, organic products⁸.

The key farmer network decided to transform into Mekong Community Networking and Ecological Trading (MECO-ECOTRA). This network focuses on traditional ecological products (e.g. traditional handicraft and herbal medicine and organic farming as a sustainable alternative) for small scale ethnic minority farmers in Mekong region.

The themes for networking have been selected by the key farmers and link closely to their cultural values. Networking will be professionalized into six thematic focuses:

- a) Customary law and watershed forest management;

⁵ Center for community capacity development (training center) in Quang Binh province

⁶ The national coordinators are responsible for cross-region forums. The cost for participation (transport, food) is paid by the area that sends its representatives (so CIRD pays for Quang Binh participants to participate in a workshop in HEPA).

⁷ Laos PDR; Northern Thailand; downstream of Sesan river of Cambodia i.e. Ratanakiri province; and Yunnan province in China (of the traditional local side)

⁸ This direction is suitable to Agenda 21 of Vietnam according to Decision 153/2005/QĐ-TTg about sustainable development in Vietnam.

- b) Human Ecology village (eco-tourism);
- c) Organic farming;
- d) Herbal medicine;
- e) Handicraft;
- f) Vocational training.

Up to 2010, MECO-ECOTRA expects to have qualified organic products, herbal products and handicraft which are made by members of the network to access the market.

In front of the above requirement, the key farmer network changed their approach to face new challenges in the globalization context.

Firstly, coordinators who worked in the field office of CCCD, HEPA, and SIMACAI as members of national and regional key farmer board have returned back to their community to strengthen the base of communities of the network and to develop their own and pilots of other villagers. They recognized that the network is strong only when its members are equipped enough knowledge and their economic life is stable. Secondly, coordinators will concentrate to improve their knowledge on one or two themes, so that they can directly consult and support other members.

This reform process clearly indicates the ability of the farmer coordinators to coordinate, organize, monitor and evaluate the network's activities. They are able to develop their own ideas for the future and to adjust the networking structures to the new direction.

Except for the workshops and seminar regarding the organizational development of the key farmer network, the following activities were organized.

The coordinators coordinated and negotiated with Department of Veterinary of Ha Tinh province for four months - training course on veterinary for 21 participants (farmers⁹). The training was organized basing on farmers' needs, applying practical and sandwich approaches¹⁰, self-management. During the practice period of one month, also 2 study tours were organized about husbandry and veterinary. All participants graduated and got official certificate from Department of Veterinary of Ha Tinh province, which will allow the participants act legally in the community. They also set up a networking of veterinary in Son Kim 1 and Son Kim 2 to keep sharing together.

The coordinators facilitated a workshop on farming development for 35 farmers from Ha Tinh, Quang Binh, Nghe An province during four days in HEPA. A lot of valuable lesson leant were shared among farmers. Other issues which were raised and discussed during that workshop are some still not yet had official land use rights certificate, unclear sharing benefits from contracted forest, allocated forest, solutions for better and stable soil management, some others. The coordinators took up the issues for other workshops later on.

National farmer coordinators facilitated two seminars, which focused on herbal medicine for 3 to 4 days each with participation of 25 healers per seminar in HEPA. As a result of the conference the participants selected a coordinator for herbal medicine networking in Ha Tinh province and a coordinator for the herbal medicine network between provinces. Also about 250 different species of herbal medicine were recorded in HEPA.

⁹ Participants are mainly from Son Kim 1, Son Kim 2 commune, Huong Son district, two from Can Loc district, Ha Tinh province; two from Bo Trach district, Quang Binh province.

¹⁰ After half time of the training, farmers came back to their village for a month to practice. All lessons leant and problems occurred during practicing in the field, the farmers first discussed among them, they then brought to discuss with experts as well.

Furthermore, farmer coordinators organized two study tours – one focusing on herbal medicine and one focusing on handicraft - including field seminars for key farmers. Also, one study tour was organized for local authorities to visit Quang Binh, both to see the training center CCCD in Dong Le and to learn about land allocation activities and the cooperation between authorities and farmers in this respect.

The coordinators played an advisory role for developing a network of key farmers in Son Kim 1 and Son Kim 2; pilots of 28 households of Truong Son forest cooperative which borrowed credit¹¹ via CHESH. The 28 pilots were designed as a green fence rounding the forest of Truong Son forest cooperative. Those pilots are still on a process of thinking to move towards organic system.

2. The network of sub-practical training centers and farmers' pilots at Quang Binh, Nghe An, Lao Cai and Ha Tinh provinces.

Over the past years, efforts in developing pilots were implemented in HEPA and it gradually becomes a multi-functional centre with the following functions

- a) Experimenting with pilots of sustainable use and manage forest resource, sloping land and water by combining indigenous knowledge and skills as well as local plants and animals with suitable external ones;
- b) Creating an enabling environment as forums, study-tours and experience exchange for the farmers (through key-farmer network), researchers, managers and policy makers;
- c) Building an enabling environment as vocational training and consultancy for people that desire to work in agriculture – forestry cultivation, landscape designing and sustainable use of slope land, especially for the ethnic minority people living in watershed areas

The coordinators and farmers from the networking supported to develop pilots in HEPA during last year. The pilots have been designed and built with “learning by doing” approach via experience sharing between and practical trainings for key farmers and staff of TEW/CHESH/CIRD (TCC). By that way, both key farmer coordinators and staff have enhanced their understandings and skills in translating theoretical lessons of human ecology, learning from the experience gained from different communities where TCC have been working, into practical actions to consult and build the pilot (see for more information the farmers school report).

In October 2005, a CHESH staff member¹² participated in a course on permaculture design certificate given by Permaculture Research Institute (PRI) – Australia - in Melbourne. Permaculture is suitable to our human ecology base and providing solutions / techniques to translate human ecology theory into practice. Also it links closely with the traditional ecological systems of ethnic minorities. Via this course, CHESH built up a partnership with PRI in permaculture.

In April 2006, Mr. Geoff Lawton - the PRI executive director came to Viet Nam to facilitate the first course on planning and designing a permaculture system which was held in HEPA during 20 days for 43 people¹³. The participants are farmers from Simacai, Lao Cai; Que Phong, Nghe An; Huong Son, Ha Tinh; Tuyen Hoa & Bo Trach, Quang Binh; staff from TEW/CHESH/CIRD and Ha Tinh Union of Science and Technology Associations (HUSTA).

¹¹ 28 households borrowed 280 millions credits from contract no. VN080049

¹² Mr. Duong Quang Chau - CHESH

¹³ In 43 learners, 15 are farmers, 2 are foreigners and the rest is community development workers.

The participants gained benefits not only from the training. During the time learning, practicing and sharing in HEPA, the learners from different regions had chances to share experience in using the soil and plant, designing and managing water containers, etc.¹⁴. It helps many ethnic groups more clearly understand the sustainable value of their system for natural resources cultivation, protection and management.

The lessons and experience gained from the training for landscape planning and designing are applied in HEPA linked with activities to maintain and enhance traditional cultural values of the local people via traditional houses, working tools and harmonization with the nature in HEPA.

After the training course on permaculture, key farmers, staff have shared experience and practice via building pilots in the field. They were divided into small groups to research and get information of the field from HEPA. After researching on the field, the groups started to plan landscape to apply learnt principles. The planning pilots were then evaluated to find out the most suitable one to pilot test. During implementation, there was regular discussion to solve problems. The process does not only help the farmers and the staff deal with problems quickly, but also provide a democratic working environment. Practical lessons helped learners understand easily and feel more confident in building pilots.

Nine pilots¹⁵ were successful in practicing and combining the (indigenous) knowledge and skills of local people and the knowledge given by the course about planning, designing and developing pilots which based on lessons learnt from a training on permaculture and done by one family of a farmer and young farmers.

After the permaculture course, 5 foreign volunteers¹⁶ came to share and work at the pilots in HEPA, Ke village, CCCD in Quang Binh Province and CCCD in Simacai, Lao Cai province. The volunteers shared with the farmers and the staff about planning for a cultivation system, making compost, disposing waste, etc. Via the volunteers' activities, the farmers and TEW/CHESH/CIRD staff as well as local officers started to regard agriculture as a professional job. To be a farmer, it requires learning, sharing, applying knowledge and regularly practicing. Specialization is really necessary. This is a gradual impact to members of the network and farther more.

The permaculture course marked a new way of looking at our pilots while at the same time being consistent with our holistic human ecology approach. By applying permaculture, HEPA and the key farmer network will be able to apply sustainable principles in a systematic way.

During the training program in HEPA and visiting of Mr. Geoff Lawton to CCCD in Dong Le, Quang Binh province and Simacai-center, Lao Cai province, we learnt that there is big potential to promote permaculture through networking of key farmers and farmers schools in Vietnam as well as regional countries such as Laos, Thailand, Cambodia and networking to Southeast Asian countries. It links closely with the long term goal of the key farmer network to expand to Mekong level and to work in a sustainable way with organic products.

¹⁴ Mr Vi Van Nhat, Na Sai village, Hanh Dich commune, Nghe An province guided the staff in HEPA and others how to make water reel according to Thai people's experience with available local materials (bamboo, rattan)

¹⁵ The 9 pilots including: 1 pilot in Hanh Dich commune, Que Phong district; 4 pilots in HEPA built by young farmers and staff; 1 in Son Quang commune, Huong Son district, Ha Tinh province; 1 pilot in CCCD, Quang Binh; 1 pilot in Ke village, Tuyen Hoa district, Quang Binh; 1 pilot in Lam Trach commune, Bo Trach district, Quang Binh. For more information about the pilots and applied principles see the farmers school report (VN080121).

¹⁶ The volunteers are from Australia and America.

Thus, CHESH and PRI decided to sign an official cooperation agreement to provide research, training and promote permaculture in Vietnam and the region. The Permaculture Research Institute provides knowledge and skills for the training centers and access to the current perma-culture networking in Asia. Via the field-based training centers we provide space for practice and link the key farmer network with the permaculture networking.

HEPA also has the capacity to organize forums for different groups to visit and exchange experience. Many researchers, policy makers and local authorities came to visit HEPA and also CCCD in Quang Binh province and SIMACAI in Lao Cai province. Researchers commented that such practical training pilots will be focal points of research to test practical solutions for sustainable development (Viet Nam Agenda 21)¹⁷, especially in the current situation that 16/33 million ha of natural land, which makes up to 50%, is being eroded, destroyed and deserted in Vietnam¹⁸.

Farmers Schools and pilots in HEPA, Son Kim 1 commune, Huong Son district, Ha Tinh province and in CCCD, Dong Le town; in Ke village, Lam Hoa commune, Tuyen Hoa district, Quang Binh province, in Que Phong district Nghe An and in Simacai, Lao Cai has created a space to study for farmers, especially young local farmers and staff in mountainous areas. There are regularly cross-exchange within the farmers school in Quang Binh, Ha Tinh, Nghe An and Lao Cai. Staff from different farmers' school came to CCCD in Dong Le or HEPA for sharing and practicing new knowledge and skills. CHESH organised for Mr. Geoff Lawton to visit CCCD in Dong Le, Ke village and CCCD in Simacai for his short-training and sharing with field staff and farmers.

Detailed results and activities are described in the progress reports of CIRD (CCCD and Quang Binh province) and TEW (Simacai and Lao Cai province). HEPA is described in detail in this report¹⁹. For Nghe An province, activities have slowed down due to the long procedure for approval to work in Nghe An for both TEW/CHESH and ICCO. In Nghe An province no sub- practical training center is developed yet, but several pilots have been developed. Below the role and function of one herbal medicine pilot is explained more in detail.

¹⁷ Prof. Vo Qui – Former Director of Centre for Natural Resources and Environment Studies (CRES)– Ha Noi National University, PhD. Vo Thanh Son – Vice-director of CRES, consultant of Viet Nam Agenda 21.

¹⁸ In Viet Nam, the reduction of cultivation land, degradation of soil due to erosion, flood, drought, landslide and desertification is around 16 million ha out of 33 million ha in total of natural land (which makes up to nearly 50%) (Information from Minister of Environment and Natural Resources released on the occasion of World Environment Day 6/5/2006 - Source: <http://vietnamnet.vn/khoahoc/moitruong/2006/06/577231/>)

¹⁹ Some activities – mainly infrastructural and developing pilots – are described in the farmers school report (VN080121)

Herbal medicine pilot in Hanh Dich commune, Nghe An province

In Hanh Dich commune a group of herbal healers organized themselves in an interest group and shared their knowledge about herbal medicine. They used their indigenous knowledge to improve health of the local people. Moreover, it helps the local people understand and appreciate the value and the role of herbal medicine and local herbalists in daily life.

Due to this effectiveness, Hanh Dich communal authority decided to let the local herbalists use one room at the commune healthcare centre for medical examination and prescription. Thus the position of these herbalists is recognized not only by the local people but also by the state healthcare system.

The herbal medicine group gets the necessary herbs from the forest. Thus the herbalists recognized the need to sustainably manage the forest to have sufficient herbs. Therefore they discussed with the communal authorities for assigning a specific part of the forest as herbal forest which will be managed by the community. The communal authorities agreed to let the community manage the herbal forests in Pa Kim and Pom Om villages. The community forest resources and herbal plants have been protected and managed well, affirming the community right in managing community forest.

From the experience in Hanh Dich, the key-farmer network realized that the Land Law and the Forest protection and Development Law approved the concept of “community forest”. Unfortunately, it only reflects appreciation in name.

Especially these two laws do not recognize effective solutions for protecting and managing natural resources like land, water and forest of the local people, which have been formed, sustained and developed through their belief, creed, customary law and indigenous knowledge already for long time.

These (traditional) solutions have helped the local people be self-confident and autonomous in protecting and developing the forest, but also to sustain and develop their own cultural values.

Lobbying for legal recognition of such traditional customary law systems and indigenous knowledge in natural resource management is a big challenge for the key-farmer network as well as supportive organizations like TEW-CHESH-CIRD.

3. Capacity of TEW/CHESH/CIRD staff

Together with the changes of the key-farmer network throughout the year, TEW/CHESH/CIRD staff had opportunities to discuss with the network about the vision, strategy and orientation in the next 10 years. These opportunities helped TCC staff clearly understand and make a master plan for their own work and specialization in the future in order to be able to support for and give advice to the network to reach MECO-ECOTRA. TCC staff's ability in problem identification, analysis and planning has been improved very much.

The capability of 4 staff in HEPA office has been improved considerably in preparation in legal procedures to work with local authorities. They are confident to assist in organizing exchange-visits for farmers, between farmers and local authorities. The specific indicators are

a lot of well-organized forums, workshops and study-tours for the key-farmers and foreign experts, especially in the situation that HEPA is near the frontiers.

Ten young staff have had great opportunities to learn, to work and to practice in the practical training centers in HEPA, CCCD and Simacai. They had chances not only to share experience and practice working skills related to seedling gardens, planting and caring for trees, disposing solid waste and waste water, etc. at the field-based training centers; but also to listen and learn from the people through regular activities of the key-farmer network like forums, workshops, conference or visit to the pilots. Thus young staff has become self-confident to continue study from and support the community's activities.

It is not only field staff, but also some staff from office in Hanoi had opportunities to learn empirical knowledge and to practice skills in Farmers Field Schools which like in HEPA, CCCD in Dong Le and Simacai, for example how to make compost, banana circle. These activities helped staff who works in office gaining experience and skills about field works which help them being confident sharing information about field works within office and with other organizations.

The activities regarding the reform of the key farmer network and thus related organizational change for TEW, CHESH and CIRD took quite some time in the last year. Also a local-level seminar with regard to the law on associations and study tours for policy makers to learn about networking and civil society took quite some time. It delayed some other capacity building activities.

Especially research activities were limited. Only one small scale research about Truong Son Forestry Cooperative was implemented by a student. Capacity of staff in writing case studies and articles is limited. However, we had some articles²⁰ published in Saigon Economics Times, Literature News, ethnic minority magazines, and some other newspapers. Researchers and policy-makers are interested in our articles.

CHESH started to build up a website which focuses mainly on decentralization of land use and minority existence (www.dolame.org). Designing and technical development of website have been done a Dutch company and one part-time foreign staff. In the autumn of 2006 the website will be live. Training in writing articles and case studies for the website is planned.

Staff of CHESH (and TEW/CIRD as well as some coordinators) got training on lobby facilitated by Mr. Govert van Oord from BBO – the Netherlands. Staff have gained lot of new knowledge and skills from the training and involving the process of lobbying, for example about identifying different roles of lobbyist, stakeholders' analysis, timeframe analysis, etc. In addition, we have involved in lobbying for land use rights issues for most ten year until now. Thus, we are confident to set up a group specialize on lobbying.

Some senior staff participated in different workshops and study tours in Vietnam²¹ and abroad²². In September 2005 a study tour to the Netherlands and Belgium was organized in cooperation with BBO surrounding civil society issues, key farmer networking (LTO in the Netherlands) and how farmers can lobby for their interest to the national and EU government.

²⁰ Most articles wrote by Ms. Tran Thi Lanh and some senior staff of a research group.

²¹ Last year, senior staff of TCC participated in many forums, workshops on criticizing the law of associations.

²² Last year, senior staff of TCC involved in facilitating some study-tours for policy-makers and some governmental senior staff to learn about civil society in the Netherlands, Hungary, England, Belgium, EU.

This study tour helped a lot in understanding about the role of civil society and further lobby activities in Vietnam regarding the law on associations.

After the study tour one CHESH staff member visited farms and agricultural vocational schools in the Netherlands to get ideas for further capacity strengthening of the training centers and key farmer network.

In October 2005, a CHESH staff member²³ participated in a course on permaculture design certificate given by Permaculture Research Institute (PRI) – Australia - in Melbourne.

Also CHESH-staff worked closely with Profound consultants from the Netherlands about Non Timber Forest Products (NTFP) marketing. This is a follow up activity of the 2003 NTFP seminar. Most of the activities regarding the NTFP consultancy took place in 2004 and early 2005. The report finalized in 2005. Unfortunately, CHESH was not fully satisfied by the final report by the Profound consultants. For the coming time the activities regarding bamboo and rattan – the NTFP products focused on during the consultancy – will focus on sustainable growing of bamboo and rattan.

Furthermore one staff member followed a 10 weeks postgraduate diploma program on ‘Governance, Democratization and Public Policy’.

TCC carried out a crucial financial auditing which audit projects of TCC as well as organizations (see auditing report). With a new staff member²⁴ who has a professional background in accountancy, the auditing process was going well. Still, organizational changes (merging into SPERI) require to revise the internal financial system.

Last year was a very busy year in logistic arrangements and official procedures for study tours, meetings and more than 30 times foreign visitors who traveled to the field. The office’s staff coordinated with different field offices and arrange well. CHESH also decided to send a staff²⁵ attending an eight-month English training course in New Zealand. This staff will be a potential additional human resource for CHESH/SPERI office next year.

Senior staff learned many valuable experiences through the workshops and study tours. They are confident and pro-active to share their experience with international organizations. TCC create a positive image to high-ranking peoples. TCC set up an informal network with those peoples with whom we can regularly arrange sharing regarding to issues from fields. Though workshops, senior staff of TCC linked with new Vietnamese experts who are researchers, policy-makers and new international networks including the regional networking for indigenous peoples based in the Philippines; Korea Women's Environmental Network; permaculture network; Asian Foundations and Organizations based in Hong Kong. They are now also main responsible to communicate and maintain with those partners²⁶.

TCC links with other international organizations which mainly did by Ms. Margreet Mook – our advisor, Ms. Tran Thi Lanh and Ms. Pham Lan Anh. So far, there were several meetings with staff of UNDP, Peace and Development – Spanish NGO; Swiss Embassy; SNV; Caritas,

²³ Mr. Duong Quang Chau - CHESH

²⁴ Mrs. Tran Thu Hang graduated from Department of Economics, Hanoi National University and got an accounting certificate from Hanoi Economics University. She has a six-year working experience as an accountant.

²⁵ Ms. Nguyen Minh Phuong was field staff based in Luong Prabang – Laos who probably will take a position as office manager of CHESH.

²⁶ Ms. Tran Thi Lanh is a major contact for some main organisations and focus mainly on lobbying partners. Mr. Dan Trong Tuan will be main responsible for Research institutes, the regional networking for indigenous peoples based in the Philippines. Mr. Duong Quang Chau is main responsible for a permaculture networking or farmers school network.

Swedish Embassy, Dutch Embassy; Cordaid, a vocational training program and some other organizations and individual experts. With some of them we link regarding lobby activities and others have been approached for funding and/or cooperation.

Difficulties and challenges

The orientation towards industrialization, modernization of agriculture and rural areas, and focus on cash crops of the Viet Nam government over the past 10 years has deeply influenced the perspectives of authorities. Besides, the current trend of society is focusing strongly on economic development, which is translated into mass-production and mono-cropping, planting; only one or just very few kinds of cash crops. Those are strong barriers and challenges for the key-farmer network to develop permaculture and organic farming.

The changes in future orientation, the new needs and requests from the key farmer network require staff to have good specialization regarding herbal medicine, handicraft, market understanding or enterprise management and student based teaching. Also networking with professional organizations to consult and quickly support for the network will become more and more important. Finally, strong lobby skills of staff and farmers will help envoy the need and desire of the people to policy making institutes so that the policies will get along well with the real situation and the need of the grassroots in reaching sustainable development. These changes in role and functioning of staff and organization are one of the biggest challenges for staff.

A network of Farmers' schools (practical training centers and HEPA) was built on the foundation of need and experience after more than 10 years of CHESH (TCC)'s working with different indigenous peoples in different regions.

However, CHESH still lacks experience to fully develop a network of professional farmers' schools for farmers, especially indigenous farmers which is suitable to farmers' needs and their situations and will be able to influence to the overall top down policy of training for the indigenous farmers. Thus, CHESH needs support and consultancy from international organizations²⁷ and institutes with experience in student centered learning.

Solutions

In order to increase awareness raising for organic farming, it is important to promote a network of pilots of sustainable farming systems based on the networking of key farmers. The pilots will reflect empirical indicators upon Agenda 21 of Vietnam²⁸ and will be live curriculums for sharing with other farmers, agriculture extension workers, authorities, researchers and policy-makers. By carrying out case studies on costs and benefits analysis, social and environment analysis of the pilots the results will help farmers, authorities and policy-makers understanding clear effectiveness of the pilots. Also promoting organic farming through media such as newspapers, television programs, websites, etc. is important. CHESH will strengthen cooperation with Saigon Economics Times, Ethnic Minority Magazine for public raising awareness on sustainable farming systems and towards permaculture.

²⁷ We mention about international experts and institutions because at this moment in Vietnam only have conventional vocational schools with top-down learning approach and not based on needs of students. We learnt from some international experts and institutes that there are many experience and vocational pilots that base on needs of students and promote students to be proactive and central of learning process.

²⁸ Agenda 21 of Vietnam has issued by the Prime Minister at Decision No. 153/2005/QĐ-TTg for sustainable development for Vietnam.

All staff in CHESH should decide about their specialization. This will be discussed and decided in staff meetings which also look at sufficient capacity for every specialization. Training courses and study tours in organic farming, handicraft etc. will benefit those staff members who will specialize in it.

The coming years CHESH/SPERI will focus on development of the training program and staff in the training centers. With regard to staff and training development, CHESH/SPERI will work with an international consultant from Larenstein to develop a program for further curriculum development and capacity building in vocational training. This is one of the follow up activities from the visit of a staff member to agricultural vocational schools in the Netherlands.

Finally, it is important to expand networking and collaborating with other institutes, vocational schools and universities, both national and international, to re-enforce the human resources for the regions as well as the network of practical training centers.

Conclusions

In the past year activities in the key farmer network focused mainly on the key farmer network reform. By in-depth discussion between key-farmers, coordinators and staff a new vision for the key farmer network was developed. This has been the base for the new MECO-ECOTRA-proposal and it required TEW, CHESH and CIRD to change. TEW, CHESH and CIRD have decided to merge into one organization SPERI (Social Policy Ecology Research Institute). The complete change in way of working will take time, but the first important steps have been made by the key farmer network and the organization.