

# **AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION AND POVERTY REDUCTION: STRATEGIC CHOICES IN ETHNIC MINORITY COMMUNITIES**

POLICY BRIEF<sup>1</sup>

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# KEY MESSAGES

- For agricultural extension to realize its poverty reduction mission, **strategic choices** are needed in policy design at the central level, and in implementation of solutions at the local level, through **an agricultural extension plan toward sustainable poverty reduction in ethnic minority communities**, integrated into the agriculture reform plan.
- **The State budget for agricultural extension should be restructured**, based on the clear delineation between “agricultural extension for livelihoods” (towards poor areas) and “agricultural extension for commodity production” (towards areas with possibility of commodity production)
- **A coordination mechanism for stakeholders implementing agricultural extension at the provincial and district level** needs to be established, so that they are part of the existing “steering committee” for the New Rural Program managed by the Agriculture – Rural Development sector. This will ensure planning, integration of activities, supervision and evaluation of local agricultural extension and production support activities are carried out.
- **Agricultural extension approaches should be tailored to ethnic minorities, based on** “micro-agricultural extension projects”<sup>2</sup> which should last long enough (2-3 years). They must be organized to suit local conditions and customs, indigenous knowledge, language and culture. The Farmers Field School (FFS) method and “self-managed households group” should be made into policies.
- **Reforms of the agricultural extension model replication policy** and agriculture production support should be based on a comprehensive assessment (effectiveness, approaches, implementation procedures, suitability, conditions and channels for replication), so that measures for replication can be expanded, (information and communications, advertisement, field workshop, support with key seeds and seedlings and materials, and access to capital and market).





# INTRODUCTION

Vietnam's ethnic minorities have achieved remarkable successes in reducing poverty. However, they still face difficulties and challenges in their everyday lives. The poverty rate among ethnic minorities remains high. In 2012 59% of ethnic minority people were living in poverty. Poverty in Vietnam is also becoming increasingly concentrated in ethnic minority communities. In 1998, ethnic minorities accounted for 29% of the total poor in Vietnam. By 2012 this number had risen to 51%<sup>3</sup>. Approximately 75% of poor ethnic minority people's income comes from agriculture, a sector which has seen significantly slower overall growth than others in the economy<sup>4</sup>.

Agricultural extension policies have achieved major successes in recent years. They have contributed to successful agricultural development, ensuring food security and increased incomes for ethnic minority people. However, challenges to sustainable poverty reduction in ethnic minorities require fundamental reforms to agricultural extension policies and agriculture production support<sup>5</sup>. On June 10<sup>th</sup> 2013, the Prime Minister commissioned a Project on Agriculture Restructure, assigning the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and related ministries to review, amend and finalize agricultural

extension and agriculture production support policies to "increase income and raise living standards for the rural population, to ensure food security and reduce poverty".

In order to support discussions on policy reform that work towards sustainable poverty reduction in ethnic minority communities, Oxfam has analyzed agricultural extension and agriculture support policies in seven provinces across Vietnam. Each of the surveyed provinces has a high concentration of ethnic minority people. They include Lao Cai, Hoa Binh, Nghe An, Quang Tri, Dak Nong, Ninh Thuan, and Tra Vinh<sup>6</sup>. This research was carried out as part of Oxfam's "**Pro-poor Policy Monitoring and Analysis**" Project which is funded by Irish Aid and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). The research focused on the challenges and limitations of current policies and good practices in the surveyed sites. The results were used to produce a comprehensive research paper and this policy brief. Both provide recommendations for policy reform at the central level and implementation solutions at the local level to ensure agricultural extension and agriculture production support is focused on achieving sustainable poverty reduction in ethnic minority communities.

# STRATEGIC CHOICES

The purpose of agricultural extension policies is to help farmers “increase their income and escape poverty”<sup>7</sup>. Several recent papers from prominent organizations have highlighted the challenges and limitations of agricultural extension policies and provided recommendations to ensure policies are geared towards sustainable poverty reduction in ethnic minority communities<sup>8</sup>. Studies show that to realize this mission, strategic choices in policy design at the central level and implementation solutions at the local level need to be decided on.

## PRIORITIZE AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION FOR LIVELIHOODS:

There are two major themes in agricultural extension policy. Agricultural extension for livelihoods focuses on providing support to poor areas. Agricultural extension for commodity production focuses on providing support to areas which have

been identified as good commodity production areas.

The state budget should, in principle, focus on theme one, agricultural extension for livelihoods. This is because agricultural extension for livelihoods is a non-profit public service that is not of interest to or controlled by the private sector. However, there is not a clear delineation or prioritization between agricultural extension for livelihoods and agricultural extension for commodity production in any of the surveyed provinces and districts. The National Agricultural Extension Fund is carrying out the “Targeted Agricultural extension program” for the 2013-2020 period<sup>9</sup> - including a number of agricultural extension projects covering “3 or more provinces” for mass production of certain types of produce, so there has not been investment in “agricultural extension for livelihoods” towards sustainable poverty reduction in ethnic minority communities.

### “Agricultural extension for livelihoods” and “Agricultural extension for commodity production”

- “Agricultural extension for livelihoods” aims to ensure food security and support commodity production in poor communities. It is especially targeted to ethnic minority communities living in mountainous areas. It works by linking agricultural extension to other livelihood support, based on individual communities’ specific demands.
- “Agricultural extension for commodity production” aims to support the mass production of plants or animals identified under local agriculture reform plans in areas where mass production is suitable. It works by linking local farmers with other market actors in the value chain.

## APPLICATION OF AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION APPROACHES SUITABLE TO POOR ETHNIC MINORITY COMMUNITIES

There is currently no holistic system of policies operating across central and local government, focusing on agricultural extension solutions for poor ethnic minority people (this includes the sharing of budgets and human resources). There are at least three choices for agricultural extension toward ethnic minorities poor:

*The “micro-project” approach* has been implemented in several ethnic minority communities under different projects. The micro project approach involves organizing small scale projects, which include agricultural extension and livelihoods support activities specific to local communities needs. Each micro project has specific goals, a specified timeframe and its own resources. Each ethnic minority community is a unique social

entity, with respect to this; micro projects give ethnic minorities more effective access to agricultural extension. They are organized based on community demand, conditions, customs and cultures and promote the role of local pioneers and the social links between farmers in each ethnic minority community<sup>10</sup>. Existing agricultural extension policies do not mentioned this approach. Instead they focus more on large scale, targeted projects.

*The Farmers Field School (FFS) approach* aims to increase farmers’ knowledge, improving their productivity. The delivery of the project to ethnic minorities in Hoa Binh and Lao Cai demonstrates this is a useful agricultural extension approach for poor ethnic minority people. However, national policies have not included any program for building trainers’ capacity (especially with regards to soft skills such as facilitation, presentation and participation skills), and there has been no allocated budget to promote Farmers Field School as a comprehensive agricultural extension model in ethnic minority areas.

### The Farmers Field School (FFS), a useful agricultural extension approach to the poor ethnic minorities

The Farmers Field School (FFS) is a group based agricultural extension programme, and a process of learning and sharing experience in order to build the capacity of farmers to decide and develop suitable and effective production methods that suit their needs and conditions. The learning takes place on site during the crop season. By teaching through illustration, on the job training and interactive exchanges in small groups, in the field, the Farmers Field School has attracted and encouraged the participation of ethnic minority women.

During 2011 - 2013, there were more than 1100 FFS classes in Hoa Binh and Cao Bang provinces with support from the Public Service Provision Improvement in Agriculture and Rural Development (PSARD) project. A survey of 1600 farmers (94% are ethnic minorities) in 2013 showed that 87% of them now know how to increase productivity after their application of FFS skills and knowledge<sup>11</sup>.

*Agricultural extension models that include household groups* can help improve livelihoods by utilizing poor people's existing social capital. Agricultural extension projects implemented by mass organizations and local civil society groups, (e.g., collectives, interest groups, micro credit groups) are popular with ethnic minority people at the surveyed sites. Farmers groups facilitate members to share information and support each other. Farmers help one another access markets and they help create favorable conditions for the poor and women to participate and receive benefits. Among all agriculture production support policies, only Programme 135 provides support to households groups<sup>12</sup>, however, there is a lack of guidance and associated support policies to ensure the group's sustainability and effectiveness. There has been no guidance for agricultural extension support to households groups.

## **REFORMING THE USE OF AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION BUDGET**

In the surveyed provinces, the annual budget managed by the provincial agricultural extension centers ranged from 4-10 billion VND/year (excluding salary and admin costs). The operational budget of district agricultural extension centers in ethnic minority areas was around 200-300 million VND/year, less than the agriculture production support budget for

one commune under Programme 135. After Decree 02 on agricultural extension was issued with a mechanism to select and tender national agricultural extension projects, provincial agricultural extension centers have been receiving less money from the national agricultural extension budget (apart from Lao Cai, which manages one project, all other surveyed provinces have to coordinate with other agencies to manage projects in their provinces)<sup>13</sup>. There is no regulation on how much percentage of annual budgets needs to be allocated to agricultural extension. The mode of operation for the Agricultural extension Fund (from donors and social sources) has not been established in surveyed provinces.

Insufficient budgets are a common issue, but the more important issue is the appropriate use of budgets. As mentioned earlier, agricultural extension budgets have not given priority to approaches suitable to poor ethnic minority communities. The packaged transfer of budgets to commune under the Commune Development Fund (CDF) - so that the commune authorities can contract certain services to suit the local demand - has been piloted in some projects at some sites such as PSARD in Hoa Binh and Cao Bang, International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) in Ninh Thuan and Dak Nong. However, there has been no legal framework at the central level for the large scale roll out of CDF.



## PROMOTING THE COORDINATION OF RELATED STAKEHOLDERS

Currently, there are 16 policy documents related to agricultural extension and 28 documents related to agriculture production support, managed by various agencies. This leads to the dispersion of resources, replication of activities, differences in approaches, methodology and support norms, differences in procedures and sometimes multiple targeting of a single beneficiary group. All of which create difficulties for local authorities in ethnic minority areas. There are many stakeholders involved in agricultural extension, including: the national agricultural extension system, professional and other agencies (such as plant protection, animal husbandry, aquaculture center, seedling centers, etc.) schools and institutes, mass organizations, sale agencies, agriculture materials shops, enterprises and internationally funded projects.

There are few detailed mechanisms and regulations that coordinate (lack of a focal point) to guide, consult, plan, integrate funding, supervise and evaluate all agricultural extension and agriculture production support activities in the same site. In surveyed provinces, the “Agricultural extension service advisory council” (established during the 2003-2007 period) has ceased to exist, but there has been no replacing mechanism (in the background of various “steering committees”)

Ethnic minority communities have greater access to the market than ever before, even

the poorest ethnic minorities participate in the market. Therefore, enterprises play an important role in poverty reduction. However, no guidance or regulations have been issued to instruct which forms of cooperation and linkages, (such as co-sponsor or co-implementation with the business (public-private partnership-PPP) should be promoted alongside agricultural extension and agriculture production support.

All of the surveyed provinces have carried out participatory planning processes that contribute to social economic development. Some provinces (Hoa Binh, Nghe An, Quang Tri) have cemented this process into their local regulations. The participatory planning process has enabled people’s demands to be included into commune plans. However, provinces are not regulated to use the commune plan as a basis for all projects and programs with agricultural extension activities. This leads to the dispersion of resources of those projects and programs, as they are carried out by different agencies. It is difficult to integrate those activities into micro projects to support people’s livelihoods.

## IMPROVING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GRASSROOTS AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION STAFF

Some provinces (Tra Vinh, Ninh Thuan, Nghe An) do not have an official title for commune agricultural extension staff, and



the task is managed by the local agriculture staff. Some provinces (Hoa Binh, Tra Vinh) do not have a network of commune agricultural extension collaborators, and the agricultural extension activities are often managed by hamlet chiefs or mass organizations. Each model has its own advantages and disadvantages, and is decided by provincial authorities to suit local conditions. Some agriculture staff working as agricultural extension staff do have a full compensation package, but they often don't possess the required skills and knowledge to effectively carry out the work and they are often 'too busy' to pay attention to agricultural extension.

Due to the diverse range of cultures in mountainous ethnic minority communities, local agricultural extension staff play an important role in implementing agricultural extension for livelihoods policies. They understand the local language, customs

and culture. However, local people do not appreciate local agricultural extension staff, due to their limited effectiveness; site visit frequency and personal capacity (see the box below for more details). Support measures to increase their capacity, to clarify their job description, to help with planning for the commune agricultural extension staff and agricultural extension collaborators are limited, leading to the low level of commitment. Some commune agricultural extension collaborators are not pioneers in agriculture production, as there has been no mechanism to bind them and their demonstration models, or to link them to the leading role in different groups. In reality, agricultural extension staff at the hamlet level may not be fixed agricultural extension staff, but can be groups of farmers, local pioneers, sale agencies, local cadres or mass organizations<sup>15</sup>, depending on local conditions.

### Commune agricultural extension staff and hamlet agricultural extension collaborators have not met people's demand

A survey of 240 households by Rural Development Centre (RUDEC) (2014)<sup>16</sup> in Quang Ngai, Dak Lak, Tra Vinh and Kien Giang shows that a significant number of people do not highly appreciate the work of local agricultural extension staff:

- 39% of interviewed households consider commune agriculture promotion staff as having little practical experience, 47% think that they have low professional knowledge and 32% think that they are not enthusiastic
- 51% think that rural agriculture promotion collaborator have no practical experience, and 70% think that rural agriculture promotion collaborator have weak professional knowledge.



Hoa Binh and Lao Cai provinces have initiated advisory services and agriculture services conducted by local agricultural extension staff and veterinary staff. This can potentially improve the implementation capacity and effectiveness of commune agricultural extension staff, thus helping ethnic minorities in remote areas access better veterinary, plant protection and agriculture material services. The next step would be to evaluate and draw lessons from these initiatives, feeding lessons learnt into the policy making process, so suitable policies that promote the positive impacts of advisory services and agriculture material service points in ethnic minority areas can be developed.

## **HOLISTIC APPROACH TO MODELS MAINTENANCE AND REPLICATION**

Recently various agricultural extension models have been implemented in ethnic minority areas. At the survey sites, there are several examples of models and

approaches that have been successfully replicated (including models on restructuring of seedling, and approaches like “3 more and 3 less”, “1 certified 5 less”<sup>17</sup>). This has helped to change agriculture production customs, ensure food security and increase ethnic minorities income. There are also examples of models that have not been sustained and replicated. It is quite common for models to have been successfully implemented as a pilot, but not replicated elsewhere.

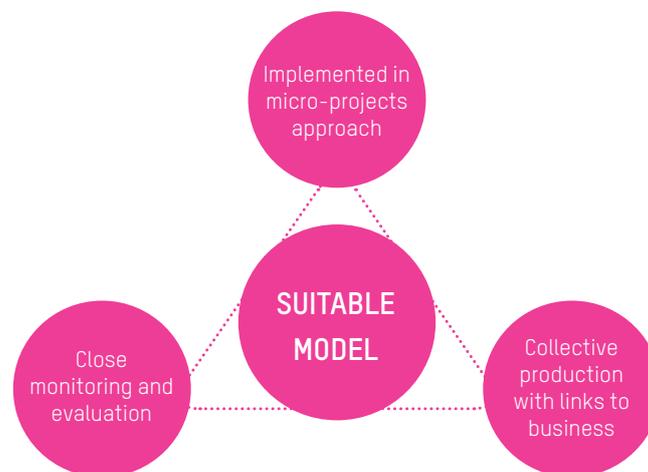
Lessons from successful and sustainable models in ethnic minority areas show that they are easy to do, use less labor and investment; are suitable to local soil conditions and irrigation; produce products that are easy to sell, receive continuous support over the years, receive close monitoring, and promote farmer to farmer cooperation in the community<sup>18</sup>. On the contrary, failed models that are difficult to sustain or replicate normally require intensive investment that is unaffordable to ethnic minority households, are not suitable to local soil and irrigation conditions, do not link to markets and receive one time support without close monitoring and evaluation.

## Models are successful at the pilot stage, but difficult to replicate

The Agricultural extension Center of Dak Nong province and the Dak Glong District, estimate that up to 80-90% of piloted models yield higher productivity than comparable models, or than existing production customs. In Dak Glong, out of 720 models being implemented during the 2003-2013 period, only about 30% of them were successful at demonstrations and were maintained and replicated by the people after the end of the pilot.

## Factors leading to the sustainability and replication of livelihoods models in ethnic minority communities

Experience of agricultural extension and agriculture production support models that are sustained and replicated at the surveyed sites in ethnic minority communities shows that the model's suitability needs to be ensured and implemented in the integrated "micro-project" approach, with monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, and that the model should promote farmer to farmer and market linkages.



**Suitable models:** Suitable models in ethnic minority areas do not need advanced science and technology, but need to be suitable to local soil, climate and production condition; to combine new knowledge and indigenous knowledge; and to be suitable to local cultural customs of ethnic minority groups.

### **Implemented through the micro-projects approach:**

- Agricultural extension and agriculture production support for micro-projects should be established and implemented for at least 2-3 years, with annual reduction in support or only technical support after the first year. Clear commitments are made to beneficiaries, and part of the investment can be repaid for successful micro-projects.
- The micro-projects in ethnic minority communities should be based on a participatory planning process and conducted using on the job training

methods. Support should not only be economic or technical, or to reduce climate and environmental risks, but also social and community based, based on the promotion of the role of pioneers, and making full use of informal channels and networks. This will build respect for and promote community ownership of the projects.

***Close monitoring and supervision:***

- Concrete indicators and targets should be put in place. They should include: impacts on changes to livelihoods; changes in households living standards in terms of economic, social, and environmental sustainability; and the possibility of sustaining and replicating the models.
- The supervisory and support role of the commune authorities, hamlet, mass organization, local agricultural extension staff and outstanding farmers should be clarified.

***Production cooperation, market linkage:***

- Farmer to farmer cooperation should be promoted (informal community institutions, labor exchange groups, interest groups, credit groups, cooperation groups and collectives)
- Farmer's production should be linked to the value chain to ensure market for products. This means connecting farmers to businesses with transparent and fair purchase practices.

Currently, many agricultural extension models are implemented once and for one crop only<sup>19</sup>; meanwhile, the ethnic minorities need more time to verify the results and to learn the process. There are no clear lines of responsibility or budget allocation for the commune staff, hamlet staff and mass organizations for the implementation of models in their locality. This makes it difficult to mobilize the resources from the commune for models assigned by the upper level of government. Agricultural extension agencies do not have the budget for post-modeling supervision and evaluation.

There aren't any criteria for the comprehensive evaluation of effectiveness, implementation procedures and approaches, conditions and channels for replication of "success models". The terminology "replication" in the existing agricultural extension policy only means to "transfer the results of science and technology to a broader scale", so the funding for replication only stops at "information, communications and advertisement, or field workshop" for "recommendations" to replicate the models<sup>20</sup>. These limitations make it difficult for localities to implement integrated solutions to increase the possibility of replicating the models<sup>21</sup>.

## **AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SHOULD BE LINKED TO OTHER AGRICULTURE LIVELIHOODS SUPPORT**

Agricultural extension alone is not enough to help improve the poor's livelihoods, since they often need a combination of agricultural extension and other agriculture production support, such as materials, credit and market access. The Agriculture production components of Program 135 and the New Rural Program have authorized the commune authority to act as an investor; however, there has been no detailed guidance on how to implement such components as well as how to establish livelihood models. There are many issues in the surveyed communes: the participatory planning process is not attached to demand; the roles of different agencies, organizations and authorities are not clear; and there is no coordination mechanism between agricultural extension units and the district agencies. Most commune staff in ethnic minorities communities consider material support and training as a "model", and there are a lack of other types of support (including, information, communications, linkages, the role of pioneers, community channels, credit and market access support) leading to a lack of clarity over the effectiveness of this component.



The linkage between agricultural extension, credit service provision, vocational training and market access is limited. Most surveyed provinces do not have an official mechanism to link agricultural extension services and the banks so that agricultural extension participants can borrow for the maintenance and replication of models. In some of the surveyed sites (Lao Cai, Dak Nong, Tra Vinh), the provincial agricultural extension centers and district agricultural extension centers have not been upgraded, supported and financed to serve as agriculture vocational training centers. However, there has not been a strong policy on market linkage in micro livelihoods projects in ethnic minority communities. The “large field” policy is only suitable to low lying areas.

The policy, Decision 62/2013/QĐ-TTg, (which supports cooperation and linkages between production and consumption and supports the creation and cultivation of large size fields) has not specified the roles, responsibilities, and coordination between, the people’s committees of the communes and districts. No guidance or regulations have been issued to instruct the forms of cooperation and linkage, such as co-sponsor or co-implementation with the business (public-private partnership-

PPP) in agricultural extension and agriculture production support. The ethnic minorities’ participation in and benefit from linkages with business are risky, and there is a lack of a mechanism to share benefits between stakeholders.

A positive sign at some surveyed sites is that agriculture production support for ethnic minorities has focused on targeted investment based on an integrated budget. Quang Tri, Ninh Thuan and Dak Nong provinces have established plans for livelihood support for the poorest ethnic minorities. It is based on an integrated budget sourced from different projects and programmes. In Dakrong district (Quang Tri), the district people’s committee has integrated budgets from the 135, 30a, 134 programmes, the 661 afforestation programme and the local budget to pilot “targeted support” to poor households. This is a holistic solution for 2-3 years, attached to the households’ commitment to escape poverty. However, as there are no integrated policies at the central level, without a medium term budget framework and allocation of power and budget to the localities, the isolated efforts to integrate this budget at the local level are not sustainable.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

Strategic choices as analyzed above should be conducted through an Agricultural extension plan toward sustainable poverty reduction in ethnic minority communities, under the agriculture reforms plan at all levels. The following are our key policy recommendations for central level actors and implementation solutions for local level actors:

## 1. Restructure the agricultural extension budget towards poverty reduction in ethnic minority areas:

- **Prioritize “agricultural extension for livelihoods”** Amendments should be made for competitive selection of central agricultural extension projects<sup>22</sup>, so that a portion of the national agricultural extension budget is assigned to “agricultural extension for livelihoods” projects in the mountainous ethnic minority provinces. Local agricultural extension agencies or authorities should be assigned to directly implement such projects. Provincial budgets should give priority to “agricultural extension for livelihoods” in poor ethnic minority areas that suit local demands, conditions, production customs and the culture of local ethnic minorities.
- **Provincial budget for agricultural extension** Regulations requiring

People’s committees to assign a certain percentage of the rural regular budget to local agricultural extension should be drawn up and issued. The fund raising mechanism of the Agricultural extension Fund in poor mountainous ethnic minority areas should be amended to include local budgets for the Fund and other resources from successful production support models<sup>23</sup>.

- **Packaged investment.** Provide packaged investment to commune under the Commune Development Fund (CDF) - so that the commune authorities can contract services to suit the local demand.

## 2. Establish coordination mechanism of local agricultural extension stakeholders:

- **Coordination mechanism:** A coordination mechanism for related stakeholders at the provincial level should be established to provide advice, to help with planning, funding integration, and supervision and evaluation of local agricultural extension and production support activities. They should be part of the existing “steering committee” for the New Rural Program

managed by the Agriculture - Rural Development Department/Division, with the Agricultural extension Center/ Unit as the focal point.

- **Integration in participatory planning process:** Provinces should make it their policy to assess the needs for agricultural extension using the commune social economic development participatory planning process. Provinces should use the participatory plan as a basis for the integration of resources for agricultural extension and agriculture production support activities from Programme 135, 30a, the New Rural Programme and agriculture vocation training.
- **Linkages with Businesses:** Clear guidelines from the central level on methods of cooperation and linkage, co-sponsorship and co-implementation with businesses (public - private partnership - PPP) needs to be produced. This guidance should be based on a value chain analysis of specific products. More decentralization to provinces and districts, depending on the scale of linkages, are needed in order to increase the activeness of business in proposing and implementing projects linked with ethnic minority communities. A portion of the State agricultural extension budget at different levels of Government should be set aside for cooperation with businesses in “agricultural extension for commodity production”.

### **3. Apply agricultural extension approaches and agricultural extension organization to suit the local conditions of ethnic minority communities:**

- **“Micro-projects” approach:** Micro-projects should operate over a sufficient enough length of time (2-3 consecutive years) for them to be successful. They should be focused on villages, especially the poorest hamlets. The micro-projects should be localized to

suit the local conditions, production customs and cultures of the local population. They should not only be economic or technical, or implemented to reduce climate and environmental risks, but also social and community based, based on the promotion of the role of pioneers, and making full use of informal channels and networks. This will build respect for and promote community ownership over the project.

Micro demonstration projects should be allowed to be repeated in the following 2-3 years at ethnic minority communities, but the level of support should be gradually reduced after the first year or stopped altogether. Only technical assistance should be provided in the subsequent years<sup>24</sup>. There should be clear binding regulations for the participating households to ensure their cooperation. They include: counterpart contributions, maintenance of the model, partial repayment of investment, risk management, and responsibilities and punishments in case of violations<sup>25</sup>.

- **Participatory approach:** A participatory approach should be regulated by provinces, including “on the job training”, “from farmer to farmer”, using the local language spoken in each ethnic minority community. Guidance on the allocation of budgets for Farmers Field Schools needs to be issued. Farmers Field School trainers at the district and commune levels should be trained and their capacity built, so that Farmers Field Schools will be a key approach in ethnic minority communities. At the same time, the establishment, operation and management of self-help groups should be supported, based on the real demand of each household and ensuring the value added of the self-help group compared to each individual household. The amount of support for demonstration models for household groups and the amount of support for poor households, near poor

households and non-poor households participating in households groups needs to be regulated, toward raising the support for the “soft side”, such as training, communications, survey, monitoring and evaluation<sup>26</sup>.

- **Commune agricultural extension staff:** The compensation policy for the commune agricultural extension staff in ethnic minority communities needs to be improved. Agricultural extension staff’s capacity should be built, especially on skills such as advisory, facilitation and teamwork with local people, so that they are able to analyze and plan for the correct use of existing resources for household economic development. A manual for commune agricultural extension staff, and collaborators, should be developed, especially on their job description and regular work plan. A support policy should be issued for the development of a network of advisory and agriculture services, attached to the commune agricultural extension staff, especially in remote commune and ethnic minority communities.
- **Agricultural extension collaborator:** The definition of agricultural extension collaborators should be expanded, so that there are agricultural extension collaborators in every village, as well as households groups, outstanding farmers,

mass organizations, etc., who will also help with agricultural extension services<sup>27</sup>. There should be regulation on the use of short term and flexible contracts for agricultural extension collaborators.

#### 4. Reforms of agricultural extension model replication policy in ethnic minority communities:

- **Evaluation of models that can be replicated:** Detailed instructions on evaluation criteria for evaluation for “demonstration models, and replicable advanced production examples”, should be produced. Focus should be given to the evaluation of effectiveness, process and approach, replication conditions and channels, and providing support measures for the replication of models in ethnic minority communities.
- **Replication support measures:** The budget for replication of models should be expanded, going beyond “information, communications, advertisement, field workshop” to “providing partial funding and material support for the replication of models” (e.g. 50% of the model) and “providing assistance to production linkages, pioneers and other channels of communications in the community, from farmers to farmers, supporting access to funding and to the market”<sup>28</sup>.



# REFERENCES

1. This summary of policy recommendations is one of three summaries of policy recommendations conducted by Oxfam in 2014, under the “Poverty reduction Policy Monitoring and Analysis” Project for the 2014-2016 period, funded by the Irish Aid and Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC). The two others are on “Participatory planning process and Fiscal Decentralization for the Grassroots level” and “Agriculture Vocational Training (Project 1956)”
2. The phrase “Micro-agricultural extension project” differentiate itself from the phrase “project” which indicates all production support components of Programme 135, 30a. The essence of “micro project” is the collection of holistic activities implemented by all stakeholders to achieve specific objectives under specific timeframe and resources.
3. World Bank, 2013, Tacking Stock: An update on Vietnam’s recent economic developments, Hanoi, December 2013. The quoted number is under the 2010 poverty line suggested by General Statistic Office and the World Bank.
4. World Bank, 2012, Well Begun, Not Yet Done: Vietnam’s remarkable progress on poverty reduction and the emerging challenges, Washington DC; Oxfam and AAV, 2012, Integrated Monitoring Report of Participatory Poverty Monitoring in Rural Vietnam (2007-2011), Hanoi.
5. Oxfam, 2014, Review and Analysis of poverty reduction policies: background paper for the Review and Analysis of poverty reduction policies, conducted by Oxfam in the 2014-2016 period, Thanh H.X et al., 2013, Mid-term review report of some poverty reduction policies to implement the national target programme for sustainable poverty reduction 2012-2015 and Resolution 80/ND-CP of the Government.
6. Findings and recommendations in this summary is collected from 159 group discussions with the participation of 646 people and civil servants from provincial, district and commune authorities (391 male and 255 female, 271 people from Kinh ethnic group and 375 ethnic minority people), and from 250 in-depth interviews (including 149 male and 101 female, 81 people from Kinh ethnic group and 169 people from ethnic minorities)
7. Article 1, Decree 02/2010/ND-CP on Agriculture promotion.
8. Example, Thanh HX., Quy LT and Hai, NV 2004. Gender and ethnic issues in agricultural extension, Part II of agricultural extension services for the poor, VUFO – NGO Resource Center; RUDEC 2014: Synthesis Report: Improving the effectiveness of agricultural extension for ethnic minorities in Vietnam’s northern mountain region.
9. Decision 1258/QĐ-BNN-KHCN dated June 4/2013 by the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, approving the Central agricultural extension targeted Program for the 2013-2020 period.
10. For more information, please see: Oxfam and AAV, 2013a, The role of hamlet institutions in poverty reduction at some typical ethnic minorities communities in Vietnam – Case studies from Dien Bien, Quang Tri, Dak Lak and Tra Vinh.
11. Helvetas, 2013, Mid-term Review Report of Output of PSARD Project in Hoa Binh and Cao Bang.
12. The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development is in progress to formulate a circular under the programme 135, accompanied with a handbook on implementation of production support projects, including specific guidelines on establishment, management and operation of the households groups.
13. Provincial agencies can hardly compete with institutes or universities in being selected as national project implementing agency because they can hardly implement

- the project at “regional and national scale, from 3 provinces or more” (Article 2, Circular 15/2013/TT-BNNPTNT).
14. Oxfam, 2014.
  15. Reality is that “agriculture promotion clubs” as stipulated in Item 1, Article 10 of Decree 02/2010/ND-CP, do not operate at the surveyed sties.
  16. RUDEC, 2014, Research on improving the effectiveness of agriculture promotion for the ethnic minorities in south central coastal provinces, highlands and Mekong Delta (presentation at the workshop on June 6, 2014 in Can Tho).
  17. The model “3 reduce - 3 increases” applies to rice cultivation, meaning: reduce the amount of seeds, reduce the pesticides, and reduce fertilizer, increase productivity, increase quality of rice, increase economic effectiveness. The “1 must 5 decreases” model means to use the confirmed seeds, and to reduce the amount of water used, reduce post-harvest losses, reduce the amount of seeds, reduce the amount of pesticides, and reduce fertilizer used.
  18. For more information: Oxfam and AAV, 2013b, Poverty Reduction Models at some ethnic minorities communities in Vietnam. Case study in Ha Gang, Nghe An and Dak Nong.
  19. The regulation on the number of demonstrations only allows for a maximum of 2 times for less than 6 months model, and 1 time for more than 6 months model (Point 2, Article 5 of Circular 15/2013/TT-BNNPTNT). Regulations on supporting seeds and fertilizers under Programme 30a only allows for one time support (no repetition).
  20. Circular Number 15/2013/TT-BNNPTNT regulates the replication of the agriculture promotion models as “transfer of science and technology results from demonstration models, advanced production examples to a larger scale”. The funding for implementation of replication includes “funding for information, communications, advertisement, field workshop”.
  21. In Nghe An, Decision 09/2012/QD-UBND stipulates support for replication of economic models, which regulates that: the model to be replicated (at least to a size 4 times bigger than the successfully proven model) will receive support for communications, workshop with a norm of 20 million VND/model, and 30% of the cost of key materials and fertilizers. However, because of the lack of knowledge about evaluation criteria and conditions to replicate, the support has not been realized at survey sites in Nghe AN province.
  22. Article 17, Decree 02/2010/ND-CP on Agriculture promotion.
  23. The Government has assigned Ministry of Finance to lead and coordinate with Ministry of Agriculture to guide the development and management of the Fund for Agriculture promotion, but there has not been a guiding circular on this issue. The Project “Expanding the Poverty Reduction Model” under the National Target Programme for Sustainable Poverty Reduction is still the only national programme using state budget that can partly recover the support funding for models, according to item 2, Article 3 of the inter-ministerial circular 68/2013/TTLT-BTC-BLDTBXH
  24. In item 2, Article 5 of circular 15/2013/TT-BNNPTNT; and point c, item 3.2, Article 5 Inter-Ministerial Circular 183/2010/TTLT-BTC-BNN.
  25. Regulations on the responsibilities, commitments of households benefiting from production support projects in Item 1, Article 4, Inter Ministerial Circular 05/2013/TTLT-UBND-NNPTNT-KHDT-TC-XD.
  26. Item 3, Article 5 Circular 15/2013/TT-BNNPTNT; and item 4, Article 5 inter-ministerial circular 183/2010/TTLT-BTC-BNN.
  27. Reality is that “agriculture promotion clubs” as stipulated in Item 1, Article 10 of Decree 02/2010/ND-CP, do not operate at the surveyed sties.
  28. Item 4, Article 5 of Inter-Ministerial Circular 183/2010/TTLT-BTC-BNN



Oxfam in Vietnam's Pro Poor Policy Monitoring Project (2014-2016) works in partnership with local officials to research how pro poor policy is implemented and what impact it has on people's lives.

Our research is conducted annually in 9 provinces and cities in Vietnam. The voices and stories we collect are used to produce a series of comprehensive reports, organise policy meetings and dialogues and work with national and local officials, development partners, and the media, to advocate for stronger, more sustainable pro poor policy.

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