

**Evaluation of
The Continued Proposal on Mekong Community Networking
and Ecological Trading (MECO-ECOTRA 2010-2013)**

**KEY FARMERS NETWORKS, COMMUNITY FOREST
MANAGEMENT, LAND RIGHTS AND ADVOCACY**



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March 25, 2013

Executive Summary

The evaluation of The Continued Proposal on Mekong Community Networking and Ecological Trading (MECO-ECOTRA 2010-2013) was conducted by two evaluators: Dr. Friedhelm Goeltenboth was asked to cover “Eco-Farming in Land Use Planning and Farmer Field School including Community Ecological Enterprise” and Dr. Christian Erni was asked to cover “Indigenous Customary Law in Natural Resource Management and Conflict Resolution”, which, in accordance with the program document and as discussed with SPERI, includes land allocation.

The two evaluators were asked to submit separate reports, but a joint executive summary covering both. The executive summary has been produced as a stand-alone document.

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Acronyms

AIPP	Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact
CBFM	Community-Based Forest Management
CDP	Commune Development Plan
CEM	Committee for Ethnic Minorities
CHESH	Centre for Human Ecology Studies of Highlands
CIRD	Centre for Indigenous Knowledge Research and Development
CPP	Commune People's Committee
DPP	District People's Committee
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FLA	Forest Land Allocation
GTZ/GIZ	Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit, recently renamed to Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
ha	hectare(s)
IMPECT	Inter Mountain Peoples Education and Culture in Thailand
MARD	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NRM	Natural Resource Management
NTFP	Non-Timber Forest Product
PRDFA	Project for Rural Development of Focus Areas
PES	Payment for Environmental Service
PPC	Provincial People's Committee
RCSD	Regional Centre for Social Science and Sustainable Development
RECOFTC	The Center for People and Forests (formerly Regional Community Forestry Training Center)

SPERI	Social Policy Ecology Research Institute
SFE	State Forest Enterprise
TOR	Terms of Reference
UNDRIP	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Introduction

Objective of the evaluation and main research questions

According to the Terms of Reference (ToR) the objective of the external evaluation is “to determine the effectiveness of the project in achieving its outputs and outcomes as part of a process of consolidating lessons learned and providing recommendations that will be helpful to the organization’s programming of activities for the next phase of Mekong Community Networking and Ecological Trading development.”

The evaluation was asked to provide answers to the following main questions:

1. Relevance – do we do the right thing?
2. Effectiveness – do we reach the objectives of the project?
3. Efficiency – do we reach the objectives with an acceptable level of means?
4. Development impact – do we contribute to objectives on a higher development policy level?
5. Sustainability – is the impact sustainable?

Under paragraph III, the ToR provide a set of detailed questions (see annex 1) for the following main aspects to be covered by the evaluation:

- A. Project design
 - a. Challenge and strategy analysis
 - b. Design of Activities, Outputs, Outcomes, and Objectives
- B. Project outcomes
Here the ToR ask to „give special attention to outcomes 1, 6 and 2 of [the] program“.
- C. Project organization and implementation
- D. Impact
- E. Recommendations from Lessons Learned

The consultancy service for the evaluation was contracted to two experts. Dr. Friedhelm Goeltenboth was asked to cover “Eco-Farming in Land Use Planning and Farmer Field School including Community Ecological Enterprise” and I was asked to cover “Indigenous Customary Law in Natural Resource Management and Conflict Resolution”, which, in accordance with the program document and as discussed with SPERI, implies covering land allocation.

Methods used

The ToR provided detailed guidance on how the evaluation was to be conducted and what its scope was supposed to be (see annex 1).

It identified the people to be interviewed: key farmers, elders, local authority officers, local and national media, senior staff of SPERI in Laos and Vietnam.

SPERI arranged all the meetings and interviews and a senior staff was part of the team throughout the evaluation. During the field visit to Quang Binh, Ha tinh and Nghe An provinces in Vietnam an evaluation assistant, who also acted as interpreter, joined the team. He was however not able to continue for the field visit to Lao Cai province. In Laos, an evaluation assistant was part of the team throughout the field work.

The scope of the evaluation defined by ToR included:

- Getting to know MECO-ECOTRA and its 6 thematic approaches from SPERI staff and tye visit to HEPA Farmer Field School

- Review of program documents, reports, articles, SPERI web-site, videos etc.
- During field visits interviewing/group discussions with the people identified
- The planned feedback workshop in the middle of the evaluation could not be held since Dr. Goeltenboth had to return to Germany
- A verification workshop was held at SPERI's office in Hanoi after the field visits in Vietnam

Prior to the interviews, the relevant documents (mainly program documents, progress reports and information from the SPERI web-site) were reviewed and based on this and the ToR an evaluation plan structured around main thematic issues and the corresponding questions was made.

The main method used during the evaluation was holding semi-structured interviews with individuals and small groups. A list of questions was prepared prior to each meeting which defined the focus and guided the course of the interview, but allowed for the flexibility needed for digression as new issues and aspects emerged. The outcomes were further discussed in informal talks with SPERI senior staff.

Most of the people interviewed were suggested by SPERI. A few people were added to obtain the view of people working on similar issues but who were not involved in any of SPERI's activities.

Purportedly an external evaluation, it was in reality more participatory in nature. This for the simple fact that all meetings except those arranged with a few individuals by myself were "multi-stakeholders meeting", i.e. usually involving local partners (e.g. key farmers, local government official, FFS students), SPERI staff and the evaluators. For a supposedly "external" evaluation the fact that one, in Laos more than one, senior SPERI staff was present during almost all meetings at least potentially, implies the methodological problem of making it difficult for interviewees to give unbiased and entirely open answers and views. However, I do not believe that this limitation had a severe impact on the quality of the results of the evaluation. I do believe that the most relevant issues, including strength and weaknesses of the program and its proponents (SPERI and MECO-ECOTRA) were identified and discussed. In fact, I would have preferred if the evaluation had been called and accordingly designed as fully participatory. This would have implied a different preparation process but would have created a different atmosphere for interaction during the meetings.

Presentation and analysis of findings

A. Relevance: Project design

Analysis of Challenges and Theoretical Issues

SPERI operates with a clearly defined analytical framework inspired by theories developed within the field of human ecology. Human ecology is the interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary science concerned with the relations of human beings with their physical, biological and social environment. SPERI has been particularly inspired by human ecology taught by Terry Rambo at the Environmental Policy Institute, East-West Center, Hawaii, United States. After its co-founder Tran Thi Lanh completed a postgraduate training course there in 1990, SPERI (or at that time TEW and CHESH) developed their own theoretical framework which they call "Biological Human Ecology", which is described on their web-site.¹ It is however not explained what the difference is between human ecology and "Biological" Human Ecology. Since human ecology is a discipline that per definition combines natural and social science – and thus includes biology – it is not evident what the addition of the adjective "biological" implies. It appears to be rather redundant.

¹ <http://speri.org/eng/info/311/SPERI-and-Theory-of-Biological-Human-Ecology--886.html>

Biological Human Ecology (BHE) is the theoretical framework for SPERI's work with ethnic minority communities "to alleviate structural poverty and conduct community development work which based upon belief system and respecting community traditional structure at each ecological zone".² The basic tenets of this framework are described on its web-site as follows:³

[Bio-] Human Ecology acknowledges development base on natural balance between human system and ecosystem and respect for natural laws – human system is illustrated via three structural circles.

The Central circle is called core value of human system, is modeled as the core of the living cells. Core value of human system consists of faith, beliefs, rules, ethical norms of the system.

Intermediate circle is community structure, is modeled as cytoplasm, which nurture core value of human system. Community structure, includes customs and traditions of the community, which functions to maintain the vitality of the faith, beliefs and moral norms of the community.

External circle is cultural appearance, which is modeled as membrane covering the cell. External manifestations of culture are the everyday activities of the community, such as housing design, style of worship, food types, clothing, housing, how to communicate with the outsiders. External appearances change depending on the characteristics of each natural region through process of labor, creativity and adaptation over time and the process of community movement and resettlement.

While in earlier documents, partly produced by SPERI's predecessor organizations (TEW and CHESH), (biological) human ecology theory and philosophy applied have been elaborately described, no explicit reference can be found in the two MECO-ECOTRA program document relevant for this evaluation, i.e. "Continued Proposal on Mekong Community Networking and Ecological Trading (MECOECOTRA 2010-2013 ") and the more recent program "Civil Society Network Action Towards Community Ownership of Forest, Land & REDD+: A Pilot Customary Law Based Programmatic Approach to Forest Land Allocation".

Nevertheless, it is evident that the analysis presented in these documents is based on the same Biological Human Ecology approached developed by SPERI and its predecessor organizations.

For SPERI, BHE is not just a theoretical but as much a philosophical framework, and has a strong ethical dimension that is evident in many aspects of SPERI's analysis and is guiding its strategy and action.

This is expressed on SPERI's website where it states:

SPERI has rooted our actions in "Feeding the Soil" and "Nurturing Nature" philosophy. We are proud of this philosophy and have attempted to turn from mind to action in the daily activities of not only current and prospective indigenous minority students of SPERI but also SPERI's staff.

'Nurturing Nature' is a belief but also a part of the traditional ethical system. It is the most civilized way of interacting between men and men, and men and nature. We can sense the deep engagement and sense of purity and honesty in the daily life of the indigenous ethnic minorities in the Mekong Region.⁴

SPERI's analysis of the situation in communities and the wider context of its target areas is supported by in-depth field research and policy studies, conducted by well-trained and capable researchers, partly in cooperation and with advice from researchers and academic research institutes, such as the Ho Chi Minh Academy of Politics and Public Administration, Region I, the Regional Centre for Social Science and Sustainable Development (RCSD) at Chiang Mai University, Thailand, the University of

² Ibid.

³ <http://speri.org/eng/info/118/TEW-approach-to-ethnic-groups-in-the-highlands--844.html>

⁴ <http://speri.org/eng/content/Belief-41-42.html>

Waikato, New Zealand, or the Permaculture Research Institute (PRI), Australia (which is a co-founder of SPERI).

In-depth field research combined with national and international policy analysis result in an intimate knowledge of the reality on the ground in indigenous communities and a thorough understanding of the global and national socio-economic and political context, and the national legal and policy framework.

In particular, SPERI's analysis of challenges faced by indigenous communities is holistic in the sense that it does not limit itself to the conventional focus on poverty but includes and emphasizes social and cultural aspects, such as traditional institutions, customary law and spirituality

In its analysis SPERI is seeking to understand the multiple inter-relations between poverty, social disintegration, loss of values, culture and identity, and environmental degradation and identifies their underlying causes: non-recognition of the rights of indigenous communities, especially to land, forests and resources as a result of inappropriate laws and policies.

This is clearly demonstrated on page 6 of the MECO-ECOTRA program document 2010-2013, where the challenges and underlying causes identified are summarized:

Minority people are in threat of the dissolution of traditional practice, land ownership, livelihood, culture and community spirit, their *values* and spiritual belief. This contributes to a loss of identity and is a consequence of; (1) loss of land and forest rich in biodiversity, the degradation of fertile land and erosion of soil; (2) globalization and the promotion of a demanding consumer society based on the exploitation of natural resources; (3) 'development' schemes brought in by 'outsiders' such as multi-national companies; (4) Resettlement programs and displacement. Inherent in all of these issues is the top-down control and insensitive approaches from centralized governments that have contrasting values and vision to minority people.

Loss of identity is further linked to what SPERI calls an imposed poverty structure, which has its roots in 1. "Unconfident" (the lack of confidence as a result of discrimination); 2. Lack of ownership; 3. Isolation (isolation from or non-participation in decision making processes that affect their lives). This part of the analysis was already developed by TEW based on which it devised its three-pronged strategy in working with indigenous communities.

Most important, SPERI's continuously monitoring the situation on the ground as well as legal and policy developments, and tries to respond and adjust its strategy and activities accordingly. The most recent example is its analysis of the issuing of Joint Circular 07/2011/TTLT-BNNPTNT-BTNMT and Directive 1019/2011/TTg-ĐMDN of 2011, which promote and call for speedy implementation of the process of transforming land-use rights allocated or contracted under programs 327/CT/1992 and 661/QĐ/1998 into land use rights titles (the so-called Red Books). The other important recent policy development in Vietnam analyzed by SPERI is the government's engagement in REDD+ (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation). As a result of its analysis of these two developments SPERI came up with a new program document "Civil Society Network Action Towards Community Ownership of Forest, Land & REDD+: A Pilot Customary Law Based Programmatic Approach to Forest Land Allocation". In this document SPERI explained the need for a change of priorities in order to respond to the challenges posed by these policy developments. It is commendable that SPERI's donor partners responded positively to SPERI's explanations and request and are thus supportive to the need for flexibility in SPERI's work.

Challenges

Indigenous communities are not homogenous: in particular during times of rapid changes and increasing influence of the mainstream society and the state it is to be expected that there are diverging opinions, preferences, values, interpretations of customary law and strategies among

community members, especially between youth and older generations. Likewise, men and women usually have different opinions, preferences and needs, and thus define priorities differently.

Having a clear theoretical and ethical framework is part of SPERI's credibility. The flip-side of the coin of the strong ethical aspect of SPERI's "Biological Human Ecology" is that there is sometimes a tendency to idealize or romanticize indigenous communities. Internal contradictions, dissonance and conflicts that are encountered and dealt with in every day work do not appear much in SPERI's analysis. There is a danger to see problems mainly as a result of unwelcomed external influences (state policies and interventions, market integration etc.) to which communities react, and to underrate human agency, choices and strategies.

SPERI has conducted numerous studies but has not made much of it public. Research partners found that there is a mismatch between the wealth of data gathered and SPERI's data management and processing for publication and other forms of dissemination.

Recommendation

SPERI certainly is aware of the differences and complexities encountered in communities, but the analysis presented in the program document does not reflect this well. Thus, a more differentiated analysis and above all a stronger gender perspective are recommended for future program documents.

SPERI should also explore ways to improve its data management system and try to publish more.



H'mong women selling incense sticks at the Sunday market in Simacai.

Approach

SPERI applies a rights-based approach in its work with indigenous communities. SPERI’s vision⁵ for 2010 to 2020 is “Livelihood Sovereignty of the Indigenous People all over the world as well as in Mekong region [] determined by five fundamental interrelated rights:

1. The right to Land (basic)
2. The right to performance one’s own religion on one’s own land (unique)
3. The right to practice one’s own knowledge in daily farming (practice)
4. The right to decide what to grow on one’s own land (holistic)
5. The right to co-government of one’s land (strategic)

SPERI calls these a “vital empowerment strategy for the Indigenous People in order to sustain and enrich their original civilized dignity and achieve their self-determination towards their own ancestral traditional value of ‘Nurturing Nature!’”⁶

It is notable that in its English documents SPERI is increasingly using “indigenous people/peoples or indigenous minorities/communities youth etc. instead of ethnic minorities. In both program documents relevant for this evaluation, the terms indigenous peoples, indigenous people, indigenous minority, indigenous ethnic minority, indigenous communities etc. or ethnic minorities are used interchangeably. The composite terms using “indigenous” are more often found now than the term ethnic minority.

This is worth emphasizing because it implies an adherence to international practice as opposed to the official government position: Vietnam does not officially recognize the concept (and existence) of indigenous peoples in the country. Vietnam has voted in favor of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) but never officially acknowledged that (some of) its ethnic minorities are considered indigenous peoples.

Despite its explicit rights-based approach and the use of the concept “indigenous peoples”, nowhere in the two documents does SPERI refer to the UNDRIP or any other international legal instrument relevant for indigenous peoples. Especially the use of indigenous peoples (with an ‘s’ at the end as in the UNDRIP) can be interpreted as an implicit recognition of its legal implication, i.e. the recognition of the *collective* rights of indigenous peoples.

At least the senior staff of SPERI are very much aware of the UNDRIP but have so far consciously chosen not to refer to it due to the government’s touchiness with respect to references to human rights and the related international legal instruments. It is easy though to make references between the basic rights identified by SPERI and the UNDRIP. Some examples are given in the following table:

Basic rights identified by SPERI	Articles in the UNDRIP
1) The right to Land (basic)	Right to Land, Territories and Resources: articles 3, 4, 5 (among others)
2) The right to performance one’s own religion on one’s own land (unique)	Right to culture in various articles, more specific article 12 on religion and spirituality
3) The right to practice one’s own knowledge in daily farming (practice)	Article 20: the right to “engage freely in all their traditional and other economic activities”
4) The right to decide what to grow on one’s own land (holistic); <i>ibid.</i>	Article 20, too, but also articles referring to the right to self-determination and participation in decision-making: e.g. Article 12
5) The right to co-government of one’s land (strategic)	right to self-determination and participation in decision-making: e.g. Article 12

⁵ <http://speri.org/eng/content/Vision-41-158.html>

⁶ *Ibid.*

Recommendation

In light of the rights-based approach SPERI is applying in its work with indigenous communities, reference to the international legal instruments relevant for indigenous peoples should be considered even though these cannot, for political reasons, be explicitly referred to in actual advocacy and lobbying. This will reflect to the outside world that SPERI is aware of and supports the application of international standards on the rights of indigenous peoples.

Strategy

SPERI's main strategic principle is to empower indigenous peoples through **networking**. This is explicitly stated in the MECO-ECOTRA program document 2010-2012 (p. 14):

Network action helps key farmers to recognize rights and responsibilities in the policy making and implementing processes. Networking strengthens the power at the grassroots. It reduces the negative impacts caused by centralized power and top down policy implementation. It encourages freedom for the marginalized to participate in decision making processes, promotes transparent institutions and transactions, and brings about social equity that contributes to the local democratization process.

SPERI **mobilizes grassroots people**, to empower them and to facilitate and support their local, national and, to a so far minor extent, regional advocacy work. At the same time SPERI forges **alliances with supportive government officials, and the media**, and seeks advice from eminent personalities within the government and academe.

Policy advocacy and lobbying of decision makers at local and national level are done through a lot of **informal relationships, sharing, discussions, joint activities**. SPERI itself is keeping a low profile in advocacy, instead lets the grassroots people, government officials and expert speak.

SPERI invests a lot of effort in **studying and understanding the communities**, their culture, the economic, social and political reality they live in. This also means, as on senior adviser pointed out, to "study the capacity of local people to manage their own economic and social affairs. SPERI's work can be a good model on how to learn from and work with villagers." As a result of the in-depth knowledge gained, SPERI is able to identify key institutions in the respective communities, which it tries to strengthen and empower. Examples are the *Phuong Hoi* of the Black Thai, or the *Nao Long* of the Hmong, etc.

Based on such a thorough understanding, activities are initiated. Thus, SPERI works **slowly but thoroughly** and with a **long-term perspective**. In all the field sites visited, SPERI (or its predecessors/members TEW, CHESH, CIRD) have worked since many years and helped form networks on a broad range of issues including gardening/eco-farming, handicraft, herbal medicine, savings and credit groups; they supported participatory irrigation and drinking water projects, the building of cultural centers etc. The intimate partnership that developed with communities and local governments allowed SPERI to take up other, more sensitive issues and to help solve conflicts over forest land.

SPERI has shown a remarkable ability to identify opportunities to work towards its goals within the existing legal and policy framework and the specific local conditions. The particular strategy, e.g. to securing land and forest rights therefore, may therefore differ accordingly. As already mentioned, SPERI is constantly analyzing developments in the policy context and the target areas, and is responding in a flexible manner

Another key feature of SPERI's strategy is that its **mobilization and networking of key farmers are based on specific and concrete interest and concerns**: gardening and animal husbandry, herbal

medicine, capital needs (savings/micro-credits), forest conservation. This allows for the involvement of genuine grassroots leaders and furthers a strong identification with the network.

SPERI makes strategic choices in its use of **terms and concepts**: for example, it speaks of “key farmers” instead of “leaders” and avoids referring to human rights. In a political context where a direct human rights/indigenous peoples’ rights-discourse is not possible, it is a strategy to prevent misunderstanding by and create the conditions for dialogue and cooperation with the authorities.

Another strategic decision is the **diversification of the institutional base** of rights advocacy, i.e. the formation of new organizations. CIRUM and CODE were founded to promote specialization and professionalization, but also to spread the risk (if one organization gets into troubles, the other can continue).

CIRUM (Culture Identity and Resource Use Management) is focusing on forest issues. It has, among others, set up and “land coalition” named Ethnic Minority, Forest and Land Rights Network for a three-years pilot period (2011-2013) under the project “Assuring the community right including the poor and the ethnic minority people in approaching, managing and effectively using forest and forest land resources”. The coalition was formed in response to the new, so-called programmatic approach developed by SPERI’s main partner Interchurch Organisation for Development Cooperation (ICCO). The members of the coalition are CODE, RDPR (Rural Development and Poverty Reduction Fund, Quang Binh province), CRD (Centre for Rural Development in Central Vietnam, at Hue University) and CIRUM. The coordination role of the coalition is annually rotated among the members. It aims at facilitating exchange of experience and collaboration in advocacy on forest land rights for ethnic minorities, and cooperates in this closely with academics, journalists and senior members of MECO-ECOTRA.

CODE (Consultancy on Development Institute) is an independent organization registered as a non-profit organization providing consultancy services. The main purpose of its foundation however was to have a specialized research and advocacy organization. It is among others dealing with highly sensitive issues like bauxite mining in the central highlands.

In 2006, TEW, CIRD and CHESH for merged into the Social Policy Ecology Research Institute (SPERI). It was a response to the growing capacity of the key farmers network and communities to implement activities and coordinate the network themselves. Conceived as an independent research institute SPERI’s aim in the long run is to focus on research and providing professional services, and to increasingly confine its cooperation with the key farmers and communities in MECO-ECOTRA to the role of an adviser and supporter.

Both CHESH and CIRD however remained independently registered organizations. CIRD’s de-facto merger with SPERI was reversed in 2011 as part of the decentralization and diversification strategy. CHESH is still the formal project partner in Laos, where it works in close cooperation with the provincial and district government of Luang Prabang.

In sum, SPERI’s strategy is well chosen to address the challenges in working with a rights-based approach in the rather difficult political and legal context of Vietnam and Laos.

Challenges

SPERI is a bit isolated among the Vietnamese CSO. Other Vietnamese and international NGOs do not have the same rights-based approach, were too reluctant to address sensitive issues (like e.g. bauxite mining in the Central Highlands) and SPERI found that it was difficult to work with them. Most VNGOs and INGOs have for long confined their work to more conventional livelihood/poverty alleviation and have not tried to address the underlying root causes. Only recently have others started to take up land and forest rights issues. However, there are a few exceptions among INGOs, such as RECOFTC, and bilateral donor agencies, such as GTZ/GIZ, who have worked in community forestry and directly on

forest land allocation (see more in the chapter on land allocation below). SPERI has not been much in touch with them.

SPERI's predecessor TEW attended meetings of the Ethnic Minority Working Group (EMWG) of the NGO Resource Centre⁷ but decided not to continue since they found the INGOs and Vietnamese NGOs participating on the group somewhat out of touch with the reality of indigenous peoples on the ground. TEW found that most of the participants were foreigners who did not have a clear understanding of indigenous issues in Vietnam, that many spend most of their time in their offices in Hanoi, occasionally organizing workshops to which indigenous elders are invited. These foreigners were using experiences from other countries and were applying concepts and a language that was not appropriate for the Vietnamese context, in particular Human Rights which TEW considered politically too sensitive to apply in Vietnam. Instead, TEW wanted to directly work with healers and farmers and their needs (which is much more acceptable for the authorities), and focus on strengthening the network of "key farmers", to empower them doing their own advocacy and lobby work.

Vietnamese NGOs, some of them I met years before the evaluation, have noted SPERI/CHESH/TEW's reluctance to maintain relationships with them. This keeping-a-distance has been interpreted by some as arrogance. Others mainly stated that they didn't know what SPERI/CHESH/TEW were doing, that they kept to themselves and that they were known among Vietnamese NGOs as "the TEW family". This has somewhat improved with the formation of CIRD and CODE, who are more actively engaging with other organizations.

In Laos, CHESH has also worked largely by itself, with its government partner organizations. There have been occasional dialogues with bilateral agencies like GTZ, or exchanges with Lao-based organizations on occasion of regional meetings (such as e.g. the 9th Asia-Europe People's Forum in Vientiane in October 2012), but there is no regular or systematic exchange or any form of cooperation with INGOs, bilateral or any other donor agencies in Laos, nor with the emerging Lao civil society.

Recommendation

In light of the need for stronger advocacy on the rights of indigenous peoples SPERI may miss opportunities for alliances with Vietnamese and Lao CSOs, INGOs, bilateral and multilateral development agencies working in provinces in which SPERI, or in Laos, CHESH have no contacts to relevant government agencies and indigenous communities and leaders. It may therefore be advisable to re-assess its networking and alliance strategy within Vietnam and Laos. (See related recommendation in the chapter on advocacy.)

Design of Objectives, Expected Outcomes and Outputs, and Activities

In accordance with the ToR, the main reference document for this evaluation is the program document "The Continued Proposal on Mekong Community Networking and Ecological Trading (MECO-ECOTRA 2010-2013)". It is the objectives and expected outcomes laid out in this document that the evaluation mainly refers to.

60% of the funding needed for this program was obtained from the Dutch Interchurch Organisation for Development Cooperation (ICCO). SPERI was able to source the remaining funding needed from three other donors: the French CCFD-terre solidaire, the German Brot für die Welt (Bread for the World) and Evangelische Kirche Deutschland (EKD, Evangelical Church in Germany), and Norwegian

⁷ EMWG is a platform for exchange on ethnic minority issues under the umbrella of the VUFO-NGO Resource Centre. As it states on its web-site, "It is managed by a 'Core Group' of International and Vietnamese NGOs in accordance with the Government of Vietnam's policies related to ethnic minorities. Oxfam is currently the focal point for the core group." <http://www.ngocentre.org.vn/emwg>

People's Aid. While ICCO provided core funding, SPERI has made a contract and a separate project document with each of the other three donors. These three documents were reviewed in preparation for the evaluation but were not used as reference document.

In response to new policy developments in Vietnam, i.e. the Joint Circular 07 and Directive 1019 of 2011 and the currently ongoing revision of the land law, SPERI decided to put priority on land allocation and policy advocacy for the remainder of the three-years program period and came up with a document in which this change of priorities and activities is explained: "Civil Society Network Action Towards Community Ownership of Forest, Land & REDD+: A Pilot Customary Law Based Programmatic Approach to Forest Land Allocation". It was submitted to the donors in October 2011. This change of priorities was allegedly approved by SPERI's donors. As discussed in the chapter on achievement of outcomes, the evaluation also referred to the expected outcomes/outputs defined in this document in the assessment of the level of achievement of expected results.

For the new donors CCFD-terre solidaire, the German Brot für die Welt, and the Norwegian People's Aid separate project documents were written. These were consulted in preparation for the evaluation but are not taken as reference documents (even though their quality is much better in terms of logical structure, i.e. identification of aims, objectives, activities and expected outcomes etc.).

The ToR asks the evaluators to look into three issues related to the program design:

- Were the proposed activities appropriate for achieving their expected outputs?
- Were the expected outputs consistent with their expected outcomes?
- Were the expected outcomes consistent with the objectives of the project and relevant as solutions to the problems being addressed by the project?

The program document "Continued Proposal on Community Networking and Ecological Trading MECO-ECOTRA 2010-2013"

The program document in its entirety is relevant only for the first half of the project period (2010-2011) since it was amended/partly super-ceded by the program document of October 2011.

The original program document presents a comprehensive problem and context analysis based on which the program was developed. It however does not clearly identify an aim/overall object, specific objectives, outcomes and outputs. The program document would clearly have benefited from a more explicit definition of overall aim, objectives, outcomes and outputs.

The aim/overall objective is implicitly stated in chapter II. The strategy of MECO-ECOTRA, where it is written that MECO-ECOTRA "[] promotes and strengthens civil society in order to achieve a harmonious life, social justice and democracy for highlanders and indigenous peoples living in the Mekong region.

Thus, we can say that the program's **overall aim** is

- to contribute to "**a harmonious life, social justice and democracy for highlanders indigenous peoples**".

The following paragraph states that "MECO-ECOTRA lobbies for social – political and economic rights of indigenous peoples including their dignity, beliefs, traditional social institutions, community rights and natural resources." We can consider these the program's **objectives**, namely the promotion of

- The recognition of **the social, political and economic rights of indigenous** peoples in general and
- the recognition and **protection of their dignity, beliefs, traditional social institutions, community rights and natural resources** in particular

They are fairly general and the program document lacks any explicitly stated specific objectives.

The activities by which the aim and objectives are to be achieved and the expected concrete outcomes are described in the subsequent paragraphs and in more detail in chapter III. The three themes of MECO-COTRA, and chapter IV. Expected Outcomes and Activities – Jan 2010 to Dec 2013.

Three main thematic issues and for each three to four sub-issues are identified, which define the framework for planned intervention.

1. Community Institution in Watershed Resources Management
 - 1.1 Community social norms/beliefs in protecting watershed resources
 - 1.2 Community laws and regulations in using and preserving watershed resources
 - 1.3 Community rights in managing watershed resources
2. Eco-farming
 - 2.1 Learning about spiritual ecology
 - 2.2 Promoting adaptive local knowledge, and local solutions
 - 2.3 Learning holistic eco-farm planning and design
 - 2.4 Promoting the sustainable governing of eco-farm
3. Community based Eco-Enterprise
 - 3.1 Promoting an ethical, cultural, social and ecological local production chain with local branding
 - 3.2 Promoting a spirit of active voluntary participation, community orientation and transparency among members
 - 3.3 Promoting the value of nurturing ecological values
 - 3.4 Working towards fair share, fair distribution, local livelihood security and ecological return

Seven expected outcomes are defined:

- Outcome 1: To have stronger Mekong regional networks of the key community leaders in areas of community institution in watershed resource management, eco-farm pioneering practices, and community initiatives on eco-enterprises;
- Outcome 2: To have stronger Mekong regional legal recognition on Community Rights to Watershed Resources; and expansion of Community Institution in Forest Management;
- Outcome 3: To have a specialized Mekong regional network on eco-farming action to lobby for sustainable land use planning at the community level;
- Outcome 4: To have some Mekong regional pilot initiatives in community eco-enterprises towards ECOTRADING strategies;
- Outcome 5: To have stronger Mekong regional networks of capable and confident young indigenous;
- Outcome 6: To have stronger Mekong regional civil society discourse;
- Outcome 7: To have capable human resources for research, training, lobbying and media production.

The formulation, though not the substance, of these expected outcomes differ from the ones used in the progress reports. As explained in the next chapter, in the assessment of the level of achievement I will refer to the outcomes as formulated in the progress reports.

For each outcome (except outcome 7) a number of planned activities are defined in the program document on pages 53 to 28. While the program document does not explicitly identify expected outputs, these are implicitly included in the list of activities.

The program document “Civil Society Network Action Towards Community Ownership of Forest, Land & REDD+”

The new program document of October 2011, relevant for 2012 and 2013, defines its **overall aim** clearly on page 21: The **“re-structuring and decentralizing the centralized top down approach towards forest and land allocation”**.

On page 24 it defines three objectives:

Short-term objective

Re-mapping forest and land to clear out overlapping between stakeholders [] via traditional knowledge, local notion of boundaries and landscape, customary law and customary based institutions []

Mid-term objective

Re-distributing forest and land which are being managed by public centralized (state owned) and private powers (companies) to local indigenous communities via bottom-up participation and interface among different stakeholders []

Long-term objective

Community right over forestland will be legalized by amended Land Law 2013 and coming amended Constitution via evidences and achievements from successful land/forest (re)allocation programs in case studies in North West, Central North and Central Highland in Vietnam []

Unlike the original program document, the new document contains a logical framework matrix including the challenge/problem identified, the expected outcomes, the planned activities/targets, some expected outputs (“Product to be produced”) and the beneficiaries.

Overall, this program document is much more clearly structured and results are thus easier to monitor. While the inclusion of a logical framework matrix is an improvement, it does not provide the full picture of the logic behind the program. For example, it does not include the aim and the three objectives identified but refers to “Strategic Challenge” instead, using different formulations. The outputs are also not comprehensive and clearly formulated. The program document could have benefitted from more accuracy and consistency.

It is to be expected that because of the focus given to land allocation and policy and legal rights advocacy in this document some of the expected outcomes and the respective activities identified in the original program document were de-facto dropped. However, it is basically only outcome 4 on community eco-enterprises that has become completely irrelevant during the period 2012-2013.

Consistency between outputs and outcomes, activities and outputs, outcomes and objectives

A proper assessment of the consistency between outputs and outcomes is difficult due to the lack of explicit identification especially in the original program document. This could be much more easily done with the project documents for CCFD-terre solidaire, the German Brot für die Welt, which however cover only SPERI/CHESH’s project work in Laos. Since the ToR refer to the MECO-ECOTRA program as a whole it is the overall program document that is relevant here, and a general assessment of the consistency of outputs and outcomes, outcomes and objectives is attempted here.

What can be concluded from a review of the documents is that where outputs have been identified they are indeed consistent with the expected outcomes. While a comprehensive monitoring of the achievement of planned outputs could not be done (it was also not mandated by the ToR), evidence

found during the evaluation gave the general impression that activities were conducted much according to plan and thus the respective outputs were achieved.

I also have the general impression that the activities are well targeted and can be considered appropriate for achieving the expected outputs.

The expected outcomes (and the respective activities) are clearly consistent with the objectives in both program documents. This, again, is more clearly evident in the new program document because the objectives are explicitly stated. It is however fairly easy to see that the outcomes are all in one way or the other contributing toward the general objectives implicitly formulated in the original program document, namely promotion the social, political and economic rights of indigenous peoples in general, and the recognition and protection of their dignity, beliefs, traditional social institutions, community rights and natural resources in particular. They are well targeted and undoubtedly relevant as solutions to the problems that are addressed by the program.

Recommendation

The project documents written for CCFD-terre solidaire and Brot für die Welt for the CHESH projects in Laos represent a considerable improvement in terms of clarity and consistency over the original MECO-ECOTRA program document and the amendment document of October 2011. The aim, objectives, activities and expected outcomes are much more clearly identified and described and quite consistently linked to each other in a logical framework matrix. As a result, the progress reports for these projects are also much clearer and a better tool for progress monitoring for donors.

It seems that SPERI has realized this already and is considering using one of the formats (the one required by Brot für die Welt). It is recommended that SPERI examines donors' project document and reporting formats and chooses the one which is clearest and easiest to use.

It is further recommended that all donors accept a common format for the project document and for reporting, and agree to accept a joint progress report. This would considerably reduce the reporting burden for SPERI and CHESH.

B. Effectiveness: Main findings on the achieved outcomes

According to the ToR, the evaluation was expected to identify objectively verifiable indicators for the achievement of the project's outcomes, and how effective these were in addressing the problems identified in the project proposal. Special attention was to be given to outcomes 1, 2 and 6 of the program. These three outcomes largely correspond to the issues I was asked to focus on in my part of the evaluation. Thus the main findings on the achieved outcomes are structured according to these three outcomes.

Expected Outcome 1: Strong key farmers networks

Outcome 1: To have three strong MECO-ECOTRA key farmers networks in the way that their own CBOs and CBIs can influence policy making processes in all aspects at commune level. The influence is reflected in the sense that the CBOs and CBIs play crucial roles in the policy making process.⁸

The ToR asked to identify objectively verifiable indicators for the project's outcomes, and asked the team to look into two issues specifically linked to the key farmers networks/MECO-ECOTRA:

1. The issue of sustainability (organizationally and financially) of MECO-ECOTRA at commune, district, provincial and regional levels
2. The question whether the transformation of MECO-ECOTRA's 6 networks into 3 themes resulted a) in an increase in the capacities of farmers, and b) in furthering the promotion of Young Indigenous Ethnic Leadership Development Strategy (YIELDS) through Farmer Field Schools.

The sustainability question will be covered in this report, while the second, related to farmers' capacities and YIELDS, will be dealt with in Dr. Goeltenboth's report

Level of achievement of the expected outcome

The formation of an independent regional network run by indigenous key farmers has been one of the long-term goals of SPERI and its predecessor organizations. This goal emerged out of the past 15 years' local and national-level networking activities that resulted in the establishment of five thematic networks on 1) customary law in NRM 2) eco-farming 3) herbal medicine 4) handicraft and 5) community-based ecological enterprise. These are based on small interest groups (e.g. gardening group, herbal medicine group etc.) that were formed in the communities with support from SPERI (or TEW, CHESH, CIRN). People interviewed during field work confirmed that these interest groups have contributed considerably to the improvement of livelihood security in their communities. Some of their members assumed leading roles and were then identified by SPERI as "key farmers". They play a pivotal role in the thematic networks, and thus MECO-ECOTRA.

The evaluation team found evidence for the existence of at least the first four of the five thematic networks during field work, and we found indicators that at least at commune and district level herbal medicine networks function independently and quite well. Some key farmers have engaged in small-scale enterprises, sometimes linked to the savings and micro-credit groups established with facilitation and support of SPERI. SPERI promoted the formation of a network on community-based ecological enterprise over the past three years but was not successful. SPERI got engaged in Toward Organic Asian (TOA) in late 2011 and was able to get in touch and have exchange with pilot initiative in this field in Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam but an actual grassroots network akin to the other thematic networks did not yet materialize in Vietnam. With the recent need to prioritize land allocation and land rights advocacy efforts SPERI has not been able to pay sufficient attention to the component on community-based ecological enterprise over the past two years.

⁸ In the program document for MECO-ECOTRA 2010-2013 the expected outcomes are formulated slightly differently. Expected output 1 is given as follows: "To have stronger Mekong regional networks of the key community leaders in areas of community institution in watershed resource management, eco-farm pioneering practices, and community initiatives on eco-enterprises, For the purpose of this evaluation I chose the formulation used in the two progress reports (2010-2011; 2012).

In its strategic reorientation for the second phase of the MECO-ECOTRA program, SPERI narrowed the focus of its work to three key issues: a) 1) Community Institution in Watershed Resources Management b) Eco – Farming and c) 3) Community based Eco-Enterprise.⁹

Since the thematic networks are part of and together constitute the regional MECO-ECOTRA network the assessment of outcome 1 will not be done for the three thematic networks separately, but for the MECO-ECOTRA network as a whole, at different levels, i.e. local (commune/district/provincial), national and regional levels. In line with the emphasis on the network members' engagement in advocacy it will focus on the key farmers and their local networks who have been involved in advocacy. The level of engagement and success in advocacy can be considered an indicator for the strength of the networks.

In order to assess the level of achievement of expected outcome 1, three additional indicators were identified, thus four indicators are being used: participation in decision making, communication, active involvement in advocacy and institutional independence. The question of sustainability of the MECO-ECOTRA network is closely linked to the fourth indicator.

Participation in Decision Making

Participation of key farmers (as representatives of the different constituent networks) in decision making in planning and implementation of the MECO-ECOTRA program is considered a key indicator of the level of empowerment of the MECO-ECOTRA network.

The evaluation found that key farmers are actively involved in planning and decision making. The identification of MECO-ECOTRA's overall objectives, the formulation of expected outcomes and the planning of activities are in response to needs and priorities defined by and with key farmers. In the consultation workshops held across the country between May 2005 and May 2006 that lead to the formation of MECO-ECOTRA around 4000 key farmer have allegedly been involved.¹⁰

One of the strengths of SPERI, repeatedly emphasized by both key farmers as well as local government officials during interviews, is that it is in close contact with the grassroots. To facilitate staying in close contact with partner communities SPERI set up its network of geographical field offices within or near communities. These are currently functioning as Farmers Field Schools. SPERI's staff is intimately engaged with communities on a daily basis, SPERI's senior staff is regularly monitoring and back-stopping activities on the ground, SPERI is conducting research, and it organizes key farmers and stakeholders meetings in which priorities are discussed and identified. Thus, the overall program is decided by key farmers. On the basis of this close engagement with communities and key farmers, SPERI's senior staff formulates program documents and general activity plans. These are then to be presented to key farmers for comments and for approval. However, this may not always be easily possible, largely due to time constraints.

The presently ongoing formulation of the next 10-years strategic plan is done under time pressure because of the deadline for submission of follow-up proposals to donors. In a series of round-table discussions and workshop between May and November 2012 the basic elements of the new strategic plan were developed with key farmers. As of the time of writing this report, SPERI has written a draft concept of the strategic plan in English. In order to get comments and the final approval by the key farmers in MECO-ECOTRA it would have to be translated into Vietnamese, and possibly Lao, and sent out to the key farmers in MECO-ECOTRA. This has not yet happened and is not likely to happen before the submission of the proposal. There is simply no time for that. Even though the whole planning was

⁹ In other SPERI documents these three themes are formulated slightly differently: a) Customary Laws & Natural Resource Management b) Eco – Farming & Young Indigenous Ethnic Leadership Development Strategy – YIELDS and c) Community Based Ecological Enterprise

¹⁰ Undated anonymous report, see reference n.n./n.d., page 28

done on the basis of the consultations and discussions last year, this time constraint still limits the full participation of key farmers in the final decision making on MECO-ECOTRA's long-term planning.

Communication

For a network to function well, good communication is indispensable. Dolleris concluded in her evaluation report in 2009 that communication is "the biggest challenge for the networks" (p. 69), She found that at the village and commune level the networks are able to regularly communicate face-to-face and thus organize meetings and sharing themselves, but that at higher levels the networks depend on SPERI to organize events (ibid.).

Today, the situation has somewhat improved. There is much better access to internet since G3 mobile phone network connection is available even in remote areas and works very well. Above all mobile phones are now widely used for communication among network members within but also across districts and even provinces. Healers were reported to seek each others' advice for the treatment of particular illnesses. This also allows network members to organize meetings more easily. However, as discussed further below, key farmers interviewed found coordination at national or regional levels still difficult. Difficulties in communication are only one of the reasons.

To further more autonomy of the network, Dolleris recommended the production of "a 1 or 2 page newsletter (monthly or quarterly) of new methods, best practices etc. within each thematic network" (p.91). SPERI does not seem to be convinced that this will help much. Indeed, unless network members produce the newsletter themselves the production of a newsletter does not contribute to more autonomy of the network. As experiences elsewhere have shown,¹¹ it can certainly be a valuable tool for sharing of experiences and good practices where other (e.g. internet-base) means of information dissemination are not available. Furthermore, receiving newsletters regularly can help strengthen the identification with and the sense of belonging to a network.

Students and trainers at HEPA are regularly disseminating information to FFS graduates and key farmers within the MECO-ECOTRA network, and SPERI has comprehensive web-sites in both English and Vietnamese that are used for information sharing. With improved access to internet, these two tools of information sharing are therefore more effective. The evaluation team was however not able to assess to what extent these tools are being used by FFS graduates and key farmers, and especially to what extent internet is used for communication and sharing among them. Doing a survey among network members would allow SPERI to assess the actual potential of internet-based communication and information sharing and revise its communication strategy for MECO-ECOTRA.

Involvement in advocacy

In response to the issuing of Joint Circular 07 and Directive 1019 of 2011, which provided for speedy re-surveying and mapping of previously issued land use right certificates and their transformation into land titles, there was an urgent need for advocacy among responsible local governments agencies in the MECO-ECOTRA project areas to promote a participatory and customary-law based approach to land allocation for communities. This also implied addressing competing claims by and emerging conflicts with state-forest enterprises, companies or mass organizations.

Furthermore, the land law is undergoing a revision and the amended land law is tabled for discussion and approval during the National Assembly in May 2013. There was therefore an equally urgent need for national level advocacy in support of the recognition of community rights over forest land.

In accordance with SPERI's advocacy strategy, key farmers were playing an active and often leading role in advocacy both at the local and national level. SPERI facilitated a number of formal and informal

¹¹ An example is the newsletter "Sal Leaves" (named after an important NTFP) produced by the Jharkhand Save the Forest Movement" in Jharkhand State in India.

interactions and sharing that helped raise awareness among both key farmers and local government officials, and laid the foundation for cooperation between government and civil society, i.e. the network members/key farmers and SPERI. This resulted in the authorities agreeing to pilot projects on forest land allocation using the participatory and customary-law based approach promoted by SPERI and the MECO-ECOTRA network. (The process and results of the pilot titling activities are discussed in the chapter on outcome 2).

Experiences from these pilot projects were used and the key farmers and local authorities involved were mobilized for advocacy at the national level for the recognition of community land rights in the amended land law (advocacy is discussed in more detail in the chapter outcome 6).

I would like to emphasize the importance of CIRD's awareness raising on benefits from the forest and from reforestation.

In the past, people just relied on State Forest Enterprises [for jobs] and didn't know about the benefits of forests. Then they became aware of them, and of how to defend their resources. They became able to express themselves, to access and to lobby the authorities.

*Mr Tuyen, Chairman of Cao Quang Commune People's Committee,
Tuyen Hoa District, Quang Binh Province*

Institutional independence and the sustainability of MECO-ECOTRA network

Closely connected to the issue of communication is institutional independence, which is understood as the extent to which the networks are run by network members independently, i.e. without direct operational involvement of SPERI. One of SPERI's main goals is precisely to empower indigenous communities by supporting them to establish and eventually independently run the MECO-ECOTRA network and its constituent thematic networks. In 2009 Dolleris found that "The networks are not yet strong enough to be sustainable. If the networks are to be viable, members need to take more responsibility for sharing the experiences and organizing events." (p.90)

While the five original thematic networks continue to exist the focus on three thematic areas is of course expected to strengthen the respective three networks. This also means that unless herbal medicine and handicraft networks are subsumed under any of these three networks in the future they will continue to receive less attention. As argued above, communication among network members has improved in recent years and appear to function well at local level, but the networks still rely on SPERI with regards to organizing events above the district level. The focus on three thematic areas may imply that the herbal medicine and handicraft networks above the district level will not be able to become sustainable.

With regards to MECO-ECOTRA as an overarching regional network, key farmers interviewed during the evaluation generally found that they had the capacity to run it independently at commune, district and provincial levels, but that it was difficult at the national and regional (Mekong) level, above all due to lack of language skills. Another factor to be taken into consideration is that key farmers are engaged in daily livelihood, other occupational and leadership activities and may not be able to commit fully to coordinating MECO-ECOTRA.

Furthermore and probably most important at this point of time, some key farmers pointed out that it was difficult for them to take over the responsibility for coordinating the MECO-ECOTRA network because of the political and legal conditions in Vietnam. Key farmers are reluctant to take over this role for fear of possible repercussions. They felt they still needed SPERI.

The connection between MECO-ECOTRA and the Farmer Field Schools, and some unexpected outcomes

Three FFS are already operating in Vietnam (HEPA in Ha Tinh province, the FFS in Simacai, Lao Cai province, and the Centre for Community Capacity Development – CCCD – in Quang Binh province). A new FFS is planned to be established in Long Lan in Luang Prabang province of Northern Laos. Since 2006, the CCCD in Dong Le, Quang Binh, is run independently, but has faced considerable challenges with respect to human and financial resources, and hasn't been able to achieve the desired sustainability. The FFS in HEPA and Simacai however are continuing to train indigenous students from both Vietnam and Laos.

The Farmer Field Schools are playing a pivotal role in MECO-ECOTRA/SPERI's overall strategy. Their main goal is to help build up a new generation of indigenous leaders and the pursuance of this goal has been formulated as a specific strategy: the Young Indigenous Ethnic Leadership Development Strategy (YIELDS).

But FFS are not only aimed at capacity building among young indigenous. One of the outstanding aspects of SPERI's work is the effort to connect elders and knowledge holders (usually key farmers) and youth to ensure the inter-generational transfer of traditional knowledge and to promote inter-generational cooperation in the promotion of MECO-ECOTRA and its goals. And FFS play a key role in this.

The priorities for the Farmer Field Schools (FFS) have been defined jointly with key farmers and are periodically revised based on an evaluation of the trainings. Key farmers are involved in the identification of potential students for the FFS, and they are involved as trainers on specific topics as needs arise (see annex 6: Involvement of community leaders, elders, healers etc. in trainings).

Graduate students of the FFS become part of the MECO-ECOTRA network and are already and will increasingly be assuming leading roles in their communities, local networks and within MECO-ECOTRA. Thus, the FFS do what their stated purpose is: build a generation of young farmers-leaders. SPERI encourages graduate students, who it believes have a good potential, to undergo further training and eventually become teaching assistants in the FFS, mobile teachers or staff for SPERI and MECO-ECOTRA, still follows and trains certain number (about 20%) of graduated students who are potentials in terms of: teaching assistants in FFSs, mobile teachers, human resources for SPERI and MECO-ECOTRA

SPERI itself does not systematically follow what graduates from FFS do after graduation or when they stop the training. The schools themselves and also key farmers from the areas where the students come from are however in touch with them and know their whereabouts and what they are doing. It was therefore possible for HEPA to compile basic information on previous students in both HEPA and the Simacai FFS within a short time.

A quick review of the data on post-training activities of FFS revealed that of all the former students in HEPA and Simacai FFS just a little under half (43.5%) continue as farmers. Remarkable is that a considerable number either continued education in state institutions (6.5%) or started working in government services (teachers, village head, commune and district extension services). Combined, almost one out of five (19.6%) is working in such a position. This means that the education in FFS has contributed considerably to capacity building among young farmers, most of whom have had only low education levels and would most likely not have had any chance to get these jobs without the FFS training.

Thus, an unexpected result of MECO-ECOTRA's strategy to empower young indigenous farmers through FFS is capacity building for non-farming occupation in government services. It would be interesting to see to what extent these ex-FFS students are able to apply their knowledge and above all the values and underlying philosophy conveyed in FFS in their work, and to influence, for example,

agricultural extension services toward the inclusion of eco-farming practices. MECO-ECOTRA/SPERI should consider this in their post-activity impact monitoring.

	HEPA			Simacai	Total	%
	Vietnamese	Lao	Total			
Farming	7	5	12	28	40	43.5
Studying	1	1	2	4	6	6.5
Small business		1	1		1	1.1
Other occupation	1	2	3	3	6	6.5
Commune staff			0	13	13	14.1
District staff				3	3	3.3
Village head				1	1	1.1
Teacher	1		1		1	1.1
FFS advance study		7	7	4	11	12.0
HEPA staff	5		5	1	6	6.5
Volunteer at FFS Simacai				3	3	3.3
CHESH Lao staff	1		1		1	1.1
Total	16	16	32	60	92	100.0

Regional networking and alliance building

MECO-ECOTRA has been conceived as a regional network for the lower Mekong countries – Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia and China (Yunnan). The regional network established among key farmers, communities and government agencies involved in SPERI’s (and its predecessors’) projects, among CSOs and academic institutions has proven invaluable for the implementation of one of the key strategies for awareness raising, transfer of knowledge and skills, encouragement for the application of and the generation of new ideas: the study tours. Many people interviewed during the evaluation recounted experiences made during study tours and pointed out how these gave them new ideas and helped them improve their situation at home. This ranged from concrete practical knowledge obtained by farmers, like on how to grow certain vegetables or how to improve pig or chicken raising, to the interest in and commitment to trying out a new approach in community development and poverty alleviation, like in the case of the four senior PRDFA staff from Laos who went on a one-month study trip to Vietnam in 1999 to acquaint themselves with TEW’s participatory approach.

Likewise, the network of CSOs and academic institutes in the region and beyond are a rich source of knowledge and inspiration for SPERI, and some of them became partners in research (like the Regional Centre for Social Science and Sustainable Development of Chiang Mai University in Thailand and the University of Waikato, New Zealand, in research in Long Lan community, Laos).

In Vietnam, SPERI and its predecessors TEW and CHESH have over the years painstakingly built up the key farmers networks from the community to the district, provincial and national level involving in one way or another several thousand key farmers in nine provinces.¹² After its engagement with Laos in 1999, the network was expanded to include Laos. Here, a network of key farmers exists as well, but

¹² Lao Cai, Lai Chau, Ha Tay, Son La, Nghe An, Ha Tinh, Quang Binh, Dak Lak, Gia Lai.

at a more modest level and largely confined to Luang Prabang province due to the smaller number of communities CHESH has worked with so far.

In Thailand, SPERI has been in touch with the country's most prominent of the few existing indigenous CSOs: the Inter Mountain Peoples Education and Culture in Thailand (IMPECT). Over the years, it has visited them several times on occasion of study tours and workshops organized in Thailand. Community visits were done in indigenous communities who are part of the ethnic networks that represent IMPECT's constituency, and elders and leaders of some of these communities attended several study tours and workshops organized by SPERI. However, the study tours and workshops held in Thailand were organized by SPERI's long-term partners in the Regional Centre for Social Science and Sustainable Development (RCSD) of Chiang Mai University, and not IMPECT directly. Two indigenous elders are members of the Board of MECO-ECOTRA and are invited every three years to revise its action plan. The last meeting in Thailand was held in November 2012, in which some of IMPECT's elders attended, but IMPECT itself was not involved. SPERI does not have any regular direct communication with any representative indigenous organization such as IMPECT or the national Network of Indigenous Peoples in Thailand. And the directors of the two main indigenous organizations based in Chiang Mai, IMPECT and IPF, said they had never heard of MECO-ECOTRA.

In Cambodia, SPERI's networking appears to be still rather incipient. Above all, from the response received from indigenous leaders in the country it seems SPERI does not have any direct contact with indigenous peoples' organizations¹³. SPERI has worked with the Centre d'Etude et de Développement Agricole Cambodgien / Cambodian Center for Study and Development in Agriculture (CEDAC) and with My Village (MVI). The former is a large, well-known working mainly with small farmers. It is not an indigenous organization and does not have a particular focus on indigenous peoples. MVI works with indigenous communities in Mondulkiri and Stung Treng provinces. However, it is not run by indigenous themselves and most of the staff are non-indigenous.

Even though Yunnan is mentioned as one of the target countries in the overall MECO-ECOTRA profile, it is not included in the 2010-2013 program and there were therefore no activities there.

In Myanmar, no national-level formation of indigenous peoples exists but a number of ethnic-based indigenous organizations with which MECO-ECOTRA could establish partnerships. In general, there is a keen interest among these organizations in learning from and networking with other indigenous CSOs in the region.¹⁴ MECO-ECOTRA/SPERI have established contacts with and through the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB), METTA Development Foundation, Toward Organic Asia and Kalayana Mitria Foundation (KMF). None of these is an indigenous organisation but some work on and with indigenous peoples.

These observations raise the question on the nature of MECO-ECOTRA as a regional network. If its aspiration is to have a network akin to that one established in Vietnam, i.e. with a solid and extensive grassroots base, it would have to establish closer partnerships with existing indigenous peoples'/community networks. Of course, it could invest try and build it up itself. This would however face considerable challenges: Starting from scratch would imply a heavy investment of time and effort. Furthermore, since the indigenous movement is comparably advanced in Thailand and Cambodia any

¹³ Presently the most important indigenous peoples' organizations are probably: Indigenous Rights Active members (IRAM), the Cambodia Indigenous Youth Association (CIYA) and the Highlanders Association. There are smaller, regional or ethnic-based organizations like the Cambodia Prey Lang Indigenous Peoples Network (PLIPN) and the Cambodia Organization to Promote Kui Culture (OPKC). And there are organizations and networks not run by indigenous themselves but with a focus on supporting indigenous peoples, like the Cambodia Indigenous Community Support Organization (ICSO) and the Cambodia Indigenous Peoples NGO Network (IPNN)

¹⁴ In a recent report we tried to provide an overview of the organizational landscape among indigenous peoples at the national level and with a focus on the Naga areas and Chin state (see Erni and Nilsson 2012).

attempt by a *non-indigenous* organization to set up such a network *for* indigenous communities may not be well received.

That no real partnership has so far been established with the regional indigenous peoples' alliance Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP) is partly due to limited effort on the part of MECO-ECOTRA/SPERI, partly due to the fact that in the one initiative I was made aware of SPERI staff and not indigenous leaders/key farmers were taking the lead, and that their attitude was seen as too overbearing.

I find it important to stress that among MECO-ECOTRA's network countries Laos is by far the weakest in terms of indigenous CSOs. There are few Lao NGOs (officially called Non-profit Associations – NPA) working with indigenous communities and to my knowledge only one which has been established by indigenous. A rather exceptional CSO I came across actually during my recent visit to Laos is the Luang Prabang Hmong Association. But as an exception it confirms the rule: Indigenous peoples' civil society is extremely weak in Laos. Formally, there may also be very few NGOs in Vietnam which are run by indigenous themselves, but the existence of the so far informal but strong key farmers network established with the help of SPERI and its predecessors represents an entirely different situation. What CHESH has so far helped create in Laos goes in the same direction but has not yet reached a comparable scope and strength.

If MECO-ECOTRA aims at expanding its community-based network to Cambodia and Thailand it would have to seek partnership with the existing indigenous peoples' organizations and networks. This would also imply having to accept and respect different ways of working. SPERI has so far been rather reluctant to cooperate with CSO in Vietnam due to differences in approach and strategies. While these have been valid reasons and may be acceptable for the context of its own country, MECO-ECOTRA/SPERI would not get very far in establishing the desired close partnership if it does not have the flexibility required.

This does not imply that MECO-ECOTRA, and SPERI as its supporter and adviser, have to compromise on their own principles, values and approaches. In fact, I am convinced that there would be a lot of interest in MECO-ECTORA/SPERI's approach and I would strongly encourage them to share more of their experiences with indigenous organizations in these countries, but too assertive an attitude may not be easily accepted. In particular I would expect a great interest in some of MECO-ECOTRA/SPERI's *thematic* networks like the healers/herbal medicine network.

Challenges

Gender equality

Gender equality seems to be a challenge for MECO-ECOTRA/SPERI. Women have played a dominant role in the foundation and continue playing a key role in the leadership of SPERI. According to the list of the present staff (excluding expatriate volunteers) 17 of 51 (33.33%) of the SPERI staff are women. This is commendable even though full gender balance has not yet been reached.

The situation is certainly less commendable when it comes to the sex of key farmers/trainers and FFS students. Only 9 out of the 34 teachers (most of whom are key farmers), on which the SPERI website (ffs.speri.org) provides a profile in Vietnamese, are women. This amounts to only 26.5%.

In the two FFS HEPA and Simacai combined, female students constitute 18.6% (18 out of 97 students). The share of female students is higher in Simacai (21.7%) than in HEPA (13.5%). The tables below provide more detailed figures.

Table 2: Sex of trainees at HEPA FFS

	Vietnamese			Lao		Total	%
	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2011	2007-2008	2010-2011		
Male	8	3	7	2	12	32	86.5
Female	1	1	1	0	2	5	13.5

	2005-2006	2007-2009	2010-2012	Total	%
Male	13	15	19	47	78.3
Female	7	2	4	13	21.7

Recommendation

Unequal participation of women in the key farmers network, as trainers and as students in FFS means not just an unequal treatment and of women, but also represents a missed for fully mobilizing and exploiting the potential of women leaders – young and old – for the benefit of the MECO-ECOTRA network.

It is therefore recommended that MECO-ECOTRA puts more effort into encouraging women to participate as leaders, resource persons and trainers (as key farmers) and to enroll in FFS.

Independence and sustainability of MECO-ECOTRA

The very strength of MECO-ECOTRA is the fact that most of its members as well as the leaders (key farmers) are grassroots people, genuine representatives of indigenous communities. The draw-back is that these people are engaged in daily livelihood, other occupational and leadership activities which make it difficult for them to take over the responsibility for coordination of a national and regional network. Many also lack one or the other of the required skills (language, use of modern communication technology).

At the same time, young indigenous farmers trained at FFS like HEPA show impressive knowledge, skills and confidence. They represent a potential that can be tapped for a future independent running of the MECO-ECOTRA network by the indigenous themselves.

To become independent MECO-ECOTRA however also needs an institutional set up with personnel, basic infrastructure and equipment. There are basically two options:

1. With modern communication technology this can be done in a decentralized manner and based on voluntarism. This is however risky. Experiences made by indigenous networks elsewhere in Asia with such a model have shown that the responsible focal persons tend to be too absorbed with work on the ground to which they give higher priority than work for the network.
2. The other option: a professional secretariat based in one of the member communities/local networks. However, this poses above all two challenges: a) the political and legal conditions which make it difficult for the network to legally register and operate and the reluctance of key farmers to host and assume responsibilities for a secretariat due to possible mistrust and interference by the government; b) the financial implications, above all the challenge of achieving financial sustainability.

Recommendation

A possible solution could be the institutional integration of the MECO-ECOTRA network coordination in HEPA. There are several factors that point at the feasibility of this solution:

- *HEPA has now capable young indigenous staff and the management of HEPA is now also being handed over to them.*
- *HEPA is already engaged in coordinating regional network activities. It should be possible to expand this to include coordination of MECO-ECOTRA, i.e. to assign one of the indigenous staff, or employ an additional indigenous staff, as coordinator of MECO-ECOTRA.*
- *HEPA is already legally registered (it has “its own stamp”).*

HEPA could therefore rather easily become the MECO-ECOTRA Office/Secretariat – instead of a SPERI office.

Being part of HEPA, or rather vice-versa HEPA being part of MECO-ECOTRA, the MECO-ECOTRA secretariat would have a better potential to become financially sustainable.

A combination of diverse funding sources could be considered:

1. *Modest membership fees (in cash and kind; mainly for strengthening the sense of ownership among members);*
2. *On-farm income generation*
 - a. *Become fully self-sufficient in food for the staff and trainees*
 - b. *Generate income from sale of NTFPs and farm products*
3. *Income from services*
 - a. *Course fees for short- and long-term courses for non-indigenous trainees from developed countries or with an otherwise wealthy background*
 - b. *Providing workshop facilities*
 - c. *Eco-tourism services for small group*
 - d. *Consultancy services, including consultancy and training services provided to government agencies*
4. *Government subsidies/payment for services*
 - a. *Remunerations for training, advise etc. to government extension services etc.*
 - b. *State support/subsidies may be a possibility in the distant*
5. *Donations from sympathetic persons, foundations etc. in the Mekong countries*

Achieving financial sustainability is challenging and foreign donors will most likely have to continue providing financial support for some more years. SPERI and MECO-ECOTRA should however try, and seek assistance, to develop a comprehensive funding strategy.

Regional networking

As discussed in the paragraph on regional networking and alliance building above, MECO-ECOTRA would face considerable challenges if it aimed at establishing itself on its own as a regional network with the same grassroots base it has built up in Vietnam. This would require considerable human and financial resources it would spread its resources too thinly if it attempted to start working in all these countries. This may however be neither necessary nor desirable since indigenous peoples' organizations already exist in these countries (except maybe China), some of which do have a solid grassroots base.

While there are already a number of indigenous peoples' organizations and supporting NGOs in Thailand and Cambodia and a good number are emerging in Myanmar, indigenous CSO are few and weak in Laos. In light of the enormous challenges indigenous communities are facing there in the wake of the government's granting of land concessions over much of indigenous community land and the

forced resettlement of indigenous communities there is an urgent need to strengthen their self-organization, representation and advocacy efforts.

In Vietnam, a strong key farmers network has emerged over the past 15 years covering nine provinces. There are however many more provinces in which indigenous peoples live, where they are facing severe challenges and where such a grassroots mobilization is very much needed.

Among indigenous communities all over the world there is much concern for the loss of traditional knowledge, and spirituality and healers are often the main holders of such knowledge. Healers, who are often also spiritual leaders, have come under increasing pressure not just because of modernization but also from Christian proselytizing. There is hardly any initiative addressing this problem.

Recommendations

Given the fact that Cambodia, Thailand and Myanmar already have indigenous peoples' organizations that are conducting advocacy, capacity building and awareness raising work, and given the fact that civil society is still very weak in Laos and that there is still a need for further strengthening indigenous CSO in Vietnam MECO-ECOTRA/SPERI/CHESH should define their priorities accordingly.

CHESH has started supporting the establishment of key farmers networks and has successfully cooperated with the Luang Prabang Hmong Association. Buttressed by the good relationship it has with government agencies, CHESH has a good potential for facilitating the formation of a national-level key farmers network comparable to that built up in Vietnam.

It is therefore recommended that MECO-COTRA/SPERI/CHESH uses its strategic position and focus grassroots networking efforts on Laos, as well as on Vietnam, where there is still scope and the need for consolidation and expansion.

Regional networking in the other Mekong countries should focus on strategic alliance building and exchange with the main purpose of serving and strengthening the key farmers networks in Vietnam and Laos. This may however include addressing trans-boundary issues for mutual benefit.

This recommendation is not meant to discourage MECO-ECOTRA to maintain and expand its existing regional network, but it should not happen at the expense of further consolidating and strengthening the networks in Laos and Vietnam. For regional networking it is recommended that MECO-ECOTRA focuses on specific thematic issues, i.e. expand one or the other of its thematic networks. In particular, an initiative bringing together healers and spiritual leaders under its herbal medicine/healers network would be unique and address a real need.

If MECO-ECOTRA seeks to build alliances with existing indigenous peoples, organizations and networks this should be done under the leadership of MECO-ECOTRA's key farmers/leaders. Non-indigenous SPERI/CHESH staff should at best play a facilitating role (like as interpreters) but to the extent possible remain in the background.

Expected Outcome 2: Recognition of Community-based Institutions in Forest Management

Outcome 2: Community Based Institutions in Forest Management in all project sites will be given legal recognition in forest.¹⁵

As already mentioned, SPERI changed its priorities for the program in response to new policy developments (Joint Circular 07) and emerging challenges (REDD+) and developed a new program document titled “Civil Society Network Action Towards Community Ownership of Forest, Land & REDD+: A Pilot Customary Law Based Programmatic Approach to Forest Land Allocation”. This document identifies three expected outcomes which are closely related to outcome 2 and 6 of the original MECO-ECOTRA program document. At least the first and second are more specific and can in fact be considered expected outputs and subsumed under outcome 2. The third outcome would fall more under outcome 6 of the original program document.

The evaluation has therefore taken the two expected outcomes of this document into consideration when assessing the level of achievements for the original expected outcome 2. They are:

1. Re-Clarifying & re- Mapping in 5 case studies will be produced
2. Community Ownership of Land & Forest will be given in pilot cases via the Joint Circular 07/2011/TTLTBNNPTNTBTNMT and Directive 1019/TTgĐMDN

The ToR for the evaluation requested the evaluation team to look into five issues that are directly linked to expected outcome 2 and the specific outcomes/outputs formulated in the updated program document:

1. Indicators for the integration of customary law and formal law
2. Indicators for the effectiveness of natural resource management by traditional community organizations
3. Indicators for changing attitudes of local authorities toward natural resource management by traditional community organizations
4. The area of forest land that was allocated to communities
5. The conflicts encountered, which parties were involved in the conflict, what their cause was and how the conflicts were resolved.

The presentation of the evaluation findings related to outcome 2 will therefore be structured according to these 5 questions.

Level of achievement of the expected outcome

Integration of customary law and formal law

Since the very beginning, SPERI has put a lot of emphasize not only on helping communities to obtain tenure security over their land and forest, but to do this through an approach that takes customary law regulating access to, rights over and the management of land and resources as a point of departure. Thus, SPERI has advocated for an approach in land allocation that is based on customary

¹⁵ The formulation of expected outcome 2 is also taken from the progress reports. In the original program document it is given as follows: “To have stronger Mekong regional legal recognition on Community Rights to Watershed Resources; and expansion of Community Institution in Forest Management”

law of the respective communities and participatory. The two are intricately connected: the former would not be possible without the latter.

In adopting such an approach the responsible government agencies at least implicitly recognize customary law and resource management practices. Therefore, the fact that forest land rights certificates (so-called “Red Books” in Vietnam) have been issued in the name of communities (and not individuals) in all three project sites (Lao Cai, Nghe An, Luang Prabang provinces) is not just an indicator for the recognition of communities as collective right holders, but, since it was done in accordance with the approach promoted by SPERI, an indicator for the recognition of the communities’ customary law.

Such recognition alone does not yet mean integration of customary and formal law in a formal or legal sense. There is however evidence that this has actually happened at local levels and that there are good prospects that it will eventually happen at national level.

In Lao Cai province, customary land and forest management practices are included in the Land Use Plans at district and province levels by the Office of Natural Resources and Environment and the Office of Forest Protection. Furthermore, the Provincial Department for Forestry and SPERI made plans to develop guidelines for community-based forest allocation and conflict resolution which would be applied to the whole province. It is also intended to help in the implementation of the PES schemes.

In Laos, the participatory land use planning and land allocation conducted in Long Lan in previous years set an important precedent. The ‘community regulations on natural resource management and land use practices of Long Lan based on the customary law of the Hmong’ were laid out in detail in a 22-page document the underwent several steps of discussions and revisions with a broad range of stakeholders. The Luang Prabang district authorities formally approved the document and with it the allocation of the community land in December 2005. The same approach was applied in the two neighboring villages Den Xa Vang and Phon Xa Vat during the present project phase and the two villages received the formal recognition and approval of the land allocation, their land use plan and the community regulations agreed on by the communities.

The provincial and district Agriculture and Forestry Offices and even a representative of the Ministry of Agriculture participated in pilot community-based LUP in Long Lan. The Luang Prabang provincial government is particularly keen on tapping customary conflict resolution successfully, applied under the leadership of the Luang Prabang Hmong Association in the three villages.

While recognition and integration of customary law in local land use plans and regulations is happening in some of the MECO-ECOTRA project areas, it is integration in national law which is required for full recognition – and protection – of customary law and practices in natural resource management of indigenous communities.

In Vietnam, the forest law of 2004 does recognize community forest management (see the respective article in annex 3) but the land law of 2003 does not clearly recognize communities as collective rights holders (even though this has been done in practice since many years already). Nor is there any explicit recognition and provision for legal harmonization of customary and statutory law in natural resource management. It remains to be seen whether the amended land law will contain any provision on community land rights and customary law and practices in land and resource management.

Effectiveness of natural resource management by traditional community organizations

The evaluation team came across ample evidence for the effectiveness of community-based natural resource management and forest conservation in the communities visited.

The existence of at least patches of old-growth forests (as observed in Lao Cai and Nghe An provinces) in Vietnam's otherwise largely degraded forest landscape is a result of the protection of these forests by customary law.

In Simacai district in Lao Cai province, the spirit forests and community forests are the only remaining stands of natural forests. These forests are only a few hectares large: for example, the 'Nao Long' spirit forest of Sin Cheng commune measures 4 ha, that of Can Ho commune 5 ha and that of Lung Sui commune 19 ha (see annex 4: Statistic of forestland allocation of SPERI). Certainly, many animal species (especially mammals and birds) must have gone extinct in the district since the remaining small and dispersed patches of forest did not provide a suitable habitat for sufficiently large populations of some species to survive in the long run. Still, these forests are critical for the preservation of what is left of the districts original biodiversity.



Nao Long spirit forest of Lung Sui commune, with roofed ritual site

It is remarkable that these forests survived the era of collectivization (1970s to 1990s) during which traditional belief and customs were branded backward and superstitious, and logging was done extensively, unsustainably and with not concern for biodiversity or the rights and interests of communities. That these forests, which play such an important role in the traditional spirituality of the Hmong communities, have been saved is an indicator for the strength of the customary institutions and laws, and the determination with which communities asserted them and therewith their control over the spirit forests.

Community forest management has also been effective in protecting and thus facilitating the regeneration of degraded forests once the communities were given the right to do that by the issuing forest land use certificates.

Pom Om, a Thai village in Han Dich commune, Que Phong District, Nghe An province, has been supported by SPERI to obtain a red book over 443 ha of forest land. The pilot forest land allocation to Pom Om, done in a participatory manner by the commune and district authorities, and the community

with support from SPERI, set a precedent in the province since it was the first community title so far issued there. The area has been logged before and the community has conducted a participatory land use zoning identifying the boundaries of the spirit forest, watershed forest, plantation forest (Acacia), herbal medicine forest, protected forest (allowing the regeneration of degraded forest), and pasture land. Management and conservation rules were formalized and a summary of the key rules are put on the large board with the land use zone map erected at the entrance of the village (see picture below).



Sign board with land use zones and summary of conservation rules in Pom Om village

The forest visible from the village appears to be in good condition and the elders, village leaders and healers interviewed confirmed that the quality of the forest has improved. According to them there is no logging going on in their forest.

In **Huong Son District, Ha Tinh province**, forests were heavily logged and overexploited from the 1970s to the 1990s. As in many other parts of the country, only barren hills remained. The situation became very critical especially for irrigation, and people (they all belong to the majority Kinh) took the initiative to try and protect the forest land and allow its regeneration. In 1996, 780 ha of largely barren hill (officially production forest) land was allocated to the canvassing board of a forest cooperative which was subsequently established and approved in 1998. Its main objectives were to protect and zone the forest land, and to do reforestation. The cooperative was very successful and the forest grew back. In 2001, TEW (SPERI's forerunner) supported the cooperative members in obtaining red books for production and protection forests land (each household received one lot each). The, by then, 30 member households decided to manage and conserve the protection forest jointly through the cooperative (relinquishing the individual red books to the cooperative and thus creating a de-facto community forest), while managing their production forest plots individually (each got 3 to 5 ha, now mostly planted with fast-growing Acacia for the local wood industry). The production forest plots along the foothills act like a buffer zone, successfully preventing encroachment on the upland protection forest. Cooperative leaders interviewed pointed out that awareness raising on, capacity building and technical support for forest conservation and land allocation by TEW was crucial for the changed

attitude of community members, their success in forest conservation and for obtaining land rights certificates. Many more households outside the cooperative received support from TEW for land allocation.

Today, Truong Son Forest Cooperative faces considerable challenges in conserving its protection forest since it borders Vu Quang National Park and a forest managed by the army, where a lot of illegal logging is happening. At the same time they are facing economic challenges since it is difficult to get loans for banks for investment in the production forest plots. Nevertheless, the cooperative is still able to protect its forest and they receive many visitors who come for a study tour. The cooperative leaders stressed that for them exchange on forest management was and is important.

Lon Lan community in Luang Prabang district and province in Laos is an outstanding example of an indigenous community's capacity to sustainably manage and conserve natural resources in its territory. Having received the district government's approval of the land allocation, its land use plan and its customary-law based regulations in 2005, it has since then faced several challenges in the form of encroachment by farmers from neighboring communities, by illegal logging, attempts for commercial exploitation of NTFP without the community's permission as well as the granting of a 50 ha land lease to an outsider for a coffee plantation within its territory by misguided leaders (who subsequently were replaced). Long Lan community has been able to deal with all these challenges due to the community's united stand behind the customary law-based regulations, its assertive action under the leadership of committed village authorities and traditional elders when violations were detected, and their support by the district authorities.

In neighboring Den Xa Vang and Phon Xa Vat, challenges are considerably bigger. Here, resources and above all land are scarcer and farmers are therefore more tempted – or forced – to clear land in areas designated as community forests. Furthermore, there are competing claims by families living outside the territory but who had earlier lived there. Despite an agreement reached with the help of the Luang Prabang Hmong Association, these families have again cleared land in the community forest this year. The village authorities, Hmong Association and the district government have however agreed not to tolerate this and take the necessary action.

These observations in the communities visited during the evaluation are supported by a vast body of literature, based on decades of research that has produced sufficient evidence for the effectiveness of community-based natural resource management. It is however vulnerable to external pressures (unsupportive or outright conflicting government policies, the weakening of customary institutions etc.) and does not always apply to all types of natural resource. For example, the regulation of hunting has proven very difficult in indigenous communities where many men are passionate hunters.

Attitudes of local authorities toward natural resource management by traditional community organizations

The evaluation team met representatives of local government of commune and district levels¹⁶ with which SPERI has closely cooperated, with some of them for many years. All of them were very supportive of community-based natural resource management and stressed the importance of SPERI (or its former member CIRD) and, in Laos, CHESH in making them aware of the importance of community-based forest conservation and in contributing critically (conceptually, technically and financially) to the piloting of participatory land allocation and land use planning.

There are ample indicators of changed attitudes among local governments in the project area: The willingness and even enthusiasm of local governments to cooperate with SPERI/CHESH, key farmers and communities in a participatory manner, demonstrated by the signing of MoU on forest allocation in Que Phong and Simacai districts, and the issuing of Red Books in Vietnam, the district government's

¹⁶ E.g. Cao Quang CPP in Quang Binh province, Han Dich CPP and Que Phon DPC in Nghe An province, Simacai DPP in Lao Cai province. See list of people met in annex2.

land allocation certificates in Laos, and above all the decision to expand the initiative to other communes or villages and the request for further support from SPERI and CHESH in both countries. Experience sharing by means of workshops and conferences organized by MECO-ECOTRA/SPERI in Vietnam is also likely to raise awareness and ultimately change the attitude of local governments in neighboring districts or at provincial levels. At least, district and provincial government representatives participating in these events have shown interest in the customary-law based participatory approach in land allocation.

In Laos, a wider sharing has so far not yet happened. However, the mayor of Luang Prabang district, Vongsavanh Thepphachanh, informed us during our meeting with him that he and the director of the Provincial Agriculture and Forest Office had agreed to invite all 12 district governments to a meeting in which CHESH can present the results of the past years' land allocation and LUP projects. District Agriculture and Forest Offices interested in this approach would then be invited for field visits.

The area of forest land allocated to communities

SPERI has an impressive record on support for forest land allocation. Since 1995, a total of 51,706.90 ha have been allocated to a total of 6,439 individuals and 36 community organizations.

Table 4: Total forestland areas and beneficiaries from forestland allocation supports of SPERI since 1995		
	Area (ha)	Total beneficiaries
Individual households	38,345.90	6,439
Community organizations	13,361	36
Total	51,706.90	

Not in all cases do communities prefer collective/communal titles. This depends on the existing land use practices and the corresponding customary law. The latter is changing as the conditions and thus land use change. For example, where shifting cultivation has been (forcefully) abandoned shifts in customary law regarding access to agricultural land are to be expected from communal ownership to individual ownership.

Preference for individual ownership over forest is preferred by the majority Kinh, among indigenous communities individual ownership is in most cases a result of government policies and it is very likely that the preferred option for forests is still communal ownership and management (see e.g. Sikor and Tan 2011, p.9ff).

Since SPERI adheres to a strictly participatory approach and puts a lot of emphasis on the recognition and strengthening of customary law as well as the culture and spirituality of the communities with whom they are working with it is very unlikely, and we found no evidence, that SPERI imposes or unknowingly promotes an approach that is not in line with the communities' preferences.

After the issuing of Joint Circular 07 and Directive 1019 of 2011, the need for the promotion of a participatory and customary-law based approach in land allocation was more urgent than even since the Directive asked for a speedy implementation of Joint Circular 07, i.e. the re-mapping of allocated land and the ironing-out of overlaps and other mistakes. SPERI therefore engaged with and collaborated with supportive local governments, with whom they have had long partnerships before, in piloting the participatory and customary-law based approach in land allocation.

The total area allocated during the present MECO-ECOTRA program phase (since 2010) amounts to 2,995.9 ha, allocated to 59 individuals and 5 community organizations (see table 2). For that purpose the land had to be (re-)surveyed, competing claims and conflicts had to be settled, and maps had to

be produced. All this was done in close cooperation with the technical staff from the relevant departments (Department of natural Resources and Environment, Department of Forestry) of district and commune governments. SPERI provided technical and financial support.

Table 5: Total forestland areas and beneficiaries from forestland allocation supports of SPERI since 2010		
	Area (ha)	Beneficiaries
Individual households	313.9	59
Community organizations	2,682	5
Total	2,995.9	

These land allocations happened in three locations in Laos and three locations in Vietnam. Details are given in table 3.

Table 6: Location of forest land allocated since 2010			
Location	Type of forest	Area (in ha)	Ethnic group
Pom Om village, Hanh Dich commune, Que Phong district, Nghe An province, Vietnam	Spiritual forest, herbal medicine forest, protected/watershed forest, productive forest	443	Thai
Ta Lung Sui village, Lung Sui commune, Si Ma Cai district, Lao Cai province, Vietnam	'Nao Long' spiritual / herbal forest	19	H'mong
Community forest of Den Xa Vang, Luang Prabang district and province, Laos	Spiritual forest, herbal medicine forest, protected/watershed forest, productive forest	1,005	Kho Mu, H'mong, Lao Lum
Community forest of Phon Xa Vat, Luang Prabang district and province, Laos	Spiritual forest, herbal medicine forest, protected/watershed forest, productive forest	815	Kho Mu, H'mong, Lao Lum
Community forest of Na Xam Phan, Luang Prabang district and province, Laos	Spiritual forest, herbal medicine forest, protected/watershed forest, productive forest	400	H'mong
	Total of forest land allocated to communities	2682	
Ta Lung Sui village, Lung Sui commune, Si Ma Cai district, Lao Cai province, Vietnam	Individual plots for forest land allocated to 59 individual households	319.9	H'mong



Po Om village and community forest

SPERI's main purpose in engaging in this initiative was however not just to help communities and households to get land rights certificates, but to test the participatory and customary-law based approach in practice and to promote its replication in the respective districts and beyond.

SPERI has been successful in this since both the Que Phong and the Simacai district governments have confirmed their intention to apply this approach in other communes. Lao Cai province plans to review all land and forest land allocation. There is already a budget for the review of agricultural land. It can therefore be expected that the land allocations conducted under the present MECO-ECOTRA program phase will have a multiplying effect and lead to further land allocation with a participatory customary-law based approach.

Furthermore, CIRD, which is now (again) part of SPERI, has started a land allocation program late in 2012, covering three villages in Lam Hoa commune, Tuyen Hoa district in Quang Binh province. The project is funded by Oxfam and includes land use planning and forest inventory.

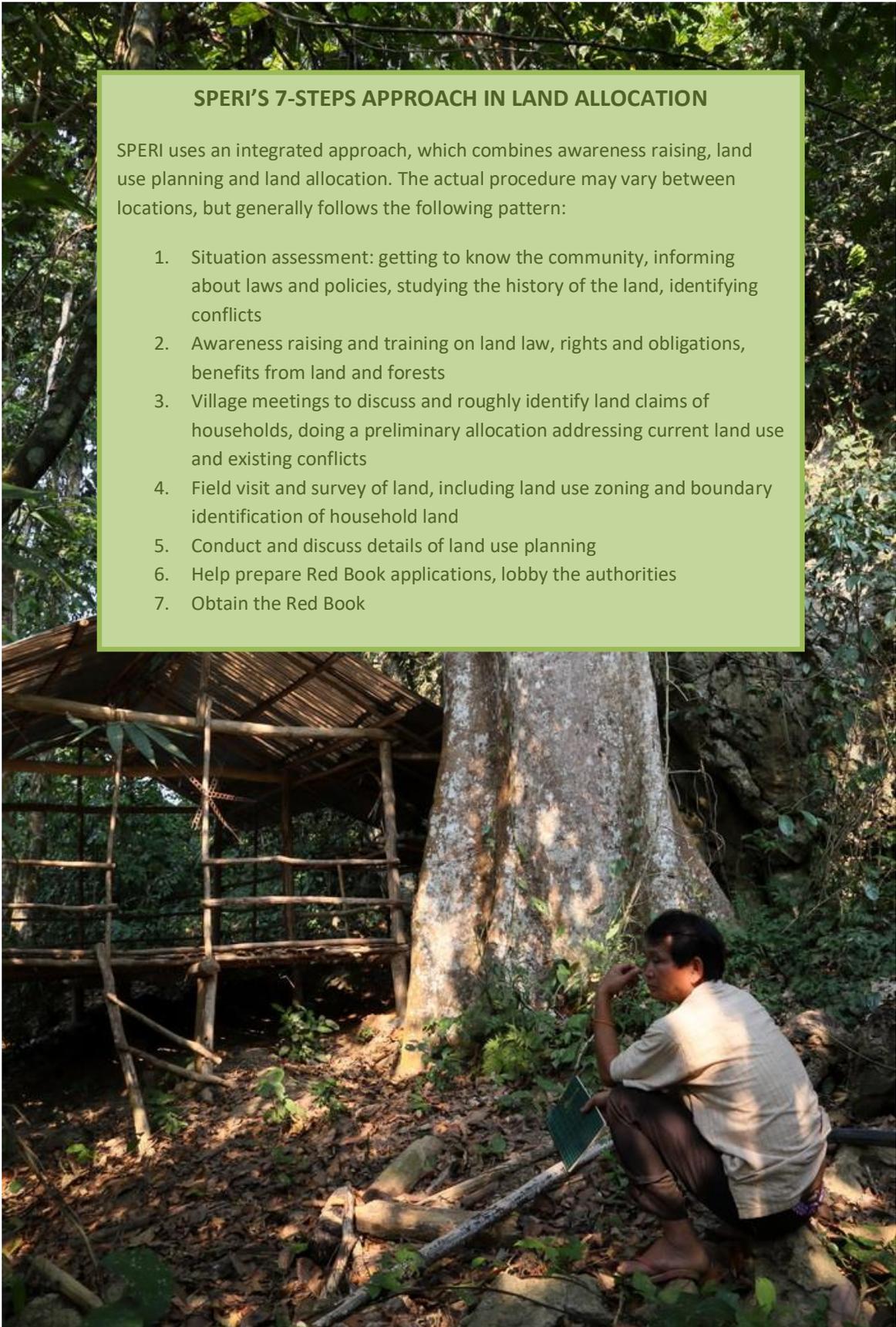
As briefly mentioned, a sharing on experiences in participatory land allocation is planned among all districts in Luang Prabang province in Laos. This is expected to encourage replication in some of these districts.

Interesting to note is that in Simacai district, during the pilot land allocation conducted in Lung Sui commune the Department of Forestry staff doing the survey were at the same time conducting a forest stock assessment. This was in preparation for PES schemes expected to be implemented in the near future since Lao Cai district has been identified a pilot province for PES. MECO-ECOTRA/SPERI are in a good position to monitor what will happen under that pilot PES program in Lao Cai, and to learn lessons on the implementation of PES schemes that can also be applied to REDD+.

SPERI'S 7-STEPS APPROACH IN LAND ALLOCATION

SPERI uses an integrated approach, which combines awareness raising, land use planning and land allocation. The actual procedure may vary between locations, but generally follows the following pattern:

1. Situation assessment: getting to know the community, informing about laws and policies, studying the history of the land, identifying conflicts
2. Awareness raising and training on land law, rights and obligations, benefits from land and forests
3. Village meetings to discuss and roughly identify land claims of households, doing a preliminary allocation addressing current land use and existing conflicts
4. Field visit and survey of land, including land use zoning and boundary identification of household land
5. Conduct and discuss details of land use planning
6. Help prepare Red Book applications, lobby the authorities
7. Obtain the Red Book



Spirit forest in Phon Xa Vat village

Individual or communal titles?

CHESH succeeded in creating a precedent in Laos when in 2005 the district government signed a document allocating 8,439 ha of forest and agricultural land to Long Lan community. It was the result of a participatory land use planning, boundary demarcation and conflict resolution process which was allegedly the first of its kind in Laos. Land allocation to communities has happened all over the country before but was done in a top-down manner, usually allocated far too little land to allow sustainable land use, and has been criticized to be more a tool for stopping shifting cultivation and resettlement, and keeping people out of the forest so that it can be put to other uses (officially for forest conservation).

This was followed by the issuing of such documents for Den Xa Vang and Phon Xa Vat. With 92 and 84 households respectively, these two communities are larger than Long Lan, but total land area allocated is much smaller. Most critical is agricultural land. While Long Lan has 1,723 ha of agricultural land for 67 households (and additional land cattle pastures), Den Xa Vang has only 289 ha for its 92 households (including 49 ha planted with teak) and Phon Xa Vang has 205 ha of agricultural land for its 84 households.

All households in Den Xa Vang and Phon Xa Vat have received what they call “Golden Papers” for their residential lots. These are transferable land rights certificates that can also be used as collaterals for loans. They also have “Yellow Papers” which recognize their right over agricultural land. On top of this comes the district government’s certificate recognizing the community’s right over all land and forest within the delineated boundary, the land use zoning and planning, and the corresponding customary-law based regulations.



Village chief of Den Xa Vang explaining the different land right certificates

When asked whether they feel secure with the papers they have received from the government, people in Phon Xa Vat were of the opinion that they would like to have “Golden Papers” for all their agricultural land because only these can be used for obtaining loans. At the same time it turned out that many villagers have actually already lost the land planted with teak as a result of debts. Obviously,

people did not make the connection between the right to sell land (or use it as collateral) and the risk of losing it as a result of the inability to pay back debts. And they did not seem to understand that the issuing of a communal land rights certificate would, which gives the community the right to regulate land use, also implies that it can adopt rules prohibiting land sale to outsiders. Exactly this has been done in Long Lan. There, some households have been given individual land rights certificates in an area at its northwestern border. Even though these households have the right over these plots of land, the community prohibited their sale to outsiders.

The problem of land loss among poor farmers who have been issued individual land rights is widely recognized. Thailand has made this experience with the so-called *Sor Por Kor 4-01* land reform, in which Sor Por Kor titles for agricultural land were given to poor farmers, partly as a strategy to prevent further encroachment on public forest land. It was however soon realized that these poor farmers were not able to hold on to their land and most of it ended in the hands of rich people.¹⁷ In an alternative approach, the Thai government is now experimenting with the issuing of titles given to whole communities.¹⁸

Conflicts and conflict resolution

As SPERI predicted, conflicts emerged in Vietnam in the process of re-surveying allocated land, either due to the mistakes done earlier, or due to competing claims.

In Hanh Dich commune, Que Phong district, a rubber plantation company claimed an area of 2000 ha and thus much of the community land of Phom Om village, which the project wanted to support in obtaining a red book. A decision by the PPC has already approved the company's claim. The village itself was not aware of the threat, but the commune officials have realized that this competing claim might lead to conflict and approached the district on the matter. In the ensuing tug-of-war between the district and province the former ultimately prevailed and was able to convince the PPC that the community's rights should prevail and a corresponding reduction of the area allocated to the company was necessary. In the end, the size of the company land was reduced to 700 ha, and Pom Om village obtained a red book over its 443 ha community forest. At the time of the field visit, the company hadn't received the red book yet.

In Simacai district, the conflicts that emerged in the process of land allocation were of an entirely different nature. While SPERI originally intended to support forest land allocation to communities, it turned out that, aside from the spirit forests, forest land had already earlier been allocated to households. In accordance with Joint Circular 07, the district was mandated to re-survey and re-map the allocated land and correct earlier mistakes. So SPERI decided to support not just the allocation of communal rights over spirit forests, but the process of re-mapping the individual forest land in a participatory manner as well. It turned out that indeed, there were a lot of errors resulting in overlaps of boundaries. So a lot of effort was needed to resolve the competing claims and conflicts, for which SPERI's participatory approach proved to be invaluable. Eventually, all conflicts were resolved, the correct maps made and the Red Books issued.

Most remarkable were CHESH's achievements in conflict resolution in Laos. Conflicts emerged over boundaries with some of Long Lan's 12 neighboring villages during the land allocation and LUP process. When a settlement was not reached in direct negotiations it was referred to the sub-district level

¹⁷ The ensuing scandal toppled the Democrat-led government in 1984.

<http://www.bangkokpost.com/learning/learning-from-news/198971/first-community-deeds-issued-in-thailand-land-reform-program>

¹⁸ The same rationale is behind the protective discrimination policies applied to the so-called tribal areas (identified in the 5th and 6th Schedule of the Constitution) in India. There, no land owned by tribals can be bought by non-tribals. This policy has been developed by the British and has been continued with by independent India until today.

group of village heads. Eventually, a solution was reached. However, as briefly mentioned earlier, there have been cases of violations since then but Long Lan community was able to handle them well.

Conflict resolution in Den Xa Vang and Phon Xa Vat proved much more challenging. There, the cooperation with the Luang Prabang Hmong Association was crucial in bringing about a solution. There were existing conflicts within the communities as a result of the resettlement of households from communities that were forcefully dissolved as part of the government’s policy of consolidation of small villages into large ones and the resettlement of remote villages to areas closer to the lowlands or existing infrastructure. The forced merging of communities lead to scarcity of land above all among the resettled households. Tensions and conflicts also emerged as neighboring villages were asked to part with some of their land and hand it over to the resettled families. The main conflict however was with a group of Hmong families that used to live at the headwaters of the territories of the two villages (the majority of the people in both villages are Khmu). The Hmong families moved there around 1975 but were forcefully resettled in 1995. They were asked to join Phon Xa Vat but refused and most moved to a village at the outskirts of Luang Prabang city. Later, they managed to obtain a pasture land concession over a grassland area on their former land. However they also cultivated land outside the concession area, claiming that this was their old village land. The concession and the land cultivated by them however lies in the protected community forest of the two villages, which is critical for maintaining the drinking water source for both of them. The land allocation to Den Xa Vang and Phon Xa Vat conflicted with these families’ claim over their former village land and they continued to ignore the decisions by both the village authorities and the district. The Luang Prabang Hmong Association was able to mediate and bring about an agreement, in which these families accepted the rights of the two villages over the land. The district authorities showed much appreciation of the role of the Hmong Association and it is very likely that all this has contributed to better relationship between the Hmong Association and the authorities in general.



Xay Xua Ly Her, Chairman of the Luang Prabang Hmong Association explaining the conflict resolution process

CHESH chose to start working in Den Xa Vang and Phon Xa Vat precisely because of the complex and difficult situation there. The situation and conflicts are typical for a large number of villages all over Laos and are a result of the much-criticized but still ongoing program of forced resettlement and village consolidation. Different communities, often belonging to different ethnic groups and thus different social organization, culture and customary laws, are forced to live together on areas much too small to ensure sustainable and decent livelihoods.

Aid agencies considering working in these villages are confronted with a dilemma: While these villages are facing not only severe economic hardship but also deteriorating health conditions and lack of infrastructure and services, they would implicitly endorse, and provide tacit support to the government's controversial resettlement program. Furthermore, involuntary resettlement as conducted by the Lao government represents a violation of fundamental human rights. Among these instrument, which the Lao government has signed (but not always ratified) are: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights or the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which guarantee the right to freedom of movement; the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (since the resettlement program targets almost exclusively indigenous communities) and of course the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples which mandates states to respect indigenous peoples' right to Free and Prior Informed Consent on any outside intervention in their lands and territories and which also explicitly refers to involuntary settlement.

Of course, CHESH also faces this dilemma. In its project documents it does refer to resettlement but does not really discuss it, nor the dilemma it poses when working with a rights-based approach to development as SPERI/CHESH do. This does not mean that they are not critical of the Lao government's resettlement program. In the needs assessment conducted in Den Xa Vang and Phon Xa Vat in 2009, problems caused by resettlement have been identified. However, its critique appears to be limited to pointing out shortcomings in implementations¹⁹ and does not raise more fundamental questions regarding the purpose, reason, legal and ethical base of the resettlement program.

The Lao government is however extremely sensitive to outside critique, and especially critique of the resettlement program. It has so far stubbornly refused to reconsider its position despite much evidence, produced in a number of in-depth studies, of the devastating impact of the resettlement program on the people affected. CHESH and SPERI have chosen to be pragmatic and refrain from being too overtly critical, in order to be able to continue working in Laos.

Challenges

Replication and Mainstreaming

District governments in the project areas are ready to expand forest land allocation with a participatory and customary-law based approach to other communes, and there are prospects that this will be further expanded to other districts in the respective provinces. The local governments request SPERI's support. But there is a need for replication of the approach all over the country and SPERI, despite its highly committed, capable and hard-working staff does not have the capacity to do this alone.

SEPRI is not the only organization that has successfully supported forest land allocation to communities – as opposed to allocation to individual households, which the government has preferred and which was much easier to do. While the latter is more appropriate for and actually often preferred

¹⁹ “[] resettlements, merging villages, land allocation implementation and other intervention programs have not taken well thorough study, analysis of community in terms of psychology, beliefs, livelihoods and their other concern such as health and education. That caused crisis of community belief, daily livelihood, and healthcare. Resettlement and merging villages particularly resulted in land overlapping and conflict between moving resettled villagers []” SPERI/CHEH 2009, p.10

by the Kinh, indigenous communities often prefer communal ownership of forests. This has also been realized by others, like the German GTZ and RECOFTC (see e.g. Sikor and Tan 2011, p.9ff). In fact, GTZ has supported forest land allocation to communities (and thus the issuing of Red Book Certificates) all over the country. It has done that in Dak Lak province in the Central Highlands as early as 2000/2001. Furthermore, research has been conducted by RECOFTC and other organizations and individuals on land allocation, and in particular on post-allocation control and related issues, that have produced insights that are very valuable for SPERI/MECO-ECOTRA.²⁰

In light of the existence of a considerable number of precedent cases all over the country, local and international NGOs in Vietnam who have so far been reluctant to work on this sometimes rather sensitive issue might be willing to do that now. So far, SPERI has preferred not to work with any international NGOs or bilateral donor agencies, and confined its cooperation with Vietnamese CSOs to the rather small circle of close partner NGOs, some of which were formed as part of SPERI's (or, formerly, TEW's or CHESH's) overall strategy. SPERI's (and its predecessors') non-engagement with local NGOs beyond this circle has been criticized, has by some even seen as a sign of arrogance.

Even though SPERI has had good reasons not to use time and resources on engagements that were considered not useful for their cause and thus not worth the effort, and since it was indeed prudent for SPERI to keep a low profile in a politically highly sensitive environment, the situation may have sufficiently changed now. So SPERI might be well advised to re-assess the organizational landscape and the potentials for strategic alliances and cooperation in order to bring about the desired expansion of community forest land allocation.

Likewise, in Laos, CHESH has so far had very limited interaction with INGOs, bilateral and other development agencies on land allocation and NRM and therefore may miss opportunities for mutually beneficial sharing and cooperation.

As local governments are becoming more open to forest land allocation to communities, the limited capacities will present a bottleneck for rapid replication. As a senior advisor of SPERI (former director of the Land Department) has observed, the professional capacity of SPERI is considerably better than that of the government agencies he knows of. This is above all the case in working at the grassroots level, with indigenous communities. The same observation has been made by others. And SPERI is not the only Vietnamese CSO that has built up a respectable level of professionalism. Thus, as one of the interviewees has pointed out, cooperation between government agencies and Vietnamese CSOs has a great potential for up-scaling forest land allocation and other support for indigenous communities. For that a better enabling policy environment is needed than what is found at the moment in Vietnam. SPERI should consider to jointly advocate with other VNGOs for such an improved enabling environment for VCSO and government cooperation.

Recommendation

SPERI should re-assess and consider revising its strategy on collaboration with VCSOs, INGOs, bilateral and multilateral donors in order to more effectively promote up-scaling and mainstreaming of its participatory and customary-law based approach to FLA to communities.

²⁰ Nguyen Quang Tan 2003 and 2005; Nguyen Quang Tan, Thanh Ngoc Tran, Tuan Huy Hoan 2008a + b

Post allocation issues

Communities which have obtained the right over extensive natural forests are facing the challenge of asserting their rights and control over their forests. The ability to prevent outside encroachment has been identified as a key precondition for the functioning of community-based management of communal resources.²¹ For that state support for law enforcement can be critical. Furthermore, communities need to be able to derive sufficient benefits from large natural forests to pay off for conservation efforts. This may include the right to harvest and sell not only NTFP but also timber, to the extent existing forest stocks allow. Where communities are not able to prevent external violators due lack of support from authorities for enforcement, or where they are not able to legally obtain sufficient economic gains due to bureaucratic or legal obstacles, community management and conservation regimes may eventually break down as people revert to an attitude of “taking as much as they can before other do”. It is therefore indispensable to advocate for and support post-allocation assertion and implementation of community rights over forests and natural resources found therein.

In general, conservation needs to be complemented with livelihood security. SPERI’s human-ecology approach, which promotes seeking a balance between humans and nature, provides the general framework for doing that. SPERI’s tries to do this in practice by inter-linking CBFM, eco-farming (FFS) and eco-trading.

Putting eco-farming into practice is fairly easy in a context where land and resources are plentiful and farmers are practicing traditional low-input farming. It can however be extremely challenging in a situation such as in Simacai district, where resources are scarce, people are poor and already caught in a cycle of dependence on external farm inputs (agrochemicals, high yielding seed varieties) once they adopted conventional farming. The transition from conventional to eco-farming is very difficult for poor farmers who do not have any possibility to compensate for temporary drops in farm productivity. The transition from high-input conventional farming, which implies among others the restoration of severely abused and degraded soils, is also technically challenging and cannot be easily accomplished without knowledge that may go beyond what FFS students learn. Thus, change to eco-farming may not be possible without support and specific advice even for graduates of FFS. It therefore did not come as a surprise to learn that even FFS graduates in Simacai continue with conventional farming and apply eco-farming methods only to a rather modest extent.

Furthermore, people interviewed in all areas visited stressed the need to be able to sell farm products and NTFP on the market. While SPERI’s recent priority shift to land allocation and land rights policy advocacy was the right decision in the current situation (Joint Circular 07 and the revision of the land law) SPERI should soon resume its planned strengthening of the marketing component of the MECO-ECOTRA program.

SPERI may however not (yet) have the expertise for developing this program, and even when it does it would be prudent to seek cooperation with organizations (VNGOs, INGOs like RECOF-TC) who are engaged in this and who have developed that expertise already.

²¹ There is a vast body of literature on this, usually revolving around the concept of the commons. See e.g. classics like McCay and Acheson 1987. Plenty of sources can be found on the web-site of the International Association for the Study of the Commons: <http://www.iasc-commons.org/>



Intensively used uplands in Simacai District, Lao Cai province

Recommendations

MECO-ECOTRA/SPERI should closely monitor the post-allocation situation in communities and try to address the specific challenges through:

Advocacy and support for post-allocation assertion and implementation of community rights over forests and natural resources found therein;

Providing technical advice and support to develop practical solutions for the transition from highly unsustainable conventional farming practices to eco-farming.

SPERI should soon resume and strengthen the component “community-based ecological enterprise” of the MECO-ECOTRA program and actively seek partnership with organizations that have developed expertise in this.

Expected Outcome 6: Policy advocacy

Outcome 6: The discourses between- MECO-ECOTRA and local policy makers is willfulness, consciousness and sharing social – culturally and politically correct. In the other words, the local policies making process is participatory, transparency, taking into account local norms and custom, and happily accepted by the two sides.

The formulation of this outcome is taken from the progress reports 2010-2011. Outcome 6 is not reported on in the progress report for 2012. The formulation differs from the original formulation in the MECO-ECOTRA program document 2010-2013, which states: “Outcome 6: To have stronger Mekong regional civil society discourse”. The reformulation reflects a narrowing of the focus to advocacy at the local level, at the expense of a regional discourse.

Level of achievement of the expected outcome

Ever since, SPERI has conducted policy dialogues, advocacy and lobbying based on an approach that **facilitates the expression of the voice of local people**, their concerns and customary ways of natural resource management.

Key farmers are actively involved in SPERI/MECO-ECOTRA’s advocacy work at all levels in a nested approach: they are engaging with government agencies at local levels (commune and districts), some of them are involved at the provincial levels and a few are active at national level (like the small group now jointly working with advisers and SPERI staff on the revision of the land law).

This approach is combined with an engagement of sympathetic local government officials who raise issues at higher (provincial or national) levels, the media for public awareness raising and expert advice from eminent personalities. SPERI itself tries to stay in the background as much as possible. In workshops and conferences its name often does not appear as one of the organizers even though it may have actually done most of practical work.

SPERI has shown a remarkable cultural and political sensitivity and thereby managed to create a constructive atmosphere for dialogue and cooperation. Over the past two years, advocacy focused on the recognition of customary law and practices in NRM and the promotion of a participatory and customary-law based approach in land allocation. This has occurred at the local level (commune, district, provinces) in connection with the implementation of Joint Circular 07 and Directive 1019 of 2011, and at national level in the context of the presently ongoing revision of the land law of 2003.

As discussed in the previous chapter, SPERI has been successful in gaining the support and cooperation of **local governments** in the implementation of pilot land allocations based on its participatory and customary-law-based approach. Local government partners also co-organized and actively participated in workshops and conferences that aimed at sharing experiences within and between provinces, to advocate the replication of this approach and to advocate for inclusion of community land rights in the new land law.



SPERI staff in a meeting with government officials of Simacai District, Lao Cai province

Among the larger local and national advocacy events in which local government officials, key farmers and experts advisers were involved are: The conference: "assessing the situation on forest management and solutions for the pilot allocation in Simacai district, Lao Cai province" in August 2011; the seminar on "Community-based Forest Land allocation" in Simacai district in September; talks between relevant parties on the implementation of the forest land allocation program stage 2 in Lung Sui, Simacai, in March 2012; the workshop "Community Forest Management: Policy and Practice" in Vinh, Nghe An in October 2012; the workshop "Management and land use in mountainous ethnic minority communities" in Hanoi in November 2012 (see also annex 5: List of study tours, workshop, seminars between 2010 – 2013).

SPERI's, or rather its predecessors TEW and CHESH's earlier lobby work has apparently been critical for the adoption of a provision in the Land Law 2003 which ensures that women's names are included along with their husbands' as equal co-holders of land title certificates, as well as the inclusion of article 29 on community forest rights in the forest law of 2004 (see annex 3).

In Laos, CHESH cooperates very closely with the government. The rather unique partnership started in 1999 when CHESH agreed to work with the Project for Rural Development of Focus Areas (PRDFA) of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. At present it partners with the Luang Prabang Provincial Department of Agriculture and Forestry Office (PAFO). Despite being formally very closely linked to a government agency, CHESH appears to have considerable space to put its ideas into practice. According to CHESH, an important factor enabling smooth cooperation with the Lao government is the fact that it is a Vietnamese organization. There have been close relationships between the two countries over the past decades. Apparently, CHESH is also often, though erroneously, considered a government agency, which further contributes to the level of trust which other foreign development agencies hardly ever enjoy. This allows CHESH to pioneer ideas and above all participatory approaches in a political and administrative system that is extremely top-down and does not encourage critical – and thus creative – thinking.

SPERI has developed a close partnership with the **media**, in particular the Literature Review newspaper, the Online Newspaper of the Communist Party of Vietnam, Vietnam Television (VTV, the national television broadcaster for Vietnam), and Vietnam Television Corporation (VTC, a large multimedia corporation in Vietnam founded by VTV).

Journalists working for these media are regularly documenting events organized by SPERI/MECO-ECOTRA, are publishing and broadcasting on issues raised by SPERI/MECO-ECOTRA and above all local people and local governments during these events or during field visits. SPERI has also produced an impressive number of video documentations (at least 49 since 2007, according to a list received from SPERI, which means an average of 8 per year), many of which have been broadcast by the TV stations and put on the web-site of the Online Newspaper of the Communist Party of Vietnam (as well as its own web-site).

The cooperation with the Online Newspaper of the Communist Party of Vietnam is of particular strategic importance. SPERI's issues and concerns are regularly covered, its videos are uploaded and even SPERI's logo is found on the home-page. Given the fact that the Communist Party is ruling the country, having one's views and perspectives published on this web-site of course implies an endorsement by the most powerful institution in the country.

The other crucial alliance in SPERI's advocacy is the **advice and support of a number of eminent personalities**, people who are or have been in high positions in the government and party. These allies not only provide invaluable technical and political advice on the often sensitive issues SPERI is working on, but also provide a certain level protection.

SPERI's advocacy strategy has over the years, and again during the past two years of the MECO-ECOTRA program delivered results. As already discussed in the previous chapter, SPERI's advocacy efforts lead to a change of attitude among local governments toward customary practices in NRM and the adoption of a participatory and customary-law based approach and a fruitful cooperation with CSO (SPERI) in FLA.

At the national level, during the time of the evaluation trip to Vietnam, a group of key farmers and advisers were intensively working with SPERI staff on inputs and recommendations for the revision of the land law. The draft amended law has been published in a newspaper and the public was invited to submit comments. SPERI's comments and recommendations are presently being discussed in meetings at provincial levels, are going to be channeled to the working group drafting the amendments to the land law, and made known to the public through the media. Through all this SPERI/MECO-ECOTRA hopes to be able to influence decision makers in charge of the revision of the land law and members of the National Assembly who will gather and vote on the law in May.

In sum, through its engagement with key government agencies and institutes, personal advisers and the media, and the organizing of workshops and conferences SPERI has been able to bring key issue of concern of indigenous communities related to forest land allocation from the local to the national level and to the attention of key decision makers.

When I was working for the government I had many ideas that I could not realize. But now, that I am working with SPERI, I can do that.

Mr. Ton Gia Huyền, senior adviser, former director of the Land Department



Seeking help from a senior adviser on the revision of the land law.

Challenges

Having good laws is certainly crucial, but no law is of any use if it is not properly implemented. The lack of implementation and enforcement of the law is a serious problem in many countries where progressive legislation for the protection of the rights of indigenous peoples exists, like in the Philippines or India. Indigenous peoples in Vietnam are facing the same challenge, and will continue to do so also with a new land law that fulfills all their aspirations (which is far from certain to happen). Even with the already existing law much could be achieved if it was only implemented in letter and spirit. This means that advocacy needs to continue and stepped up to push for proper implementation of the law. SPERI alone will not be able to do that.

Recommendation

In light of the present and, to be expected, future implementation gap in laws and policies SPERI/MECO-ECOTRA should consider to broaden its alliance and seek cooperation with VNGOs, INGOs, bilateral and multilateral development agencies to push for and support better implementation of existing (and future) laws and policies.

Advocacy in Laos and the potential role of the Hmong Association and the planned Farmers Field School in Long Lan

As already pointed out earlier, there is an urgent need for strengthening CSO and indigenous rights advocacy in Laos, and MECO-COTRA/SPERI/CHESH are in a unique position to do that. This potential lies not only in CHESH's expertise, the close partnership with the government and the level of trust that have been developed over the past 14 years. There are two additional factors that represent a considerable asset: the existence of the Luang Prabang Hmong Association with its 1038 member families and a total of 7468 individual members, all from Luan Prabang Province.

Until 2009, the Hmong Association was registered under the Fatherland Front, now it is under the Ministry of Defense and Home Affairs. This may be taken as an indicator for how serious – both positively and negatively – the Hmong Association is taken by the government. In any case, it is well respected and, as described earlier, has played a critical role in conflict resolution related to land allocation and land use planning, for which the government showed a lot of appreciation.

The Hmong Association could be promoted as a model for the formation of similar ethnic-based networks. Stressing their cultural and customary-law dimension and making the link to community-based NRM would make also them more acceptable to the government. Such ethnic-based networks would above all be needed for the weaker indigenous peoples', usually those belonging to the Austroasiatic linguistic family earlier classified as "Lao Theung".

Long Lan has set a precedent in Laung Prabang province, and probably the whole of Laos since a rather small community of presently 67 households has been given the use and management rights over an area of more than 8000 ha of farmland and forest. SPERI/CHESH plan to promote it as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, which would give it additional protection. Considered by SPERI/CHESH an Eco-Village, Long Lan has not only successfully served as a model for the promotion of a participatory and customary-law based approach in land allocation within the districts, it has drawn considerable attention due to the successful management and conservation of forest and biodiversity while providing people a decent livelihood base.

Recommendation

Even if the condition in Long Lan are much more favorable than this may be the case in many other communities elsewhere in the country, it does show and prove what is possible if a conducive policy and administrative environment is created. SPERI/CHESH's plan to establish Long Lan as a FFS would allow to make even better use of this pilot initiative in advocacy for a replication of the approach, and a stronger recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples to their land and resources and their contribution to sustainable management natural resources and biodiversity conservation.

It is recommended that the FFS is established in Long Lan and that it is linked to and becomes part of a new and comprehensive advocacy strategy for Laos that CHESH/SPERI should develop.

Project organization and implementation, and the capacity of SPERI

The assessment of the way the project was organized and implemented was done by means of seven criteria identified in the ToR.

1. Level of involvement and participation of partners and MECO-ECOTRA in project design and implementation

Participation in planning and decision making within MECO-ECOTRA has already been discussed. To sum up, it was found that generally, key farmers are involved in discussions and decide on overall goals and priorities as well as main activities. Due to time constraints full participation in the final

development of a program document appears to be limited, at least in the presently ongoing drafting of the program document. Key farmers are actively involved in supervision of project implementation on the ground

2. Managerial and technical expertise

SPERI has a team with a high level of technical and managerial expertise. This has been pointed out by several of its partners during the evaluation, including government officials and senior advisers. An indicator for the high level of professionalism among SPERI's staff is the fact that many staff trained by SPERI have been recruited by INGOs. Having worked for SPERI is considered an endorsement. This has of course negative consequences for SPERI because it spends much time and effort for building up the capacity of its staff, but loses them to organizations that are able to pay higher salaries. A list of past staff compiled by SPERI reveals that between 1997 and 2008 a total of 79 staff have worked with but then left SPERI and its predecessors TEW/CHESH! This is a turn-over of way over 150% with reference to the present number of staff (51), which is higher than in previous years.

SPERI invest considerably in continuing education and capacity building of its staff, and it put particular emphasis on training indigenous youth (like graduates from its FFS) to become SPERI staff. Two of its senior staff members are currently studying in universities in New Zealand and Australia. This will contribute further to the professionalization of SPERI.

As a result of the high turn-over of staff is that SPERI has apparently a problem of building up second-liners. Most of the senior staff have been there almost since the beginning. They are bearing most of the responsibility for research, program development, overseeing, monitoring and reporting on implementation, and the overall management. When more than one of this handful of people is tied down with other commitments, the implementation of planned activities gets delayed or has to be put on hold. This is very much the case at the moment as four of the senior staff conducting advanced studies.

Over-ambition as well as internal dynamics in the organization have been mentioned as a possible other reasons why some of the planned activities could not be carried out. For example, the actual cooperation with the Regional Centre for Social Science and Sustainable Development (RCSD) in Thailand has not been as effective as intended. SPERI has signed several MoU with RCSD on cooperation in research, exchange and training, but not all the plans were realized. This was partly due to lack of funding, but apparently partly also due to the fact that SPERI sometimes has too many initiatives ongoing but not sufficient senior staff to see them through, and SPERI's senior staff, already busy in other work, are reluctant to hand over responsibility to others.

3. The capacity to respond to unexpected events and circumstances

The need to be flexible and respond to unexpected events has also been discussed already earlier. In general, SPERI has shown to be very flexible and able to make use of not only its knowledge and experience but also its extensive network of contacts to respond to unexpected events. It was able to navigate through times of crisis with a remarkable flexibility and resilience

4. The monitoring and evaluation system

SPERI does regular monitoring and back-stopping by a group of senior staff in cooperation with field-based coordinators and key farmers. The close connection of SPERI to communities is one of the strengths of SPERI. This is not just confined to the field staff but also to the senior staff who are very often traveling to visit field sites and to monitor and provide advice and support to activities.

Both internal and external evaluations are done in response to its own needs and donor requirements. It was not possible for the evaluation team to go into detail with respect to the methodology applied, or to make an assessment of the quality of previous evaluations.

5. Fund raising

SPERI was able to diversify its funding sources by entering into partnership with three new donors who are committed to a long-term cooperation.

The problem for SPERI however is that each so far it had to do separate reporting and accounting for each donor, who have different formats and requirements. This is very time consuming. I was told that donors agreed to accept a common annual report and common audited accounts. This is very commendable.

6. To what level has SPERI shifted from a coordinating role to an advisory one?

SPERI is well on its way to achieve this goal it has decentralized coordination and management and handed over responsibilities over FFS to graduates (who have become staff) and key farmers. As discussed earlier, it will however take time, the creation necessary institutional set-up and a funding strategy to make the MECO-ECOTRA network fully independent.

7. Strengths and limitations of the relationship between Donor Organization Project Officers (POs) and SPERI

There are indicators that the relationship with the Vietnam-based Project Officer is not as SPERI would like to see it. Communication is not smooth (long delays in response), and the PO makes too many demands for explanations the reason for which are difficult to see and not considered constructive and supportive. According to SPERI, many of the issues raised by the PO had already been discussed and settled with ICCO long ago. To them, bringing them up again was an expression of lack of trust, and strained the relationship between ICCO and SPERI.

SPERI welcomed ICCO's decision to decentralize and hand over responsibilities to regional and national coordinators. However, they feel there is a need for supervision and monitoring on the part of the donor and a regular participatory assessment in the spirit of the intended partnership and co-responsibility.

Recommendations

While SPERI's attempt to address the needs of indigenous communities in a holistic manner, and to expand its work in the region is commendable, there is the danger to spread itself too thinly and that some initiatives cannot be fully implemented. Related to this is the problem of senior staff taking over too many responsibilities. It is therefore recommended that SPERI tries to strike a better balance between human resources and planned activities, and to put extra effort into building up second-liners to the senior staff.

While the decentralization of program implementation by donors like ICCO is appreciated, there is a need for better supervision of national coordinators. A periodic participatory assessment should be considered.

C. Project Efficiency

A thorough assessment of the efficiency of the use of funds in the implementation of the MECO-ECOTRA program would require, among others, a detailed scrutiny of expenditures given in financial accounts, their comparison with similar programs in the same regions of the respective countries and under consideration of standard salary costs, prices of goods and services etc., all of which is beyond the scope of this evaluation.

In order to obtain at least a general impression on the efficiency of use of funds, three selected annual accounts were examined in order to calculate the proportion of salary costs and direct program implementation costs, the proportion of salary costs for program staff and administrative staff. A high proportion of salary costs as compared to direct implementation costs, and a high proportion of administrative salary costs in the overall salary costs would be considered an indicator for a not very efficient use of funds.

The accounts examined showed that salary costs ranged between 21 and 28.7%, and the program implementation costs a corresponding 79 and 71.3%. This can be considered an acceptable proportion.

The share of administration in the salary costs ranged from 31 to 53%, that of the program staff from a corresponding 69 to 47%. I consider the lower range for administrative salary costs acceptable. The higher range looks unusually high. However, I have to emphasize again that this is a very superficial assessment based on the examination of only three annual accounts. The high proportion appears to be exceptional and could probably be explained.

Salaries ranged from around 200 USD per month for junior administrative staff to about 780 USD for senior staff. Given the current living costs in Vietnam and Laos, especially in urban centers like Hanoi, these are rather modest salary levels.

The costs of a few individual activities also showed that SPERI/CHESH operate with rather modest budgets. A local workshop with 60 participants in Laos, for example, was held for a mere 660 USD. Study visits inside the country for 5 people that involved considerable travels were conducted for around 700 USD. The annual budget for 10 HEPA students from Laos was only a little over 12,000 USD, which means a modest 100 USD per month. This may however not include all costs (like costs for teachers, travels etc.). A budget requested for the total costs for a student at HEPA (including insurance, food and accommodation, tuition fees, materials etc.) came up with an estimate of 3,400 USD for 12 months. This is still a very modest amount.

To conclude, my, admittedly rather superficial examinations confirmed that SPERI/CHESH are trying their best to make the best use of available financial resources.

D. Impact

Building on achievements and the capacities built up over the years, the past three years of implementation of the MECO-ECTORA program have had a considerable impact both on the ground as well as on the policy environment. These have already been discussed in previous sections of this report. They include:

- The empowerment of communities, their organizations and leaders (key farmers) which has lead, among others, to an improvement of livelihoods (through interest groups), better relationships with the authorities and better control over land and resources
- Better management and protection of forests and natural resources

- Improved tenure security over land and resources
- Reduction of conflicts in and between communities
- Recognition of and a more positive attitude of the authorities toward customary law and NRM practices of indigenous communities

The program also had an impact beyond the immediate target in several respects. In general, SPERI's (which also means CIRD's and CHESH's) partners found its impact considerable.

As already discussed in the chapter on outcome 1, a considerable number of FFS graduates have joined the local government (like in commune agricultural extension services) or gone for further studies (e.g. for becoming a teacher). It can be expected that this will have a longer-term, hopefully positive impact on the institutions for which these graduates work.

The mobilization and empowerment of key farmers combined with furthering collaboration with local authorities can be expected to have a considerable impact beyond the immediate objectives of the project:

- There is evidence that key farmers actively use the network for information exchange which is expected to allow key farmers to better respond to other emerging needs
- There is evidence for good relationships between key farmers and local government officials and strengthened confidence of key farmers which make it more likely that communities are better able to express their opinion, needs and make requests to the authorities

The most important planned impact of the past two years' intervention have not yet been but are most likely about to be realized.

- The replication of a participatory and customary-law based approach in FLA by other local governments at district and provincial levels
- Clear provisions on community land rights in the revised land law

An unexpected outcome materialized in connection with the resolution of a conflict over land between Cao Quang commune and Cao Quang State Forest Enterprise in Tuyen Hoa District, Quang Binh Province. CIRD provided critical support not only in the technical part of the land allocation process, but above all in lobbying district and provincial authorities and to bring the over to the side of the community. The government stopped the operations of Cau Quang SFE. Apparently, the district and provincial authorities raised the issue also at the central level, and in the recent Prime Minister decision on the review and restructuring of State Forest Enterprises and re-allocation of the respective forest land there was an explicit reference to Cau Quang commune

Challenges

Even though it was not possible for the evaluation team to do a proper survey, there are indications that in Simacai, for example, there is so far little impact of the FFS on farming practices in the communities where the graduates come from. Even graduates seem to have implemented only minor changes in farming practices. Possible reasons for that have been suggested in the discussion of post-land allocation challenges in the chapter on outcome 2. The actual reason and ways to address them could be established through post-activity impact monitoring.

Recommendation

It is recommended that SPERI conducts more formal post-activity impact monitoring, which will help in an assessment and a revision of approaches, strategies and priorities.

E. Sustainability

The sustainability of benefits was already addressed in the chapters on the assessment of the achievement of outcomes. The institutional sustainability of MECO-ECOTRA was discussed in the chapter on outcome 1. The capacity of key farmers and graduates of FFS is considered sufficient to run the network independently not just at local, but also at national and regional level. But for that the institutional set-up needs to be created. Proposed is the integration of the coordination of the MECO-ECOTRA network in HEPA. This will also require a strategy to achieve financial sustainability.

Benefits from awareness raising, capacity building and empowerment of key farmers and FFS students are sustainable since they create human and social capital. It is also likely that more will be created as acquired knowledge and skills are passed on, ideas are replicated and the M.E. network expands.

As already argued in chapter 2, the benefits flowing from tenure security over land and forests are sustainable, but only under the conditions already mentioned: the ability to assert their rights and control over the forests, and the possibility to get sufficient immediate economic benefits from community forestry.

Finally, the benefits from advocacy are sustainable once the goal is achieved, e.g. the adoption of participatory and customary-law based approaches in land allocation by local governments, or the inclusion of provisions recognizing community ownership over forest and the recognition of customary law and NRM in the law.

Challenges

Critical for the continuity of MECO-ECOTRA and SPERI is financial sustainability. An estimated 93% of the total budget comes from foreign donors. While community-level activities like the running of local herbal medicine networks and enterprises can be partly self-financing, and while there may be a possibility, but only in the long-run and with a lot of effort, that a centre like HEPA and with it a secretariat for MECO-ECOTRA become largely self-sufficient, there is little chance that the present level of activities of MECO-ECOTRA/SPERI can be sustained without any donor support.

Recommendation

SPERI should develop and discuss a long-term funding strategy together with its donors which should also explore the possibility of an endowment fund.

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ANNEX

Annex 1: Terms of Reference

Hanoi December 25th, 2012

Terms of Reference

I. Project Background and Context

Regional Mekong is recognized as an area rich in diverse mosaics of natural and cultural heritage. The Mekong watershed, shared by six countries is the home to around 70 million indigenous people and other marginalized groups. Natural endemic ecosystems and agro-ecosystems offer treasures in biodiversity which form the basis of traditional livelihoods. Traditional civil society supports these livelihoods and is the self-maintained living heritage of these communities, inherently accepted and respected by the local people.

Mekong countries understandably have ambitions of becoming more developed nations and these countries are becoming increasingly interconnected to the global market and are inevitably being affected by the processes of globalization, industrialization and international flows of capital, technology and people. Natural resource exploitation and new development programs that drive the process of globalization frequently devastate areas rich in biodiversity and cultural heritage. Current extractive industries are increasing in intensity and include mining, forestry, massive hydropower operations, industrial chemical agriculture and contracting of land for cash crops and plantations. To make way for further intensification of these development efforts the legal framework is being reworked to give favour to privatization and extraction of local resources. The presence of more firms and businesses in the areas of indigenous communities threatens the maintenance of community structures and traditional practices. With new development schemes there has been a failure from governments in the region to address the *actual needs and concerns of local people*. Most development schemes fail to improve the quality of life for marginalized people, they create *disparity in the social structure* and there is often a *lack of community consultation and participation*. This goes together with an immature view from governments which don't understand the value that traditional civil society and local knowledge has to offer to local people.

Propaganda and education systems are being reworked to suit a high paced approach of industrial development, and the formal educational curriculum has been revamped with an industrial focus. Indigenous peoples, especially youth in the highlands are often not well accommodated for in the formal educational system. The shift towards industrial topics at vocational training schools represents a move away from the forms of knowledge and methods of teaching that suits these youth. Indigenous youth will continue to be marginalized in the new system and at the same time will lose future prospects of a traditional farming career, with associated traditional forms of knowledge and community education lost forever.

Indigenous minority people are under threat of the dissolution of traditional practice, land ownership, livelihood, culture and community spirit, their *values* and spiritual belief. This contributes to a *loss of identity* and a *value crisis* which is a consequence of (1) loss of land and forest rich in biodiversity, the degradation of fertile land and erosion of soil; (2) globalization and the promotion of a demanding consumer society based on the exploitation of natural resources; (3) 'development' schemes brought in by 'outside investors' such as multi-national companies; and (4) Resettlement

programs and displacement²². Inherent in all of these issues is the top-down control and insensitive approaches of centralized governments that have contrasting values and visions to those of minority people.

Since the 1990s, the key strategy of SPERI has been to: 1) fight against top-down centralized policy making approaches to forestland management; 2) connect elders and young key-farmer who are strongly practicing their traditional values of community governance and natural resource management according to their own customary laws, spiritual beliefs, and local knowledge, to build up their capacity and confidence; and 3) Stimulate diverse Community Based Organizational and Institutional Networks (Networks of CBOs & CBIs) for strengthening Organizational and Institutional Development (OD & ID) locally, regionally and internationally in order to overcome the interrelated problems of isolation, in-confidence and no-ownership.

To achieve these ends, SPERI has built up MECO-ECOTRA (MEkong COmmunity Network Action for ECOlogical TRAding), a regional network of traditional elders and key-farmers, as a foundation development partner. MECO-ECOTRA operates in terms of six thematic networks: 1) Customary Law in Community Governance and Management of Natural Resources; 2) Community Ownership of Spirit Forest and Bio-Cultural Diversity; 3) Eco-Farming Knowledge for Sustainable Land Use Planning and Livelihood Security; 4) Herbal Medicinal Wisdom for Community Healthcare and Bio-diversity Preservation; 5) Women's Wisdom in Natural Dying and Embroidery of Textile Handicrafts; 6) Farmer Field School (FFS) for Teaching by Learning, Learning by Doing toward Leadership in Democratization and Decentralization.

MECO-ECOTRA is the Grassroots foundation for Traditional Civil Society Organizational & Institutional Development beyond national, territorial, social, and political borders. It provides the visionary, strategic and practical direction of SPERI's journey based on the interactional principles of Biological Human Ecology Theory which underlies SPERI's approach to the daily challenges and obstacles as well as advantages when working with the Indigenous People in the Mekong region. It is a vital partner of SPERI and is always leading SPERI forward from 1995 – 2005 – 2015 and continuing up to 2025.

MECO-ECOTRA focuses on consolidating livelihood sovereignty defined in terms of 5 interrelated rights: 1) the right to Land (basic); 2) the right to performance one's own religion on one's own land (unique); 3) the right to practice one's own knowledge in daily farming (practice); 4) the right to decide what to grow on one's own land (holistic); and 5) the right to co-government of one's land (strategic).

In 2010, in response to new challenges, and to meet needs raised by the farmers themselves, SPERI/MECO-ECOTRA reorganized the above mentioned 6 network themes to give priority to three themes including: 1) Community Institutions in Watershed Resource Management to meet with the Community Rights to Co-manage Natural Resources strategy²³; 2) Eco-farming in land use planning to meet with traditional and local values and ways of life by promoting local knowledge participation at all levels²⁴ of Farmer Field Schools and Curriculum²⁵ development for local governing in food

²² Resettlement programs – refers to the displacement of people from their traditional lands, the merging of communities into larger centers that are easier for centralized governments to control and the relocation of people due to extractive operations, such as mining and hydro-power.

²³ The hottest challenge to MECO-ECOTRA is protecting their spirit forest and forest land from grabbing by local and international companies

²⁴ Eco-farming household level (Mr Hoang Van Phuoc, Mr Som lit, Mr Leng Van Suong) to demonstrate ways of self-sufficiency for advocacy; Community Ecological Landscaping/Mapping and Rotational Harvesting for Enriching Local Wisdom and Custom in Managing and Preserving Natural Resources in Watershed Areas in order to lobby Convention Agricultural Extension Service which is mushrooming over the mountainous villages in Vietnam and Lao (Long Lan case) . Regional Eco- Farming Farmer Field School aimed to eradicate and lobby Official Vocational Conventional Technical Training Centre of the provinces of Vietnam (Simacai Farmer Field School) ; International level to initiate Eco- Farming Curriculum for "Teaching by Learning – Learning by Doing" for broadening philosophy and behaviour of Bio- Human Ecology theory (the theory of nurturing nature from Indigenous people who worship nature in Mekong region) for international lobby strategy

²⁵ See www.speri.org/link_ffs

sovereignty and security (household, community, regionally and inter-regionally); and 3) Community based Eco-Enterprises in order to initiate local niche market network for security and self-sufficiency.

The Agreement to finance a three year program (“*MECO-ECOTRA development strategic framework from 2010-2013*” which has been implemented via a contract Project number: 76-03-02-015. Project name: SPERI Program 1008-1307. Period of support: 1-8-2010-30-7-2013) was approved by ICCO. The total budget of the program is 1.000.000 Euro, in which ICCO (Inter-Church Organization for Cooperation and Development), the Netherlands, approved 60% of the total budget. The remaining 40% was later on raised through support from: 1) Bread for the World (BftW), Germany; 2) CCFD (The Catholic Committee against Hunger and for Development), France; 3) Norwegian People’ Aids (NPA); and a small grant from UNDP in Vietnam. The Continued Proposal on Mekong Community Networking and Ecological Trading, July 2010– June 2013 was funded by all the above mentioned donors.

II. Objectives of the Evaluation

The objectives of the external evaluation are to determine the effectiveness of the project in achieving its outputs and outcomes as part of a process of consolidating lessons learned and providing recommendations that will be helpful to the organization’s programming of activities for the next phase of Mekong Community Networking and Ecological Trading development. In this context, the evaluation should provide answers based on the following criteria:

1. Relevance – do we do the right thing?
2. Effectiveness – do we reach the objectives of the project?
3. Efficiency – do we reach the objectives with an acceptable level of means?
4. Development impact – do we contribute to objectives on a higher development policy level?
5. Sustainability – is the impact sustainable?

At the end of the evaluation process, the evaluation Evaluation Experts shall submit to SPERI and donors a final evaluation report based on the terms of reference described below.

III. Terms of Reference - Key Questions

A. Project design

Challenge and strategy analysis

1. Assess the depth and accuracy of SPERI’s analysis of the challenges facing ethnic minority farmers in the Mekong region (*focus on Livelihood Sovereignty²⁶ via 5 rights based approach*).
2. How appropriate is SPERI’s MECO-ECOTRA Strategy for meeting these challenges? (*Focus on Customary Based Conflict Resolution and Forest Land Rights via Allocation Approach, and Eco-farming in Land Use Planning following Land Rights*)
3. How effectively does this strategy build upon SPERI’s earlier achievements? (*Focus on local knowledge in eco-farming and herbal wisdom for food security and community health care via lobbying conventional Formal Vocational Technical Training at provincial and district level included attracting more local and international donors*)
4. Assess SPERI’s analysis of the challenges facing MECO-ECOTRA. (*Focus on regional connection with Towards Organic Asia (TOA), International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB), Universities nationally and internationally and others for education and influence²⁷*).
5. How appropriate to these challenges is the strategy of transforming the 6 MECO-ECOTRA networks into 3 themes?

²⁶ MECO-ECOTRA focuses on consolidating livelihood sovereignty which is defined in terms of 5 interrelated rights: 1) the right to Land (basic); 2) the right to perform one’s own religion on one’s own land (unique); 3) the right to practice one’s own knowledge in daily farming (practice); 4) the right to decide what to grow on one’s own land (holistic); and 5) the right to co-government of one’s land (strategic).

²⁷ Students from Hanoi University, International Academic Students, internships inspired by Eco-Farming in Farmer Field School while taking courses...

6. Is there a strong interconnection between these 3 themes?

Design of Activities, Outputs, Outcomes, and Objectives

1. Were the proposed activities appropriate for achieving their expected outputs?
2. Were the expected outputs consistent with their expected outcomes?
3. Were the expected outcomes consistent with the objectives of the project and relevant as solutions to the problems being addressed by the project?

B. Project outcomes (give special attention to outcomes 1, 6, and 2 of program contracted in July 2010-July 2013 between ICCO and SPERI **Contract No: 76-03-02-015**).

1. What objectively verifiable indicators are there for the achievement of the project's outcomes, and how effective were these outcomes in addressing the problems identified in the project proposal?
2. Were the achieved outcomes consistent with the objectives of the project and relevant as solutions to the problems being addressed by the project?
3. Has the transformation of MECO-ECOTRA's 6 networks into 3 themes resulted in:
 - a) An increase in the capacities of farmer?
 - b) Furthering the promotion of **Young Indigenous Ethnic Leadership Development Strategy (YIELDS)** through Farmer Field Schools?
4. How effectively are the 3 MECO-ECOTRA themes connected with activities of the Farmer Field Schools?
5. What indicators are there for integration between customary law and formal law in natural resource management, eco-farming and traditional health treatment in projects areas. To what extent have customary practices been legalized?
6. What indicators are there of the effectiveness of natural resource management by traditional community organizations in project areas, and of local authorities changing their attitudes toward natural resource management by traditional community organizations?
7. Identify any cross-cutting influences between different outputs, outcomes, and effects.
8. During the three years under consideration, traditional community land and forest was allocated to communities in Simacai, Nghe An and Laos:
 - a. What area of forestland and forest was allocated?
 - b. What kinds of conflicts were encountered between what kinds of parties?
 - c. What was the cause of these conflicts (e.g., legalities, un-transparency, non-participatory processes) and how were they resolved?
9. What unplanned outcomes were achieved during the course of the project? (For example, how many households received land certificates as an unexpected outcome of community land allocation?)²⁸
10. Describe any exceptional outcomes/experiences that deserve special attention as case studies/examples of best practice.
11. Identify the barriers to achieving those output/outcomes that were not achieved.
12. Assess the sustainability of the benefits flowing to the participating communities and to the wider society of the outcomes achieved by the project.
13. Assess the sustainability (organizationally and financially) of MECO-ECOTRA at commune, district, provincial and regional levels.

²⁸ What level of control over the land do the target group get after receiving the red book? In the other words, what additional rights and practical use do the target group get after obtaining the red book? What behaviour of the target groups toward the land has changed after getting the land used certificate? What hinders people from fully control over the land? And what should be changed, especially regarding legal framework on land use, to improve ownership of the land by the people?

14. Assess the level of extension of the pilots and activities conducted by FFS students and members of MECO-ECOTRA to other farmers (at village and households levels for eco-farming activities; at provincial level for eco-enterprise and community forest management).

C. Project organization and implementation

1. What level of involvement and participation did members of SPERI's partner, MECO-ECOTRA, have in designing and implementing the project?
2. Did SPERI and MECO-ECOTRA have sufficient managerial and technical expertise for carrying out the project? Where there any areas where this was lacking?
3. Evaluate the capacity of SPERI to responding to unexpected events and circumstances that arose during the course of the project.
4. Evaluate the monitoring and evaluation system used during the project implementation.
5. How successful has SPERI been in attracting funding from other sources to contribute to its programme?
6. To what level has SPERI shifted from a coordinating role to an advisory one?
7. What are the strengths and limitations in terms of dynamic and innovative development cooperation of the relationship between Donor Organization Project Officers (POs) and SPERI?

D. Impact

1. What has been the impact of the project's outcomes for people and organizations/institutes beyond those specifically targeted, what indicators are there for this and what has been its extent?
2. To what extent has MECO-ECOTRA (including students who have graduated from FFSs and the FFS network) been successful in influencing policy making processes at commune and district levels?
3. How well do indigenous people in the provinces where SPERI and MECO-ECOTRA work (mainly Quang Binh, Ha Tinh, Nghe An, Lao Cai and Luang Prabang) know about MECO-ECOTRA and SPERI? How do they perceive MECO-ECOTRA and SPERI?

E. Recommendations from Lessons Learned

IV. Methodology

- The evaluation process will involve key farmers, elders, local authority officers, local and national media, senior staff of SPERI, and pay special attention on **Young Indigenous Ethnic Leadership Development Strategy (YIELDS)** at different farmer field schools (Long Lan, Simacai, HEPA²⁹);
- The Evaluation Experts is expected to apply the following approaches: (1) Get to know MECO-ECOTRA and its 6 thematic approaches over time via SPERI's senior staff's holistic overview and **YIELDS** at HEPA Farmer Field School (period 2007 – 2012); (2) Review document and information via projects³⁰, annual reports, articles; videos of Communist Party Website, Global Cooperation Channel VCT 10 - National Television Broadcasting on forest and land rights facilitated by MECO-ECOTRA and SPERI; (3) Visit field sites for output/effect/impact indicator observation, collection, and cross-checking via interviews/meeting/debate and analysis individually and by group and open workshop at field site places; (4) Screening key informants from different themes at places for later re-confirming for further recommendations; (5) The Evaluation Experts should feel free to facilitate approaches and skills of encouraging local key informants in order to maximize efforts for achieving answers to TOR questions; (7)

²⁹ See annexes of annual reports, video, articles of Long Lan Community Based Farmer Field School, Simacai Regional Based Farmer Field School, HEPA Inter-national Based Farmer Field School.

³⁰ Different project from ICCO, BROT, CCFD and NPA for ensuring SPERI's transparent and coordination skill between donors who are involved in MECO-ECOTRA framework of 2010-2013 period.

An open workshop at middle period should take place at HEPA Farmer Field School for confirming impact indicators via open debate with **YIELDS** at HEPA;

- Evaluation Experts is expected to interview and learn: 1) how Farmer Field School (HEPA) influences students of Hanoi Agriculture University via internship yearly; 2) how HEPA integrated young network movement with Towards Organic Asia (TOA), 3) How HEPA engaged with International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB), VEDA program from Australian Embassy, American Ordinary School's pupils...
- The Evaluation Experts is expected to organise meetings/presentations/workshops with key informants to get feedback during the evaluation process for:
 - process verification to correct and complete;
 - Verification of preliminary findings and recommendations
- Target location³¹ will focus on Vietnam and Laos activities.

V. Expertise required

Two experts are required: One in ecological farming and land use planning and practical training methods included community based ecological enterprising experience³², and other in indigenous people and customary law in natural resource management and conflict resolution³³. Each needs more than 5 years working experiences in 1) the field of Community based Organizational and Institutional Development included project planning, monitoring and evaluation; and 2) bottom-up policy analysis and lobbying with regards to local governance in natural resource management. The evaluation report is to be written in English.

VI. Expert Selection Process

1. Evaluation Experts and Evaluation Assistant will send their Curriculum Vitae to SPERI (board@speri.org, ttlanh@speri.org, dtuan@speri.org, dqchau@speri.org, speris@speri.org) and Program Officers of Donor Organizations by group email³⁴ for reference. SPERI will be the final decision making about Evaluation Expert and Evaluation Assistant.
2. A representative of Program Officers together the Director of SPERI will select candidates for interviewing.
3. Final decision for evaluation Evaluation Experts and assistant will be made by January 30th 2013.

VII. Consultant's Duties and Responsibilities

VII. 1. Evaluation Experts

The Evaluation Experts will take overall responsibility for the ethical, high quality and timely submission of the evaluation report in English. Specifically, the Evaluation Experts will perform the following tasks:

³¹ Lao Cai province, Quang binh province and Ha tinh province of Vietnam and Luang Phrabang province of Laos

³² With regards to the theme of "Eco-farming in Land use Planning and Food Security; 2) Farmer Field School; and 3) Community Ecological Enterprising.

³³ With regards to 2 themes: 1) Customary Law in Community Governing and Managing Natural Resources and Community Ownership of Sprit Forest and Bio-Cultural Diversity Preservation

³⁴ Le Hien <Le.Hien@iccokia.org>, "Liem Dao Duc (Vest)" <Dao.Duc.Liem@brot-fuer-die-welt.org>, Hoang Thi Xuan Diem <dpo.vietnam@npaid.org>, Lucie <l.bouto blaise@ccfd.asso.fr>, "Papendieck Jan (VEST)" <j.papendieck@brot-fuer-die-welt.de>, Kees de Ruiter <kees.de.ruiter@iccokia.org>, Anne-Sophie DELECROIX <as.delecroix@ccfd.asso.fr>, Jonathon Guthrie jonathong@npaid.org,

- Transparent communication to all partners who are involved with MECO-ECOTRA development strategy: 1. MECO-ECOTRA; 2.SPERI; 3.ICCO; 4. BROT; 5.CCFD and; 6.NPA including 7.CARITAS (new in-coming partner of SPERI) and; 8. Evaluation Assistant (assistant). This will be indicated in detail in the contract between SPERI and Evaluation Experts and Evaluation Experts' Assistant;
- Carefully review documents given by SPERI including approach and methodology before, during and after evidence collection and analysis;
- Work openly, sincerely and accountably with assistant and MECO-ECOTRA as well as SPERI included conducting any meeting for clarification and reconsideration;
- Interim information should be given to above 6 partners for comments straight away before final report;
- Final report of evaluation will be send to above 6 partners by email PDF file;
- Design and coordinate the detailed evaluation action plan, scope and methodology for actual performance and responsibility including field visit conduct;
- Organize the meeting with YIELDS, MECO-ECOTRA and SPERI for re-confirming logistics, legal procedure for access to field sites, middle term seminar, workshop with key informants of MECO-ECOTRA and SPERI for further recommendation;
- Full responsibility for the ethical and accurate final evaluation report before publicizing to SPERI and above partners.

VII. 2. Evaluation Assistant

The Evaluation Expert's assistant will be involved in all processes of the Evaluation Expert from preparation, data collection, analysis and finalization, and checking final report as determined by the Evaluation Expert. There will be basic activities in the evaluation process that will be done by Evaluation Experts' Associate/Assistant.

The Evaluation Assistant should have more than 5 years professional experience in Indigenous Ethnic Minority's Community Development Mekong regional wide, and very professional translating Vietnamese, Lao and English.

VII. 3. Reporting requirements

The evaluators will produce a concise report summarizing their findings which will cover the points described above so that these may be used to improve future programs of SPERI. The report should be tightly drafted, and usable as a free-standing document. It should focus on the main analytical points; indicate the main conclusions, lessons learned and specific recommendations. Cross-references should be made to the corresponding page or paragraph numbers in the main text that follows.

Two Evaluation Experts will write their own reports and then merging in one final report by the Evaluation Expert who respond for the theme of "customary law in community governance and natural resource management and conflict resolution". Key findings and recommendations from the Evaluation Expert in Eco-Farming in Land Use Planning and Farmer Field School including Community Ecological Enterprise need to be sent to MECO-ECOTRA/SPERI and all donors before 11.00 PM February 25th, 2013, and this Evaluator will start last week of January; The other Expert who deals with Indigenous Customary Law in Natural Resource Management and Conflict Resolution will send his report before 11.00 PM March 25th, 2013. This Evaluation Expert will start his work on 15 February 2013. SPERI will discuss specific field work schedules with each Evaluation Expert when finalizing the contract.

The main text should start with an introduction describing, first, the project or programme to be evaluated and, second, the evaluation objectives. The body or core of the report should answer Key Questions provided above. It will usually consist of:

VII.3 1. Main text

- The purpose and objectives of the evaluation
- The main research question and the specific research questions
- Explanation and justification of the methods used; a justification of selections made (of persons, villages, groups); and the scope and limitations of the evaluation.
- A (short) discussion of the relevant theoretical issues or hypotheses behind the main interventions, strategies and description of project areas.
- Presentation and analysis of findings (clearly distinguished), including unexpected, relevant findings.
- Conclusions with reference to the (specific) research questions (following key evaluation criteria relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, results, sustainability, impact)
- Recommendations for different stakeholders.

VII.3.2. An executive summary which can be used independently

VII.3.3. Annexes

1. Terms of Reference
2. Data collection and analysis techniques such as persons interviewed, places visited, questionnaire, interview guide or topic list, statistical elaboration and analysis
3. Evaluation programme (dates and activities)
4. Concepts and abbreviation list
5. List of documents / literature / materials used.

Wherever possible, for each key conclusion there should be a corresponding recommendation. The key points of the conclusions will vary in nature but will often cover aspects of the evaluation criteria. The ultimate value of an evaluation depends on the quality and credibility of the recommendations offered. Recommendations should therefore be as realistic, operational and pragmatic as possible. Recommendations should be carefully targeted to the appropriate audiences at all levels.

All reports shall be written in English. A draft evaluation report detailing the Team's initial findings and areas of concern encountered will be prepared and will be presented to SPERI approximately halfway through the evaluation through an open workshop among key stakeholders of MECO-ECOTRA/SPERI. This document will provide a source of discussion before Evaluation Experts finally leaves from Vietnam. The draft of the final evaluation report will again be presented to SPERI by electronic mail for final comments. Upon receipt and consideration of SPERI's final comments the report shall be finalized and two sets submitted via courier, one to donors. Each set should include a hard copy (A4 size paper) and digital file.

Length of the report: preferably no longer than 50 pages, excluding annexes. The report should include a chapter with conclusion in concordance with to TOR, a limited number of recommendations and an executive summary. Final report has to submit to SPERI and forwards to above 4 donors at 11.00 PM March 28th, 2013 latest.

VIII. Work plan and Time Table for Two Evaluation Experts

VIII. 1. Detail Working Plan for Evaluation Expert in Eco-Farming and Land Use Planning and Training Methodology

Activities	Tasks	Proposed dates
Pre-Evaluation		
Formation of evaluation team	<p>1. Accnouncêmnt through sending TOR to ICCO, BROT, CCFD, NPA and International Consultancy Firm through Google search and Websites of donors for seeking candidates;</p> <p>2. Candidates send their CV to email groups at page 10 of TOR ;</p> <p>3. Select Candidate for both evaluation team leader and assistant by Representative of Program Officers of donors and SPERI's executive director completed official contract;</p> <p>4. Arrange and completed legal procedure for check in Vietnam and Laos (Working Visa and Legitimacy for in and out included territorial border locally)</p>	<p>December 28th, 2012</p> <p>From January 1st to 10th, 2013</p> <p>January 11th – 20th , 2013</p> <p>January 20 - 30th, 2013</p>

Evaluation proper	Tasks	Original schedule	Schedule Dr. Erni	Schedule Dr Goetenboth
Arrive Vietnam and get to know each other at SPERI office for the first Evaluation expert	Overview MECO-ECOTRA and checklist of TOR included Field Work Trips Vietnam and Laos	February 5 th – 6 th , 2013	February 15th – 16th	7.1. in Luang Prabang
Reports and Document handling for review	Evaluation Experts and SPERI's Senior if needed at SPERI office in Hanoi	February 7 th – 8 th 2013	2 days prior to the start of the evaluation	23.1-25.1. Hanoi
Field trip to Ba Vi, Ha Noi	Meet Herbal Medicine Cooperative of Dzao group			29 January
Field trip to Central Vietnam	Travel to Quang binh and Ha tinh included HEPA Farmer Field School (eco-farming, community forestry, key farmer network, YIELDS, TOA, INEB, Universities influence effect and impact indicator of achievement)	February 14th to 17th 2013	Leave for field trip on Feb. 17th to 22nd	Feb. 16 th arrive at Vinh, then to HEPA.
Middle term workshop with YIELDS at HEPA	Deeper understanding beyond border of impact and network action amongst young indigenous ethnic eco-farmers movement	February 17th 2013	During field visit (17-22 Feb.)	
Turn back Hanoi for interim report and plenary feedback with Senior of SPERI	Present initial findings from Central Vietnam (3 hours) at SPERI office	February 18th 2013	Feb. 22nd	Feb. 22 nd

Field trip to Lao cai province	Meet FFS, community forestry and official VOTECH included group meeting with Simacai YIELDS	February 9 th to 12 th 2013	Leave for field trip on Feb. 23th	Jan. 30 to Feb. 2 nd
Turn back Hanoi	Open exchanging and feedback for correction and clarification between Evaluation Experts and SPERI	February 13 th AM, 2013	Feb. 26th	
Writing down interim	Evaluation Experts in Hanoi	February 19 th 2013	27th February; 28th return home	Feb.6 th -14 th but not in Hanoi
			March 11 – 14: report writing; send out draft report for comments	
Flight to Luang phrabang - Laos	Check in and review by CHESH Laos and advisory board of elder, coordinator and Hmong Association's President	February 20 th -21 st 2013	15 March	11.-14. Jan.
Visit Long lan	Meet up with YIELDS at Long lan and observation	February 22 nd , 2013	16-18 March field visit 19 March return home; Finalizing of report Submission of final report on 22 March	15.-17.Jan. 17 Jan. Visit to. Den Xa Van,Phon Xa Vat 19 Jan. Visit to Xiengda, Nam Kha
Meeting with Laos Authorities and feedback	Evaluation Experts representing findings and get feedback from different partners: Hmong Association, Coordinators, key farmers, elders and YIELDS in CHESH Laos	February 23, 2013		January 21 st in Luang Prabang
Flight back Hanoi	Digesting and reflecting	February 24 th 2013		March 7 th Flight to Hanoi
Open workshop in Hanoi with MECO-ECOTRA representative and SPERI	Presentation of Findings, Feedback included correction; debate for further recommendation and finalize final report writing framework	February 25 th 2013		March 8 th In Hanoi
Writing final report in Hanoi and inter-sharing for clarification and correction of evident	Evaluation Experts and assistant will provide modest accommodation for finalize evident included writing report in Hanoi	February 26 to March 5 nd		March 10 th -March 18 th . On 18 th March send the final report to Chris

IX. Duration of Consultancy Assignment

Two evaluation experts will be employed for a total of 32 days. One who deal with Eco-Farming in Land Use Planning will be employed for a period of 15 days and started from January 11th 2013 and the other will be employed for a period of 17 days between 15 February and 25 March, 2013. The deadline for submission of the final report to SPERI is 25 March 2013.

The Evaluation Assistant will be employed for 24 days to translate from Vietnamese to English and Lao to English during all field trip and interviews of Two Evaluation Experts. One from January 11th and other from the first week of March, 2013. Totally is 24 days on the entire evaluation mission.

X. Assignment location and field visits (s mentioned in the above action plan framework)

The evaluation will take place at the office of SPERI in Hanoi, Vietnam and in Luang Prabang, Laos. In regard to the logistical requirements and arrangements for field visits in remote areas, SPERI will pay attention carefully on time and cost efficiency and available human resources. These field visit itineraries are subject to the agreement of the Evaluation Experts, which shall be finalized prior to the introductory meeting.

Final report will be presented to all above partners by digital version before the team finally leaves for their countries.

XI. Budget and Implementation arrangements

Items	Note	Amount (USD)
Transport, accommodation, per diem etc.		
1. Return air ticket to Hanoi	ca. 20,000 THB	ca. 680.00
2. Return air ticket to Luang Prabang	9,400 THB	330.00
3. Accommodation and meals while in the field	To be reimbursed against receipts; ca. 20-50 USD/day for 19 days	ca. 600.00
4. Local transport (car rental etc.)	Paid directly by SPERI	0
5. Visa and other fees etc.		ca. 90.00
Total transport etc.		ca 1,700. 00
Consultancy Fee	17 days x 500 USD per day	8,500.00
Total:		ca. 10,200

XII. Implementation Arrangements

SPERI and its field offices will provide full support to the Evaluation Experts members during their assignment, including:

- Provision of office space, facilities and equipment while in Vietnam and Laos;

- Help in identifying key partners to be interviewed and setting appointments with interviewees;
- Assistance in arranging accommodations and other logistical requirements while in Vietnam and Laos

The evaluators will also be provided with:

- One return-trip economy class air tickets for the most direct route between home country and Hanoi, Vietnam, plus airport charges as required.
- Return-trip economy class air tickets, travel insurance and/or land transportation during the actual mission itinerary between Hanoi and Luang Prabang, Laos.
- Per Diem and accommodation during fieldwork in Vietnam and Laos, following SPERI travel policies.
- Miscellaneous expenses for local transportation, office supplies for producing trip reports and communication during field trips, postage, etc., reimbursable based on the actual costs incurred.

The consultants will be subject to a lump sum payment for the consultancy fee (50 % upon signing of contract, and 50% upon submission of the final report).

XIII. ANNEXES

- a. Projects for the duration 2010-2013 including contracts between SPERI and Partners (ICCO, BROT, CCFD, NPA, UNDP and ESP scholarship);
- b. Annual reports, internal evaluation, articles, formal public website and national television links; case studies; national conference manuals;
- c. List of pilot demonstration addresses, key informants, key farmers, Elders, Farmer Field Schools, Local Authorities, Media, Researchers, University's name and person for contact./.

Annex 2:

List of people met/talked to

The following people were met or contacted via telephone/skype or e-mail. More people attended the meetings but not all were actively participating, and not all names are included.

Staff members

Mr Duong Quang Chau, SPERI, vice-director
Ms Tran Thi Lanh, SPERI, chairperson (skype conversation)
Mr. Le Van Ka, SPERI senior staff
Mr. Trong Dam Tuan, SPERI, executive director
Mr. Phon Thip, CHESH Lao, Coordinator
Ms. Tran Thi Hoa, CIRUM, director
Mr. Pham Quang To, CODE, deputy director
Mr. Ngo Van Hong, CIRD, director
Mr. Chao Van Hue, CIRD vice-director
Mr. Tran Dinh Phuong, HEPA, coordinator
Mr. Le Hong Giang, HEPA, staff
Mr. Giang A Su, HEPA, staff
Mr. Ly Yeo Vu, HEPA, executive coordinator
Ms. Pham Nai Tan, HEPA, office manager/accountant

SPERI advisers

Mr. Ton Gia Huyên, SPERI adviser, former director of the Land Department

Media

Mr. Luong Ngoc An, Literature Review newspaper
Mr. Tran Thanh Toan, Communist Party of Vietnam Online newspaper

Government official

Quang Binh province

Mr. Tuyen, Chairman of Cao Quang Commune People's Committee
Mr Tam, Vice-chairman, Cao Quang Commune People's Committee
Mr. Huy, fatherland Front, Cao Quang Commune People's Committee

Nghe An province

Mr. Lang Van Minh – Vice chairman of Que Phong District People's Committee
Mr. Lang Van Minh, vice chairman, Que Phong district People's Committee
Mrs. Tuyen, party secretary of Hanh Dich Commune;
Mr. Kiem, party vice-secretary
Mr. Le, chairman of Hanh Dich Commune People's Committee

Lao Cao province

Mr. Nhan, Vice Chairman, Simacai District People's Committee
Mr. Dang, head, Department of Natural Resources and Environment of Simacai district
Mr. Tuong, vice head, Department of forestry
Mr. Thao, staff of District Office

Mr. Vang Seo Pao, village head, Lung San village, Lung Sui commune, Simacai district

Mr. Giang Seo Van, chairman, Lung Sui commune, Simacai district
Mr. Giang Seo De, head of communal security, Lung San village, Lung Sui commune, Simacai district
Mr. Viang Seo Dung, elder, Lung San village, Lung Sui commune, Simacai district

Luang Prabang Province, Laos

Mr. Vongsavanh Thepphachanh, Mayo, Luang Prabang District
Mr. Som Vang, Deputy director, Luang Prabang district Agriculture and Forestry Office
Mr. Som Xac, staff, Luang Prabang district Agriculture and Forestry Office
Dr. Outhay Suc Khi, deputy director, Northern agriculture and Forestry College (interpreter)

Mr. Houmphanh Thammavong, Den Xa Van village chief
Mr. Seevone Chanhthasone, Den Xa Van Communist Party head

Mr. Noew, Phon Xa Vat village chief
Mr. Bounmee, Phon Xa Vat village deputy chief

Key farmers/elders/students/villagers

Ha Tinh province

Mr. Nguyen Khac Thu, Truong Son Forest cooperative
Mr. Tran Quoc Viet, (e-mail correspondence)

Nghe An province

Mr. Ha Van Tuyen, elder and healer
Mr. Vi Dinh Van, chairman of Hanh Dich herbal medicine association
Mr. Hung, head of Qua Phong herbal medicine association
Mr. Sam Quoc Viet, Que Phon district, local coordinator

Quang Binh province

Mr. Hoang Van Phuoc, Lam Trach commune, Bo Trach district
Mrs. Nguyen Thi Thu – Chairwomen, Saving and credits group in Lam Trach commune, Bo Trach district.

Lao Cai Province

Mr. Hoang Sao Cau, elder/healer, Ta Can Ho village
Mr. Thao Nhat Pao, deputy chairman of the herbal medicine association
Hoang Seo Chao, member of herbal medicine association
Mr. Minh, ex-student, now coordinator of Simacai FFS

Luang Prabang Province, Laos

Mr. Xay Xua Ly Her, Chairman of Luang Prabang Mong association
Mr. Xom Lit, member of CHESH Lao Coordination board

Mr. Sa, Head of Veteran organization, Den Xa Van
Ms. Lay, Women organization, Den Xa Van
Mr. Khamsook, Head of the village Forestry, Den Xa Van
Mr. Phonekhoun, Den Xa Van village
Mr. Khamlek, Den Xa Van village
Mr. Chanhsook, Den Xa Van village

Mr. Visay, Phon Xa Vat village water service group

Mr. Kham Man, Phon Xa Vat village, head of livestock group
Mr. Bounthan, Phon Xa Vat village
Ms. Phew, Phon Xa Vat village
Mr. See Chanh, Phon Xa Vat village, head of veteran organization
Mr. Thiem, Phon Xa Vat village, head of village guard
Ms. Chit, Phon Xa Vat village
Ms. Loy, Phon Xa Vat village
Mr. Thongsee, Phon Xa Vat village

NGOs, UN agencies

Ms. Luong Thi Truong, CSDM director, AIPP ex-EC member (Hanoi)
Mr. Nguyen Quang Tan, RECOF-TC, country program coordinator (Hanoi)
Ms. Vo Hoang Nga, UNDP programme officer (Hanoi)
Mr. Sakda Saenmi, IMPECT, director (Chiang Mai, Thailand)
Ms Yun Mane, Chairwoman, Cambodia Indigenous Youth Association (e-mail correspondence)
Mr Yun Lorang, member Cambodia Indigenous Youth Association (e-mail correspondence)

Academic Institutes

Dr. Chayan Vaddhanaputi, director, RCSD Chiang Mai University
Dr. Prasit Leepreecha, Lecturer, Center for Ethnic Studies and Development, Chiang Mai University

Annex 3:

Provisions on Community Forests in the Forest Law of 2004

Law on Forest Protection and Development No.29/2004/QH11

Article 29. Assignment of forests to village population communities

1. The conditions for assignment of forests to village population communities are prescribed as follows:

a/ The village population communities have the same customs, practices and traditions of close community association with forests in their production, life, culture and belief; are capable of managing forests; have demand and file applications for forest assignment;

b/ The assignment of forests to village population communities must be in line with the approved forest protection and development plannings and plans; and match the capacity of the local forest funds.

2. Village population communities shall be assigned the following forests:

a/ Forests which they are managing or using efficiently;

b/ Forests which hold water sources in direct service of the communities or other common communal interests and cannot be assigned to organizations, households or individuals.

c/ Forests which lie in the areas adjoining villages, communes or districts and cannot assigned to organizations, households or individuals and must be assigned to village population communities for the sake of the communal interests.

3. The competence to assign forests to and recover forests from village population communities is prescribed as follows:

a/ The People's Committees of rural or urban districts, provincial towns or cities shall, basing themselves on the approved forest protection and development plannings and plans as well as the provisions of Clauses 1 and 2 of this Article, decide on forest assignment to village population communities;

b/ The People's Committees of rural or urban districts, provincial towns or cities shall have the competence to recover forests from village population communities according to the provisions of Points a, b, d, e, f, h and i, Clause 1, Article 26 of this Law or when such communities move to other places.

Annex 4: Statistic of forestland allocation of SPERI

Friday, March 20, 2020

Table 1: Total forestland areas and beneficiaries from forestland allocation supports of SPERI since 1995

Sectors	Total area (ha)	Total beneficiaries
Individual households	38,345.90	6,439
Community organizations	13,361	36
	51,706.90	

Table 2: Total forestland areas allocated to individual households since 1995

Districts/Provinces	Ethnic minorities	Total areas of forestland allocation (ha)
Bac Ha, Muong Khuong, Than Uyen, Si Ma Cai districts of Lao Cai province	H'mong	2,680.7
Son La province	H'mong, Xinh Mun	3,697.5
Nghia Hoa commune, Chu Pah district, Gia Lai province	Gia Rai, Mo Nong	300
Que Phong district, Nghe An province	Thai	3,300.0
Huong Son district, Ha Tinh province	Kinh	3,613.7
Tuyen Hoa, Minh Hoa, Bo Trach districts of Quang Binh province	Ma Lieng, Sach, and Kinh	16,304.8
Luang Prabang district of Luang Prabang province, Laos PDR	H'mong	8,449.2
Total		38,045.9

The program has allocated 38,345.90 hectares of forestland to 6,439 households.

Table 3: Forestland allocated to community organizations in SPERI's project sites since 1995

No.	Organizations	Types of forests	Area (Ha)	Note

I	Ke village, Lam Hoa commune, Tuyen Hoa district, Quang Binh province - Vietnam		64	Ma Lieng minority
1	Women Union	Watershed forest	26	
2	Youth Union	Protected forest	38	
II	Hanh Dich commune, Que Phong district, Nghe An province - Vietnam		274	Black Thai minority
1	Youth Union in Chieng village	Protected forest	20	
2	Women Union in Chieng village	Protected forest	18	
3	Farmer's Association in Chieng village	Protected forest	15	
4	Veterans Association in Chieng village	Protected forest	17	
5	Herbal medicine group in Pa Kim village	Spiritual / Herbal medicine forest	7	
6	Women Union in Pa Kim village	Protected forest	21	
7	Farmer's Association in Pa Kim village	Protected forest	19	
8	Women Union in Chan village	Protected forest	9	
9	Farmers' Association in Chan village	Protected forest	11	
10	Women Union in Pa Co village	Protected forest	17	
11	Farmer's Union in Pa Co village	Protected forest	13	
12	Traditional herbal medicine group in Pom Om	Spiritual / Herbal medicine forest	19	

13	Women Union in Pom Om village	Protected forest	22	
14	Farmers' Association in Pom Om village	Protected forest	19	
15	Women Union in Khom village	Protected forest	14	
16	Traditional herbal medicine group in Cham Put village	Spiritual / Herbal medicine forest	13	
18	Women Union in Cham Put village	Protected forest	16	
19	Women Union in Mut village	Protected forest	6	
20	Women Union in Cong village	Protected forest	9	
21	Women Union in Na Xai village	Protected forest	8	
22	Border Army 519	Protected forest	20	
23	Pom Om village	Spiritual forest, herbal medicine forest, protected/watershed forest, productive forest	443	
III	Si Ma Cai district, Lao Cai province		9	H'mong minority
2	Traditional herbal medicine group in Sin Cheng commune	'Nao Long' spiritual / herbal forest	4	
3	Traditional herbal medicine group in Can Ho commune	'Nao Long' spiritual / herbal forest	5	
4	Ta Lung Sui village in Lung Sui commune	'Nao Long' spiritual / herbal forest	19	
IV	Luang Prabang province, Laos		116	
1	Long Lan community	Spiritual forest, herbal medicine forest, protected/watershed forest, productive forest	8,234	

2	Traditional herbal medicine group in Long Long Lan village, Luang Prabang district	'Nao Long' spiritual / herbal forest	47	H'mong ethnic minority
3	Traditional herba medicine group in Xieng Da village, Nam Bac district	'Nao Long' spiritual / herbal forest	59	Lao Lum
4	Traditional herbal medicine group in Nam Kha village, Nam Bac district	'Nao Long' spiritual / herbal forest	10	Kho Mu ethnic minority
5	Community forest of Den Xa Vang	Spiritual forest, herbal medicine forest, protected/watershed forest, productive forest	1,005	Kho Mu, H'mong, Lao Lum
6	Community forest of Phon Xa Vat	Spiritual forest, herbal medicine forest, protected/watershed forest, productive forest	815	Kho Mu, H'mong, Lao Lum
7	Community forest of Na Xam Phan	Spiritual forest, herbal medicine forest, protected/watershed forest, productive forest	400	H'mong
Total			11,881	

36 local community organizations got 11,881 ha of different types of forestland

Table 4: Total forestland areas and beneficiaries from forestland allocation supports of SPERI since 2010

Sectors	Total area (ha)	Total beneficiaries
Individual households	313.9	59
Community organizations	2,682	5
	2,995.9	

Annex 5: List of study tours, workshop, seminars between 2010 – 2013

No	Event	Time	Place	No of participant	Source
1	Study tours conducted between (8 trips)			193 participants	
1.1.	A study tour for sharing and learning experience in natural resources management and protection of the watershed area for Authorities and villager	12/5/2010 to 1/6/2010	Vietnam	28 participants including 04 CHESH Laos's staff	BftW
1.2	Study tour to Quang Binh province for ethnic students, volunteers and SPERI's staff for sharing and learning experience in ecological farm	6/2010	Quang Binh & Ha Tinh, Vietnam	30 participants	BftW
1.3	Study tour: "Laying a foundation for networking for the development of the people in the Mekong River Basin in relevance to SPERI's strategic activities"	15-20/8/2010	CEDAC-Cambodia	One SPERI's staff and three ethnic students	ESP
1.4	A visiting trip to Long Lan and Xieng Da villages for Denxavang and Phonxavat's villagers for sharing and learning experience in Forest Management and Land Use Planning.	7-11/2010	Laos	33 participants including 02 CHESH Laos's staff	BftW
1.5	A study tour for 3 ethnic student in ecological farming from Vietnam to Lao	3-20/4/2011	Laos	Three ethnic students	ESP
1.6	A visiting trip for Denxavang and Phonxavat's villagers to chicken farm in Muong Sun village, Luang Prabang, Laos	30/11/2011	Laos	60 participants including 02 CHESH Laos's staff	BftW
1.7	A visiting trip for Denxavang and Phonxavat's villagers to fish farm in Nam Thuon village, Luang Prabang, Laos	6/6/2012	Laos	24 participants including 02 CHESH Laos's staff	BftW
1.8	A study tour for sharing and learning experience in community forest management, traditional education and community governance in Northeast Thailand.	3-14/10/2012	Chieng mai, Thailand	11 participants (one elder, 2 Local authorities, 4 youths, one scientist, 2 SPERI's staff and one Media)	CCFD

2	Workshops and seminars (15 events)			480 participants	
2.1	Attended a workshop in in Malaysia	23-26/4/2010	Malayxia	One SPERI's staff	BftW
2.2	Attended a workshop for "Ethnic Minority Youth" in Hoa Binh province, Vietnam	20 đến 28/08/2010	Hoa Binh, Vietnam	Three ethnic students	ESP
2.3	Attended a workshop "Agricultural innovation and dissemination of traditional knowledge" in Luang Prabang, Laos	23/10- 1/11/2010	Laos	10 participants	ICCO
2.4	Attended the seminar "model of community-based forest management" in Lang Son Province	20-25/4/2011	Lang Son, Vietnam	Two ethnic students and one elder	NPA
2.5	Tham du hoi thao ve xung dot dat dai tai Duc: Attended a workshop on "Land conflict issues" in Germany	24/6-3/7/11	Germany	One SPERI's staff	BftW
2.6	Organized of the conference: "assessing the situation-oriented on forest management and solutions for the pilot allocation in Simacai district , Lao Cai province"	11/8/2011	Lao Cai, Vietnam	30 participants including 03 SPERI's staff; one dornor's codinator.	NPA
2.7	Organized a seminar on "Community-based Forest Land allocation" in Simacai district	7-9/2011	Lao Cai, Vietnam	50 participants including 06 SPERI's staff and one media	NPA
2.8	Attended the forum: "Community forests in the northern provinces" in Huu Lung Lang Son	21- 26/12/2011	Lang Son, Vietnam	25 participants including 05 SPERI's staff	NPA
2.9	Held joint talks between the parties on the implementation of the program FLA stage 2 in Lung Sui	14/3/2012	Lao Cai, Vietnam	20 participants including 02 SPERI's staff	NPA
2.10	Organized the workshop "Land Conflict resolution" of DenXaVang and PhonXaVat village in Luangprabang, Laos	9/4/2012	Laos	52 participants including 08 SPERI's staff	BftW & NPA
2.11	Organized the workshop "program evaluation results FLA stage 1" in Que Phong-Nghe An	9/5/2012	Que Phong, Nghe An	43 participants including 04 SPERI's staff	NPA
2.12	Organized the workshop "Community Forest Management: Policy and Practice"	9/10/2012	Vinh, Nghe An	53 participants including 10 SPERI's staff and 07 media	NPA
2.13	Organized the workshop "Management and land use in mountainous ethnic minority communities "	1/11/2012	Hanoi	134 participants including 10 SPERI's staff and 23 media	NPA
2.14	Attend the Towards Organic Asia Workshop	12- 19/10/2012	Laos	3 participants	NPA & ICCO

	“Mekong Youth Alliance for Organic Agriculture & Agro-ecology”				
2.15	Organized the seminar: "The problem of forest land and arable land for ethnic minorities in Vietnam (through northern provinces practices"	2/3/2013	Hanoi, Vietnam	45 participants	ICCO
3	List of cross-visits – 5 trips			8 participants	
3.1	Visiting trip to Thailand and Korea	12/12/2011	Thailand and Korea	1 participant	ICCO
3.2	Visiting trip to Cambodia	18/2/2012	Campodia	1 participant	
3.3	Visiting trip to Myanmar	20/2/12	Myanma	4 participant	ICCO
3.4	Visiting trip to CCFD- France	31/3/2011	Paris	1 participant	ICCO
3.5	Visiting trip to Thailand	9/2011	Thailand	1 participant	

Annex 6: Involvement of community leaders, elders, healers etc in trainings

	Total of 20 training courses			435 participants	
1	Mr Nguyen Trung teaches the thematic on farmer household economy in Hepa	30/6/2010	HEPA-Vietnam	One professor and 15 students	BftW
2	Mr Lo Khanh Xuyen teaches the thematic on culture in Hepa	12/08/2010	HEPA-Vietnam	One elder and 12 students	BftW
3	Training on agriculture law for 3 village: Densavang, Phonsavat, Nasamphan	18-22/10/2010	Laos	25 participants including 02 CHESH Lao's staff	BftW
4	Mr Nguyen Ngoc teaches from 10 to 14/10/2010	10-14/10/2010	HEPA-Vietnam	One professor and 15 students	BftW
4	Mrs Lanh's Training Course in New Zealand	2/2010-12/2010	New Zealand	SPERI's founder	ICCO
6	Fanancial and administraion traning for July in Viet Nam	5-12/1/2011	Vietnam	One CHESH Laos's staff	BftW
7	Quang Binh key Farmer traning and sharing on same interest group: Farming, breeding...	19-24/9/2011	Laos	4 key farmers and 60 villagers	BftW
8	Mr Pham Van Dung training Course in Newzeland	2-8/2011	Newzeland	One SPERI's senior staff	ICCO
9	Cost for the training course of method to plan for Community advisory Board	9/2/2012	Laos	18 participants including 02 CHESH Lao's staff	BftW
10	Cost of environment training for 2 village: Phonsavat and Densavang	26 đến 30/3/2012	Laos	53 participants including 4 CHESH Lao's staff	BftW
11	Paticipate in land and forest management method in Vien Chan	2/5/2012	Vien - Laos	one key farmer and one SPERI's staff	BftW

12	Organizing the breeding and planting training in Densavang	18,19/5/2012	Laos	45 participants including 3 CHESH Lao's staff	BftW
13	Organizing the breeding and planting training in Phonsavat	20,21/5/2012	Laos	31 participants including 3 CHESH Lao's staff	BftW
14	tham gia khóa học quay phim tại HN Participate in film training course in Ha Noi	29/5 - 12/6/2012	Hanoi, Vietnam	Two ethnic students	NPA
15	TOT training for Longlan peoples on practicing about breeding and gardening knowledges	24-26/6/2012	Laos	28 participants including 2 CHESH Lao's staff	CCFD
16	Traning and Planing for breeding group and people in Phonsavat	19-21/7/2012	Laos	43 participants including 2 CHESH Lao's staff	BftW
17	Traning and Planing for breeding group and people in Phonsavat	23-24/7/2012	Laos	44 participants including 2 CHESH Lao's staff	BftW
18	Traning and information collecting with breeding group in Densavang	10 -12/8/2012	Laos	21 participants including 2 CHESH Lao's staff	BftW
19	Method of making plan course for village leader and advisory board in Luangprabang	7-9/9/2012	Laos	10 participants	CCFD
20	Fund raising training Course in Vien Chan by BFTW.	19- 21/11/2012	Laos	One SPERI's staff	BftW

