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WORKING BEYOND THE GRASSROOTS: AN EVALUATION OF THE CHIA SE POVERTY ALLEVIATION PROGRAMME 2003 TO 2008

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Full responsibility for the text of this report rests with the authors. In common with all evaluation reports commissioned by Sida, the views contained in this report do not necessarily represent those of Sida or of the people consulted.

¹ The report's title, "Working beyond the grassroots", is based on earlier work by Fforde (2007) that showed that Chia Se operates at a level *beyond* that being addressed by the Grassroots Democracy Decree, i.e. beyond the formal administrative structures of the province, district and commune.

² Fforde, A. (2009), "*Reflections on the Chia Se project – participation, empowerment and democratisation*", paper prepared for the SAT evaluation team, 20th March 2009, Australia.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

AWPB	Annual work plan and budget
CEM	Committee for Ethnic Minorities
CPMU	Commune Project Management Unit
CPRGS	Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy
CSB	Commune Supervision Board
DPMU	District Project Management Unit
EIA	Environmental Risk Assessment
FCP	Forestry Cooperation Programme
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GoV	Government of Vietnam
GSO	General Statistics Office
HCS	Hanoi Core Statement
IGA	Income generating activity
ILSSA	Institute of Labour, Science and Social Affairs
IoS	Institute of Sociology
LDF	Local Development Fund
LPMD	Local Planning and Management of Development
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MARD	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Vietnam
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MFA	Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Sweden
MO	Mass Organisation
MOF	Ministry of Finance, Vietnam
MOLISA	Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs, Vietnam
MPI	Ministry of Planning and Investment, Vietnam
MRDP	Mountain Rural Development Programme
MSE	Micro and Small Enterprises
MTR	Mid-term Review
NP	National Project
NRM	Natural Resources Management
NTP	National Targeted Programme
ODA	Overseas Development Assistance
P135-2	Programme 135, phase 2
PFT	Planning Facilitation Team
PMU	Project Management Unit
PP	Provincial Project
PPMU	Provincial Project Management Unit
PS	Programme Secretariat
PSCP	Plantation and Soil Conservation Project
RAR	Results Analysis Report
SAT	Sida Advisory Team
SEDP	Socio-Economic Development Plan
SEK	Swedish Krona
SME	Small and Medium-size Enterprise
SPMU	Sub-Project Management Unit
ToT	Training of Trainers
USA	United States of America
VCP	Vietnamese Communist Party
VHLSS	Vietnam Household Living Standards Survey
VMG	Village Management Group
VSG	Village Supervision Group

Executive Summary

The purpose of this evaluation is to provide an ex post assessment of the Chia Se Poverty Alleviation Programme, from 2003 to 2008. By working at village level (i.e. beyond the lowest tier of the administrative system), the Chia Se programme has demonstrated that with the right support, investments can be decentralised and used to empower local people. While there have been shortcomings in the design and management of the programme, many stakeholders and beneficiaries see clear benefits from the approach – and this has been a significant achievement. A major shortcoming of this programme has been that it is near impossible to verify its effectiveness and impact with objective data – and this has done little to enable government and Sida to reach firm conclusions on the way forward. The key findings are explained in the following paragraphs.

Chia Se was implemented in the three provinces of Ha Giang, Yen Bai and Quang Tri, covering 6 districts, 64 communes and 466 villages. A fourth element, the National Project, aimed to provide policy and technical support to the provincial projects as well as utilise the lessons learned for policy-making. The programme builds on the earlier work of the Forest Co-operation Programme (FCP) and the Mountain Rural Development Programme (MRDP), and takes a broader approach to poverty alleviation through a strong emphasis on decentralisation to the village level. The programme is designed with a rights-based approach to poverty alleviation by aiming to promote participation, grassroots democracy and transparency. This is achieved through empowering villagers through access to village funds, which are spent according to the priorities of the villagers themselves. Commune and district levels also receive funds and considerable capacity building.

Overall, Chia Se could be said to be at the forefront of rural development in Vietnam with its pro-poor orientation and decentralisation to the village level, but less innovative in terms of management and its aid modality – a mixture of experimental and conventional. The approach of Chia Se is considered to be well suited to address persistent poverty in Vietnam, particularly because: (i) Participatory planning process better enables the poor and ethnic minorities to address their own development needs; (ii) The flexible use of local funds (the LDF) provides opportunities for people to address location-specific needs and diversify from land-based production; and, (iii) The approach can help tackle corruption and improve accountability through supporting local democracy (i.e. villagers plan, manage and supervise investments). In terms of aid modality, Chia Se utilises a more ‘traditional’ project approach compared to other rural development interventions in Vietnam. This has changed over time, but essentially there has been a reliance on donor guidelines and resources, a semi-integrated PMU structure, and a mix of donor and government procedures for procurement and reporting.

The design process of Chia Se is seen as innovative within the Vietnamese context; using workshops at the provincial level to design the programme from the bottom-up, based on local demands. The subsequent delay in the development of the logical framework and M&E system however, has resulted in a lack of specific and measurable objectives that have continued to affect the programme and make it difficult to objectively verify its achievements (i.e. with no clear targets/benchmarks, and a lack of a baseline). Therefore while the M&E system has helped to demonstrate that such a system can be applied at the lower levels – and especially the district – the data and analysis from it have never fully addressed the performance management and evaluative requirements of the programme. Only at the village level has the participatory monitoring and supervision been successful, i.e. where villagers have been involved in the active management and supervision of activities.

On the whole, the management of the programme by the Provincial Projects has been effective, with the good use of capacity building and technical assistance (including contracted-in staff). In the early years, the technical assistance was marked by difficulties defining roles, with this became clearer in the

latter stages – as Advisors moved from plugging operational shortfalls, to a more strategic and advisory function. The internal quality reports confirm this finding, though the reports also highlight that technical assistance has been weaker in support to M&E, communications and policy reform. Capacity building and training has been implemented through an impressive range of training courses (more than 2,000), although many courses were not held regularly, raising concerns about the overall impact – a concern that is difficult to verify because of the lack of systematic assessments of the quality and impact of training. In terms of the National Project, this has struggled to sufficiently perform its role and functions, although efforts in recent years have helped to improve the capacity of the Programme Secretariat and the use of annual work plans and disbursement of funds.

In terms of impact and effectiveness, the Chia Se programme has been highly effective at demonstrating that decentralisation and grassroots democracy can work – and in particular that the management and ownership of investments can be decentralised to the commune level and lower (i.e. with villagers usefully participating in local decision-making). Many staff and project beneficiaries cite the contribution of Chia Se to community empowerment as an important achievement. Plus, most government officials involved in the project see the approach as a positive and one that supports local prestige rather than undermine it.

In terms of poverty impact however, the picture is more mixed and difficult to verify. It seems that Chia Se has contributed to poverty reduction, but that it is not clear that this is greater than other approaches or whether it has addressed longer-term poverty reduction. Indeed, there is some evidence that shows that while incomes have increased in Chia Se areas, it may have increased faster for ethnic minorities and the poorest in non-Chia Se areas. Only in Ha Giang is there more robust evidence that appears to attribute Chia Se more strongly to improved incomes – through livestock provision and improved farming techniques. Where Chia Se seems to have performed less well is in introducing new sources of income – that could address poverty and growth in the longer term – with less attention given to off-farm production, micro and small enterprises, microfinance, and adding value through improved market access. The construction of inter-village and village-to-commune roads have helped reduce the time to schools and health clinics, plus the installation of electricity, water tanks and latrines have been important in many areas. The link to hygiene practices seems however to have been weakly addressed, and contributions to education and healthcare appear to be weak areas of the programme.

Against the National Project objectives (which are poorly specified), the evidence of a real impact on policy-making appears limited. There are few concrete examples of direct policy adoption, although this is not surprising given that the Chia Se programme was originally conceived as a ten-year intervention, the complex nature of policy reform in Vietnam, and the difficulties of finding direct causal links to policy. There are nevertheless examples of SPMUs making inputs into the policy-making process, and the programme has become widely known by local officials, donor agencies and amongst NGO staff. Plus, where Chia Se has been particularly instrumental, this has been as part of a ‘common voice’ amongst a suite of development interventions; showing how decentralisation can work in practice and how existing government programmes (like P135-2) can be more effective.

There are also instances where Chia Se approaches have been adopted by development programmes (and where a more direct causal link can be shown). Most of these examples are relatively small-scale, NGO projects. There remain considerable hurdles before a Chia Se approach can be adopted more widely, particularly as part of a participatory approach to SEDP. Several donor-funded interventions are piloting different approaches, but there seems to be no coordinated timeframe to reach a consensus on the way forwards. Because of this, there is a risk that when Chia Se ends, there still won't be widespread adoption outside the project areas – and specifically of the distinctive Chia Se approach of providing predictable funds at the village level to empower individuals and communities.

In conclusion, Chia Se has achieved a lot during its implementation and many features should be retained and developed in the next phase. In particular, this includes: (i) The approach to participatory decision-making, management and supervision; (ii) The use of flexible, predictable funds that are accessible to villagers; (iii) The use of Commune Facilitators to enhance the participation of all villagers; (iv) The display of budgets and expenditure on notice boards; and (v) Community monitoring and supervision of activities.

The detailed findings, lessons learned and recommendations are set out in Chapter 9. The following are therefore only a selection of the key recommendations:

1. Any second phase should provide a distinct break, with an explicit design to demonstrate that the Chia Se approach can be mainstreamed within the government system. This will require particular attention to: its 'research' design; better integration with government structures; more attention to cost-efficiency; the objective measurement of results; and the use of strategic communication tools.
2. While the SEDP 2011-15 provides the best opportunity for mainstreaming lessons, a second phase should seek opportunities through other government departments.
3. Sida and other donors should seek to have a clear timeframe with MPI for sharing lessons and deciding on the revisions to the SEDP process. Several donors are currently 'piloting' new SEDP processes, yet this appears to be done in an un-harmonised manner.
4. The Chia Se model should be adapted to better assist the poor and vulnerable to cope and adapt to disasters.
5. Training should be decentralised so that the communes are the budget holders, and able to purchase services according to demand.
6. Processes should be put in place to systematically capture and share assessments of training performance and impact.
7. The regular monitoring aspects of the M&E system should be better integrated within the government structures, but this should be complemented with a stronger, independent evaluative function to assess impacts.

1. Introduction

Box 1. The evaluation methodology

This evaluation draws extensively on secondary sources and particularly: the Chia Se M&E system; the GSO Household Impact Survey 2008; the Special Studies commissioned by the Programme Secretariat (and undertaken by IPSARD; IoS and ILSSA); the Results Analysis Report (RAR) produced by the TA/Secretariat; and, the independent mid-term and annual reports produced by the SAT. Several of these sources have important limitations however, and most notably the M&E data (where there are concerns about data quality), and the GSO survey (where figures for 2007 and 2004 are based on memory recall). The evaluation findings have therefore been triangulated with field visits by the SAT evaluation team during January and March 2009. These visits were undertaken in all three provinces, and included consultations with national stakeholders, provincial, district and commune staff. Visits to 12 villages were also included to capture the views of the 'ordinary citizens', members of village management and supervision groups and those from mass organisations. In total, over 200 stakeholder interviews were conducted to inform this evaluation, with full details of the methodology are provided in Annex 2.

The purpose of this evaluation is to provide an ex post assessment of the Chia Se Poverty Alleviation Programme from 2003 to 2008 (hereafter referred to as simply "Chia Se").³ This report provides a detailed analysis of the available evidence. The report takes stock of the current phase and provides lessons for the planning of the second phase. Chia Se was originally conceived as a ten-year intervention but in 2007,⁴ the Government of Sweden decided to phase-out bilateral cooperation with Vietnam – in part due to Vietnam's middle-income status, as well as a result of a new policy direction within Sida.⁵ As such, a full-scale extension of Chia Se will no longer occur. Instead, the Government of Vietnam (GoV) through the Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI), requested that the Swedish Embassy continue supporting a more focussed and scaled-up version of Chia Se for a period of two years out of four – with the principle aim of drawing out lessons and feeding these into the next five-year Socio-Economic Development Plan (SEDP).⁶

An essential part of any evaluation is the assessment of achievements against the programme objectives. The programme objectives, and the logic behind the intervention, are best described in the programme logical framework (hereafter referred to as the 'logframe'). While the logframe provides a useful summary of the rationale and purpose for the intervention, it should also be re-assessed and revised as the project develops and circumstances change. Evaluating against the logframe becomes more problematic where either: (i) the original design is not well articulated through the logical framework, and objectives and targets are vaguely defined, or (ii) where there has been a more substantial redesign, and two or more logical frameworks exist for the same programme. The Chia Se programme has elements of both: a logframe that was not well defined and not utilised as a management tool, and although the programme was not substantially redesigned, several versions of the logframe exist.

³ *Chia Se* is Vietnamese for 'sharing' or 'partnership', describing the main ethos of the programme. The term 'programme' is used throughout the report to refer to the whole of the Chia Se intervention, with 'project' reserved for references to one of the four projects (i.e. the National Project, or the three Provincial Projects).

⁴ According to discussions with the design team, although not formally recorded in the design document.

⁵ Under the "Actor Partnership for Global Development" (Swedish Parliamentary decision, *Regeringsbeslut*, 19th December 2007), the Government of Sweden set out to stimulate the development of working relations with actors in poor and middle income countries. As part of the phasing out of traditional bilateral cooperation, Vietnam became one of several countries in which Sida set out to promote partnerships between local actors and actors in Sweden.

⁶ The SEDP is the national planning framework for achieving economic growth, industrial development and poverty reduction in Vietnam.

Officially the programme design is articulated in the Chia Se Logframes of 2005/06, and this provides the basis for this evaluation. These logframes are however broadly defined and in several ways do not sufficiently reflect the programme objectives as they have evolved. As such, it would be unreasonable to assess the performance of Chia Se purely on this basis. Therefore, where appropriate the evaluation draws from the work to revise the logframes (SAT 2007) and the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) system – as both help to better specify the meaning of particular objectives. See Box 2.

Box 2. Limitations of the evaluation

There are two key limitations, for reasons outside the control of this evaluation. Firstly, the Logframe does not establish targets for the programme, nor is this adequately achieved through the subsequent design of the M&E system. It is therefore impossible to objectively judge performance against the original intentions – i.e. to state for instance whether the Chia Se achieved its original targets or exceeded them. Secondly, it is generally accepted that a baseline study was not conducted in 2003/04,⁷ against which before/after change could be objectively measured.⁸ Instead, GSO undertook a 'baseline survey' in 2005 and this was still being re-checked and processed at the time of the MTR in December 2006 – some three years into programme implementation. Plus while the data from this survey has been used to populate the M&E database, its reliability is questionable,⁹ and only data for Chia Se communes was entered. Without similar data for the non-Chia Se communes, it is not possible to undertake a comparative analysis between target and control groups.

The evaluation has therefore had to make the best possible assessment against the programme objectives using a combination of indicators (from the M&E system) and other parameters and more qualitative studies (such as those on empowerment, capacity building, etc). Whether the observable changes (in terms of poverty levels, people's income, livelihoods opportunities, empowerment, etc) are significant or exceed the original design intention, will always remain open to debate.

The evaluation follows the standard OECD/DAC evaluation criteria as required by Sida. The major questions of the evaluation, as set out in the Terms of Reference (ToR), are:¹⁰

Table Key evaluation questions

Relevance:
How relevant is Chia Se to the priorities, policies and programmes of the GoV, the poverty trends and the perspectives of the poor?
Does Chia Se align with the strategic priorities and policies of the Embassy of Sweden/Sida and the Swedish government more broadly?
Effectiveness & impact:
Has Chia Se had an impact on poverty alleviation & contributed to sustainable growth?
Has Chia Se improved access to poverty alleviation resources for the poor, especially in terms of community empowerment, local democracy, and the equality of women and ethnic minorities?
Has the National Project provided effective national-level support for poverty alleviation, such as capturing lessons learned and feeding these into policy?

⁷ MARD did instigate what they called a "baseline survey" which covered all Chia Se districts and 120 households in total. This however seems to have occurred without the prior knowledge of the Programme Secretariat and with no involvement from GSO. It is generally regarded as having little or no utility for baseline purposes. Source: interviews with Programme Secretariat and Technical Assistance.

⁸ Baseline: The condition or level of performance that exists prior to implementation of the programme or intervention.

⁹ One of the most striking and obvious anomalies is the data that shows that illiteracy has nearly doubled in Mu Cang Chai district in Yen Bai, from 1,706 illiterate women (aged 15 and over) in 2004, to 3,177 in 2008 – a obvious error perhaps, but one that suggests that the checking and verification of the data has been insufficient.

¹⁰ Summarised from pages 3-6 of Embassy of Sweden (2009), *"Terms of Reference for the Sida Advisory Team to undertake the Evaluation of Chia Se Poverty Alleviation Programme during 2009"*, 2nd draft, 8th January 2009, Embassy of Sweden, Hanoi, Vietnam.

Sustainability:

Has the approach of Chia Se been replicated and mainstreamed at national and provincial levels, including into government processes and policy (SEDP, etc), and other development programmes (P135/2, NTP-PR, etc)?

Are the community-led interventions sustainable in terms of operations and maintenance, environmental mitigation and impact?

Efficiency:

Has the programme been well designed and managed, including in terms of capacity building, technical assistance and monitoring and evaluation?

The remainder of this report is structured in seven key chapters.¹¹ The first chapter describes the intervention logic of the Chia Se programme, and places this within the context of forty years of cooperation between Sweden and Vietnam (*Chapter 2: The evaluated intervention*). This is followed by an assessment of the relevance of Chia Se to policy and rural development within Vietnam (*Chapter 3: Policy context and rural development*). The main body of the report then sets out the key evaluation findings; firstly on the design and management of the programme (*Chapter 4: Programme design and management*); then the effectiveness of Chia Se and its impact on empowerment (*Chapter 5: Impact on Empowerment and Local Democracy*), and poverty (*Chapter 6: Impact on Poverty and Growth*). The report then goes on to consider crosscutting issues (*Chapter 7: Equality, Environment and Sustainability*), and assess the contribution of Chia Se to policy and development in Vietnam (*Chapter 8: Replication and Policy Reform*). The final chapter summarises the main findings, lessons and recommendations of the report (*Chapter 9: Conclusions and recommendations*).

2. The Evaluated Intervention

This chapter describes the main characteristics of the Chia Se programme, including its history and design, the location of its activities, and the organisational setup. The first part of the chapter places Chia Se within 40 years of cooperation between Sweden and Vietnam, while the second part provides an overview of the Chia Se intervention, including its intervention logic, main objectives, outputs and activities.

Cooperation between Sweden and Vietnam

For forty years, the Government of Sweden has cooperated with Vietnam – a significant milestone and unprecedented amongst western countries.¹² During this time, many interlocutors have shaped the relationship between Sweden and Vietnam. The relationship is commonly referred to as a ‘special relationship’ between the two countries, although in practice, it is difficult to identify a formal or definitive outworking of the partnership (as might be marked by favourable commercial relations for instance). The Vietnamese too do not necessarily articulate such a difference, and as Fforde (2009: 15) points out:

“The longer-term meanings of the cooperation must be looked for, and will probably be found, in the varied norms and meanings of social and political organisation carried by most well-

¹¹ In line with the requirements of Sida (2004: Annex B).

¹² In 2009, a yearlong celebration is planned to mark the 40th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Sweden and Vietnam. This was launched at the Hanoi Opera House on 11th January 2009 with a Gala Concert performed by Swedish and Vietnamese artists. Among the audience was the Standing Deputy Prime Minister of Vietnam, Mr Nguyen Sinh Hung, and the Minister of Culture, Sports and Tourism, Hoang Tuan Anh, as well as many Vietnamese and Swedish dignitaries.

meaning Swedes ... into bilateral discussions, formal or informal. These are inherently diverse, democratic and civil, and so impossible to understand in terms of any formal 'special relationship', not least as the people who have been carriers and articulators of these ideas were, in theoretical terms, probably rather unaware of their particularities, as indeed are most people when asked about what they consider to be quite normal – themselves"

Nevertheless over a sustained period both countries have adapted their mutual strategies through a long-term commitment to engagement and lesson learning. The start of the relationship is considered remarkable because it was formed during the height of the Cold War between a 'western' country (albeit neutral and non-aligned) and Vietnam, belonging to the communist block. In 1969, Sweden was among the first western nations to criticise the United States for its invasion in South Vietnam, and also the first western country to establish diplomatic relations with North Vietnam. Throughout the years of cooperation, Sweden has set out its key guiding principles. In the 1970s, these were principally that: (i) the recipient country should determine aid priorities and policies ("recipient orientation"); (ii) the choice of the "right" recipient meant that aid would necessarily contribute to "development"; and (iii) since the definition of "right" reflected a political judgment, Swedish foreign aid should explicitly and consciously be used as an instrument of foreign policy.¹³

Over the decades, Sida's country strategies have not always been strongly aligned with Vietnam's development priorities and it is somewhat debateable which side takes precedence. More importantly though, the approach has evolved over time, as both sides have changed their viewpoints. A brief chronology demonstrates this point well:

Swedish assistance to the forestry sector. Natural resource management (NRM) and especially the forestry sector have been the main focus of Sweden's assistance over many years – and closely linked to the Swedish-assisted *Bai Bang* Paper and Pulp Mill project. *Bai Bang* remains Sweden's all-time largest development assistance project and probably the most controversial.¹⁴ The venture was the result of a political manifestation of the solidarity shown by the Swedish government to the (North) Vietnamese at the peak of the American war. While plans for the project were already underway in 1969, actual start-up did not occur until 1974, with construction completed in 1982 and Swedish assistance continuing for another eight years.

Sida's shift towards rural development. The shift towards more conventional forms of development cooperation began in the wake of the so-called "forced labour debate" in Sweden. In 1985, Sida commissioned a study on the socio-economic factors influencing the productivity of labour within the forestry component (Larsson and Birgegård, 1985). This generated considerable public debate in Sweden as it revealed, among others, the deplorable living conditions of the forest workers, especially those of the women workers. As a result, development projects designed and implemented from the mid-1980s onwards clearly included socio-economic components in their objectives.

Family-farm based models of development. The changes in Sida's approach coincided with Vietnam's own shift – one towards economic development. In 1986, the Vietnamese government announced the *Doi Moi* reforms (meaning 'renovation'), officially abandoning the centrally planned economic model for a market-driven one that included the private use of farmland. In 1988, under Party Decree 10, one important shift in policy was to prevent state organs from issuing planting instructions to the 'old-style'

¹³ In the 1970s, these were called the, "choice of country" or *länderval* (Sida 1999). Since the late 1980s, these principles have been set out and defined by Sida's Country Programme Strategies.

¹⁴ The Vinh Phu/Bai Bang Project has been described and referred to in a number of reports. In one report (Sida 1999), it states that the then Sida Director-General, Ernst Michanek, wrote a note with the title "Aldrig mer" ("Nevermore"), and filed it away in his private archive. Yet, it is interesting to note that in the recent 40-years celebrations, Bai Bang was brought up by many Vietnamese speakers as "an example of most valuable and successful projects" along with the "National Paediatrics Hospital and the Uong Bi Hospital, as well as projects and programmes on good governance, administrative reforms, poverty reduction and environment". Source: <http://www.swedenabroad.com>

cooperatives that had previously played a major role in rural life. At a stroke, this eliminated much of the basis for the forestry-planting plan of the *Bai Bang* Mill. Discussions between both sides centred on treating the area surrounding the mill as a ‘Socio-economic Forestry Development Area’ (Fforde 2009: 16).

Farmer-focused development. In 1991, the Swedish Forestry Co-operation Programme (FCP) commenced with the aim of supporting socio-economic development in rural areas through sustainable and improved forestry and land use.¹⁵ While the programme primarily covered technical assistance, institution building and training, it also marked a shift towards a more farmer-focused form of cooperation: *“The primary target group of FCP was defined as ‘farmer households’ and forest workers in the three provinces, which constituted the Raw Material Area, renamed the Forestry Development Area ... The objectives of the programme, according to the Swedish documents, were to contribute to Vietnam’s effort to halt the forest destruction, maintain the forest resource and make it a basis for economic development benefiting the rural population”* (Sida 2003).

Relative decentralisation of rural development. By mid-1996, the Mountain Rural Development Programme (MRDP) had inherited many of the lessons and experiences of FCP, though it also had a wider scope and clearer emphasis on poverty alleviation and rural development. The main focus of the programme was to *“create an environment – including technology, infrastructure, information, financial services, adequate support institutions, government policies and regulations – in which poor households in mountain communities are able to benefit from sustainable and diversified economic activities, such as primary production, processing, services, trade and employment in the context of an emerging market economy”*. The evaluation of MRDP suggests that by this point, discussions had matured to incorporate the relative decentralisation of rural development efforts: *“The shift in Vietnamese Communist Party thinking appears profound; evidence for this can be found in the commune-focus and relative decentralisation of current rural development efforts; and also in the view that mass organisations, both ‘political’ and ‘non-political’ should play an enhanced role in rural development”* (Fforde 2009: 16).¹⁶

Box 3. Features of Sweden-Vietnam cooperation¹⁷

1. Serious development engagement before national reunification in 1975–76
2. Sustained engagement in rural development issues, from the late 1970s to the present (starting with support to the forestry area)
3. Continued engagement through the ‘interregnum’ of the 1980s, after the withdrawal of almost all other Western bilateral donors in the late 1970s (with the exception of Finland).
4. A cadre of Swedish and ‘other expatriate’ participants in the cooperation whose experience goes back to the late 1970s when forestry advisors first started to engage.

Chia Se and grassroots democracy. In 1998, the Party issued the Decree on Grassroots Democracy (see also Box 4 for details), which proposed that the community level should be able to participate more actively in planning and decision-making, as well as the supervision and evaluation of activities implemented by the commune level and above. In 2001, planning for the new Sida project commenced for what eventually became known as the Chia Se Poverty Alleviation Project. Early documentation shows a clear intent to support and further increase the decentralisation being promoted by the Government of Vietnam through a series of laws, decrees and regulations (PFT 2001).

In summary, it is the sustained intensity and diversity of the relationship that seems key, and one that remains unparalleled amongst western bilateral donors (see Box 3). In doing so, both sides have continued to adapt their mutual strategies to fit the circumstances of the time. Whether *Doi Moi* came about

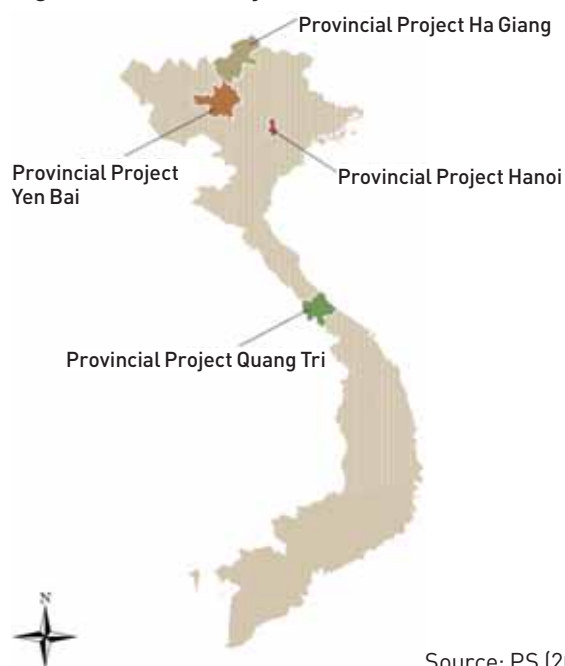
¹⁵ The programme included components on: (i) land use and land management; (ii) plantation & soil conservation; (iii) farm-level forestry; and, (iv) forestry research and forestry training.

¹⁶ Quoted from the Draft FCP/MRDP Evaluation, Chapter 4, page 9.

¹⁷ Based on Fforde (2009: 15).

partly as result of Swedish efforts in *Bai Bang*, or whether the Decree on Grassroots Democracy came to pave way for the Chia Se programme (or whether indeed Chia se was designed to fit with the above decree) is of less consequence. Rather, it is the tension between Swedish strategies and the priorities of Vietnam, or vice versa, that has at times led to changes on both parts – and that this has only been possible through a long-term commitment to engagement, projects and lesson learning. Sweden has, despite its relatively modest amount of Overseas Development Assistance (ODA),¹⁸ been able to forcefully express concerns. Some writers indeed argue that Sweden has a somewhat privileged position in this required, as Rama (2008) claims with reference to the traditionally sensitive area of human rights and corruption:

Figure 1. Chia Se Project Areas



Source: PS (2006b: 8).

“At one end of the spectrum, a donor like Sweden had the necessary credibility, because it stood by Vietnam’s side during the most difficult years of the American war. This tested solidarity allowed the Swedish cooperation agency to engage in a dialogue on corruption with the Party at a time when the issue was almost taboo. Probably no other donor would have been listened to. This engagement, while frustrating at times, paved the way for an important change in policy. The Party identified the fight against corruption as a top priority at the end of 2003, at which point it chose to move away from a mainly punitive anti corruption strategy to one involving systemic reforms and increased transparency”.

The Chia Se Poverty Alleviation Programme

The Chia Se Poverty Alleviation programme clearly builds on the earlier work of FCP and MRDP, and takes a broader approach to poverty alleviation through a strong emphasis on decentralisation down to the village level. The programme is designed with a rights-based approach to poverty alleviation,¹⁹ and one that aims to promote participation, grassroots democracy and transparency. To this end, up to 80

¹⁸ In 2008, Sweden’s total was SEK 260 million (EUR 26 million), equivalent to less than 0.4 percent of the State Budget of Vietnam.

¹⁹ Broadly speaking, a rights-based approach recognises poverty as an injustice, with marginalisation, discrimination and exploitation being viewed as the key causes of poverty. Therefore the central dynamic of a rights-based approach is about identifying root causes of poverty, empowering rights-holders to claim their rights and enabling duty-bearers to meet their obligations (Filmer-Wilson 2005).

percent of resources are delegated to the village level through the Local Development Fund (LDF), alongside tools for participatory planning (the Local Planning for Management and Development, or LPMD), and capacity building to assist the local management levels to utilise the resources more effectively. All Chia Se villages are supported with a LDF, and at village meetings, the villagers decide how to use the funds and manage the activities. Chia Se communes and districts also share the LDF (15% and 5% respectively). This is used to support the villagers' demands and help implement inter-village activities. The essence of the Chia Se approach can be summarised as:

Figure 2. Phases and Steps in the LPMD Process

Preparation:

Agreement between Sida and Provincial People's Committee (PPC)
 Agreement between PPC and selected Districts
 Creation of Provincial Project Steering Committee (SC) & Secretariat
 District Project Management Unit (DPMU)
 Transfer of Project Funds to Districts

Phase I:

Step 1. Selection of Pilot Communes
 Step 2. Training
 Step 3. Visioning and Priority Setting
 Step 4. Indicative Funding Amount (IFA)
 Step 5. Village and Commune Planning
 Step 6. Approval by the DPMU and fund release
 Step 7. Implementation
 Step 8. Evaluation

Phase II:

Continuation in existing Communes and Villages
 Step 9. Review and Re-validation of Vision and Priority Setting
 Next steps as from Phase I – Step 5 and onwards
 Extension into new Communes and Villages
 Implementation in new communes starts as in Phase I – Step 1

Source: PS 2003 (Appendix 2).

“Empower villagers by giving them access to funds to be used over a number of years, with the amounts known in advance, to be spent in accordance with priorities of the villagers themselves”
 (De Vylder and Warfvinge 2008: 3).

Table 2. Chia Se project areas

Project Areas	Communes	Villages
Ha Giang Province:		
Bac Me District	12	112
Hoang Su Phi District	18	86
Yen Bai Province:		
Van Chan District	7	58
Mu Cang Chai District	7	61
Quang Tri Province:		
Vinh Linh District	10	82
Gio Linh District	10	67
Total	64	466

Source: PS (2008: 2)

The LPMD is undertaken in two phases (see Figure 2). The LPMD cycle aims to assist the village leader and villagers to: (i) Systematically analyze the socio-economic status in their village for understanding wishes, advantages, difficulties and potentialities; (ii) Reflect not only the people's urgent needs but also to look into their requirements for sustainable development; (iii) Agree on the activities to be undertaken and prepare for development plans to ensure both short and long term sustainable solutions; and, (iv) Realize the development plans necessary to utilize LDF resources and make decisions on the basis of adequate and acceptable information.

The Chia Se programme has been implemented in two phases, with an Inception Phase that started at the end of 2003 and the current Implementing Phase that runs from January 2005 to December 2008 (extended to 31st March 2009). The programme operates through three provincial projects in Ha Giang, Yen Bai and Quang Tri (see Figure 1), plus the National Project that aims to provide policy and technical support to the provincial projects as well as utilise lessons learned for policy-making. The programme has been implemented in three provinces, six districts, 64 communes and 466 villages, covering close to 200,000 villagers. In Ha Giang province, Chia Se has been implemented in Bac Me and Hoang Su Phi districts; in Quang Tri province in Gio Linh and Vinh Linh districts; and, in Yen Bai province in Van Chan and Mu Cang Chai districts. See Table 2. The National Project is coordinated by the Programme Secretariat (PS) and functions through five Sub-project Management Units (SPMUs) drawn from the following ministries/departments:

- Ministry of Planning & Investment (MPI)
- Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD)
- Ministry of Finance (MoF)
- Ministry of Labour, Invalids & Social Affairs (MOLISA)
- General Statistics Office (GSO)

Programme objectives

The main target groups (beneficiaries) of Chia Se are set out in the Programme Document (PS 2003). They are defined in three broad categories:²⁰

- *The poor villages and the poor households* within these villages are the primary beneficiaries
- *Commune, district, provincial and ministerial staff* constitute the secondary group of beneficiaries (to benefit from improving their capacity in policy analysis, planning, management and financial matters, as well as in technical matters regarding delivery of services, techniques and knowledge to the primary beneficiaries)
- *Civil society (NGOs) and the private sector actors* constitute another group of beneficiaries, who would benefit from Chia Se's interventions through improved capacity to deliver poverty alleviation programmes and become active partners in the Project's efforts to alleviate poverty

The original "Programme Document" from 2003 sets out the main objective statements and logic for the National Project and three Provincial Projects (PS 2003: 55-59), although not in a formal logframe matrix. In 2005/06, the Programme Logframe was formally approved at a quarterly meeting, though with minimal changes from the objectives set out in the Programme Document. This is the *official* Chia Se Logframe, which actually consists of three sub-logframes: (i) one for the overall programme, (ii) the National Project logframe, plus (iii) a standard one for the Provincial Projects (i.e. all the three provincial projects are treated as identical with the same objectives and indicators).

²⁰ Note: At the time of producing this steering document, the selection of operational areas apparently had not been made.

The overall (entire) programme goal is “*A just and fair and sustainable society*”, with the goals of the National Project and Provincial Projects stated simply as, “Poverty is alleviated and growth is sustainable”. The overall objectives and indicators are summarised below:

Goal (National Project & Provincial Projects)	Indicators
Poverty is alleviated and growth is sustainable	Provincial poverty rate (MOLISA) Provincial GDP growth
Source: Logical Frameworks of the National and Provincial Projects (PS 2006).	

For the National Project, the outcome-level objective is that, “National support to poverty alleviation is effective”.²¹ The logframe workshop in 2007 (SAT 2007a) identified several weaknesses in this objective, including that it is too general, difficult to evaluate and not operational. The following were proposed as a revision (SAT 2007: 3): (i) Chia Se provinces have conditions and capacity to implement rights-based poverty alleviation through decentralization and grassroots democracy; and, (ii) The demonstrated successes of the CS approach collected and mainstreamed into other government poverty alleviation initiatives, such as SEDP, P135/2, NTP-PR. Although these were never formally adopted, the revisions perhaps better reflect the de facto dual objectives of ‘supporting the provinces’ and ‘mainstreaming lessons’. The official objectives and indicators of the National Project are:

Objective (National Project)	Indicators
National support to poverty alleviation is effective	CPRGS is operationalised in SEDP 2006-2010 Provincial projects use advice, guidelines, procedures and rules developed and provided by the National Project Disbursement rates of provincial projects for LDF and capacity building
Source: Logical Framework of the National Project (PS 2006).	

The National Project has four main outputs, which are described in the Logframe as (PS 2006) as:

- 1 Policies for poverty alleviation are more effective
- 2 Policies for poverty alleviation are better disseminated
- 3 Information systems for poverty alleviation are more effective
- 4 Management of poverty alleviation resources is more efficient

For the three Provincial Projects, the outcome-level objective is that, “*Poor households have good access to poverty alleviation resources*”. Different stakeholders have variously interpreted this objective. For example at the time of the Mid-term Review (MTR), the SAT team found, “*Some (especially Sida) regard it [Chia Se] as a governance programme, while others (more often represented by the GoV) highlight the income generation and (income) poverty reduction aspects of the programme. The former see the income-generation activities and the LDF as means in achieving the objectives of participation, decentralisation, empowerment and accountability, while the latter see the participation and decentralisation as a means of achieving economic growth and increased incomes of the rural poor*” (SAT 2006: 2). The official objectives and indicators of the Provincial Projects are:

²¹ Outcome-level objectives: The project’s central objectives in terms of the sustainable benefits to be delivered to the project beneficiaries, institution or system. Achievement of this objective requires a ‘beneficiary response’ whereby the beneficiaries use project services and in doing so derive a benefit for themselves. While project managers cannot be held fully accountable for delivery of the objective, they have a clear responsibility for ensuring that the services provided by the project meet beneficiary needs and preferences (SAT 2007: 5).

Objective (Provincial Projects)	Indicators
Poor households have good access to poverty alleviation resources	Improved sustainable livelihoods in terms of: (i) Income; (ii) Effective production (agriculture and non-agriculture); (iii) Good infrastructure; (iv) Socio-economic services (health, education). Proportion of households below MOLISA's 2006 income poverty line (= poverty rate) Access and control over resources in terms of: (i) Credit; (ii) Programme support; (iii) Village land-use plans; (iv) Community forest management; (v) Land-use certificates; (vi) Market information. Gender equity in terms of: (i) Proportion of female Commune Party Executive Committee, Commune People's Council, and Commune People's Committee members; (ii) Proportion of ethnic minority Commune Party, Executive Committee, Commune People's Council, and Commune People's Committee members. Proportion of households that feel empowered by Chia Se.
Source: Logical Framework of the Provincial Projects (PS 2006).	

The original programme design lists four outputs, though in the revised logframe *five outputs* are listed (PS 2006), with the addition of policy dissemination. These outputs are:

- 1 Effectiveness of management systems and structures is improved (Institution building and capacity development)
- 2 Local Planning and Management for Development (LPMD) is established
- 3 The Local Development Fund (LDF) is functioning
- 4 Policies for poverty alleviation are more effective
- 5 Policies for poverty alleviation are better disseminated

Financial expenditure

The total budget for the Chia Se programme was agreed at SEK 356.5 million, with SEK 310 million financed by Sida million and SEK 46.5 million (15%) as GoV counterpart funding. The main components of this funding are: LDF with 51% of total budget, LPMD 14%, Capacity building 18% and Technical Assistance 17%. Additional funds were set aside for follow-up activities such as external audit, special studies and evaluation. Table 3 shows the actual expenditure of three provinces for the period 2003–2008. QuangTri province had the highest total expenditure (VND 231,600 million) with the lowest by Yen Bai (VND 161,173 million) and Ha Giang somewhere between the two (VND 178,354 million).²² Chia Se provincial projects spent 79% of total spending for activities funded under the LDF, while management expenditure (LPMD) reached 15%, with 6% for capacity building. Quang Tri province had the highest percentage expenditure on the LDF and management (LPMD) with 80% and 16%, while Yen Bai had the lowest with 78% and 14% respectively. Yen Bai however had the highest proportion spent on capacity building, at 8%. In comparison with other programme like P135-2, the management costs are higher (Chia Se has spent 14.6% more than P135-2), though with a similar level for capacity building (Chia Se has spent 2% more than P135-2 on capacity building).

²² The total expenditures include both Sida and GoV sources.

Table 3. Actual expenditure for the period of 2003–2008 (VND million)

	Actual expenditure					
	2003–2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	Total
Ha Giang Province						
Components LDF	1,697	25,559	43,648	39,981	19,045	129,930
CB	0	952	2,019	3,546	1,629	8,146
LPMD	1,542	5,761	5,216	7,231	5,539	25,289
Sida direct payments					14,989	14,989
Subtotal HG	3,239	32,272	50,883	50,758	41,202	178,354
Yen Bai Province						
Components LDF	3,754	13,500	38,636	22,184	25,275	103,349
CB	1,125	2,635	1,399	2,489	2,695	10,343
LPMD	1,310	2,539	3,340	4,861	6,146	18,196
Sida direct payments	3,999	11,547	5,839	4,294	3,606	29,285
Subtotal YB	10,188	30,221	49,214	33,828	37,722	161,173
Quang Tri Province						
Components LDF	7,517	28,977	38,115	47,808	40,213	162,630
CB	812	1,765	1,381	2,575	3,051	9,584
LPMD	3,848	4,939	6,377	7,025	9,436	31,625
Sida direct payments	6,466	10,976	6,752	3,567	0	27,761
Subtotal QT	18,643	46,657	52,625	60,975	52,700	231,600
Source: Data provided by PS of three provinces						

Table 4 provides a summary of the total expenditure for the National Project, 2003 to 2008. The total is VND 108.847 million. The activities and outputs between programme start-up and the latter stages are different, so it is not possible to consolidate either by activities or outputs for whole period.

Table 4. Expenditure for the National Project, 2003–08

	2003-2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	Total actual (03-08)	%
National Project							
Activities/outputs							
Capacity building for the benefit of own organisation	179	2.603				2.782	2,6'
Capacity building of Chia Se Provincial projects	1.182	2.228				3.410	3,1'
Support for policy renovation	94	3.394				3.488	3,2'
M & E, reporting and dissemination of information	14	1.675				1.689	1,6'
Creating and enabling environment	4.165	3.887				8.052	7,4'
Technical support	8.888	9.304	9.995	11.892		40.079	36,8'
Output 4: Policies for poverty alleviation			3.158	4.109	7.224	14.491	13,3'
Output 5: Dissemination of policies for poverty alleviation			1.343	4.274	2.123	7.740	7,1'
Output 6: Information systems for poverty alleviation			2.211	3.308	5.059	10.578	9,7'
Output 7: Management of poverty alleviation resources			1.977	2.175	6.820	10.972	10,1'
Government contribution			2.644	2.922		5.566	5,1'
Subtotal NP	Unit: Million Dong	14.522	23.091	21.328	28.680	21.226	100,0

Summary:

Over the decades, many interlocutors have shaped the relationship between Sweden and Vietnam. It is therefore difficult to identify a formal 'special relationship' as such, but rather it is the sustained intensity of the relationship since 1969 that remains unparalleled amongst western donors.

Over 40 years, both sides have continued to adapt their mutual strategies through a long-term commitment to engagement and lesson learning (even when most other western donors withdrew support). Throughout the period there have been many turning points on both sides, including key changes in Vietnamese policy (such as *Doi Moi*, Decree 10 on family-farm based models, and the Decree on Grassroots Democracy).

Sida's approach has also shifted considerably over the period. Since the 1970s, Sida has moved away from technical support to forestry (under *Bai Bang*) and more towards socio-economic aspects of rural development. Under Forestry Cooperation Programme, cooperation shifted more towards a farmer-focused orientation, and under MARD Rural Development Programme, discussions between Sweden and Vietnam had begun to incorporate the relative decentralisation (to the commune level, involving mass organisations).

Chia Se programme takes the decentralised approach further, and most importantly by decentralising to the village level where there is an emphasis on people's democratic rights to determine planning and investments in their locality.

The programme objectives are set out in the official Logframe of 2005/06, with the National Project having the *de facto* dual objectives of 'supporting the provinces' and 'mainstreaming lessons'. The three provincial projects aimed to provide poor households with good access to poverty alleviation resources – an objective variously interpreted in terms of 'access' issues (governance and democracy) or 'resources' (income generation, growth and poverty alleviation).

3. Policy Context and Rural Development

This chapter explores the relevance of the Chia Se programme to the priorities and policies of the Government of Vietnam, the needs of the poor, and the strategic priorities of Sida. The chapter is set out in four main parts. The first reviews the relevance of Chia Se to the poor and poverty concerns in Vietnam. The second part looks at the alignment of the programme to GoV policy, while the third part considers the alignment to Sida priorities. The chapter then ends with a fourth section on aid modalities and the interventions of other donors.

Poverty Alleviation in Vietnam

Over the past decade, Vietnam has demonstrated strong economic growth, alongside the rapid reduction of poverty. The national statistics of the country show a trend of impressive economic growth: Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has on average grown at 7.3% from 1995 to 2005, and per capita income by 6.2% per annum (World Bank 2008). This has been due by and large to the market orientation policies started by *Doi Moi* and the increasing industrialisation of the country. The economic growth in 2007 was 8.5%, which was 0.25% higher than the year before. Some observers however

expect the pace of growth to fall, with 6.7% estimated in 2008 and a prediction of 4.3% for 2009 (EIU 2008: 6). It is not fully clear how the current economic uncertainty will affect growth, though there are early indications of reducing export markets for agricultural and other products, plus increased unemployment rates.

Poverty has fallen dramatically over the same period. Household data suggests that general poverty fell from 58.1% in 1993 to 16% in 2006 (World Bank 2008). Plus, income per capita rose from USD 260 in 1995 to USD 835 by 2007. To date, rapid poverty reduction has been accompanied by modest increases in inequality.

The national poverty rate has continued to fall during the period that Chia Se has been implemented, but at a reduced rate, and it is now estimated at 13 per cent. The reasons for this apparent slowing include the effects of increasing consumer prices, the failure of industrial centres to create linkages between labour and capital in rural areas and, weaknesses in education and training institutions (PS 2009: Chapter 3.1).

The main drivers of economic growth are industry and the service sectors in Vietnam, with industry/construction and services by around 7.5% in recent years, compared to 3.6% for agriculture, forestry and fisheries (based on 2007 figures). Indeed, industry and construction account for around 40% of GDP, while agriculture, forestry and fisheries account for approximately 20% of GDP. Nevertheless, agriculture and forestry remain very important because they are a key resource for a large proportion of the population (with about 75% of the population continuing to derive their livelihoods from agriculture). The GoV's priority is to orientate agricultural development towards the open market. In the lowland areas (like Quang Tri), the agricultural situation is better and increased productivity and greater market access can be seen as appropriate. Yet, in mountainous areas (such as the provinces of Ha Giang and Yen Bai) where living standards are lower and the environment more vulnerable, a market orientation is more problematic and sustainable land management (e.g. land, water and forestry) is more of a priority.

Poverty remains a major concern in rural areas, particularly in mountainous regions that have the highest poverty rates in the country. There now exist *pockets of persistent poverty*, with considerable differences between rural-urban populations, geographical locations and people groups. Rural poverty (25%) is still considerably higher than urban poverty (4%), and poverty is deepest in the sparsely populated mountainous regions of North and Central Vietnam. In 2006, poverty among ethnic minority groups was estimated at 52.2%, compared with 10.2% in the majority Kinh and Chinese population (World Bank 2008). Poverty rates are higher in Hmong and Dao minority groups than in Tay and Kinh (Vietnamese) majorities, and ethnic minorities now account for 44.4% of the poor.

Like many other rural areas, Chia Se provinces are among poorest and most difficult areas (e.g. among 61 poorest districts in the country). General characteristics of these areas are a lack of resources, high poverty rates, and low education. Opinions differ on the factors behind the higher poverty incidences in these areas, and amongst particular people groups. There is some consensus that reductions in rural poverty are closely linked to gains in agricultural productivity, and that agro-climatic and market access variables are key determinants (Minot et al 2003). But, recent analysis also shows that a key constraint behind persistent poverty is the socio-political aspects of inclusion and exclusion (World Bank 2006). A number of GoV and other development programmes are seeking to reduce poverty in the mountainous regions, including Programme 135-2 (P135-2), and programmes 147 and 661.

Relevance of Chia Se to addressing poverty in Vietnam

Although poverty has reduced rapidly over the last decade, there are signs that this is now slowing (PS 2009: 133) – with poverty increasingly concentrated amongst various socio-economic groups, which are usually geographically located in the upland and remote areas. There are many factors that are said to contribute to poverty in these regions, including:

- High population densities
- Poor natural resources (low land capital)
- Discrimination, low educational levels and language differences
- A lack of access to information and markets
- Insufficient safety nets
- Corruption and a lack of accountability
- Geographic isolation, and socio-cultural norms (e.g. around gender differences)

The approach of Chia Se is highly relevant to addressing persistent poverty in these areas because:

- Firstly, the approach to participatory planning better enables the poor and ethnic minorities to address their *own* development needs, by tailoring decisions to local priorities and the locally specific causes of poverty. For instance in one area, the lack of access to markets could be addressed through a village-to-commune road, whereas elsewhere, low educational standards or health issues might be more of a priority.
- Secondly, the flexible LDF approach provides opportunities for people to address needs by seeking new ways to diversify from land-based production. In principle, Chia Se should empower people to seek new models of production and sources of income – although in practice this may not be as marked as might be expected.
- And thirdly, the approach of Chia Se can contribute to tackling corruption and improved accountability through local democracy; with villagers actively involved in decision-making of their *own* resources, including implementation and supervision of these investments.

Therefore, not only does the programme operate in remote areas with ethnic minority populations but critically its rights-based approach attempts to address empowerment and socio-political aspects of inclusion and exclusion – which in turn should assist people to tailor activities to priority needs and causes, as well as help ensure investments are transparent and accountable. Where the Chia Se approach is less strong, is the extent to which empowering local people (to make decisions about new sources of income, or more sustainable methods of production) can truly address more structural causes of poverty.

In principle, people should be able to make choices away from increasing agricultural production where the opportunities for expansion are limited. For example, in Quang Tri province, some villagers (e.g. in Gio Hoa commune, Gio Linh district) have limited land capital and this is the main reason for the slow rate of poverty reduction. Many households in this area have only few hundred square metres of lowland rice and about 1000 m² of land for 4-6 people in family. With such limited resources, it is near impossible to produce enough food for consumption let alone for a surplus. In such cases, Chia Se may provide only part of the solution and may be insufficient to address more fundamental constraints concerning land distribution, livelihood opportunities, etc.

Alignment to Government Policies

In 2001, the early design of Chia Se sought to respond to two key policy areas that were regarded as being of special importance to the government (PFT 2001: 8). Firstly, the promotion of decentralisation by the GoV through a series of laws, decrees and regulations (including the Decree on Grassroots Democracy, passed in 1998). This included a desire to give greater power, autonomy and responsibility to districts and communes, as well as to providing greater transparency and accountability through the

budget and finance systems. And secondly, Chia Se sought to address the high priority to reduce rural poverty, with several policy initiatives including the Hunger Eradication and Poverty Reduction initiative, Programme 135 and the Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy (I-PRS). Since then, the Socio-Economic Development Plan (SEDP) 2006–2010 has come to replace the I-PRS.

In this sense, Chia Se responded to favourable conditions to ‘working at the village level’. And, while there was a clear awareness of these policy changes at the time of the design, the implications were not fully apparent as up until that point there was little in the way of practical experiences. As De Vylder and Warfvinge (2008: 4) puts it, *“the timing of the launching of Chia Se was highly fortunate in that its main emphasis on participatory planning and grassroots democracy by and large coincided with the Vietnamese government’s own policy shift”*. Indeed, Fforde (2009: 9–12) goes further in this argument, asserting that it was not until around 2007/08 that it was clear that the context was favourable to working at the village level. Indeed while the direct elections of village leaders throughout the country started in 1998,²³ it is only in recent years that provincial-level instructions on the ‘village leader’ elections have placed less attention to the rigours of the formal system (Fforde 2009: 10).

Several other government policy areas are now beginning to follow a more ‘bottom-up’ approach. For instance, the GoV has supported and motivated people at the grassroots level by organizing activities to support farmers. Farmers’ organisations are known under many names such as Common Interest Groups, Collaborative Groups, Self-help Group of Farmers, Extension Clubs, Labour Exchange Groups and Farmer Field Schools. Under Civil Law, these groups are generally known as the farmer collaborative groups and operate on the principles of being self-controlled, voluntary and self-responsive. In recent years there has been a growing acceptance that these informal groups exist and have a role to play alongside the formal system. In the GoV’s recent strategies on rural development for instance, new terms and slogans have emerged on grassroots democracy (such as, *“farmers know, farmers discuss, farmers do, farmer check”*).

Chia Se is therefore not only highly relevant to the shift to grassroots democracy, but has been at the forefront by going further; working ‘beyond the grassroots’ so to speak. See Box 4.

Box 4. Understanding Grassroots Democracy in Vietnam

During 1997, there was prolonged social unrest particularly in the provinces of Thai Binh and Dong Nai over local corruption, high taxation and land reform (HRW 1997). As a result the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) leadership directed government agencies to ensure that people’s democratic rights at local level are respected.²⁴ This instruction has become more popularly referred to as the Decree on Grassroots Democracy. This decree proposed that people should participate actively in planning and decision-making, by being better informed and able to participate, supervise and evaluate the activities implemented by local authorities. Most importantly, the Decree focuses on **the functioning of the lowest level of the party system**, which is what is referred to as the “grass root”. This is not the same as more generally accepted interpretations of grassroots democracy, as to a certain extent decisions are still taken by the structures of the State and Party. In Vietnam, four administrative levels have high-level mandates (the central, province, district and commune) but not yet the village level. In rural areas, Party, State and Mass Organisations are at commune level and below, but do not involve ordinary citizens. The concern of the Decree is therefore not primarily about popular decision-making, such as exercised through elections, but a degree of oversight in terms of decisions taken by those structures (Fforde 2007).

Chia Se also sought to respond to the PRS at the time, the Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy (CPRGS, GoV 2002). During the implementation of Chia Se, the CPRGS was super-

²³ Under Order 30 of the Politburo on ‘enhancing democracy at the base’.

²⁴ The GoV issued an Instruction no. 30/CT-TW dated 18 February 1998 on establishment and implementation of Grassroots Democracy Regulations. This Instruction was specified by Decree no. 29/1998/ND-CP, and then completed by Decree no 79/2003/ND-CP. This was later replaced by Ordinance 34/2007/PL-UBTVQH11 dated 20 April 2007 on democratic implementation at communes, wards and towns.

seded by the Socio-Economic Development Plan (SEDP) 2006–2010 – a national plan that is less donor orientated, and sets out targets for the industrialisation and market-orientated economic development for the country. While Sweden strongly supported the anti-poverty and grassroots democracy emphasis in the CPRGS, the Sweden-Vietnam country strategy expressed concern that its implementation might be hampered by a lack of capacity at local level and by inherent tendencies towards centralization at national and provincial levels (MFA 2002: 5). There was a clear risk that the allocation of GoV resources to poverty reduction and its commitment to grassroots democracy could flounder during the period of implementation. In the discussions between Sweden and Vietnam about a development cooperation programme for the period 2004–2008, the partners agreed to reduce this risk by giving high priority in ODA allocation to implementing the principles of CPRGS, in particular pro-poor growth, rights of the poor, grassroots democracy and gender equity. Support for this orientation of development cooperation was declared by a wide alliance of Vietnam’s development partners and has been maintained throughout the preparation and implementation of SEDP 2006–2010.²⁵ The SEDP however rather MPI-centric with more limited ownership by other ministries, although it has spawned provincial and district SEDPs.

In this regard, Chia Se has shown a flexibility to respond to a changing policy context and in recent years, the provincial projects have begun to develop a more participatory approach to socio-economic development planning at the commune and district levels – based on the Chia Se approach.

One final policy that deserves mention, is the Hanoi Core Statement (HCS). The HCS is the Vietnamese interpretation of the internationally adopted Paris Declaration.²⁶ The document addresses donor harmonisation and alignment, as well as “rules of the game” for donor cooperation with Vietnam. The HCS commits donors to use government strategies, plans and budgets as the basis for their own planning, and explicitly to align to the Government’s SEDP. The commitments specifically cover:

- To assist the country in achieving its strategic objectives by developing and effectively implementing the five-year SEDP 2006–2010
- To provide support to the GoV in strengthening its institutional capacity
- To enhance cooperation between GoV and donors to harmonize and simplify administrative procedures, with the aim of increasing the effectiveness of development resource use.

The Independent Monitoring Report of the HCS (Cox et al 2008) notes that one of the major challenges in meeting the commitments of the HCS is that in many sectors, “...*old-fashioned projects are still dominating, and donors have been slow to phase out Project Management Units and to work through government structures instead of creating their own parallel structures and procedures*”.²⁷ This particularly appears to be the case in some ministries, such as MARD, whereby the strong project-orientated culture can lead to institutional behaviour that is divisive, competitive and can result in the fragmentation of activities.

The original Chia Se design has semi-integrated structure of programme management; a position viewed as appropriate for that time,²⁸ when Chia Se was piloting a new approach to democracy and grassroots development within an essentially centralised, top-down system (for a fuller discussion, see paragraphs 3.25 to 3.28). Yet, when viewed as a stand-alone programme, Chia Se is subject to many accepted critiques of the project modality – the so-called ‘islands of excellence’ (Warrener 2004: 7).

²⁵ Based on inputs by G. Edgren to an internal SAT-RD discussion paper titled, “*Justifications for a Chia Se Successor Project*”, 11th March 2008.

²⁶ The Paris Declaration is an international agreement endorsed in 2005, which commits donors and developing countries to increase efforts in harmonisation, alignment and managing aid for results. This was followed up in 2008 with the Accra Agenda for Action.

²⁷ *Independent Monitoring Report*, by the Partnership Group for Aid Effectiveness, 24th January 2008.

²⁸ Note that under Chia Se, Sida is working has agreements with three provinces plus MPI, rather than working through the central ministry.

Indeed, despite the many positives of the Chia Se approach, it affects very few people (less than 0.3% of the population), it runs as an additional structure to the government system (i.e. it is only partially integrated), and may not be sustainable (when programme funding ceases). These remain important challenges for any subsequent phase to address.

Alignment to Sida's Priorities

The country strategies of Sida have gradually changed in orientation and emphasis, as each has had to respond to new challenges. From the early focus in the 1970s on reconstruction and humanitarian relief after the war, cooperation has become increasingly concentrated in the 1990s on economic reform and building institutions for a modern society. As economic growth and institution building led to dramatic reductions in mass poverty, the focus of Vietnam-Sweden cooperation shifted to deal with the weaknesses of this development pattern: growing differences in living standards, lack of access to public services and investment resources among vulnerable groups, and weak accountability and transparency within the public administration.

This latter shift is clearly articulated in the Country Strategy 2004–2008 (MFA 2002), which is the main strategic instrument for the period under review. The strategy was adopted before the GoV had presented its SEDP for the period 2006–2010 but after its publication of the CPRGS. The Country Strategy sets out two overriding development objectives: firstly, to promote Vietnam's capacity to reduce poverty on a long-term and environmentally sustainable basis; and secondly, to promote openness and a development towards democracy and increased respect for human rights.

Development cooperation is guided by sub-goals, with interventions linked to their primary sub-goal. The main interventions and sub-goals are presented in the following table:

Table 5. Summary of development cooperation, 2004–2008

Sub-goal:		Development cooperation
1 Sustainable poverty alleviation	To promote an equitable, pro-poor and sustainable use of natural resources based on local initiatives	A major proportion of Swedish support to the implementation of the CPRGS through decentralised poverty alleviation – and mainly through the Chia Se Poverty Alleviation Programme.
2 Reform of economy and public sector	To promote a professional, transparent, accountable, service-oriented and non-discriminatory public administration	Support to reform the Vietnamese economy, legislation and administration, e.g. helping to build an effective public sector able to operate in a market economy (including support to the tax authorities, national statistics, and the Ministry of Justice).
3 Human rights and democracy	To contribute to increased respect for human rights and democratic access for poor people, with a special focus on development of the rule of law that ensures predictability, equality, non-discrimination and protection against abuse	Financing of a joint programme between the administrative offices of the National Assembly in Vietnam and the Swedish parliament. Cooperation in the field of human rights to strengthen the capacity of the Vietnamese Research Centre for Human Rights (jointly with the Raoul Wallenberg Institute). Plus, support to develop a “free and independent press” by training journalists and the Swedish-Vietnamese Culture Fund.
4 Healthcare	To work to promote the right to adequate health care for all people, including improved access to health services for the poor	Support for healthcare and medical services from Sweden, which more lately has been directed to toward policy work and improved healthcare in rural areas. Earlier engagement and support was for the construction of hospitals and primary health care extension.
5 Open relations and trade	To work to promote pro-poor growth based on a dynamic private sector and open trade relations	Other areas of support from Sweden to the energy sector, commerce (including training and support to small-scale entrepreneurs), various research institutes that started in 1979, and a number of Swedish NGOs working in/with Vietnam. ²⁹

Projects are however often multi-dimensional with effects related to several of the goals presented in the Country Strategy. The Chia Se Programme was developed in response to these objectives and considerations by both Sweden and Vietnam. In the Country Strategy, Chia Se is presented mainly as a decentralized poverty alleviation programme in which control over investment resources was exercised at community level and was justified in terms of its effects on poverty among the poorest and most vulnerable groups. As the Chia Se programme has evolved, it has become increasingly viewed as an effective instrument for addressing rural governance and grassroots democracy. Hence, it is also making an important contribution to achieving the second of the two development objectives of the Swedish Country Strategy – and continued relevance for the future work on human rights and democracy.

Aid modalities and interventions in rural development

The present ODA for rural development in Vietnam comprises of a mix of general budget support (e.g. PRSC), sector budget support (particularly in health and education), sector programmes (e.g. in rural transport) and projects (e.g. Chia Se, RUDEP). In line with commitments under the Paris Declaration, most donors have shifted upstream and out of projects, and with greater emphasis on policy dialogue, budget support and support through Technical Assistance (TA). A few donors, notably AusAID and Finnida, have a clear policy to remain engaged in implementation projects in order to continue learning and be more effective partners in the policy arena.

Yet, while the HCS and commitments under the Paris Declaration have influenced donor thinking in recent years, there remain many different rationales for the continuing proliferation of aid modalities. Some donors (including Sida) argue that to promote “ownership and alignment”, the only way is to carry out specific projects or programmes in Vietnam (for example, Chia Se has promoted the ownership of the local levels, especially in empowering villagers and communes in the project areas). Others argue that they are able to use “more of the national system” but that it is not necessary to use a budget support modality, while a third group (like the World Bank, DFID and Danida) assert the need to move away from project modalities towards budget support. This latter group has supported P135-2 through targeted budget support, and Danida support to Agriculture and Rural Development (ARD) through sector budget support.

In recent years, a number of donors have designed interventions that are closer to a ‘non-traditional’ modality. Typically these interventions are newly formulated and have not emerged through the re-formulation of an existing project or programme. IrishAid make widespread (but not exclusive) use of programmatic approaches in their aid interventions and their VOICE programme is based on a form of provincial targeted budget support. This design makes significant use of local government structures and systems. At the same time, the design also makes use of a number of project-type components and stand-alone TA (such as for M&E), with IrishAid issuing its own guidelines and oversight. See Table 6.

In an analysis of the main rural development interventions in Vietnam (Annex 5), it is clear that several donors continue to use a more ‘traditional’ project-type modality. Chia Se falls into this category, with a Project Management Unit (PMU) system and a separate financial mechanism from that of the GoV system, stand-alone TA and use of donors guidelines and requirements (donors cost norms and instructions). Chia Se, like NMPRP, started prior to the Paris Declaration (PD) commitments and the HCS, though during implementation, donors and the GoV have attempted to incorporate in PD/HCS commitments with the promotion of local ownership, alignment and harmonisation with the recipient country. Chia Se for instance is not strictly a parallel PMU, as it makes significant use of the government cadre. There have also been attempts towards greater integration of management structures.

²⁹ Web: http://www.sida.se/sida/jsp/sida.jsp?d=541&a=3653&language=en_US.

Table 6. Overview of aid modalities in rural development, Vietnam

Project/ Programme	Donor(s)	Partner(s)	Year(s)	Value	Aim/Objective	Modality type
NMPRP	WB/DfID	MPI	2002–2007	US\$ 132.5 million	To increase income and well-being of the rural poor living in six northern mountain provinces.	Conventional WB project modality, except direct to six provinces (no central bank account), and commune-as-investor absorbed 15% of funds.
Chia Se programme	Sida	MPI and HG, YB & QT PPC	2003–2008	SEK 310 million	The over-all objective of the Programme is long-term poverty alleviation. The achievement of the over-all objective shall be manifested in four related areas: a) improved sustainable livelihoods, b) access and control over resources, c) equitable distribution of resources and benefits, and d) empowerment through effective capacity to communicate and to manage the resources.	Project/Programme-type modality at province with separate project management and financial mechanisms, separate donor requirements and guidelines and stand-alone TA, but it is partly integrated with GoV system (it involves some GoV staff)
Project/ Programme	Donor(s)	Partner(s)	Year(s)	Value	Aim/Objective	Modality type
RUDEP	AusAID	Quang Ngai PPC	Phase I & II (2001–2007); Phase III (2008–	AUS\$ 33 million	To identify the content and approach for a programme that could sustainably address, among other objectives, poverty alleviation, rural development, governance, poverty reduction, improved strategic infrastructure and environmental protection.	RUDEP phase I & II (2001–2007) follow the programme type modality with parallel PMU and financial system and long term TA, but Phase III (2008–) of intervention hybrid comprising TBS at the provincial level but still using a long-term stand-alone TA component.

Project/ Programme	Donor(s)	Partner(s)	Year(s)	Value	Aim/Objective	Modality type
P135 II	WB- AusAID- Finida- IFAD-IA- DFID	45 provinces	2006–2010	US\$ 921.86 million	Radically accelerate production, promote an agro-economic structural shift in the direction of market-driven production; sustain improvement of spiritual and material living conditions of ethnic people in extremely difficult communes and villages, and narrow the development gap between ethnic groups and other regions. By 2010, basically there are no hunger-stricken households in the targeted areas and the number of poor households drops below 30% of the poverty line.	Targeted Budget Support (TBS) modality, following the GoV guidelines and instructions, and using government system to implement.
VOICE	Irish Aid	Bac Kan PPC	2008–2010	Euro 2.9 million	To support local sustainable poverty reduction through further decentralisation of investment management to the commune and village level, while strengthening local government and empowering local people.	Provincial TBS and project-type modalities with significant use of government systems but following donor guidelines and with stand-alone TA component.
ARD	Danida	MARD/ PPCs	2007–2012	DKK 230 million	To reduce rural poverty, especially among the ethnic minorities, through sustainable agricultural and rural development focusing on uplands.	Sector BS/TBS at provincial level using government systems, but with stand-alone TA component.

Summary:

In the past decade, Vietnam has demonstrated strong economic growth, alongside rapid poverty reduction. Yet, there remain persistent pockets of poverty, with considerable differences between rural-urban populations and socio-economic groups.

While Vietnam is a fast industrialising country, agriculture continues to play an important role in the lives of the majority of the population. Opinions differ on the reasons for continued high instances of poverty, and while agricultural productivity and market access are key determinants, relative social and political inclusion and exclusion (education, literacy, local democracy, etc) are key constraints.

The approach of Chia Se is well suited to address persistent poverty in Vietnam, particularly because (i) Participatory planning (the LPMD) better enables the poor and ethnic minorities to address their own development needs; (ii) The flexible LDF approach provides opportunities for people to address location-specific needs and diversify from land-based production; and, (iii) The approach can help tackle corruption and improve accountability through local democracy.

The Chia Se programme is strongly aligned to the national development plan (SEDP) and policies on grassroots democracy – although it goes further by working ‘beyond the grassroots’ and involving villagers in decision-making and supervising their own resources.

In terms of donor harmonisation and alignment to the Hanoi Core Statement, Chia Se presents a more mixed picture. In Vietnam there continues to be a proliferation of different aid modalities in rural development, with donors citing different rationales for either moving (or not moving) towards more programmatic approaches (budget support, sector programmes).

Overall, Chia Se has been at the forefront with its pro-poor orientation (and decentralisation to village level), but less innovative in terms of management and its aid modality – a mixture of experimental and conventional. In terms of aid modality, Chia Se utilises a more ‘traditional’ project approach compared to other rural development interventions in Vietnam. This has changed over time, but essentially there has been a reliance on donor guidelines and resources, a semi-integrated PMU structure, and a mix of donor and government procedures for procurement and reporting.

4. Programme Design and Management

This chapter assesses the design and management of the Chia Se programme. These aspects are important for the future design of Chia Se, as it is widely perceived as an expensive programme to implement – requiring high levels of Technical Assistance (TA) and a significant investment in the capacity building of government staff and local people. For the programme to be adapted to the constraints of the government budget and capacity, then any subsequent phase will need to learn lessons from the current approach and develop a more streamlined design. The chapter commences with an assessment of the programme design, followed by a focus on four important aspects of programme management: national-level support to the programme, the use of technical assistance, the provision of capacity building and training, and the monitoring and evaluation system.

Design Considerations

As far back as 2001, care was taken to involve national and provincial authorities such as MARD, MPI, and MoF in the early formulation process (PFT 2002). The design process itself is viewed as innovative within the Vietnamese context; using workshops at the provincial level to design the programme from the bottom-up, based on local demands. In Yen Bai, staff recalled this period in term of, *“Staff who were familiar with the old way (doing by orders/instructions from the higher level, or the consultant always doing the work for them) were very surprised as Chia Se leaves open a menu of activities that encourage everyone to create, without any instruction on activities ... It was also very strange for us; the consultant just facilitated but did not do any specific activities for us”*.³⁰ During the first year of Chia Se, staff in Yen Bai focused on collecting ideas and activities, and providing the rationale and analysis for project formulation. The provincial authorities organized many village meetings to collect information on local demand as well as activities for the project design. This was followed by a ‘brainstorming process’ whereby project ideas were filtered and facilitated through provincial level workshops.

The design team clearly understood and recognised that (PFT 2001, 2002):

- The promotion of provincial autonomy was in line with GoV efforts at decentralisation, with Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) being signed with individual provinces participating in the project, rather than being run from a central ministry.
- The importance of using pilot projects at the local level to secure local political support before feeding findings upwards to the national level institutions concerned with national policy reform.
- Poverty alleviation is multi-sectoral, with implications across a number of GoV sectors and ministries, ranging from: implementation of the CPRGS through the new SEDP by MPI; agriculture and rural development through MARD, social security and welfare through MOLISSA; decentralised financial management of the State Budget by MoF; and measuring socio-economic progress through GSO

Since poverty alleviation is crosscutting and multi-sectoral, the design of the National Project identified a need for effective support systems and structures; as the provincial projects were implemented, and as ongoing decentralisation reforms were put into practice, it was envisaged that the National Project would capture what policies, systems, procedures and structures needed changing and bring these to the attention of the relevant ministries. The role would be to support a conducive environment for development, growth and poverty alleviation, *rather than one of project implementation* (PFT 2002: 33).

³⁰ Source: Group discussion with staff from DPI, DARD and DOLISA in Yen Bai province (SAT, January 2009).

While a programme of this nature necessitates an element of flexibility in the early design stages, the objectives and indicators of success remained ill defined throughout the life of the programme (see the official logframe, 2005/06). So for instance, one of the indicators states that a measure of success should be in terms of, *“the proportion of households that feel empowered by Chia Se”*. This indicator does not specify the baseline or target to be reached (and by when) nor provide guidance on what is meant by empowerment and the way in which it might be measured.³¹ Similarly, another indicator states, *“improved sustainable livelihoods in terms of income, effective production (agriculture and non-agriculture), good infrastructure and socio-economic services (health, education)”*. This was later specified in 2006, when the GSO with TA support, further detailed the indicators as part of establishing the M&E system. Nonetheless, indicator gaps continued to persist throughout the life of the programme, and in 2008, the Review of the M&E System (SAT 2008a: 4) concluded:

“The major weaknesses appear to be that the nature of the current indicator set is such that it is not likely to adequately indicate the achievement of programme results; that participatory monitoring processes are still weak and insufficiently connected to the rest of the M&E system and to programme planning and management processes, and that the overall formal M&E system has not been used to generate information for planning, implementation management and performance reviewing, or for stakeholder learning”.

In December 2006, the SAT-RD Mid-term Review (SAT 2006: 1) recommended that programme logical framework should be, *“reworked to improve the objective structure of the projects and get a better and more balanced set of outcome indicators”*. The same MTR report also proposed that a ‘road map’ be developed as a framework for action during the remainder of the current phase and as a precursor for a second phase: to focus more on consolidating lesson-learning, expand the programme so as to demonstrate a district-wide management model, and to develop a strategy to mainstream the experience from Chia Se to inform other National Targeted Programmes (NTPs), primarily P135-2. In March 2007, the SAT-RD facilitated a workshop to revise the logframes for the Programme. This included a review of the National Project logframe and a proposed revision of the National Project objectives – to reflect both its role in supporting the provincial projects and to assist the uptake of lessons by other programmes and government policies.

The official National Project Logframe however was never altered, and the 2005/06 version remains as the formal document of the programme design. Instead, the National Project developed a ‘roadmap’ for action during the remainder of the current phase and as a precursor for a second phase. The Programme Secretariat has used the Roadmap as a two-year planning tool for the Annual Work Plans and Budgets (AWPBs), particularly for 2007 and to a lesser degree for 2008 (as many of the 2007 AWPB activities were carried over). The SAT-RD Logframe workshop 2007 also reviewed the outputs of the Provincial Logframes, and proposed changes to the objective statements and indicators. The provinces have produced some revised provincial logframes but these have not been officially adopted and do not formally supersede the 2005/06 Logframes. In early 2008, the M&E Review (SAT 2008a: 5) noted that, *“attempts at producing updated logframes have been made for some provinces but there is no one overall agreed updated framework, and new indicators developed by some provinces have not been incorporated into the M&E system”*.

The provinces have also produced Roadmaps for the remainder of the programme and these have been variously used to inform the AWPB process.

In summary, Chia Se set forth an innovative and flexible approach to programme design, building on the experiences and needs of the provinces from the bottom up. As the programme evolved, the logframe never became a tool for the management and monitoring of the programme. This allowed the programme to remain somewhat vague in its aims and achievements, and open to multiple interpreta-

³¹ Most of the indicators fail to comply with the generally accepted standard for indicators of: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound (SMART).

tions of success. As subsequent chapters reveal, this also undermined any rigorous, objective assessment of Chia Se' contribution to poverty reduction, and as a pilot project of this nature, does little to support evidence-based policy decisions by Sida or the GoV.

National-level Support

Throughout the life of the programme, the National Project has struggled to function as intended, being particularly poorly coordinated in the early years. The 2005 Monitoring Report (Axberg et al 2005) found that while there was progress in training and the development of the Programme Implementation Manual (PIM), detailed analysis of activities in support of the provincial projects to promote policy through the CPRGS and SEDPs, was slow to get started. The report noted that, *“most other activities planned by the National Project have stalled and the earlier sense of urgency seems to have evaporated”* (Axberg et al 2005: 18). By the mid-term in 2006, coordination was still an issue and there continued to be confusion about the role of the PS and the five SPMUs (SAT 2006: 6). There were also coordination concerns between national-level and provincial activities (see Box 5).

Box 5. SPMUs and the provinces

Even to the present day there are examples of SPMU work being carried out seemingly in isolation from the Provincial Projects. In Ha Giang province for example, coordination is not generally close with the line ministries, though better with DARD. Under the National Project, MOLISA funded some of the MTR of NTP-PR, holding meetings at the village, commune and district levels; with more focus on Chia Se areas (as more funds were available for this). Not only is it unclear why Chia Se funds were used for this purpose, but also staff from the PPMU only heard about the workshops after the event.

Efforts in recent years have improved the functioning of the National Project. Following the mid-term review, considerable effort was made to increase the capacity of the PS, improve the work-planning process and the disbursement of funds. While problems of progress and disbursement persisted throughout 2007 (PS 2008a: 2), there were signs of improvement – with a reasonable ‘fit’ between workplan objectives and the roadmap, plus the inclusion of expected results in the AWPBs (SAT 2007b: 6–7). By 2008, progress against the AWPB had improved greatly, though helped in part by the carry-over of activities from 2007 and the pressure to spend before programme closure (SAT 2008b: 3–4).

For some activities though, there remain doubts about the extent to which they support the overall objectives of the Chia Se programme (SAT 2008b: 3–4); with funds appearing to support the broader mandates of the respective ministries above that of the programme (and demand from the provinces). This appears to be particularly the case for MARD and MOLISA. The SAT Annual Review (SAT 2007b: 8) for example found that a substantial part of the budget for MARD was under spent in 2007, and there were concerns about activities such support for P135-2 – such as how experience from Chia Se was being used, and how the indicators linked to Chia Se. An example from Ministry of Finance (MoF), illustrates a similar issue. The preparation of Guidelines for Commune level accountants by MoF, aims to address the financial management of state funds at commune level, which is the lowest level involved in the management of state funds. These guidelines have been written with a Commune readership in mind, based on lessons from Chia Se training programmes. The content of these guidelines has nothing to say about VDF because the state accounting system reaches down only as far as the commune. So while some impact of Chia Se can be detected this seems hardly sufficient to justify the years of support through the SPMU in MoF.³²

³² For some however, the National Project and the provision of separate budgets to each of the SPMUs were necessary prerequisites for gaining support across central government – and required almost regardless of the results that ensued.

Technical Assistance

The Chia Se programme has required a great deal of technical assistance provided by Orgut, and their understanding and interpretation of the Programme Document has been an important contribution to the programme. Before 2003, considerable work had been undertaken to prepare the ground before the TA arrived, following a two-year preparation and planning exercise that involved the three provinces, six districts and the ministries taking part in the National Project. In November 2003, the first four long-term technical advisors arrived to find that a Provincial Secretariat in each province, the District Project Management Units (DPMU) and the Commune PMUs were already staffed and ready to begin the implementation of the programme.

One result of this preparation was that the TA role at the district level and below was more clearly defined, with the largest amount of programme financing going to support the LDF and the LPMD via the district and commune accounts. This provided the focus for the national and international TA efforts to establish management systems based on Chia Se principles that could handle the large flow of funds generated by the programme. Only later did the role of the TA become clearer at the national and provincial levels, despite the design of the programme recognising the importance of these levels in promoting policy reform (a key objectives of the programme). This duality appears to have persisted throughout the duration of Chia Se, and is probably related to the rather opaque process of policy reform in Vietnam contrasted with the obvious appeal of making things happen on the ground.

Long-term national and international advisors were embedded in project offices in MPI, GSO, Provincial DPI and District DPC. This long term presence has been supported by a range of short-term consultants coordinated by MPI and specialising in communications, environment, policy, quality assurance, financial management, operations and maintenance, SEDP planning, micro-financing and impact assessments as shown in Table 7.

Table 7. TA to Chia Se to the end of 2008

Position	Host organisation	Number advisors
Team Leader	MPI	1 international (long term)
Deputy Team Leader	MPI	1 national (long term)
Senior Analytical Support Advisor	MPI	1 international (part time)
Monitoring & Evaluation Advisor	GSO	1 international (long term)
Provincial Advisors	Provincial DPI	3 international (long term), 3 national (long term)
District Management Advisors	District People's Committees	6 national (long term)
Short term consultants: Communication, Environmental Impact, Policy Environment, Quality assurance, Financial management, Operations and maintenance, various aspects of result analysis, SEDP planning, micro-finance	Coordinated by MPI	Short term consultants
Source: Junker (2008: 3).		

The technical assistance provided by Orgut over the five years of the project amounts to some 231.25 years of effort, making an annual average of 46.25 years. A breakdown of these inputs shows that over half of this total is accounted for by the Commune Facilitators recruited by Orgut to undertake capacity building activities at commune and village levels, in particular the operation of the LPMD and VDF. National TA accounts for some 30% leaving just over 16% for international and short-term inputs. See Table 8.

Table 8. TA inputs, 2003–2009

TA	Inputs (years)	%
Facilitators	126	54.49
National	67	28.97
International	23.5	10.16
Short term	14.75	6.38
Total	231.25	100

While the Chia Se is often perceived as being very ‘TA-heavy’ these figures suggest that international and short term inputs averaged 7 advisors a year with national advisors at 13 per year or 20 advisors to serve a total of 14 PMU’s at national, provincial and district levels. As for facilitators on average there were 25 to serve 12 commune PMU’s or two per commune. Considering the amount of work undertaken by facilitators in the LPMD and VDF, the use of facilitators appears to be effective, as was the role of the Advisors in the early years of the project when they were involved in mobilising the project. In the later years of the project however, the long-term advisors were less hands on and relied more upon PMU’s to administer the project. Yet, this is not reflected by any shrinking of inputs until 2007.

Orgut’s own analysis of the TA trends (in their internal Quality Assurance reports) shows that the TA became clearer and easier over time as the counterpart situation improved and counterparts became clearer about their role and job descriptions. However the reports point out that the very practical hands-on advisor role in the early part of the project was replaced by a more analytical role concerning strategic issues of policy reform and replication in the medium to long term.

The roles of the national and international advisors are seen to be substantially different. International advisors who bring international experience to the programme needed national advisors to bridge them into the Vietnamese system and to overcome the language barrier. At the same time the international advisors lent legitimacy and support to national advisors to prevent counterparts using them as additional project staff in the PMUs. These kinds of partnerships are a good indicator of programme’s success and SAT interviews with other donors revealed that Chia Se was generally perceived as doing well at forging such partnerships with both national advisors and counterparts.

Similarly for facilitators, their status as Orgut employees prevented them from becoming a part of the Commune workforce because the consultant could intervene if necessary to protect the interests of their employees. It is thought that most facilitators engaged by Orgut have stayed with the project since being employed by their respective CPMUs in 2007, and if true, a significant success for the TA.

Reflecting on lessons learned, the Orgut Quality Assurance report makes the following points:

- The TA design underestimated the amount of capacity building required for facilitation, M&E and communication
- The M&E system, which should have been operational at the beginning of the project, did not in fact become operational until 2007 almost a year and a half after the Mid Term review.
- The role of the National Programme in policy reform in Vietnam was unclear. For instance, in retrospect it seems that there have been wasted opportunities to tap into the advisors international experience and that the TA was not sufficiently proactive in facilitating this process.
- There is a need for better communications, especially at the beginning of the programme to provide coordinated advice to PMU.

- Short-term consultancies appear to have been quite effective in bringing specific competencies and external views to inform the long term TA.

In summary, Chia Se by being a highly innovative programme required a great deal of flexibility to respond to new demands as and when they arose during implementation. The role of the Quality Control Teams as early warning process seems to have been effective, and at the provincial, district, commune and village levels Orgut deserves considerable credit. At the national level however, apart from MPI, Chia Se success appears to have been largely driven by GoV initiatives and the GoV staff associated with the SPMUs. The proactive contribution of TA has been less effective in supporting communication, monitoring and evaluation, and policy reform.

Capacity Building and Training

Training courses designed to support capacity building at the village and commune levels have played an important role in supporting the decentralisation and poverty alleviation objectives of Chia Se. This section focuses on the use of training to support management and implementation of the programme, with the impact discussed in Chapter 5.

Throughout the implementation of Chia Se, some 2,000 training events have been conducted to:

- Support the operation of the core components of the programme and in particular the LPMD and LDF
- Build capacity of local government staff, both at the district and commune level but more particularly at the village level
- Support a rights-based approach to poverty alleviation and income generation

Delivery of the training programme has involved a considerable amount of Training of Trainers (ToT), in particular of Chia Se facilitators to support implementation of the LPMD and operation of the LDF. Chia Se has used a wide range of training approaches, mostly conducted in the villages themselves, including group discussions, meetings, workshops, and demonstration visits tailored for trainees with a low educational background. As such, the Chia Se training component is acknowledged as being essential to the implementation of the project (and its success) in terms of: (i) promoting decentralisation and empowerment of local communities, and (ii) building capacity among village level communities to participate pro-actively in planning, decision making and management of project introducing grass-roots democracy.

Chia Se has supported a remarkable range of courses. In part this can be linked to the different types of training that has had to be delivered to districts, commune and villages to implement the LPMD and LDF, of which 80% is allocated to the village level, 15% to the commune level and 5% to the district level. Secondly, training has often been provided as a support service so for example, households receiving direct support in the form of a buffalo would also receive animal husbandry training courses on breeding and care of buffalo. Thirdly, additional training needs for both government staff and villagers have depended on the decision of the group concerned (a self-assessed training needs assessment). Significantly, training programmes for GoV staff included the development of skills that could be used in carrying out their other administrative duties including M&E, Project Management and supporting skills such as report writing and the use of computers.

Table 9. Courses for Local Government staff

1.	LPMD	Introduction to Commune and Village project and LPMD planning
2.	LDF	Introduction to LDF, Management of LDF cycle, Financial reporting, Accountancy
3.	Investment	Training on purchasing and bidding
4.	M&E	Project monitoring and evaluation
5.	System Management	Data management and analysis for LDF, Chia Se database & Commune budgets
6.	Project Management	Preparation of project proposals, project management
7.	Supporting Skills	Management Skills, Assessment of capacity building, Advocacy, MS Office for communes, Report writing, English

Training programmes for villagers initially concentrated on the operation of the LPMD and LDF and project management but later expanded to cover a whole range of income generating skills and life skills as shown below (Table 10), though with marked differences between the provinces.

Table 10. Courses for villagers, comparing Ha Giang, Yen Bai and Quang Tri

	Yen Bai & Ha Giang provinces	Quang Tri province	
Income generating skills	Agricultural techniques	Natural resource management and Environmental protection	Seafood Processing
	Forestry techniques	Ethnic Minority finished products	Latex extraction
	Bee keeping	Breeding techniques	Vocational learning
	Veterinary care	Cultivation techniques	Demonstration visits
Life skills	HIV Prevention	Law	Bank loan management
	Reproductive healthcare	HIV/AIDS	Healthcare
	Village security funds	Sex	Food Safety
	Illiteracy classes for women	Waste treatment	First Aid
Project Management	Planning	Capital construction	Club of safe motherhood
	Management	IT training	
	Supervision	LPMD and LDF	
	LPMD and LDF		

Despite this impressive range of courses, an analysis of the frequency with which they were held shows that most courses were not held regularly. In Gio Linh district (Quang Tri province) for instance 13 out of the 21 courses were conducted less than 10 times in four years (Table 11); an issue that raises concerns about the impact of the training programme. Sometimes the training topic is separated from the income generation activity being supported by the VDF. For example, farmers in Mu Cang Chai district explained that they had been provided goats but they did not get training about raising these live-stock. Or, a farmer in Hoang Su Phi district said that while he little in the way of lowland rice fields, they get a lot of training about rice rather than other crops.

Table Popular courses in Gio Linh District

Frequency	Training course
More than 30 Classes	Law and health care
21–30 Classes	Vocational learning
11–20 Classes	Sex, HIV/AIDS, cultivation and breeding techniques and demonstration visits
Less than 10 classes	13 out of the 21 courses prepared

Implementation issues

Overall, Chia Se is generally acknowledged as being successful in organising training activities, with each course having a ToR defining contents, requirements for trainers and trainees, report format covering teaching methods used, duration of training, target groups and trainees assessments of trainers, content and organisation. ToT played a major role in the transfer of capacity to the local level on key issues relating to the management of the project and demonstration of how to promote decentralisation and empowerment at the local level. Training material was in general set out in the form of manuals. Some key findings on the implementation of training, as perceived by course participants (ILSSA 2008):

- Significantly, many trainers and trainees felt that courses tended to use too much academic language and there was difficulty with translation of imported concepts that had not been localised. In *all* the Northern Chia Se villages visited by the SAT evaluation team, this was a problem described by villagers – and particularly women, many of whom did not understand the *Kinh* language. Even when translation from *Kinh* was provided, the women stated that they, generally, could not learn or benefit from the academic style learning, which was not conducted in their own language. Training in many cases follows a traditional way of teaching, with teaching in a classroom first followed by practice in the field. It seems that participatory training approaches that are suitable to low educated farmers and minority groups (such as ‘farmer field school’) are not applied.
- Courses with mixed participation of district, commune and village level trainees were generally seen as not effective. Instead it is viewed that it is more cost effective to deliver training at districts using experienced external trainers to train facilitators who in turn cascade training to communes and village training courses.
- Study tours met with a more mixed reception. While popular, there is little (if any) evidence of discussions or reports concerning contents, experiences and application after training of government staff. A few interviews with farmers suggested that they now fed and watered cattle in pens rather than letting them graze free range as a result of visiting a model farm elsewhere in the same province – but this was one of the few observations found.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) system has been variously described as comprehensive and impressive, while at the same time both complex and difficult to implement. In December 2005, some two years into the programme, the Monitoring Mission (Axberg et al 2005: vi and 21–22) concluded that:

“Chapter 5 of the PIM is a truly impressive model of a comprehensive MIS. But the Mission fears it has become something of a monster. We wonder how much of the information is now being submitted, is really needed by upper levels, and will actually be used. We are concerned about the level of effort required to complete all the tasks mentioned, and the burden it places on field personnel”.

At the time of the Mid Term Review in December 2006, it was observed that the M&E system had been slow to develop (SAT 2006), with apparent weaknesses from the early design of the programme.³³ There had been no logical framework and no baseline design in the design documentation, and as a consequence, the inception period had to make up ground with the design of an M&E system.³⁴ The following period of implementation was then concerned primarily with gathering the baseline

³³ Protocol 2003 (8th April 2003)

³⁴ Chapter 5 of the PIM

data, and it was only towards the end of 2006 that a more fully developed M&E (and MIS) system was being put in place – with a schedule of training, piloting and the rollout of the database to the provincial levels starting after the mid-term review. Indeed, the M&E system was not fully operation until well into 2007, *some four years after the start of the programme*.

The major achievement of GSO has been to demonstrate that under the Chia Se programme, a M&E system can be applied to the local administrative levels. Setting up and operating a M&E system at the commune level is seen as significant within the Vietnamese context. As a consequence, GSO is now more able to assist MPI to set national targets for the SEDP – with GSO now formally part of MPI. A major lesson from the process has been that capacity building is indispensable at all levels of administration for M&E to be successful.

In retrospect the M&E system served three key purposes: (i) to empower local people through self-assessment and supervision of activities; (ii) monitoring information for the effective management of the programme; and, (iii) rigorous evaluative and impact assessment data for decision-makers. These three aspects were not always clearly separated, and the following sections consider how effectively Chia Se managed to fulfil each.

Rigorous data for policy decisions

While the M&E system was operational towards the latter part of the programme (2007 and 2008), it did not ultimately provide rigorous data against the logframe indicators. Instead, the National Project has had to commission and rely to a greater extent on additional studies undertaken by various research institutes (i.e. IoS 2008a and 2008b, ILSSA 2008 and 2009, IPSARD 2008).

The lack of a baseline survey at the start of the programme was a major omission, and subsequent efforts did *not* sufficiently remedy this matter. A ‘baseline’ was subsequently reconstructed as part of the M&E system rollout, drawing mainly from routine data rather survey-based data – and even then, not until significantly after the mid-point of the programme (SAT 2006). In order to fill this gap, GSO conducted a Household Impact Survey in 2008, sampling 1,200 households (evenly split between Chia Se and non-Chia Se) for the years 2004, 2007 and 2008. While the GSO Household Impact Survey was able to fill some of the data gaps, there are significant limitations as the years 2004 and 2007 are based on memory recall – plus it is not based on the VHLSS, so this limits comparability. It was also recommended to undertake a Participatory Programme Impact Assessment (SAT 2008a: 8–9), which could have utilised participatory techniques to measure beneficiary perspectives of impact in a qualitative yet systematic way. This however never took place as planned (for reasons unknown).

Admittedly, at the start of the programme it was difficult to identify what to measure given that the decisions on investments would be taken by thousands of villagers. Yet even so, many of the expected changes could have been identified, and it still would have been useful to measure household income, agricultural production, access to services, etc in Chia Se and Non-Chia areas before the start of the programme – so that it could be repeated at the end.

Data for measuring poverty status is especially weak. This is because the main dataset, the GSO Household Impact Survey relies on memory recall for the 2004 and 2007 income data – undermining any analysis of poverty by quartiles or the MOLISA poverty line, which are both based on income. The LPMD process information could also have been adapted for this purpose (SAT 2008a: 8) but with no standardization of the poverty criteria for the self-assessed (relative) measures of poverty, it is not possible to compare data produced in one village Situation Analysis with that of another.

GSO monitoring system

The M&E system was established in 2007, and has been more thoroughly checked during 2008, with the quality and completeness of the dataset said to be much improved – particularly the baseline data,

LDF activities and Situation Analysis (SAT 2008b). Indeed, GSO conducted an extensive review of the dataset in 2008.³⁵

Yet, even towards the end of 2008 and start of 2009, there are major concerns about the quality and usability of the data contained in the M&E system. For example, in order to assess the utilisation of the VDF, there had to be an *ex post facto* reclassification of over 10,000 investment decisions to identify a set of 13 more detailed ‘economic sectors’ – and in particular, breaking up two large categories of ‘infrastructure’ and ‘income generation and production’ so that for instance investments in livestock could be separated from investments in agricultural crops, irrigation systems and aquaculture (PS 2009: 44). In other areas, the data is also less comprehensive (SAT 2008a), including for: (i) Service quality and usage; (ii) Agricultural production; (iii) Maintenance, use and benefits of completed LDF outputs; and (iv) Equity, empowerment and capacity. Some of these ‘gaps’ have been filled by using the Special Studies conducted by ILSSA, IoS and IPSARD during 2008.

Ultimately though, the M&E system did not serve as an effective management tool – with most data being sent upwards to satisfy GSO requirements. Fairly simple measures of the allocation of VDF funding, and the use of funds for capacity building purposes, were rarely analysed and used to inform decision-making. Only in the latter stages of the programme were more interesting and informative assessments of production models, returns on investment, and the effectiveness of capacity building undertaken (e.g. Jonsson 2009; IPSARD 2008; ILSSA 2008) – and these tended to be extensive studies for evaluative purposes, rather than more scaled down versions to inform the programme management. As noted in Ha Giang province, the system did not allow provincial and district users to measure with reasonable rigour important indicators – many of which could have been useful for the lower level decision-making. Examples cited include:

- Qualitative judgements of service provision and maintenance, updated on a regular basis not just upon completion (e.g. were the roads still usable? was the water supply still safe? was health provision getting better? etc)
- Data checking routines for finding errors in LDF data (to provide an accurate picture of investment priorities, and complementary support that might be required)
- The number and quality of contractors (to check repeat use of contractors, and avoid using disreputable suppliers)
- Updating the number of livestock, births and deaths (were the buffaloes surviving or dying? what was the average reproduction rate for pigs? etc)

There was also insufficient recognition (from all sides) that Chia Se was a learning project and as such there should have been a high priority to study the process of change. Only in the latter stages (last few months) of the programme was there any substantive attempt to set in motion a learning process. To this end, there could also have been an independent impact assessment commissioned in parallel to internal processes such as the RAR. Indeed, there was never adequate separation of monitoring for management, which tried to promote the concept and spirit of Chia Se; and a more rigorous impact evaluation necessary for strategic decision-making and assessing impact.

Community monitoring and supervision

At village level, the Village Meeting (reporting to the CPMU) was the main consultative and decision-making unit, and for day-to-day management, the Village Management Group (VMG) was in charge of leading the local planning process, and for managing implementation, funds, and sometimes supervision. The Village Meeting could also elect a Village Supervisory Group (VSG) to supervise implemen-

³⁵ Available only in Vietnamese (“Nhận xét và đánh giá chất lượng thông tin của cơ sở dữ liệu phục vụ giám sát đánh giá”).

tation and resource management. The members of these groups were given the role of monitoring the distribution of the VDFs, which often worked by way of reimbursing villagers' costs for domestic or agricultural constructions, and animals, as well as checking the quality of work undertaken with the use of these funds. Though no formal assessment has ever been undertaken of the membership of the VMGs/VSGs, observations suggest that many of the same people were involved in both – and that Chia Se may not have penetrated deeply beyond the existing decision-making structures (i.e. often with the same representatives of the mass organisations heading up the VMGs/VSGs).

Box 6. Examples of community monitoring

Commune officials and villagers were able to provide examples of supervision making a difference under Chia Se. For instance in Hoang Su Phi district, one commune official explained how the VSG reports on people not looking after the livestock provided by Chia Se. This has included instances of: (i) a buffalo getting a disease, so the VSG member called in the 'para-vet'; (ii) the death of one buffalo, so the VSG sold the carcass at the market, recovering VND 2 million which was then used to help purchase another animal; (iii) a man selling the buffalo shortly after receiving it, so the VSG recovered the animal from the market. They gave the buffalo to his brother until they were confident that the man would take proper care of it. Other instances include VSGs noticing when contractors had not used enough cement, recalling them to complete the works.

In general, the VSG was seen as a useful and much needed 'mechanism'. See Box 6. As one VSG member in Mu Cang Chai district explained, *"We have supervised most of activities. We checked if activities were properly planned, and if they were implemented accordingly to the agreed schedule. Did villagers involved in implementation of activities receive payments for their labour in full? We would immediately report and request the Commune's project management board to take necessary timely actions if we found any delays or problems related to implementation of any activity"*. Observations by the SAT evaluation team found that the VSG needed the most strengthening, especially to involve ethnic minority people.³⁶

³⁶ Based on village discussions in 12 villages spread across the 3 provinces.

Summary:

Design issues: The design process for Chia Se was innovative within the Vietnamese context (using workshops at the provincial level to design the programme from the bottom-up, based on local demands). The lack of specific and measurable objectives in the logframe however makes it difficult to objectively verify the achievements of the programme. In particular, no clear targets/benchmarks were set against which to judge performance, plus the lack of a baseline survey at start-up means that objective measures of achievement are difficult to obtain.

National-level support: The mode of interaction between the Programme Secretariat and the SPMUs has failed to function as intended, with insufficient incentives for ministries to align with Chia Se objectives, and compete to participate in the programme. In the early years the National Project struggled, suffering for poor coordination and a lack of clarity even beyond the mid-point of the programme. Even in the latter years, initiatives by the SPMUs are not always well coordinated with work being carried out by the Provincial Projects.

Efforts in recent years have helped to improve the capacity of the Programme Secretariat, with notable improvements in the AWBPs and the disbursement of funds. Although there are still doubts about the extent to which the activities of the SPMUs *really* contribute to the overall objectives of Chia Se, with many seemingly have more relevance to the mandates of the respective ministries (e.g. MARD, MOLISA).

Technical assistance, and contracted-in staff, has played an important role in the success of the programme. The early years were marked by difficulties defining the roles, with this becoming clearer in the latter stages of the programme (as Advisors moved from plugging operational shortfalls, to a more strategic and advisory function). Technical assistance underestimated the requirements in a number of areas including: Monitoring and Evaluation; Communications; and, support to the National Project in policy reform.

Capacity building and training: Chia Se has implemented an impressive range of training courses (more than 2,000), and this has contributed greatly to the successful implementation of the programme. Many of the early courses focused on the operation of the LDF and LPMD, with others dealing with income generation, life skills and other aspects of project management. Despite the range of training courses, many were not held regularly, raising concerns about the overall impact. Plus, as training impact assessments were not conducted, the opportunity was lost to systematically assess quality and impact and learn from the process.

Monitoring and evaluation: The Chia Se programme has helped to demonstrate that an M&E system can be applied to the lower levels, and GSO and other staff have gained a lot from the experience. Nevertheless the lack of a baseline survey at start-up was a major omission, and one that subsequent M&E work never fully addressed.

The M&E system was established very late in the programme (some four years after start-up), and its utility as both a management tool and a dataset to measure performance has been very limited. Indeed, the separation of monitoring for management and the learning aspects of the programme from independent and rigorous evaluation have never been fully addressed – with neither being undertaken satisfactorily.

The approach to community monitoring and supervision has been a real strength of the Chia Se approach, with instances of follow-up to activities and contractors being held to account.

5. Impact on Empowerment and Local Democracy

This chapter considers the central feature of the Chia Se programme: its contribution to increased local democracy through the empowerment of local people and the increased capacity of government officials. The early design materials, and the official logframe, are unspecific on these aspects of the programme and do not set out clear definitions and measurable indicators of expectations. As such, this chapter relies on qualitative assessments, observations and interpretations from various studies including Institute of Sociology (2006), Fforde (2009), ILSSA (2008) and SAT village reports.³⁷

There are three crucial terms used with regard to Chia Se: participation (*su tham gia*), grassroots democracy (*dan chu cap co so*) and empowerment (*trao quyen*). This chapter focuses on Chia Se's contribution to local democracy and empowerment – the latter in terms of both community empowerment, and the empowerment of government officials.

Local Democracy

After the troubles in 1997 when there was considerable rural unrest in Vietnam, the Grassroots Decree was passed as a signal of the Party's intent – although for some time it remained largely theoretical with limited real impact. The Decree is a legal document stating ownership rights of local people and requires the Party and authorities at different levels, especially at local level, “to carry out the democratic regulations”. As mentioned previously, this provides the national framework within which Chia Se operates, although as it applies to the lowest levels of the state apparatus, it is markedly different from a democratic model of popular political control (see Box 7).

Box 7. The concept of democracy

“Democracy” refers to a form of government or state system in which power is held directly or indirectly by citizens under a free electoral system. In the context of Vietnam however, it is important to appreciate how the concept of grassroots democracy is applied. As Fforde (2007) explains: “The Vietnamese word “co so” as in the “Decree on grassroots democracy” refers to the lowest levels of the ‘apparatus’ (bo may), which in rural areas are Party, State and Mass organisations at commune level in particular, involving an amount of control or oversight ... Below the commune level is the ‘village’, which also contains communist party and mass organisation structures, and whose leadership has reporting and implementation responsibilities to the commune”. It is therefore misleading to translate ‘co so’ as ‘grassroots’ as this implies popular political control, which is largely unsupported by the evidence.

During the formulation and planning of Chia Se, this Decree was already being viewed as a challenging context in which to apply the decentralisation of development responsibilities (from the national level to the provinces) – focussing on giving greater power, autonomy and responsibility to districts and communes (PFT 2002). The final design of Chia Se (PS 2003) was an attempt to bridge the gap between reality and rhetoric regarding bottom-up planning and ownership; and, the participation of the various stakeholders was seen as an important prerequisite for increasing ownership of the interventions (PFT 2002). The two core mechanisms, the LDF and LPMD, were means of promoting local democracy, decentralisation, empowerment of local people and delivery of resources for investment and services.

³⁷ Particular use is made of the paper entitled, “Reflections on the Chia Se project – participation, empowerment and democratisation” (Fforde 2009), as this study was commissioned for this purpose by the evaluation team.

Placing the core mechanisms of the project firmly at village level was a bold move, particularly in the Vietnamese context. Villagers and members of poor farming communities had little education and lacked experience in handling administrative tasks and processes. Plus in Vietnam, the lowest administrative level is the commune, with many administrative decisions being made at higher levels, i.e. by district and province administrations. From the very start, the Chia Se approach was attempting to go further than the decentralisation and grassroots democracy instructions of the GoV.

Yet while it is too early to say whether Chia Se will leave a lasting impression on grassroots democracy, there is evidence that the programme has demonstrated a model for realising local democracy. As a member of the commune cadre in Ha Giang put it, *“Chia Se is democratic and fair (cong bang) and the people carry on democratically. The commune bears greater responsibility if there is Chia Se. As Chairman of the commune, the Chairman has no rights to decide (khong co quyen quyet dinh). For example, a village had to meet three times before it could decide what to spend the money on. Because of this, the population has more confidence in the commune Chairman and the Party Secretariat”* (Fforde 2009: 18). Importantly, Chia Se has demonstrated several key propositions:

Decentralisation can work. Chia Se has shown that the management and effective ownership of investments can be decentralised to very poor communes and villages (ILSSA 2009). In a comparison of Chia Se and non-Chia Se areas,³⁸ great differences have been found regarding procedural frameworks and successes in encouraging local participation and decision-making. Under Chia Se, communities have a village development plan and the Village Meeting is a formal decision-making body, whereas no such comprehensive plans nor bodies were found in other (non-Chia Se) villages. Furthermore, people from poor households took a more active part in discussions in Chia Se areas and the voice of women was more often recognised. On the whole, people were more aware of their rights and responsibilities, and the quality of services provided by the project had improved as a result. Villagers in Chia Se were better informed, e.g. of investment activities and raised more questions and complaints to the authorities than in other villages in the study. As some government officials explained (Fforde 2009: 18–19):

“Chia Se is good – actually a breakthrough (co tinh dot pha). Up till now nobody has managed to decentralise (phan cap) and empower (trao quyen) to families and people. Crucially it decentralises resources” (Provincial official, Ha Giang).

“The decentralisation of management occurs through empowerment to the commune, to the village, and the people have the power/right (quyen) and the permission (phep) to themselves chose activities. They are informed openly and transparently about the capital and the village meets to chose the projects and if there are different opinions they work to a majority” (District official, Ha Giang).

“This is decentralisation [understood as empowerment]. The Secretariat only assists implementation, the commune is the project leader (chu du an) but the village directly implements (trine khai). There has never ever been such a novel method” (Provincial official, Yen Bai).

Villagers can actively participate in local decision-making. Chia Se has to a varying degree in the three provinces succeeded in promoting participation of villagers (men and women) in local decision-making and the distribution of resources. New village “structures”, i.e. village groups, and mechanisms were established in order to supervise and monitor activities, and enable transparency, such as village monitoring and supervisory groups with assigned functions to keep an eye on project activities and report to the commune in case of misuse or misallocation of resources occurred. This was not always straightforward at first (Fforde 2009: 20):

³⁸ The other projects studied for comparison were Tuyen Quang Rural Income Diversification Project (RIDP), the Quang Binh Decentralized Poverty Reduction Project (DPRP) and the Lao Cai National Targeted Poverty Reduction Programme (NTPPR). See ILSSA (2009).

“... with Chia Se, it is different, the training is less formal but the essence of it is discussing things with the people of the village. Based upon what I gather from their opinions, I have to think it through, think of possibilities, and go back to them. It took two months to get to a viable solution as to how to spend the money the first time we tried... It takes time to manage the opinions of different groups, to establish just what human resources are available in the village (such as construction experts), and to tease out the best way forward”

(Villager, Quang Tri province).

*“The capacity of village leaders and mass organisations at village level improves. The autonomy (or ‘rights to autonomy’ – *quyen tu chu*) of the population increases, above all in planning/ setting up plans. At first we could not think it through, but once we got the vision...”*

(Commune official, Yen Bai province).

Interactions can improve between villagers and higher levels. Under Chia Se, villagers came to interact with the higher administrative levels, namely the communes and districts. In the Chia Se operational areas, the village units became linked, for the duration of the programme, to the higher levels and with the regular government structures. In this process, there is some evidence (see Fforde 2009: 17–22) that attitudes and behaviour have changed at all levels (village, commune, district, province and national). For example: *“Commune officials now have clearer roles, they have more respect from the people and have something to do – this in large part is because of Chia Se. They like their work now. The village management board was initially formed from existing cadres, but as experience was gained they were elected on that basis; in other words, to start with they were chosen by the commune, but after a while they were elected. This was good”* (Fforde 2009: 20). Yet as these links were never formalised, the model implemented under Chia Se remains a model; as there is little likelihood that this kind of decentralised process operating at village level could be incorporated into Vietnam’s administrative/political system within the foreseeable future.

Community Empowerment

Empowerment lies at the heart of Chia Se. It underpins the logic of the programme, so that: “If people are empowered then they will gain better control over the things that matter to them, including resources and development funds. And by doing so, this will improve their living conditions”.³⁹ As the programme’s design document states, *“Empowerment is an important issue related to understanding and addressing poverty issues. The party has laid out its policy regarding grassroots empowerment in the form of Decree 29, the grassroots democratisation decree”* (PS 2003: 12). Empowerment is also mentioned in relation to the LPMD: *“In conjunction with the LDF, the second core mechanism of the Chia Se programme is Local Planning and Management for Development (LPMD). These two tools, LPMD and LDF, are the foundation of the programme to achieve decentralisation and local democracy, empowerment of local levels...”*

Empowerment is to “increase the spiritual, political, social or economic strength of individuals and communities. It involves the empowered person developing confidence in their own capacities; to invest with power, especially legal power and official authority and to equip or supply with an ability”.⁴⁰

Empowerment has multiple meanings, and has been applied in different ways throughout the Chia Se programme. There is a tendency to see empowerment as something that *“regulates grassroots democracy”* in the Provincial projects. This interpretation is reflected in a Study on Empowerment (Luan et al 2006), commissioned by the Secretariat:

³⁹ Fforde (2009: 7) argues that the one of the successes of Chia Se has been to allow empowerment to be seen as an *effect*, rather than the *cause* – though more research would be required to confirm this view.

⁴⁰ <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/empowerment>

“During interviews in localities, many people and village cadres have attached Chia Se project with the Government’s grassroots democracy regulations. The way of Chia Se’s empowerment and the exercise of the grassroots democracy regulations were associated with each other. The grassroots democracy regulations created a legal foundation for exercising Chia Se’s empowerment and the execution of these regulations over the recent past years helped building the practical basis of the empowerment. The process of exercising Chia Se’s empowerment is again an opportunity to consolidate and improve community capacity in implementing the grassroots democracy regulations.

We have executed the grassroots democracy regulations in villages and communes but the folk have not been able to define what are the democracy regulations. Yet, through this project, people know that grassroots democracy means people are allowed to discuss and participate (in public affairs). People are able to jointly participate in the discussion, performance, decision-making and inspection (of public affairs). And what’s more important, people enjoy benefits”.

(Chairman, La Pan Tan Commune People’s Committee, Mu Cang Chai district, Yen Bai province).

Box 8. Empowering local officials

In one non-Chia Se commune in Yen Bai province, the Chair of the People’s Committee explained that under P135-2, the district is the investment owner for infrastructure works. Every year the Chair consults with villagers and submits a list of requests for works. The villagers have, for example, requested 4 km of road to the commune centre. For several years now this request has gone in, but so far just one community hall in one village has been approved. As the Chair explained, **“We live near the villagers and know what they want, but the system can’t deliver this in a knowable way which can be predicted”**. Similarly in Ha Giang province, the Chair of a Commune People’s Council explained that before Chia Se some projects would arrive in a village, yet the villagers would know nothing about it. In one example, a person came to do survey work. Four years passed (and everyone forgot about it) until they arrived to build an irrigation system and bridge! Not only were the villagers unaware, but also the commune leaders knew nothing about it – clearly disempowering for local officials that send up requests from villagers but have no way of predicting what will happen.

Part of the success of Chia Se has been its ability to translate broad concepts of empowerment into meaningful ‘procedures’, and to effectively help concretise the Party’s intent following the 1997 troubles (Fforde 2009: 13) – to ease social unrest. Indeed, empowerment does not seem to have reduced the power of officials,⁴¹ but seemingly the reverse (see Box 8) by increasing prestige amongst the local cadre, and meeting little resistance: *“... Chia Se tended to see the prestige of local officials increase, including them in progress, improving their willingness to work and their social position. Nothing, in our view, could be further from ideas of the importance of bypassing them. Hierarchy is clarified and reinforced, not destroyed”* (Fforde 2009: 17). As some villagers in Quang Tri province explained:

“It is energising (tich cuc) and I have responsibilities. With such methods it also starts to get easier to get local contributions... My prestige has risen and I have greater capacity. The crucial issue is that people have rights to decide things (quyen dinh doan)”

(Village meeting, Quang Tri Province).

“It is more democratic and people’s understanding of the system has increased. The village has more power, people know. The method is fine, the main issue now is money. The prestige of officials has risen”

(Village meeting, Quang Tri province).

⁴¹ Empowerment could be seen as reducing the power of officials at the commune level or above – so that by ‘giving power’ to villagers, this implies a loss for someone else. Power is not however a ‘substance’ that can be transferred in ways similar to budgetary resources, but rather a shift in the social and political order. See Fforde (2009: 13).

For some (Fforde 2009; Phan 2009), Chia Se may be said to help concretise the Party's push for grass-roots democratisation from 1997, with further rural development requiring improvements in institutions not resources. In particular, Phan (2009) points out that as income growth in urban areas outpaces that in less well-situated rural regions, there are potential implications for Vietnamese society. Indeed for Vietnam's continued integrity, it may be important that the 'rural poor' do not become more detached from the growth poles of the Vietnamese economy – from the Party's perspective, an important element in preventing rural unrest and retaining border security.

The Role of Capacity Building

This section considers the impact of training. Training has been used to build the capacity of officials and villagers, and help empower them to take decisions and be actively involved in the Chia Se programme. As Fforde (2009: 24) explains, “... *the importance of training was that it related to the very Vietnamese focus upon procedures. Training activities played a crucial role in legitimising procedures and making them meaningful. It is not so much that capacity was raised (though this is how it is often reported) but that people ‘learnt’ how to behave in ways consistent with Chia se procedures and so ‘learnt’ how to live with new attitudes, political relationships, powers and rights. Training, thus, enabled then to act in character in the new ways. Roles were made meaningful, acceptable and normal*” – a view based on the ILSSA assessment of training and capacity-raising activities (ILSSA 2008).

There is very little in the way of training impact assessment or such reporting by the programme, apart from interviews with Chia Se stakeholders.⁴² Furthermore, the SAT evaluation team has not been able to access training course programmes, training materials used at neither village/commune levels, nor participants' evaluations/assessments of any training courses – and can therefore not assess the quality of training based on such documents. The ILSSA study concluded that there was little doubt that the training programme of Chia Se had contributed greatly to the successful implementation of the programme (ILSSA 2008). In particular, the intensive training programme has promoted a number of project initiatives including a strong emphasis on decentralisation, delegation of power and responsibility to lower levels, flexibility in planning and management, and empowering communities in terms of access and control of resources. For instance, in the first two years of the project some 30,000 people, ranging from Chia Se employees to local government staff at district and commune levels to key villagers, attended project training courses or workshops that played a vital role in the start-up and drive for Chia Se at the beginning. Few other development projects involve stakeholders in start-up activities, project objectives and principles to the extent that Chia Se has, and this training is seen as instrumental to achieving a quality LPMD process.

More than half the training courses have been devoted to LPMD and the LDF, targeted at contracted staff, facilitators, CPMU, DPMU, village management and supervision units. The ILSSA report comments that the impact of this effort in terms of improved capacity is demonstrated by the performance of individual tasks and functions that have resulted in the day-to-day achievements of the project.

Despite there being no systematic effort to monitor impact of training, Chia Se does not appear to have had problems with handling specific management procedures such as financial procedures, project formulation, payment, planning and appraisal commonly experienced by other programmes operating at a grassroots level. Instead Chia Se focused its training energies on developing performance, management and practical skills such as moderating village meetings, VDP/CDP process, PRA tools, financial and procurement procedures, which can then be used in their normal work by those who have been trained.

⁴² The views expressed here are distilled from ILSSA (2008) and interviews conducted by the SAT evaluation team in early 2009.

Impact on government staff

The ILSSA report goes on to say that government staff at all levels state that their capacity has improved since they started working with the Chia Se programme.⁴³ In particular commune and village levels staff and women appear to have benefited especially in those districts where the general level of education is higher. The impact of training in terms of organisational capacity for local government staff at the commune level includes:

- Administration has become more systematic and planned and controlled the distribution of functions and responsibilities at the commune level is clearer
- Better quality of reporting and statistics by communes equipped with computers and trained staff.
- Better equipment has improved working conditions
- Capacity in financial management has been strengthened
- Coordination at the local level has improved
- Improvement of the in the image of local government local mass organisations by local people which has led to greater trust in the value of these institutions

Impact on villagers

Various assessments and surveys conducted on behalf of the National Project show that the Chia Se training programme met the training needs of local people and led to remarkable improvements of cultivating techniques in agriculture, forestry, fish farming as well as secondary and tertiary sector income generating initiatives (ILSSA 2008).

Indirect benefits of this improved knowledge, especially in those districts in the north with lower education levels, has been that local people have become much more confident, particularly at village meetings and assessments of the performance of activities supported by the project. This has helped to promote implementation of the “right to hear, to see, to know and to participate in implementation”. Greater interest is now paid to issues such as social affairs, the environment, healthcare, education and gender equality.

While this progress is relative (e.g. to the external observer women seem painfully shy at meetings), commune leaders pointed out, for instance, that before Chia Se local people saw little point in educating girls whereas now they understood the importance of educating the next generation (not just boys) and women – who rather ironically still carry out most of the farming.

It seems that the impact of the training programme has tended to be more effective in those areas where the general level of education is higher. Illiteracy is higher in the northern Chia Se districts in Yen Bai and Ha Giang and higher among women than men. Some illiteracy classes for women were held by Chia Se but according to assessments by participants these have not been very effective.

With hindsight, the ILSSA study concludes that where educational standards, professional skills and understanding of life skills are still low and clearly barriers to poverty alleviation, the building of human capital to promote livelihood changes requires greater attention than the 10% of VDF allocated under Chia Se. This would appear to be a significant lesson arising from the Chia Se experience in Phase 2 and if replication is to take place successfully under GoV programmes. More weight will be needed on issues such as the rights of citizens, implementing grassroots democracy and development of skills for participating and organising community based planning and supervision.

⁴³ An observation supported by interviews with GoV staff at the central and local levels, as conducted by the SAT Evaluation Team.

Summary:

Chia Se has been effective at demonstrating that decentralisation and grassroots democracy (as defined by the Decree) can work. Chia Se has shown that the management and ownership of investments can be decentralised to the commune level and lower, that villagers can usefully participate in local decision-making, and villagers can link meaningfully with higher administrative levels.

Many staff and project beneficiaries cite the contribution of Chia Se to community empowerment as an important achievement. Empowerment of villagers appears to be a positive development for most officials and management, and does not appear to undermine existing structures. This is important given the context of the 1997 rural unrest that preceded declarations on Grassroots Democracy.

It seems that for government staff at all levels, capacity has been improved. For villager and commune level courses however, participants felt that the language was sometimes too academic, there were problems with translation, and mixed courses (district, commune, village) were seen as generally ineffective. The impact of training tended to be more effective where the general level of education was higher.

6. Impact on Poverty and Growth

This chapter assesses the effectiveness (and impact) of the provincial projects. The Sida Evaluation Manual (Sida 2004) takes a broad interpretation of effectiveness: *“effectiveness refers to the extent to which the objectives of an intervention have been achieved as a result of the implementation of planned activities. Effectiveness can be measured at the level of outputs as well as at the levels of outcome and impact. In the first case we are concerned with the achievement of targets for the production of goods and services, in the second with the achievement of the further effects that we intend to bring about through these goods and services”*. This chapter concentrates on the outcome and impact levels of analysis. In terms of impact, the chapter considers the evidence for Chia Se’s contribution to poverty alleviation and sustainable growth (the programme goal). The bulk of the chapter then assesses the extent to which Chia Se has improved “access to poverty alleviation resources” (the outcome-level objective of the provincial projects).

Impact on Poverty Alleviation and Sustainable Growth

The underlying logic of Chia Se is that by increasing people’s access to resources (outcome-level), poverty will be alleviated with sustained growth (programme goal). There are many claims in project reports and by government staff that Chia Se has contributed to dramatic reductions in poverty, and much faster than comparable areas. This is however largely based on administrative data (the MOLISA poverty line), and its reliability questionable.

The MOLISA line is set arbitrarily (largely due to the availability of budgetary resources). It is not strictly comparable, with the testing not uniformly undertaken in all communes, no full coverage of the entire population and with factors other than inadequate income determining the identification of poor households (UNDP/MOLISA 2004:29–32). In other words, this the MOLISA administrative data is not considered to be as reliable as survey data that measures household income in detail such as the

VHLSS. See Box 9. Furthermore, determining the changes in poverty reduction resulting from the Chia Se interventions in the three operational provinces is highly problematic, especially due to the absence of any baseline information describing the situation *before* or at the time of *inception*. The M&E system also contains data for Chia Se districts *only*, so while there is data to compare changes over time, this data cannot be used to assess whether it is faster in these areas than those in Non-Chia Se communes and districts.

Box 9. Poverty lines in Vietnam

There are two approaches to measuring poverty in Vietnam; one calculated by GSO (with technical assistance from the World Bank) and the other by MOLISA (the official or national poverty line). The GSO calculates the food poverty line and a general poverty line. The first is based upon the minimum calorific requirements to ensure good nutritional status. The second is linked to this measurement, but also includes minimum non-food expenditure in the basket of goods. The line remains constant in real terms, and uses data from the Vietnam Household Living Standards Survey (VHLSS). The MOLISA (national) poverty line tends to be influenced by the resources the ministry has available for special assistance programmes for the poor. The data is drawn from registered poor households at the commune level. Source: AusAID (2002).

Despite this lack of early data, the Programme Secretariat has attempted to produce evidence of changes in poverty reduction and income growth (PS 2009). This is primarily based on data from the M&E system, plus the GSO Household Impact Survey, 2008.⁴⁴ The subsequent Results Analysis Report (RAR) presents a rather complex, and at times confusing,⁴⁵ set of results.

The following section shows the difficulty in drawing conclusions from the data. Though not ideal, the best data available on incomes (from the RAR) shows an unclear narrative. For instance, the GSO data shows that household incomes have risen faster in Chia Se communes compared to other households in the same provinces (GSO 2008a: 36).⁴⁶ This has been particularly for the poorest groups (Quartile 1). The majority *Kinh* appear to have benefited most, while the ethnic minorities have fared less well and the *Hmong* people have benefited least. Quang Tri Province in particular, a predominantly *Kinh* area, shows the highest increases in income. See Table 12, below.

Table 12. Average rate of real income increase per person per year (%)⁴⁷

	Total	2004–07	
		Chia Se	Non-Chia Se
Total Population	7,2	8,3	6,3
Ethnic group:			
Kinh	8,2	11,4	5,6
Tày	7,2	7,1	7,5
Mông	2,8	0,6	5,2
Nùng	7,9	3,8	9,2
Income Quartile:			
Quartile 1 (lowest)	12,9	12,7	13,0

⁴⁴ In 2008, GSO undertook the Household Impact Survey to capture data retrospectively for 2004, 2007 and 2008, for both Chia Se households (n=600) and non-Chia Se households (n=600).

⁴⁵ The tables and text of the RAR focuses on percentage changes over the period, rather than absolute figures that provide information on the starting and end points of a data series. This would provide a clearer indication of the changes, such as in agricultural production where an increase in farming land by 15% may appear high, but still not represent much growth in production.

⁴⁶ This data must however be treated with caution as the early data for 2004 was collected in 2008.

⁴⁷ 'Real income' is referred to here as income adjusted for inflation.

	Total	2004–07	
		Chia Se	Non-Chia Se
Quartile 2	7,3	6,9	7,9
Quartile 3	8,5	8,1	8,9
Quartile 4 (highest)	6,9	9,1	5,7
Location:			
Ha Giang	7,2	6,4	7,9
Yen Bai	8,0	7,3	8,6
Quang Tri	7,3	10,6	4,8

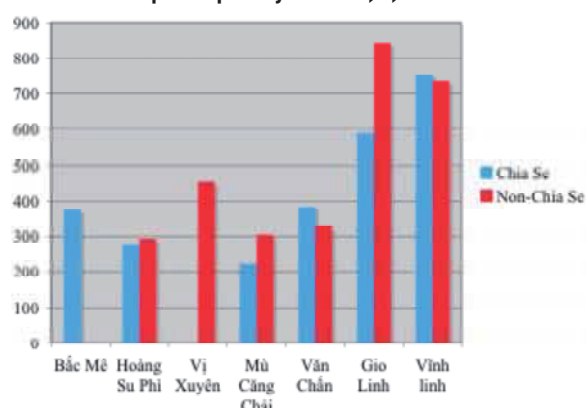
Source: GSO (2008: 36).

Note: The highlighted figures show the highest proportions in each of the main categories (i.e. ethnic group, income quartile and location).

Even presuming that the changes in income are reliable, the picture remains complex – and appears to show Chia Se was not as effective as it might first seem. For instance, the percentage increase in real incomes amongst the poorest groups (quartile 1) was actually faster in Non-Chia Se areas. Plus, ethnic minority groups *outside* Chia Se project areas seem to have increased their incomes more than the groups within Chia Se. And the more recent effects of the world food crisis (food price inflation) and the global economic downturn (reducing consumer demand) may further undermine any gains achieved. The Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung told the country's National Assembly on 31 May 2008, that the number of households going hungry had doubled in one year and that the Government was doing its best to curb inflation.⁴⁸

Therefore, in terms of poverty, people may have higher incomes but may still be poor, or even poorer. Certainly, the proportion of poor households appears to have fallen faster in Chia Se areas (PS 2009: 81), but this is based on the MOLISA poverty line – which is used for administering poverty alleviation programmes and thus not well suited for analytical purposes. Furthermore, consumer prices have risen by about 50% over the same period (PS 2003: 81), eroding some of the gains made in income growth.⁴⁹

Income 2008 per capita by district, 1,000 VND



In summary, it seems that while incomes *may* have increased and the proportion of poor households fallen faster in Chia Se areas, it is not possible to conclude that Chia Se has made a significant difference in this regard. This is particularly so as incomes in non-Chia Se areas may have risen faster for the

⁴⁸ Source: Time magazine, Monday 9th June 2008

⁴⁹ This means that the poverty line of VND 200,000 per month, measured at 2005 prices would have been gradually reduced from VND 200,000 to 133,000. Source: PS (2009).

ethnic minorities and the poorest groups – implying that Chia Se has been less effective. Plus, the findings must be treated with caution as there are no reliable estimates of income change before/after Chia Se, and data for the MOLISA poverty line relies on administrative sources. As the RAR concludes (PS 2009: 81–82):

“The proportion of poor households has fallen faster in the Chia Se districts of Ha Giang and Quang Tri than the average in Vietnam, probably to a large extent as a result of poverty-targeted programmes, including Chia Se. In the case of Bac Me and Hoang Su Phi, the rate of poverty reduction has been faster in Chia Se communes than in others, and there are clear indications that the Programme has contributed to this difference. On the other hand, household poverty rates have been particularly stubborn in Chia Se communes of Van Chan, where they fell less than in other communes of the same district. Apart from these examples it is impossible to find significant differences between the outcomes in Chia Se and non-Chia Se communes in the same districts.”

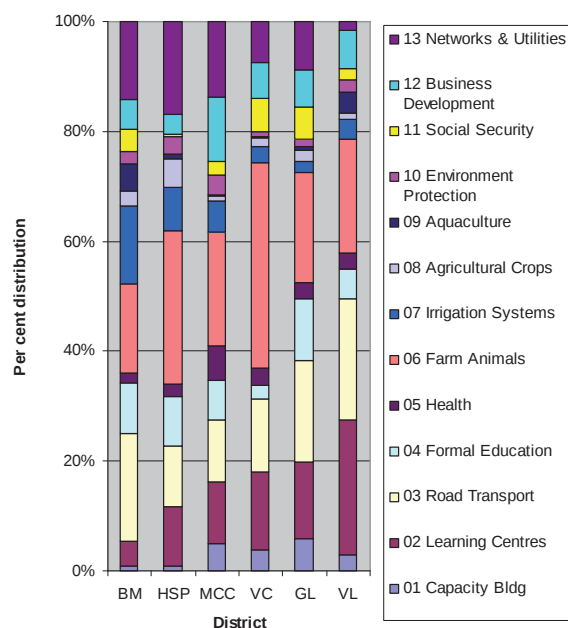
Access to Poverty Alleviation Resources

This section focuses on sustainable livelihoods and resource access (indicators of the outcome-level objectives in the Logframe 2005/06), with the other indicators of gender equity and ethnic minorities covered in the next Chapter.

Sustainable livelihoods (and access to resources)

The objective of the Chia Se is to enable, “Poor households have good access to poverty alleviation resources”. As mentioned earlier, this objective has been interpreted widely with some emphasising the empowerment aspects of “access and control” with others seeing the “resources” as the critical requirement for poverty alleviation and growth. This section covers access to livelihood resources in terms of their effectiveness at improving income generation activities, agricultural production, infrastructure and basic services, as well as social services in health and education.

Figure 3. VDF allocations by sector and district, 2004–2008



Source: PS [2009: 23].

The selection of activities is demand-led, decided by the villagers according to their priorities and needs – with over 10,000 investment decisions being made. Nevertheless some patterns emerge (see Figure 3).⁵⁰ During the first years of the LDF, funds focused particularly on income generating activities for poor households, often followed by a broader set of infrastructure projects, plus livestock and cropping activities that benefit the wider community (SAT 2006; PS 2007). The share of livestock (mainly buffalos) is high in all six districts, as well as road construction especially in Vinh Linh and Bac Me districts. Community halls (learning centres) also feature highly, particularly in the two districts in Quang Tri province.

The following sections explore the extent to which these decisions have been effective in increasing access to income generation, agricultural production, infrastructure and social services.

Income generation

Decisions to invest in income-earning activities are often based on tradition or copying investment patterns of neighboring communities (PS 2009: 24), and not necessarily the best returns on investments or activities most suited to the area. As the RAR points out there, *“Since the Programme has not formulated any specific targets or minimum standards for income growth or poverty reduction, even activities with a negative return to the invested capital would qualify for support from LDF”*.

In a review of 48 typical cases of income-earning activities (IPSARD 2008), researchers show that investments in planting and cultivation have generally been effective, while investments in livestock have yielded less income, and those in non-agricultural activities were not generally associated with high incomes. The study also finds that poorer farmers were constrained by risk aversion, and so did not always direct the largest part of their resources to the most productive types of activities. A lack of knowledge and skills was seen as a serious constraint to income growth, and more so than a lack of access to capital (Edgren 2008).

The IPSARD study is based on a selection of case studies using a household economic model that seeks to optimize income. The households were selected purposively and not necessarily representative of all Chia Se beneficiaries. The assessment focuses only on how households might optimise their income (i.e. given their resources of land and labour, which activities will provide the best economic returns?). It does not take account of environmental factors, nor consumer preferences. Most importantly, the study does not assess the total impact of Chia Se investments on actual income generation.

An analysis of statistical data from Ha Giang province provides perhaps the strongest evidence that Chia Se has contributed directly to improved income generation (Jonsson 2009: 24–25). Chia Se areas show a real income increase above the non-Chia Se areas by VND 1,597,850 (or 82%) per capita, and VND 7,558,702 (or 67%) per household. The analysis of crop and livestock activities indicates that Chia Se areas have generally done better than the Non-Chia Se areas. Livestock in particular makes the largest difference; a single buffalo can make a profitable investment provided that it is combined with training and veterinary services.

Both in Chia Se and non-Chia Se areas, the rate of increase of incomes was highest among the very poor (see Table 13). This may be due to productivity increases, though also increased resources from other poverty alleviation programmes, including Chia Se. Poor households have benefited under Chia Se from help to clear land and terraces, plus ‘handouts’ such as buffaloes, rice to stave off starvation during food-deficient months, mosquito nets, blankets, etc. A high percentage of the buffaloes did not survive however, and while the number of buffaloes per household increased for the lowest quartiles they decreased overall (GSO 2008a: 30). Several reasons are cited: in Ha Giang this was mainly because of the very damaging cold in the early of 2008, and in Yen Bai mainly because they were pro-

⁵⁰ Based on an ex post facto reclassification of the LDF activities in the M&E system.

cured from outside the province and could not survive the harsh climate and altitude. Also, there may have been insufficient knowledge on keeping buffalos, difficulties obtaining fodder, and a lack of labour to care for and make use of the animals. See Box 10.

Box 10. Labour constraints of the very poor

Reaching the very poorest is challenging for any programme. In Mu Cang Chai district, one very poor household (category 4) received one buffalo from Chia Se, plus attended some training – with other support coming from government programmes (rice, floor and roofing materials for the house, elephant grass). The household contributed VND 600,000 for the buffalo, with VND 5 million from Chia Se. The buffalo died a year later. The household head said that he couldn't register for another buffalo as no longer had the labour to utilise it, and similarly for latrines, he didn't have the labour to construct one. Not only was he ill but also his other children had married and moved away, leaving just him, his wife and a son (who was too young to work the land).

Yet while investments in certain farming enterprises have had some impact on incomes (see also GSO 2008a: 38–39), the income structure of households appears not to have altered by much as a result of Chia Se. According to the GSO Household Impact Survey 2008, the main income sources were from agriculture (51.7% in 2007), with little change in the income structure between 2004 and 2007 for Chia Se households (see Table 13).

Table 13. Income structure of households, 2007 compared with 2004

Income structure	2007 (total = 100%)			Change in comparison with 2004		
	Overall 2007	Chia se 2007	Outside 2007	Overall 2007	Chia se 2007	Outside 2007
Agriculture	51.7	49.9	53.2	3.3	3.9	2.9
Forestry	5.3	5.7	4.9	-1.4	-1.6	-1.2
Fishery	2.7	2.9	2.6	0.1	0.0	0.2
Non-agricultural sources	8.2	8.6	8.0	-0.6	-1.0	-0.2
Other sources	32.1	33.0	31.3	-1.4	-1.2	-1.6

Source: GSO (2008: 34).

This tentatively suggests that,⁵¹ Chia Se has had a less profound effect on diversifying the income sources of households. Observations in the field support this view,⁵² where income generation related to *off-farm* production seems to be poorly developed. Much of the income-generation has been focused on on-farm and agricultural extension, through DARD (especially in Ha Giang province). Quang Tri experimented with a revolving fund that did not continue (as it was not endorsed by Sida). There is also limited evidence that the project has encouraged beneficiaries to link up with microfinance agencies, nor systematic training for micro-enterprises or small-scale entrepreneurship, value chain work and marketing – although some limited work on market information.

There is also little evidence of attempts by the programme to initiate, through negotiations with the local authorities, local procurements for labour-intensive works to better benefit the indigenous population in the North and generate cash incomes (e.g. road/infrastructure maintenance). This would have required specific skills/vocational training, negotiations on legal issues with the authorities, etc. Some notions have been brought forward that local people, in particular from ethnic minority communities, would not have been able, or willing to do such work – though in the Northern Mountain project, this has apparently been done rather successfully (NMPRP 2007).

⁵¹ The GSO Household Impact Survey 2008 data should be treated cautiously, given that the 2004 information was collected by memory recall in 2008.

⁵² Based on over 50 household interviews in 12 villages, spread across the 3 Chia Se provinces (SAT Evaluation Team).

Agricultural production

Agricultural production is an important measure, especially as the ethnic minorities live within a predominantly subsistence economy, where production for sale means that improvements cannot be easily measured in monetary (income) terms.

Agricultural production in Chia Se provinces have shown an average growth of 6% per year compared with national average of 3.5–4% for the same period. As RAR points out (PS 2009: 75), the starting point was much lower for these provinces, especially in the northern provinces of Ha Giang and Yen Bai – hence larger gains are sometimes possible. The GSO Household Impact Survey estimates agricultural growth from 2005–2007 to have been 7.6% per year in Bac Me district, 6.5% in Hoang Su Phi, 6.8% in Mu Cang Chai, 6.1% in Van Chan, 7.1% in Gio Linh and 12.7% in Vinh Linh (GSO 2008a: 24).

The growth in average annual production (kilograms per household, 2005–2007) indicates that rice, soybean and rubber grew faster in Chia Se areas (GSO 2008a: 28–29); but that growth was lower for other types of crop (corn, cassava, peanut, tea, pepper). Rice is the most important plant to contribute to household income with maize ranked second and cassava third (GSO 2008a: 26). For the lowest income quartile, the rice area increased by 8% annually, while that of all households under Chia Se rose by 13.6% (GSO 2008a: 27). This compares with an average increase of 3.6% for non-Chia Se households. This tentatively suggests that Chia Se has been effective in opening up land and repairing terraces for rice production.

Access/use of infrastructure and basic services

Infrastructure has been a key investment for all provinces, and especially roads (inter-village, or village-to-commune centre), bridges, culverts, electricity installations, drinking water supply and sanitation (latrines), water tanks, wells, school investments, culverts, village meeting halls, health care stations, pens for animals and irrigation pipes (PS 2007). As mentioned earlier, infrastructure investments that benefited the wider community tended to come after the first project year. For example in 2005, Hoang Su Phi district instructed that income-generating activities (IGAs) for the poor should constitute 85% of the LDF. The following year focus shifted to infrastructure (irrigation, meeting halls, electricity connection), which increased to 45%, with utilization of LDF for IGAs dropping to 50% (SAT 2006).

Roads. The impact and contribution of roads to livelihood improvements (access to schooling, health-care, markets, etc) is not particularly well evidenced. It seems that better roads may have helped to reduce the time taken to school, particularly secondary schools; with 85.2% of households in Chia Se areas citing better roads for the reductions in the time taken to get to primary schools, compared to 64.2% outside Chia Se areas (GSO 2008a: 41–42). In terms of healthcare, the same survey finds that the time taken to the commune clinic had reduced faster in Chia Se areas (by 8 minutes to 45 minutes on average by 2007); yet, it was still much quicker in Non-Chia Se areas, at 27 minutes on average the nearest clinic in 2007 (GSO 2008a: 44–45). Constructing roads may have also helped improve the time taken to get produce to markets – in support of increased prices and opportunities for on-farm income – though there is little objective evidence that shows this to be the case

Electricity. According to the GSO Household Impact Survey, rates of electricity use increased by 6.5% in Chia Se areas and at 9.8% outside Chia Se areas (GSO 2008a: 46). The slower rate for Chia Se may however be because nearly all households now have access to electricity, so that by 2007, 92.5% of Chia Se households had access, and 83.7% for those surveyed outside the project area. The rates of increase for the lowest income quartiles (groups 1 and 2) improved faster than those for the higher ones (groups 3 and 4)

Water supply and sanitation. Water supply (mainly water tanks constructed near to homesteads) is an area that Chia Se has improved and seems to have been very important in the Northern Provinces, assisting women and girls in particular. In Ha Giang, women stated that having water near the house

made them cook food faster for the morning meal, before going to the field, thus reducing the walking distance and “saving time”. Saved time can now be used for other, perhaps productive purposes or more time to care for family members, children and animals etc. Whether or not the water is safe water is another issue. During visits by the SAT evaluation team, several of the water tanks were left uncovered, and there were examples of one being used to keep fish and another than was covered with a substance that may have been an asbestos-based material (a toxic substance).⁵³

Latrines were built in quite a number of households in the northern projects through assistance of the VDF, although 20% of Chia Se households, and 23% of the non-Chia Se households, still lacked the most basic forms of toilet by 2008 (GSO 2008b). There also appears to have been little or no sanitation/hygiene awareness raising or adaptation of knowledge for latrine construction. It seems basic knowledge about hygiene has not been a pre-condition for the release of funds for construction of latrines. This is a serious loss of opportunity – as improved hygiene is such a vital area for the well being of poor families, for instance in reducing the incidence of disease and risk for diarrhoea among children.⁵⁴ Observations also suggest that alongside latrines and “bathrooms” the availability of water for hand-washing purposes were not common, not even at commune level.

Access/use of social services (health, education)

Education. While there were investments in education, villagers used only a small proportion of the VDF for this purpose,⁵⁵ and the overall impact is difficult to identify. Exceptions can however be found in Quang Tri province, where LDF investments have supported infrastructure investments in school buildings, dormitories for lower secondary schools and roads that may shorten the time for the pupils to get to school (PS 2009: 83–84). Many investments were undertaken in combination with other government programmes, and the effects of Chia Se contributions are unlikely to be sensitive to typical indicators of educational improvement (enrolment, attendance, teacher-pupil ratios, educational standards, etc). For some, the 4-year life cycle of LDF funding was sufficient to only start addressing poor household needs and community infrastructure like roads and village halls: “... *local poor household incomes have reached the level where the burden of everyday life has been removed and/or local people’s awareness has been raised to the level where they start thinking more about the community benefit and about a greater good. In a more figurative expression, people’s priorities are being shifted from pigs to schools*” (PS 2007: 40).

Healthcare. Similarly to education, healthcare has been a relatively underfunded area of activity, and one might question whether women and poor families been raising their voices and concerns in this area – and conversely why road construction and village halls dominate investment choices. The average share of VDF resources invested in ‘health and sanitation’ is 6%, with the districts of Mu Cang Chai and Bac Me highest at 16% and 11% respectively, with Van Chan district the lowest at 0.6% (PS 2009: 85). Much of this investment supported the construction of latrines (see paragraph 6.28). In Quang Tri Province training on health issues has been undertaken to the greatest extent, such as on HIV/AIDS, reproductive health for villagers, children’s healthcare, tuberculosis prevention, support on training the village healthcare students, etc. In Quang Tri also, health checks for women/children, and vaccinations of children were carried out. Training in environmental hygiene and residue treatment was also undertaken in Quang Tri (PS 2009).

⁵³ Based on visits to 3 districts, 9 communes and 12 villagers by the SAT Evaluation Team. Observations of the ‘asbestos’ type covering could not be verified, but it is known that this material is used for construction in the region (though banned from roofing for Chia Se investments).

⁵⁴ Participatory community methodologies addressing awareness, attitudes and behaviour have been used in many other development programmes (e.g. “Total Sanitation” which has proved to be quite effective in rural programmes in Asia).

⁵⁵ Indeed, Health and Education are hardly mentioned in the 2007 Progress report (PS 2007).

Summary:

There is some evidence that shows that Chia Se has contributed to poverty reduction, but due to the lack of sound quantitative data and analysis, it is not possible to draw a definitive conclusion. For example, some evidence shows that incomes may have increased in Chia Se areas, but there is also evidence that shows that incomes may have increased faster for ethnic minorities and the poorest in non-Chia Se areas – something that appears counter to the conclusion that Chia Se has reduced poverty.

In Ha Giang province there is much stronger evidence that Chia Se has directly improved the incomes of the poor, particularly through livestock and improved farming techniques. Nevertheless, where Chia Se seems to have been less effective is in the ‘depth’ and sustainability of poverty reduction – i.e. introducing new sources of income, such as shifting to off-farm production, micro and small enterprises, microfinance, and adding value through improved market access.

In terms of agriculture, production appears to have grown faster in Chia Se areas, particularly for rice, soybean and rubber production. The opening up of land and repair of terraces seems to have contributed greatly to the total rice area under cultivation in Chia Se areas. The construction of inter-village and village-to-commune roads have helped reduce the time to schools and health clinics, plus the installation of electricity, water tanks and latrines have been important in many areas. The link to hygiene practices seems however to have been weakly addressed, and contributions to education and healthcare appear to be weaker areas of the programme.

7. Equality, Environment and Sustainability

This chapter assesses the crosscutting aspects of Chia Se, with a particular focus on gender equity and equality, ethnic minorities and environmental mitigation and impact. In the final part of the chapter, consideration is given to the sustainable nature of the programme – both in terms of the participatory planning process, and operations and maintenance.

Gender equity and equality

The CPRGS emphasised the need to, “narrow the social development gap between different regions and population groups, reduce the vulnerabilities of the poor and disadvantaged groups; realize gender equity and the advancement of women; stabilize and raise the living standards of ethnic minorities; expand social protection and the social safety net...”. The importance of promoting gender equality and empowering women is underscored by its inclusion as one of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).⁵⁶ Gender equality is also at the centre of Sida’s mission to promote and create conditions for poverty reduction in partner countries. Gender discrimination is seen as one of the main causes of poverty, and a major obstacle to equitable and sustainable global human development. Mainstreaming gender equality is seen as a strategy for achieving sustainable development for all, by supporting the right of choice, empowerment and provision of resources. To Sida, gender equality

⁵⁶ Target 3A: Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015. Indicators: Ratio of girls to boys in primary, secondary and tertiary education; Share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector; Proportion of seats held by women in national parliament.

involves ensuring that all human beings – women, men, girls and boys – are considered equal and treated equally in terms of dignity and rights (Sida 2005).

Box 11. A note on terminology

Gender equality, or equality of men and women, is the concept that all human beings, both men and women, are free to develop their personal abilities and make choices without limitations set by stereotypes, rigid gender roles and prejudices. Gender equality means that the different behaviour, aspirations and needs of women and men are considered, valued and favoured equally. Their rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female.

Gender equity is the fair treatment of women and men, according to their respective needs. This may include equal treatment or treatment that is different but which is considered equivalent in terms of rights, benefits, obligations and opportunities (ILO 2000).

During the implementation of Chia Se, the programme has undertaken one study specifically to assess the extent of women's involvement (Dung et al). The study focuses on: Income generation and technical training; credit access; women's participation in village meetings; gender awareness in village; and, Chia Se impacts on health, living standards and life quality. The study report concludes that the programme has, "... brought a significant improvement in increasing women involvement". And that, "women's needs and concerns were gradually integrated and addressed, in line with local conditions and socio-economic planning, fund/budget utilization, supervision and evaluation for results performance".

Table 14. Participation in village meetings (%)

	Male	Female
Kinh (majority)	92	80
Ethnic minority	75	61

Source: PS (2009: 88).

There are good examples of men and women benefiting from participation in village meetings (see Table 14), and increased levels of knowledge and skills. In the Northern Provinces, this has been mainly in agricultural terms, such as access to buffaloes and other livestock and the clearance of land to increase the cultivated area. In Quang Tri province women have been exposed to, and participated in, a wider range of activities and where the situation is quite different from the Northern projects, as rural women in this province have higher educational levels and seem to have generally have a more autonomous standing in their family. The Quang Tri logframe also reflects a greater understanding of gender as concept, seeing it as a concern of both men and women, e.g. the need for gender training of (male) village leaders.

There are of course exceptions, with examples from the poor and remote ethnic minority areas where women still face various difficulties to participate in training events due to socio-cultural factors and lack of education (Dung et al: 32).

Investments through the LDF have addressed some of the practical needs faced by women; daily lives have in many cases been made easier through improved access to water (water tanks near to their homes), electricity (so that more activities can be undertaken in the evenings, including children's homework), improved socio-economic standards through better incomes, and on-farm production (breeding of animals such as buffaloes, pigs, etc).

There are however several shortcomings to the approach taken by the programme, and particularly lost opportunities in improving incomes and livelihoods. The programme has mostly approached gender issues as something that concerns only women, and not men, youth, or young girls and boys.

“Gender” has mainly been equated to “women”, with the exception of some activities in Quang Tri province. This is even reflected in the provincial project’s Logframe, as mentioned above.

Dung et al (undated) also highlight a number of remaining gender issues of concern that need to be taken further into consideration. These include:

- Appropriate strategies to meet local basic needs of households, women, men/children and especially the poor (or near poor). This includes strategies to access reproductive and general healthcare, nutrition, home improvement, household water, sanitation and social security
- Support for local women income generation opportunities, so as to increase the flow of credit and linkages with the existing banking system to meet women’s needs, especially the poor (and near poor), as well as incentives for local business women groups;
- Incentives for women and assistance to form small and medium-size enterprises (SMEs) and facilitate exchanges with other networks, projects and support (resources, services, market information)
- New job opportunities for young women through rural vocational training policy, and labour-based infrastructure construction/maintenance work.

These are largely endorsed by the observations of the SAT evaluation team, that found that work burdens, encouraging non-traditional occupations, healthcare the formation of small enterprises and microenterprises were areas of weakness:

Work burdens. Increased work for ethnic minority women (who already have an extraordinarily heavy work burden) resulting from Chia Se activities have not been explored/documented. Some examples include the increased work from cutting ‘elephant grass’ for buffaloes (Ha Giang province), attending meetings sometimes far away from homes, and assuming new responsibilities. Many of the women interviewed also said they were not able to attend meetings or training events for other reasons, such as:

- In interviews with village heads, the evaluation team were told that household heads were automatically listed as participants for trainings, and in cases where the men could not attend they would delegate attendance to their wives or other women in the household.
- There were language problems especially for women who do not understand Kinh, long distances to village meetings and restricted mobility, as well as not being regarded as representing the household (it was reported in interviews that men as household heads were often called for). Being illiterate was regarded by women in both Ha Giang and Yen Bai as a *disqualifier* for attending even practical agricultural training.

Encouraging non-traditional occupations and roles of women. Although women have been encouraged to take part in planning and decision-making in Village Meetings in all Provinces, the programme has mostly worked on the assumption that gender is an issue related to women and children, to do with the household domain. Very few activities have challenged women’s traditional caretaker, occupational roles in the rural/farming community.

Health care. The VDF was originally meant as a vehicle for meeting communal needs and developing villages and even communication (e.g. construction of roads) between villages – all through consensus and in “negotiations” about priorities with the communes. The VDF was never meant to address individuals’ needs per se, except in cases of extreme vulnerability. An exception is in Quang Tri province where health related training activities were undertaken as well as health checks for women/children, and vaccinations of children (see paragraph 6.30).

Encouraging formation of MSEs/SMEs. Perhaps more could have been done to impact on women’s and thereby families’ livelihoods and income-generation needs, Micro and Small Enterprises (MSE)

could have been encouraged. The capacities and requirement for skills training in this respect could have been explored and linked with a better understanding of the scale and scope of the enterprise sector and its role in national development. More work could have been done to assist communities to add value to local produce and assisting villages and communes in engaging in value chain analysis.

Micro-finance. The Project could have placed more efforts in researching potential opportunities for rural women in the two operational districts, and provided assistance to women in linking up with, and/or build networks with any organisations willing to extend collateral free micro-finance (e.g. the Women's Union, but also potential other (micro) finance deliver institutions or programmes). However the use of revolving funds in Quang Tri and Ha Giang provinces were not endorsed by Sida. See Box 12.

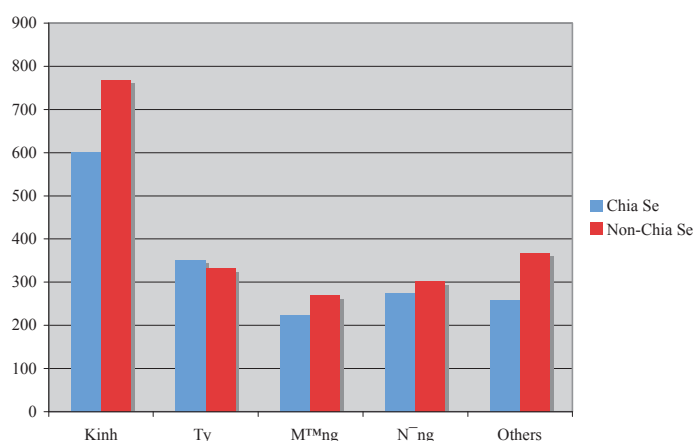
Box 12. Revolving funds

A Revolving Fund (RF) experiment was undertaken in Ha Giang province with start in 2005, based on requests by a number of Chia Se communes in Bac Me district. Some communes in the Chia Se areas in Ha Giang already had experience of revolving funds, and the Chia Se programme acknowledged that seasonal credit (e.g. new seeds and fertilizers) as an important means to increase production and productivity in smallholder farming. The villagers requested a credit scheme based "on their conditions" with easy to follow application procedures, with the village meeting setting the credit conditions and managing the VDF funds for the credits. The idea was that the revolving fund would provide an alternative to the existing rural credit services (local money lenders, the Vietnamese Bank Supporting the Poor, and the Agribank). Reportedly, the village-managed revolving fund had a good start and it was highly appreciated in many villages. In the 1st Quarter Meeting 2006, there were concerns by the TA group and including Sida's earlier experience from the MRDP Savings and Credit component. A few ground rules were enacted, such as a maximum of 25% of the LDF could be allocated to revolving funds and interest rates should follow commercial rates. The TA advisers also received instructions to assist in implementing the above instructions. However, the involved villages did not agree to transfer the funds from the VDFs to banks to manage the village revolving, and as a result no more funds were added. Those included in the scheme are now in the process of collecting the outstanding dues, with the intention to carry on with a revolving fund after Chia Se. (Source: Jonsson 2009c).

Ethnic minorities

In Ha Giang Province particularly, there is a very distinct difference in the living standards, poverty levels and access to resources (education and learning, land etc.) along ethnic lines. For instance, in some communes in Hoang Su Phi district, village locations were divided along ethnic lines: the H'Mong (the poorest living in the most remote parts of the hills), the Dao (a bit better off inhabiting areas nearer to the plains), the Thai (more outspoken, better educated and living nearer to the plains, nearer to Commune centres). Similarly, average income levels can vary considerably between ethnic groups (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Monthly income by ethnic group, 2008



Source: PS (2009).

There is no clear evidence about the extent to which the programme has succeeded in overcoming these ethnic differences through its activities. Attempts were certainly made to ensure that there was representation of all three groups in the village meetings. In Ha Giang province, this even went as far as ensuring that the village hall was built at a reasonable distance from the H'Mong community that lived the furthest away from the commune centre.

Environmental mitigation and impact

From the outset, the programme did not perceive environmental concerns as significant and subsequently few activities have been undertaken in this area. The Programme Document states, *“Experiences from different projects suggest that a more elaborate system, with quantifiable environmental indicators that are regularly followed, can be very resource demanding. The crucial question is if it is needed. For most of the activities that are likely to be included in natural resource management, there are either specific requirements for how these should be managed (e.g. pesticides), or reasonable assumptions about environmental impacts (e.g. forests and positive impacts on the hydrology). In as far as these specifications or assumptions could be questioned, they are more of an issue for a research project or a special study”* (PS 2003: 31).⁵⁷

By mid-term it was noted that, *“...concerns for the environment and the sustainable use of natural resources seems to be one of the weak points in the implementation”* (SAT 2006: 4). Only by 2008, were environmental risk assessments (EIAs) undertaken for the Chia Se districts (CRES et al 2008). The most severe environmental problems were identified in the mountainous areas of Ha Giang and Yen Bai provinces, plus a few hilly areas in Quang Tri province. These were identified as: (i) Degradation of sloping lands, due to unsustainable agricultural practices; (ii) Low hygiene at household levels, due to lack of hygienic toilets, animal husbandry practices and low environmental awareness; and, (iii) Deforestation and the agricultural upland practices causing frequent natural calamities, such as land slides and flooding (PS 2009: 100).

Around 2.2% of the LDF was used for environmental protection, varying between 1% in Van Chan district and 4% in Mu Cang Chai district (PS 2009: 101).⁵⁸ This investment has been dominated by soil conservation measures, including planting trees on sloping land, soil conservation structures and grass planting. The vast majority of the investment (76%) has taken place in Ha Giang and Yen Bai provinces. In Quang Tri province, activities funded under the LDF include waste treatment systems, rubbish dumps and flood protection systems. There has also been training on environmental matters, estimated at reaching 7,713 participants of which 85% were in Quang Tri province.

The Environmental Impact Review (Goran et al 2008) concluded that Chia Se was “environmentally benign”, with generally more positive than negative impacts from the programme. Positive effects include training and awareness raising, soil conservation measures, reforestation, latrines, etc. Negative consequences included road construction, disposal of waste from health stations, and overgrazing risks.

Yet, while Chia Se is not an environmental programme per se, the relative investment in environmental protection and the sustainable use of natural resources is very low (just 2.2%) – and particularly given magnitude of the challenge and the risk to people’s livelihoods especially in the Northern provinces. This apparent inconsistency cuts to the very heart of one of the dilemmas of bottom-up planning; while villagers decide their own priorities, decisions are often influenced by traditions and what others are doing, as well as a trade-off between short-term gains (such as buffalos or other handouts) and the longer-term investment often required for environmental matters. Although there is tentative indications that people’s awareness of environmental matters is changing, as the seemingly longer-term risks of natural calamities become an ever more present danger and risk to people’s land, housing and lives. Villagers in Quang Tri province were for instance beginning to use funds for disaster mitigation (PS 2009: 102).

⁵⁷ Author’s own emphasis.

⁵⁸ This is based on the reclassification of LDF investments, undertaken in 2009, and does not include latrines which have been classified as ‘health’. Previously ‘environment’ was classified under the NRM sector, and represented 1.4% of LDF investments.

There are though lessons that can be drawn from the existing phase of Chia Se, that show how to both empower people while also supporting them to deal with the very real environmental risks and move beyond their own knowledge base. Under Chia Se in Ha Giang province for instance, the villagers appear to be more open to adopting new farming techniques, with more complementarity between different activities, and with a greater adoption of soil conservation measures (than say in Yen Bai province).⁵⁹ See Box 13.

Box 13. Supporting village investment decisions

The application of the LPMD and LDF has been similar in all provinces, yet one difference in Ha Giang has been the various initiatives and requirements at the commune level. For instance, each commune was required to use part of the Commune Development Fund (CDF) to develop new production models – this promoted widespread innovation and adaptation of locally appropriate techniques (even though many villagers chose not to adopt such methods). Also, there were conditions for investments such as for keeping livestock (e.g. village-level regulations), plus additional support for livestock investments such as veterinary kits and allowances for para-veterinary workers (Jonsson 2009: 18).

Sustainability of Community-led Interventions

Sustainability is defined as a measure of whether the benefits of the programme's activities are likely to continue after funding ceases. While the environmental aspects have been considered in the previous section, this part assesses the on-going benefits from the community-led interventions. Firstly, whether the processes and institutional aspects of Chia Se (participatory meetings, village plans, etc) are likely to continue after the programme ends. And secondly, whether the VDF investments in community infrastructure, production activities, etc will be maintained and continue to derive benefits.

LPMD processes (Village-level planning, management and supervision). Many of the key village-level processes are intimately linked to the distribution of resources through the VDF, which after the end of the programme will no longer be available. There are some signs that elements of the approach will continue, as evidence in Chia Se communes that have completed the LDF four year cycle prior to programme completion. This includes the increased holding and participation in village meetings, commune and district meetings and increased skills/knowledge related to training events, developing plans and budgets.

Operations and maintenance (O&M) is closely related to sustainability of Chia Se achievements. In terms of operations, several obstacles have been identified as shortages and challenges in all provinces e.g. choosing contractors, high cost of constructions, limited technical skills and capacity of local people as well as post-construction operation (in remote areas, choosing contractors for construction through the process of competitive bidding has been difficult). In some cases, villagers have developed maintenance plans for construction works (e.g. villagers contribute some money or labour every year to repair a road).

Maintenance has generally been a weak area of the programme, though with greater achievement (at least in terms of regulations) in Quang Tri provinces than those in the north. District officials often refer to a lack of routines and procedures for O&M, and the need for a regulatory framework and administrative decisions from the higher levels (province or national). Other expressed reasons for lack of O&M, is "lack of funds".

⁵⁹ Such as the higher appreciation and uptake of techniques to grow grass in bands along the contours with crops in between. This provides a simple mode of sustainable and productive cropping along sloping land.

In October 2007, the SAT undertook a study of O&M arrangements, as part of the Annual Review 2007 (Kuiper et al 2007). The study found that funds received by communes for O&M were “insufficient to cover the actual needs”. Communes are expected to raise contributions from villagers who also are also expected to contribute with their labour. In the Northern provinces, decisions on the use of scarce resources for maintenance would require priority setting and that services would only be maintained at very low levels, and tend to be of a reactive nature, i.e. repairing what has broken down, rather routine maintenance. The report concludes that, *“Ensuring adequate O&M of the type of infrastructure works produced under programmes such as Chia Se, is not an easy matter. In poor rural communities, the O&M burden typically exceeds the O&M carrying capacity”*. The report further finds that, *“given the enormous variation in conditions and requirements, there is no possibility of finding a panacea. Each community will have to develop its own optimised, affordable mixture of these elements, tailored to maintaining those services and their respective levels of performance in accordance to community priority”*. The SAT evaluation team also found that at district levels, officials referred to the need for (and lack of) clear regulatory frameworks and instructions on O&M, to be issued from the higher administrative levels.

Summary:

Chia Se has brought improvements for women and girls, particularly by addressing basic needs (e.g. access to water) and increased participation in village meetings. There are however concerns that structural gender issues have not been sufficiently addressed, including work burdens, non-traditional occupations and roles, healthcare, and the formation of micro/small enterprises and microfinance.

Finally, while evidence shows that Chia Se has been largely “benign” in its impact on the environment, the total investment in environmental protection and mitigation has been very low (just 2.2% of the LDF). Despite the very real environmental risks that people face particularly from natural calamities in the Northern provinces, it seems that people did not prioritise this as an area of activity.

Within the project areas, many of the key processes are linked to the distribution of resources through the VDF. There are nevertheless some signs that elements of the approach will continue (e.g. greater participation in village meetings, greater voice for women and the poor, increased capacity to plan and supervise investments).

The operations and maintenance of VDF investments remains a challenge in all provinces, with a lack of funds, user groups and regulations to ensure that maintenance is carried out.

8. Replication and Policy Reform

However much the impact in Chia Se areas, the programme remains very small within the context of the country as a whole; working in just 5% of all provinces, 1% of districts and reaching less than 0.3% of the population.⁶⁰ As the 2008 Annual Review put it, “*the central concern is whether elements of the Chia Se approach can be sustained beyond the life of the programme – and whether other programmes and the GoV can realistically adopt them (at a lower cost)*” (SAT 2008b). The original intention behind the National Project was, at least in part, to help mainstream lessons, contribute to policy reform, and in doing so, have a far greater overall impact – something re-emphasized after the mid-term (SAT 2006) with the roadmap used as a tool to chart out a renewed vision for the remainder of the programme. There are two important aspects to increasing the nationwide impact of Chia Se. Firstly, the Chia Se approach in its entirety (or in a modified form) could be taken up by other development projects and programmes (i.e. replication). And secondly, lessons from Chia Se could conceivably be used to reform policy that is applied to all provinces and the levels below.

This chapter assesses the effectiveness of the National Project, including the extent to which it has contributed to policies for poverty alleviation (output 4) and the dissemination of these policies (output 5).⁶¹ It then goes on to consider the adoption and replication of Chia Se methods by other programmes, the approach will be replicated and the benefits seen to continue.

The National Project

The National Project was designed to address *constraints at the national level to effective support to poverty alleviation activities at lower levels*. This translated into providing effective support in the form of systems and structures concerning management, planning, policies, information, financial management, monitoring and evaluation, for effective development of what was essentially a multi-sector poverty alleviation programme involving a number of different ministries. It was further envisaged that the role of the national level would be linked to ongoing decentralisation reforms, and the creation of an environment conducive to development, growth and poverty alleviation. The National Project would not however be involved directly in project implementation, as this would run counter to Government’s decentralization policy.

Background to Policy Reform in Vietnam

Within the western political context, various theoretical approaches and models have attempted to answer the question of how policy is made. In general, there has been a shift away from linear models of rational progression, whereby research and practice can be transported into the policy sphere, to approaches that seek to understand why certain ideas are picked up and acted upon while others are ignored (Start and Hovland 2004: 6–7).⁶² Indeed, policy reform in Vietnam is influenced by a range of factors, and tends to be more iterative and not particularly transparent, especially to the outsider. As De Vylder and Warfvinge (2008: 6–7) testifies, “*The Vietnamese Government is adept at formulating, testing, evaluating, revising, and implementing policies so as to guide development. This process is influenced by a large number of factors and forces, both within the country and from abroad. The process is however not very transparent, so those who attempt to change a certain policy will later on, when the policy has indeed been altered, have difficulties in verifying whether their attempts have had any real influence or whether the effective force for change came from elsewhere*”.

⁶⁰ Chia Se works in 3 (out of 58) provinces, 6 (out of 578) districts and with 200,000 villagers out of a population of 75 million.

⁶¹ Output 3 (information systems) is covered under Chapter 4: Programme Design and Management.

⁶² Crewe and Young (2002) provide an example of this non-linear approach with a focus on three inter-related elements (i) *The political context*: the political structures and politics of policy-making; (ii) *Evidence and communication*: the verification of what works, and the way in which it is communicated; and, (iii) *The linkages*, such as between the different actors (networking, lobbying, the media, etc).

Policy-making in Vietnam is complex for other reasons, too. Firstly, the very word ‘policy’ is a difficult term to translate into Vietnamese. Usually ‘policy’ is translated to *‘chính sách’*, which can be literally translated as a ‘document of the state authority’, and is usually contrasted with ‘party line’ (*‘đường lối’*), which the state is meant to implement – i.e. achieved in part by the ‘concretisation’ of these intentions into formal documents (Fforde 2009: 6). And secondly, policy change does not necessarily influence reality, and indeed sometimes the reverse can be observed in Vietnam. Fforde (2009: 26) takes this further, challenging the very notion that it is policy that drives practice – arguing instead that the donor tendency to attribute great causative power to the national frame (or ‘policy’) is not a view that fits well with accounts from Chia Se and other programmes. As De Vylder and Warfvinge (2008: 3) explain:

“A recurrent feature of political and economic reforms in Vietnam since the 1980s is that local experiences and spontaneous actions “from below” have often preceded the institutionalisation of reforms “from above”. This is particularly true when it comes to economic reforms during the doi moi process, in which the old centralised planning system was gradually replaced by an essentially market-oriented economic system. The process of grassroots democracy, decentralisation and transition from “top-down” to “bottom-up” development planning has followed a similar pattern”.

Understanding the process of policy reform ‘from below’ and the process by which the Party leadership accept new approaches is complex to the outsider. Rama (2008: 32) argues that the this reform process is basically a cooperative *undertaking*, with policy changes being driven by the acceptance of new approaches by the existing leadership – rather than ‘victory’ of one group over another. The process of collecting information, processing and bringing it to the attention of those with authority (to approve and launch implementation) is therefore critical to understanding how new ideas become adopted. Rama (2008) identifies that the impetus for policy change often derives from three main sources of innovation: (i) international experience; (ii) local think tanks; and, (iii) experimentation on the ground.

International experience: While citing the experience of countries such as China, Russia, East Germany and Korea, and later on the experience of the so-called Asian Tigers, Rama (2008) points out that donor assistance played an important role. In particular, the Swedish were influential in sponsoring workshops, bringing experts and funding study tours, as was UNDP, both of which maintained a continuous presence in the country during the American War. The World Bank has subsequently acquired an increasingly important role as a coordinator among the donor community and funder of analytical work to support policy reform.

Local think tanks: Research institutes and think tanks are much more active in supporting policy reform, using better data and more sophisticated surveys that have now become the core business of GSO. The point made is that the impact of technical inputs by research institutes such as IoS, ILSSA and IPSARD is made available to senior leaders who need to be convinced that recommendations are based on what Rama (2008) describes as, “the reality of the country, the best interests of the country and would be compatible with political stability”.

Experimentation on the ground: By the time that Chia Se was designed, piloting of new ideas and the extensive discussion of outcomes had become a common practice and represents what Rama (2008: 39) calls a defensible approximation to policy evaluation. There is no scaling up of pilots until consensus has been reached on their merits, a process which is time consuming and possibly frustrating from a western perspective but which reduces the risk of policy blunders and the need for costly policy reversals.

Clearly, Chia Se has worked in all three areas: bringing international experience of democracy and participatory approaches, working with research institutes through the Special Studies (particularly in the latter stages), plus the experimentation on the ground that appears to show how the decentralisation and grassroots democracy might work in practice. Whether Chia Se has delivered the message to the

right place, and whether the timescale is sufficient to show any ‘impact’ are however much more telling considerations.

Policies for poverty alleviation

This section considers the contribution of the National Project to policies for poverty alleviation (output 4). There are however no clear indicators and benchmarks (standards) by which to assess the National Project against its outcome-level objectives, so the remainder of this chapter draws extensively on stakeholder interviews, SAT reports and the work of Fforde (2009) and De Vylder and Warfvinge (2008). As might be expected it is difficult to find concrete examples of policy change – with the emphasis more on lesson learning and inputs into the policy process (workshops, studies, etc). Based on detailed discussions with the SPMUs, the programme’s own summary of the National Project cites just four key achievements (PS 2008c):

- Support to SEDP 2006–2010 (MPI)
- Research on Policy for agricultural production toward poverty reduction and rural development based on the lessons of Chia Se (MARD)
- Documentation of lessons learned on poverty reduction (MARD)
- Developing and assessing poverty targeting techniques (MOLISA)

Support to the SEDP 2006–2010: MPI has developed guidebooks for making annual local SEDP at both Commune and District levels. These have been tested in Chia Se areas during 2008 and 2009 to ensure they are practical and easy to use. They includes sets of forms and templates for collecting planning data, analyzing key indicators and promoting community participation in the planning and decision making process. The Guidebooks are acknowledged as effective tools for planning and managing socio-economic activities and incorporating the needs of local communities, local mass organisations and local government. The new approach to SEDP is also seen as more reliable than previous approaches and good realisation of the principles of decentralization and participatory planning.

Yet while copies of the guidebooks have been distributed, considerable hurdles remain. The new approach to SEDP planning is not fully institutionalised, and many People’s Council will only approve the old-style SEDPs. There are currently several models being tested by different projects under MPI,⁶³ and as yet, no clear plan to finalise the approach. Furthermore, for a new approach to bottom-up planning to work, the budget law and guidelines may also need to be revised – so that information on resources are more certain and realistic for all levels. For many of the lower levels, the SEDP is still a largely symbolic document to report upwards, and no real sanction or adjustment if targets are not achieved.

Research on Policy for Agricultural Production and poverty reduction. Decree No. 151 Concerning the Management of Farmers Groups required the cooperation of a number of ministries ranging from MARD to MPI, Justice and MoT. More interesting was the consultative and participatory way in which the decree was drafted during 2007 and 2008 including for the first time NGOs such as Oxfam at a UNDP workshop. Chia Se funds were used to consult with provincial farmers groups in both Chia Se and non-Chia Se provinces.

The results have been considered so successful that the same consultative approach was adopted regarding Prime Minister’s Decision to Promote Contract Farming. This consultative approach is linked directly with Chia Se at the provincial level, where, it is claimed, MARD officials could now visit without the need for a formal invitation. So Chia Se appears to have had some impact on the working practices used for policy making, in particular the use of participatory consultations with beneficiaries as well as GoV institutions.

⁶³ For example, RUDEP (AusAID), Helvetas project, Voice (Irish Aid) and Kom Tum (UN).

Documentation of lessons learned on poverty reduction. MARD has also used Chia Se funds to document lessons about poverty reduction through studies on poverty reduction in 6 provinces through Programme 135/II. These were combined into a booklet for better dissemination.

Poverty Targeting Techniques. Chia Se funds were used by MOLISA to research the targeting of poverty which have resulted in the adoption of new methods, approaches and systems by the GoV National Targeted Programmes. Interviews with MOLISA officials revealed a number of achievements associated with Chia Se including links to Decree 67 on Social Security Policy and Decree 68 on Operations of Social Centres. While the links between Chia Se and policy change are at times tenuous, the approach of Chia Se has had an impact on the awareness of policy-makers of decentralisation and empowerment and that it can work at the lower levels. As one policy maker put it, *“I myself can see in terms of poverty alleviation being practiced in Chia Se, which means decentralisation and grassroots democracy are very clearly implemented and this can affect our own policy”*. In this regard, Chia Se has advantages over other programmes (like P135-2). By not being fully part of the Government’s administrative system, Chia Se can highlight what is not working well and pilot improvements – and is unlike NGO projects, which do not have the same involvement through SPMUs at the ministry level.

Dissemination of policies for poverty alleviation

The other key output of the National Project is the dissemination of policies for poverty alleviation (output 5). As might be expected given that the programme was originally planned to run for ten years, the dissemination of poverty reduction policies has been limited. This output was designed to inform provincial, district and commune cadres about existing and new poverty alleviation policies, but there are few instances where provincial projects have requested this type of support. The focus has instead been on setting up and managing the Chia Se pilots.

One good example of support provided by the National Project at the request of a provincial programme was a study of the potential for integration of management systems for different poverty alleviation programmes in Ha Giang province. This provided useful and practical advice on joint management of elements of Chia Se and P135-2 and it is worth noting that integration in Ha Giang is probably more advanced than in the other two provinces. Other policy dissemination activities in Chia Se areas have been designed to test the application of existing government policy. Examples of such initiatives include the MPI manual for community monitoring of state investments, and MARD’s testing of implementation modalities for the Decree on Organisation and Operation of Collectives.

Most of the National Programme’s policy dissemination activities have been linked to the nationwide application of policies that have already been adopted by GoV. Some, such as the development of a manual for commune level financial budgeting and accounting, and MARD’s information campaign regarding compliance with WTO Agriculture Agreements and the Agreement on Quarantine Regulations, have no obvious link with Chia Se. National Project funds have been used to draw on the Chia Se experience to assist work on other poverty alleviation programmes such as MPI’s Procurement Manual for P135-2, MOLISA’s poverty targeting studies on social security in the NTP-PR and MoF studies linked to the decentralisation of financial management and development of manuals for managing projects at local levels.

Table 15. Examples of work undertaken by the National Project (output 5)

SPMU area of activity	Outputs
MOF – Decentralisation of Financial Management	Financial Management of Chia Se Chapter VI of the PIM designed to guide implementation of objectives in line with GoV and Sida regulations Financial Manual for P135/2 projects in areas through out the country participating in P135 Financial Accounting and Budgeting Manual for commune level officials nationwide Review of state budget decentralization designed to prepare proposals to improve budget decentralization Review of NTTT effectiveness in use of state budget on poverty alleviation
MARD – Decree 151 on Collaborative Farming	First decree creating a legal framework for organizing, operating and controlling farmer collaborative groups. Used by P135-2, NTP-PR and Chia Se now using this decree.
MARD – WTO Agree-ment on Quarantine	Seminars and a 500 page book on Guidelines on Implementation of WTO Agreements in Agricultural and Rural Sector
MOLISA Improving Social Security Institutions	Research linked to the establishment of emergency relief funds at village levels Decree 67 preparation related to expanding beneficiaries and levels of benefits Preparation of Decree 68 and implementation guidelines for social support centres Chia Se gender equality – Review of GoV policies and regulations to inform Chia Se initiatives

Replication of the Chia Se's Approach

While the National Project may have been more limited in its direct contribution to the policy realm, the Chia Se programme has become widely known by officials in local government, donor agencies and amongst NGO staff. As De Vylder and Warfvinge (2008: 8) observe, “*What we can see at this stage is merely that Chia Se has become known outside the programme areas, and that high-level Vietnamese decision-makers as well as several donor agencies share a positive impression of the approach and appear willing to apply similar methods in other targeted poverty alleviation programmes*”. Chia Se is widely understood in terms of its main characteristics (decentralisation, participatory planning, commune facilitators) and for going further than other development interventions by working at the village level. It is also perceived by some as having high cost norms, with a high degree of TA support.⁶⁴

The Chia Se programme is part of a more general shift towards decentralisation, with several programmes and projects implementing decentralised approaches to poverty alleviation in Vietnam (e.g. P135-2, NMPRP, DPPR). Some of these are also piloting a more participatory approach to SEDP, such as RUDEP (AusAID), the Helvetas project, Voice (Irish Aid) and Kom Tum (UNOP, UNFPA, Unicef).

During the life of Chia Se, the approach has been adapted for local-level SEDP planning and this has been piloted in Chia Se and Non-Chia Se communes, particularly in Quang Tri province. In Ha Giang province, there has also been work to integrate Chia Se with P135-2 and other funding sources, so that they are all viewed in one plan (SAT 2007b). Yet, while there is much favourable talk of SEDP adopting a ‘Chia Se approach’, there are considerable hurdles to be overcome before it can be widely adopted. These include:

- The village level is not part of the Vietnamese administrative system; it has no budget, and is not an administrative body. It is therefore unlikely that the LDF and LPMD can be utilised in their present form at this level.

⁶⁴ Based on interviews with AusAID, World Bank, Finnida, IrishAid, CARE and others.

- Under the government system, budgets are not known in advance and a lot of investment areas have a strong direction from the higher levels (e.g. in education and health).
- Budgets are relatively low for the lower tiers of government, and disbursement delays can undermine plans developed by the lower tiers.
- The SEDP has a low value as a planning tool; while it sets top-down targets, sanctions and adjustments are said to be uncommon, and these do not affect subsequent resource availability (i.e. for non-performance).
- The new SEDP approach is not fully institutionalised within MPI, and many People's Councils will not accept a new approach without a clear decision/instruction from the higher levels. There is apparently no clear timeframe for finalising a revised SEDP approach based on the pilot projects (RUDEP, Chia Se, Helvetas, Voice, etc).

Therefore while the Chia Se programme has made strides to adapt and develop the approach for use as part of the SEDP process, there is a considerable way to go before it is adopted more widely. Even within the Chia Se provinces, there has been resistance by some Commune People's Councils to formally adopt the new-style SEDP plan.

It is also difficult to entangle the influence that Chia Se has had on other projects and programmes (or vice versa), and where the approach has been taken up and replicated. There are however a few examples where it is claimed that the Chia Se approach has had a strong influence, with many of its features have been adopted and taken up. These include:

CARE, Vietnam: The NGO, CARE, is developing a new project in Yen Bai province that draws lessons from the Chia Se programme. CARE is part of the International Support Group of donors and NGOs, working with MARD. As part of these discussions, CARE identified the need to strengthen the participation of local people in the SEDP.⁶⁵ During the formulation of the project, the team discussed the approach with DPI in Yen Bai province, who directed them to the lessons of Chia Se. The design team also included consultants that had experience of the Chia Se programme. The CARE project therefore draws on lessons from Chia Se amongst others. The project however has a greater focus on developing mechanisms to mobilise people to participate in the SEDP, as well as promoting the voice of local organisations (not just Mass Organisations, but also CSOs).

'Voice' programme (Irish Aid): As complementary support to the Budget Support provided to P135-2, Irish Aid instigated an intervention that would enable them to learn lessons at the ground level. As part of the design of the Voice programme, lessons were drawn from Chia Se in Yen Bai province – again using consultants that had experience of the Chia Se programme. Some of the perceived weaknesses of the Chia Se approach were identified as: (i) the high-level of Technical Assistance and contracted staff, with higher allowances than government programmes; (ii) the 'separate' PMU that was not fully integrated into the government system; and, (iii) the use of the LDF through village meetings appeared to result in less priority to the poor in the later years of the cycle (with it being shared more equally). The Voice programme is different to Chia Se, using a form of provincial BS with triggers, and a commune development fund only, with a complementary TA facility.

⁶⁵ Save The Children have also identified a similar themed project on 'democracy and participation in the SEDP', working in three provinces.

Concluding remarks

It is perhaps unsurprising that there are few concrete examples of policy adoption, particularly as Chia Se was originally conceived to run for a ten-year period. Many of the outputs from the activities of the SPMUs rarely lead to the final product, and more often than not are inputs into the policy-making process. The outcomes of policy development are therefore not always manifested in decrees (and other formal ‘policy’ documents) adopted by Government. A good example of this is the newly formulated Programme to assist the 61 poorest districts. MPI submitted lessons from Chia Se into the design process (headed by MOLISA), as did other ministries. It is said that considerable inspiration has come from Chia Se in the preparation of the 61 Districts Programme (De Vylder and Warfvinge 2008: 11).⁶⁶ Yet, discussions with others, suggest that other programmes have been just as influential (including P135-2, RUDEP and NMPRP) in the design process.

In summary, Chia Se has left a positive impression with many of its features similar to the growing sea change towards decentralised approaches to poverty alleviation. The Chia Se programme has also left a footprint amongst the cadre and consultants working in the three provinces, and there is a willingness to adopt and adapt lessons from the programme. One of the biggest influences of Chia Se has been that it has been able to add to a ‘common voice’ over decentralising investments and increasing participation in the planning process. P135-2 for instance has further decentralised to the commune level, showing that government has accepted this approach – and programmes such as Chia Se and NMPRP have (reportedly) been seen as hard evidence of how to decentralise by the Department of Local Economy and Territory (within MPI). Similarly, the use of Community Facilitators has become more ‘normal practice’ and is now being promoted under P135-2 – a significant development as it is an additional cost for GoV to implement the programme. Chia Se has “added another voice” alongside NMPRP and CBRIP,⁶⁷ providing experience that such an approach can work. As one donor put it, *“We have tried hard to plant the idea of decentralisation and procurement power to local levels, especially commune procurement. The experience of NMPRP and Chia Se has given a ‘common voice’ to show the way for MPI and government [of Vietnam] to change”*.

Nevertheless, the more radical elements of the Chia Se approach (empowering people at the village level through predictable funds and a participatory method) have not been widely replicated or scaled up, except by a few NGO projects in one or two provinces (i.e. CARE, Voice).

⁶⁶ Also cited by MOLISA during discussions with the SAT Evaluation Team.

⁶⁷ Chia Se though uses Community Facilitators at a lower level (helping to undertake the village planning process) than NMPRP and CBRIP (which use CFs to facilitate the link between the commune and district levels).

Summary:

Against the National Project objectives (which are poorly specified), the evidence of a real impact on policy-making appears limited. There are few concrete examples of direct policy adoption. This is perhaps unsurprising given that the Chia Se programme was originally conceived as a ten-year intervention, the nature of policy reform in Vietnam, and the difficulties of finding direct causal links to policy.

Nevertheless, there are examples of SPMUs making inputs into the policy-making process. Plus, where Chia Se has been particularly instrumental, this has been as part of a 'common voice' amongst a suite of development interventions; showing how decentralisation can work in practice and how existing government programmes (like P135-2) can be more effective. The Chia Se programme has become widely known by local officials, donor agencies and amongst NGO staff, although not always because of the work of the National Project.

There are also instances where Chia Se approaches have been adopted by development programmes (and where a more direct causal link can be shown). Most of these examples are relatively small-scale, NGO-type projects – although each has made adaptations to the Chia Se approach, such as greater involvement of CBOs and informal groups, and the use of budget support -type modalities.

There remain however considerable hurdles before a Chia Se approach can be adopted more widely, particularly as part of a participatory approach to SEDP. Several donor-funded interventions are piloting different approaches, but there seems to be no coordinated timeframe to reach a consensus on the way forwards. Because of this, there is a considerable risk that when Chia Se ends, there is will still no particular adoption outside the project areas – and specifically of the distinctive Chia Se approach of providing predictable funds at the village level to empower individuals and communities.

9. Conclusions and Recommendations

This final chapter sets out the main findings, lessons and recommendations from the evaluation. The findings are drawn from the summary sections in each of the main chapters of this report, while the lessons learned draw extensively on those identified as part of the programme's own lesson learning process. Lessons learned are defined for the purpose of this report as, *"Generalisations based on evaluation experience... that abstract from the specific circumstances to broader situations. Frequently, lessons highlight strengths or weaknesses in preparation, design, and implementation that affect performance, outcome, and impacts"* (Sida 2004: 108).

Main Findings

Sida's approach to cooperation over the past 40 years has shifted towards more socio-economic aspects of forestry, to rural development, and a more farmer-focused approach. In the Mountain Rural Development Project there were signs of relative decentralisation, which have since been developed under the Chia Se programme. Chia Se has taken the concept further, decentralising to the village level with an emphasis on people's democratic rights to determine planning and investment.

Relevance

Vietnam has demonstrated strong economic growth in the past decade, alongside rapid poverty reduction. There remain however persistent pockets of poverty, with considerable differences between rural-urban populations and socio-economic groups. The approach of Chia Se is well suited to addressing persistent poverty in Vietnam. The programme addresses three key pillars of relevance: (i) Poverty issues with minority ethnic groups; (ii) Scope for diversification through non land-based interventions; and, (iii) Tackling issues of corruption and accountability through local democracy. The programme is also strongly aligned to the national development plan (SEDP) and policies on grassroots democracy, although it goes further than other rural development programmes by working beyond the administrative system (the commune level).

In summary, Chia Se is an uneven mixture of experimental and conventional. The programme has been at the forefront of innovation for its pro-poor orientation (and highly decentralised approach), but not so in terms of management and its aid modality. Chia Se utilises a more 'traditional' project modality as compared to other rural development interventions in Vietnam. In planning, Chia Se relied heavily on donor guidelines and resources, and the management structure uses an explicit project-specific PMU structure. Procurement uses a mix of donor and GoV procedures and M&E/reporting follow a combination of GoV and donor-issued guidelines.

Project design and management

The programme's design is set out in the logical framework, although because of the poor specification of objectives and indicators, it is challenging to evaluate performance against this design. In particular, no clear targets/benchmarks were set against which to judge performance, plus the lack of a baseline survey means that objectively verifiable measures of achievement are difficult to obtain.

In terms of training and capacity building, Chia Se has implemented an impressive range of training courses (more than 2,000), and this has contributed greatly to the successful implementation of the programme. Nevertheless, many courses were not held regularly, raising concerns about the overall impact. Plus because training impact assessments were not conducted, the opportunity was lost to really understand and measure change.

Technical assistance and contracted-in staff have played an important role in the success of the programme. The early years were marked by difficulties defining the roles, with this becoming clearer in the latter stages of the programme (as Advisors moved from plugging operational shortfalls, to a more

strategic and advisory function). Areas which have been less well addressed by technical assistance have been monitoring and evaluation, communications and support to policy reform through the National Project.

In terms of M&E, the Chia Se programme has demonstrated that an M&E system can be applied to the lower levels, and GSO and other staff have gained a lot from the experience. The M&E system was established very late in the programme (some four years after start-up), and its utility as both a management tool and a dataset to measure performance has been limited. Indeed, the separation of monitoring for management purposes from the more evaluative aspects for learning has never been fully addressed. The lack of a baseline survey at start-up and an independent impact evaluation are major omissions. Nevertheless, the approach to community monitoring and supervision has been a strength of the Chia Se approach, with instances of follow-up to activities and contractors being held to account.

Lesson 1: *Capacity building requires considerable early investment, as is key to the overall effectiveness of rural investment* (and particularly LPMD/LDF process, in the case of Chia Se). In the early part of the programme, it became apparent that commune staff were guiding village decision-making in Ha Giang province (Jonsson 2009b: 2).⁶⁸ This led to a time-consuming but extensive revision of the participatory procedures as well as the re-training of facilitators and staff. Following this, villagers showed a greater sense of ownership and empowerment, with several VMGs reporting that the VDF was now being considered as almost their own money (and so should be spent wisely and in accordance with their own ideas).

Lesson 2: *The decentralisation of the planning and management of capacity building funds to the commune level achieves better results.* In Quang Tri, local people (VMG/VSG members) and commune staff have been able to choose topics for training, with courses better tailored to specific needs. Villagers were generally more satisfied with the training and the usefulness of the skills learnt (ILSSA 2008: 11–12, 42–46).

Lesson 3: *Commune Facilitators are essential to the successful implementation of participatory processes (LPMD), and the resulting empowerment of villagers.* The Commune Facilitators provide the critical link to the village level, and good facilitation skills are critical for enabling local people to become involved, as well as ensuring that women, ethnic minorities and the poorest/vulnerable are able to raise their ‘voice’. Facilitation skills are relatively underdeveloped in most areas, and especially within the culture and management practices of the government cadre.

Lesson 4: *The development of the monitoring and evaluation system requires considerable technical investment and training in the early stages of the programme.* While not all the parameters were known at the start of the programme, it is essential that the foundations of a M&E system are put in place and utilised throughout the lifespan of the programme (i.e. a baseline survey, a workable logical framework, clear demand for monitoring reports).

Lesson 5: *The transfer of learning requires of more active process of evaluation, with better data gathering than was achieved for Chia Se.* Too often the monitoring for management, which emphasised the participatory spirit of Chia Se, was confused with the requirement for rigorous impact assessment – that could have been served by an independent body.

⁶⁸ This came to light during a visit by the Swedish Ambassador to Bac Me district in May 2005.

Effectiveness and impact

Chia Se has been most effective at demonstrating that decentralisation and grassroots democracy (as defined by the Grassroots Democracy decree) can work. Chia Se has shown that the management and ownership of investments can be decentralised to the commune level and lower, that villagers can usefully participate in local decision-making, and villagers can link meaningfully with higher administrative levels. The empowerment of villagers seems to have been a positive development for most officials and management, and does not appear to undermine existing structures. This is important given the context of the 1997 rural unrest that preceded declarations on Grassroots Democracy. Chia Se has also helped improve capacity of government staff at all levels, with training seemingly more effective where budgets have been decentralised and the general level of education is higher.

While Chia Se has contributed to poverty reduction there is no definitive finding that shows Chia Se has reduced poverty much faster than in other areas. Some evidence shows that incomes may have increased in Chia Se areas, and poverty correspondingly reduced, but there is also evidence that incomes increased faster for ethnic minorities and the poorest in *non*-Chia Se areas. Chia Se has done less well in other aspects: The programme does not seem to have introduced new sources of income in any significant way, with less attention to off-farm production, micro and small enterprises, microfinance, and adding value through improved market access.

Lesson 6: *Basic educational levels, illiteracy, socio-cultural issues (including gender inequality) and geographical topography continue to limit democratic participation.* Greater investment literacy and capacity building may be necessary to increase the effectiveness of the programme – particularly in ethnic minority areas (IoS 2008b: 29–31). In general, the programme appears to be more effective in Quang Tri, where educational levels are higher than in the two Northern project provinces.

Lesson 7: *Chia Se has shown that poor people can effectively plan, implement and supervise the use of development funds under the Government system* (IoS 2008a: 166–167; ILSSA 2008; IoS 2008b: 19–24). The combination of democratic decision-making at the village level, and sizeable cash injections, has given local people a sense of empowerment. This is an important lesson considering that there is considerable wariness about decentralising responsibilities even to the commune level (e.g. investment owners under P135-2).

Lesson 8: *The quality of participation and planning depends to a large extent on fund availability and predictability,⁶⁹ as well as having transparent information on the Village Development Fund/Commune Development Fund.* While the same level of availability and predictability may not be possible within the government system, Chia Se shows the importance of some key principles: (i) transparency about budget allocations (e.g. published on notice boards); (ii) advance knowledge of budgets and predictable disbursements (e.g. this could be achieved through allocation norms/formula); (iii) the need for clarity about people's rights/entitlements to funds (e.g. clear criteria and regulations for investments); and, (iv) mechanisms to hold higher levels to account (e.g. supervision groups).

⁶⁹ For example at the start of Chia Se, some villagers were reluctant to participate because they thought that Chia Se would be the same as their experience of earlier GoV projects (i.e. where the villagers had been informed about the project and fund, but no funding was forthcoming).

Equality, gender and the environment

The programme has brought improvements to women and girls, particularly by addressing basic needs (e.g. access to water) and increased participation in village meetings. There are however concerns that structural gender issues have not been sufficiently addressed, including work burdens, non-traditional occupations and roles, healthcare, and the formation of micro/small enterprises and microfinance. And in terms of the environment, Chia Se appears to have been largely benign in terms of any positive or negative impact, but this issue has not been prioritised despite the very real risks people face from natural calamities. In terms of individual investments under the programme, operations and maintenance of remains a key challenge in all provinces, with a lack of funds, user groups and regulations to ensure that maintenance is carried out.

Lesson 9: *A lack of comprehensive information undermines the quality of people's investment decisions.*

Studies show that local people sometimes lack the information to make optimal development choices – such as to diversify their income sources or adapt to environmental risks – and it is often difficult for them to identify visions for the medium term (IoS 2008b: 17–18; IPSARD 2008). In particular, planning and investment choices would improve with better information on other development activities in their locality (IoS 2008b: 18–19), and alternative income-generation or production models, and microfinance institutions/programmes.

Lesson 10: *Insufficient attention was paid to assisting people cope and adapt to disasters and unanticipated risks.*

Throughout the life of the Chia Se programme, there are several instances of natural calamities undermining or destroying the benefit from VDF investments. For example, cold weather in the Northern provinces led to a loss of many buffalo in 2008 (GSO 2008a: 30), as well as crops in Quang Tri province in 2006/07 (IoS 2008b: 47). Flooding and landslides have also affected many people, alongside other non-natural risks such as rapid price inflation. Avian flu is also prevalent in Vietnam. In general such risks tend to disproportionately affect the poorest and most vulnerable, yet Chia Se provides little provision to mitigate such risks (coping strategies), or safeguard VDF investments (insurance, contingency funds, etc).

Contributions to policy reform and replication

In terms of the National Project, the mode of interaction between the Programme Secretariat and the SPMUs has often failed to function as intended, with insufficient incentives for ministries to align with Chia Se objectives, and compete to participate in the programme. In the early years, the National Project struggled, suffering for poor coordination and a lack of clarity, even beyond the mid-point of the programme in 2006/07. Efforts in recent years have helped to improve the capacity of the Programme Secretariat, with notable improvements in the Annual Work plans and Budgets and the disbursement of funds. There are nonetheless doubts about the extent to which some of the activities of the SPMUs *really* contribute to the overall objectives of Chia Se, with many seemingly have more relevance to the mandates of their respective ministries (e.g. MARD, MOLISA). Against the National Project logframe objectives (which in any case were poorly specified), the evidence of a real impact on policy-making appears limited. There are however some examples of SPMUs making inputs into the policy-making process.

Where Chia Se has been important is in its influence as part of a 'common voice' amongst a suite of development interventions; showing how decentralisation can work in practice and how existing government programmes (like P135-2) can be more effective. The Chia Se programme has become widely known by local officials, donor agencies and amongst NGO staff, though not necessarily due to the work of the National Project. Several other development programmes use similar approaches, with some testing participatory approaches to SEDP on behalf of MPI.

There are also a few instances where Chia Se approaches have been adopted and replicated (and where some degree of causal link can be demonstrated). These are relatively small-scale, NGO-type projects, and there remains a risk that when Chia Se closes, there will be no substantial adoption outside the project areas – and especially of the distinctive Chia Se approach (i.e. predictable funds at the village level, that help empower individuals and communities).

Lesson 11: *Strengthening the capacity of the Programme Secretariat helps improve the effectiveness of the National Project, especially during the early stages of Chia Se.* Within the Programme Secretariat, Government staff have several responsibilities, not just for Chia Se. The addition of contracted-in staff after mid-term helped to improve the responsiveness of the Secretariat, alongside an increased emphasis on results-based tools (e.g. the roadmap). Technical Assistance to the National Project could also have been more pro-active in supporting lesson learning and policy reform processes.

Lesson 12: *A national-level function that has limited project management responsibility (such as the National Project) needs to better identify and respond to the demand for its 'services'.* These services include coordination, monitoring, communication, lessons for policy-making and financial audit, and each one has a different target group. Many of these services became supply-orientated, such as the M&E system that never really supported management demands and decision-making. Others such as capturing lessons and supporting policy reform could have responded more to provincial (bottom-up) demands.

Lesson 13: *It is important that representatives within the National Project are the 'right' people to influence their respective ministry at a higher level.* Many of the SPMU representatives were from the departments for international cooperation responsible for external donor relations rather than the policy and technical aspects of their ministry.

Lesson 14: *There needs to be greater use of incentives and competition for funds among the SPMUs, linked to performance against results.* Ministries tend to have an equal status, and it proved difficult for MPI to assert authority over other SPMUs. The use of separate budgets and workplans, with allocations made at the start of the year, meant that SPMUs tended to fund activities for their own purposes. The introduction of the roadmap, with additional capacity in the Programme Secretariat, helped but never really resolved this difficulty.

Lesson 15: *The multi-sectoral, decentralised approach of Chia Se to poverty alleviation can be used to support inter-disciplinary coordination, particularly at the lower levels.* Efforts to harmonise with P135-2 (in Ha Giang) and develop the SEDP process (in Quang Tri) show how Chia Se can be a catalyst for better integration between vertical funding streams (e.g. education, health) and other development activities (P135-2, P134, etc). Although coordination is less apparent at the upper levels (especially at the province).

Recommendations

The findings and lessons learned demonstrate that on balance sufficient progress has been achieved to warrant a second phase; Chia Se has shown that decentralised and democratic methods can be used to empower villagers and make locally appropriate investment decisions, but that this has yet to be taken up more widely. Indeed, the programmes achievements have been demonstrated within a fairly small area, and any subsequent phase needs to demonstrate that the same benefits can be replicated and integrated into existing national and local government systems. In the section that follows, a number of recommendations are made for future development cooperation.

Box 14. Avison for Chia Se, phase 2

While there are many improvements and adjustments that can be recommended for Chia Se, it is important that there is a clear vision around which changes should be prioritised. The first phase 1 had a clear vision about empowering villagers through participatory planning, and with the LPMD and LDF at its heart. Any second phase should similarly have a clear vision, such as about replicating and mainstreaming the Chia Se approach within the government system. Now that the approach of Chia Se has been broadly shown to work, much of the focus for a second phase should be on convincing others by “getting the right messages to the right people”. This will inevitably require more work on adapting and demonstrating the approach and its benefits (studies, research evidence, communication), as well as the active involvement of decision-makers at all levels. It is the view of the evaluation team that this would be better achieved through spreading the approach wider, rather than concentrating in fewer districts. As De Vylder and Warfvinge (2008: 7) put it: “In the case of a major internationally supported programme like Chia Se, an alternative to having an elephant make three footprints in three provinces would have been to let loose a flock of deer and to follow what happened to the grass beneath their hooves. Deliberate encouragement of diversification and innovation based on local conditions, followed by learning from the results and revision of the methodology on the basis of experience, would have resulted in a different—broader—set of lessons that may have enabled government agencies at different levels to pick the best elements that could be useful for future policies from a wide selection of promising results. Such a process would have been more in line with the Vietnamese tradition of gradual change and trial and error”.

Recommendation 1:

Chia Se has achieved a lot during its implementation and many features should be retained and developed in the next phase. This includes:

The approach to participatory decision-making, management and supervision (the LPMD and the capacity building of government staff)

The use of flexible, predictable funds at village level (VDF)

The active involvement of government staff at commune, district and provincial levels

The use of commune facilitators to enhance the participation of villagers and the implementation of the LPMD process

The display of budgets and expenditure on notice boards (increased transparency and accountability)

Community monitoring and supervision of activities

Decentralised training budgets (as undertaken in Quang Tri)

The introduction of new production models (as spearheaded in Ha Giang)

Recommendation 2:

The SEDP 2011–15 provides perhaps the best opportunity for mainstreaming lessons, though any second phase should also seek other opportunities.

The SEDP appears to be the most logical choice, because Chia Se has already undertaken the pilot of SEDP using ‘Chia Se methods’, plus the Programme Secretariat is located within MPI. Nevertheless, considerable hurdles remain to wide scale adoption, and it seems likely that some core elements of Chia Se’s approach will be eroded. Furthermore, SEDP is an annual and five-year plan, not a programme distributing funds, and other potential opportunities also exist (such as the programme to reach the 61 poorest districts, under MOLISA).

Recommendation 3:

Any second phase should provide distinct break from the first phase of Chia Se, with a clearer design to demonstrate that the Chia Se approach can be mainstreamed within the government system.

This will require particular attention to:

The research design, to be able to demonstrate that phase II is not just a continuation of the same approach but more concentrated in fewer districts.⁷⁰ Importantly the design should consider an ‘experimental’ approach that compares: (i) different adjustments to the Chia Se model (e.g. using a VDF versus a CDF model, using different government norms, etc); and, (ii) communes in districts or provinces with/without the first phase of Chia Se.

Better integration, with the government administrative structures but with Technical Assistance providing different skills sets appropriate for monitoring, strategic communication (see below) and policy reform.

Cost-efficiency, with a much clearer definition and measurement of financial costs and their analysis in comparison with other development programmes.

Measuring results, with a much greater emphasis on the objective measurement of achievements (the evidence), including better use of the logframe, specific indicators and baseline and repeater surveys.

Strategic communication, with a clear focus towards increasing information for villagers (transparency, new models) and getting information from community and lower levels into the policy-making domain (workshops, events, evidence-based studies).

Recommendation 4:

Sida and other donors should seek to have a clear timeframe with MPI for sharing lessons and deciding on the revisions to the SEDP process.

Several donors and agencies (AusAID, IrishAid, CARE, UN agencies, etc) are currently ‘piloting’ new SEDP processes, yet this appears to be in an uncoordinated and non-harmonised manner. Research studies and workshops should be used to improve understanding between the different programmes.

Recommendation 5:

Although Chia Se has worked with mass organisations, this doesn’t necessarily involve a wide range of decision-makers, and more needs to be done to engage informal and community-based groups.

This would help further enhance the democratic objectives of the programme, and help raise the ‘voice’ of ordinary people/citizens – and could build on innovative work being carried out by other organisations.⁷¹

⁷⁰ The draft proposal for phase II of Chia Se proposes that Chia Se be continued in 2 districts only.

⁷¹ For example, CARE will start a programme in Yen Bai that sees to work more closely with community organisations, as part of their involvement in developing the SEDP.

Recommendation 6:

The Chia Se model should be adapted to better assist the poor and vulnerable to cope and adapt to disasters.

This includes natural calamities (some as a result of climate change), diseases (e.g. Avian flu, Swine flu) and market forces (e.g. rapid inflation). This should include consideration of:

Participatory environmental assessments, to highlight risks and options for risk mitigation

Improved information/models for village-based choices (e.g. grass inter-cropping)

Greater use of the DDF/CDF to provide complementary support (e.g. training, coping strategies, complementary support)

Insurance/contingency funds

Recommendation 7:

Training should be decentralised so that the communes are the budget holders, and able to purchase services according to demand.

Decentralisation of the budget to lower levels in Quang Tri seems to have resulted in more effective training, and this would help overcome too many top-down courses or ones that failed to meet the expectations and needs of communes and villagers.

Recommendation 8:

Processes should be put in place to systematically capture and share assessments of training performance and impact.

This need not be onerous, and might include training evaluation forms or participatory discussions at the end of the training event and then repeated some months later. The analysis of this information should be communicated widely to improve the selection of training providers and the content/approach of courses.

Recommendation 9:

The regular monitoring aspects of the M&E system should be better integrated within the government structures, but this should be complemented with a stronger, independent evaluative function to assess impacts.

The monitoring system of Chia Se should be integrated (where possible) with work of the Statistical Officers under the line management of GSO/DSO, but with specific attention to supporting the commune-level data collection. It is thought that for relatively little additional expenditure (e.g. allowances, motorbikes, etc), the quality and coverage of commune-level data could be improved. The monitoring system should be simplified and include both project-specific (e.g. LDF allocations) and non-project specific elements (e.g. livestock, infrastructure, etc) with support provided to improve the analytical use of data for lower level decision-making (communes, districts). An independent evaluative function could be provided through TA-support, a Research Institute or other body. The aim should be to ensure rigour in data collection and analysis, and ensure that evidence meets the requirements of key stakeholders (the commune/district cadre, the programme secretariat, policy-makers, Sida).

Recommendation 10:

Sida should actively seek to engage other donors in a second phase, wither through a multi-donor funded programme, provincial budget support, or an active involvement at a Steering Committee level.⁷²

Chia Se currently suffers from many of the disadvantages of the traditional project modality (i.e. small scale, location-specific benefits, not fully integrated/institutionalised in the government system, unsustainable). The programme has demonstrated that the Chia Se approach can work in Vietnam, but with

⁷² If multi-donor funding is not forthcoming, then a multi-agency steering committee may provide an alternative model for seeking longer-term sustainability, replication and/or mainstreaming.

higher cost norms, substantial technical support, and separate (though not parallel) management structures. At this stage in the programme lifecycle (i.e. as the first phase closes), there is a real risk that the achievements could be lost if not capitalised on by a second phase – though equally that a second phase could miss the opportunity to broaden the appeal of this approach. Multiple funding sources and a modality that better integrates with the government system/procedures would provide one way to achieve this, as well as a basis for longer-term sustainability (as Sida reduces support to Vietnam).

Recommendation 11:

Chia Se needs to find ways to provide more emphasis on marketing, market information and market access for agricultural products.

At present, Chia Se tends to help farmers to increase agricultural production, but with little emphasis on the market access and added value for such products. While the essence of Chia Se is village decision-making, there is a risk that if villagers do not have access to market information, then the programme will support production increases irrespective of market conditions. This would not be something that sits well with Vietnam's more market-orientated economy.

Annex 1 Terms of Reference

... for the Sida Advisory Team to undertake the Evaluation of Chia Se Poverty Alleviation Programme during 2009

1. Evaluation Purpose

The Chia Se Poverty Alleviation programme will be evaluated as an end-of-phase evaluation. The Swedish Government decided in 2007 to phase out the bilateral cooperation with Vietnam due to the fact that the country has reached the level of middle-income country. This means that no full-scale extension of the programme will take place as originally planned. The Government of Vietnam, through the Ministry of Planning and Investment, requested in 2008 the Swedish Embassy to continue supporting a more focussed and scaled-up version of Chia Se for a period of two years out of four in order to draw lessons learned from the programme to feed in to the next SEDP. This request of a two-year extension has been through the initial Embassy assessment of the Concept note, a draft programme proposal is developed but the final decision is pending the approval of the Country Strategy by the Swedish Government.

Thus, the aim of this evaluation is to evaluate the performance of the Chia Se programme from 2003–2008, and the independent external evaluation will be carried out by the Sida Advisory Team (SAT).

2. Background

The Chia Se Poverty Alleviation programme has evolved from previous cooperation programmes between Sweden and Vietnam, including the Forestry Cooperation Programme (FCP) and the Mountain Rural Development Programme (MRDP). Building on lessons from these programmes, Chia Se takes a broader approach to poverty alleviation with a strong emphasis on decentralisation down to the village level. The programme is designed with a rights-based approach to poverty alleviation, and one that aims to promote participation, grassroots democracy and transparency. To this end, up to 80 per cent of resources are delegated to the village level through the Local Development Fund (LDF), alongside tools for participatory planning (the Local Planning for Management and Development, or LPMD), and capacity building to assist the local management levels to utilise the resources more effectively.

The Chia Se programme has been implemented in two phases, with an Inception Phase that started at the end of 2003 and the current Implementing Phase that runs from January 2005 to December 2008 (with an extension to 31st March 2009). The programme operates through three provincial projects in Ha Giang, Yen Bai and Quang Tri, plus the National Project that aims to provide policy and technical support to the provincial projects as well as utilise lessons learned for policy-making.

An external Mid-term Review (MTR) of the Chia Se Poverty Alleviation programme was held early December 2006 between the Government of Vietnam (represented by the Ministry of Planning and Investment and the three provinces participating in the cooperation programme) and Sida, as represented by the Embassy of Sweden in Hanoi. The MTR was facilitated by the Sida Advisory Team (SAT) in Rural Development. At the MTR the parties discussed and agreed upon the planning and budgeting for the coming years; the possible revision of the strategic orientation for the cooperation; the experiences and learning from the programme in relation to the new national targeted programmes for poverty reduction including Programme 135 phase 2; and the consolidation and termination options for the programme, including entering into the planning for a second phase of the cooperation.

In October 2007, the SAT undertook an annual review of the Chia Se programme. The review focused on assessing implementation progress, as well as studies on Operations and Maintenance (O&M) and the harmonisation actions in Hoang Su Phi District of Ha Giang province. The SAT review was used to support the Sida Annual Review Meeting (ARM) held in November 2007. Another annual review was undertaken in November 2008 by the SAT, and this report was used to inform the “4th Quarter review meeting” held on 12th December 2008.

As the current phase of the Chia Se Poverty Alleviation Programme draws to its close, it is timely to undertake an external evaluation, to inform future interventions and learn lessons. This is particularly important as Swedish – Vietnam cooperation enters a new phase: The Government of Sweden has taken the decision to phase out traditional development assistance to Vietnam over the next four to six years, and gradually replace it with “actors cooperation”. This decision is the result of a process to focus Swedish bilateral development cooperation on fewer partner countries (from 70 to around 30) in order to improve its quality and effectiveness. Vietnam is one of seven countries to be phased out in which Sweden will shift to selective cooperation between Vietnamese and Swedish actors, and in prioritised areas such as the environment and democracy/human rights. A new country strategy is due to be approved during the first quarter of 2009. Discussions are also underway for a possible Successor Programme to Chia Se, though with a much greater emphasis on mainstreaming and replicating lessons into policy and other national programmes (NTP-PR, P135/2).

This Terms of Reference (TOR) is for the external evaluation of the Chia Se programme that is due to take place during January to March 2009. The SAT-RD will undertake this evaluation, drawing extensively on existing monitoring data and studies already commissioned by the programme. In addition, the SAT-RD will undertake field visits to the provincial, district, commune and village levels, plus commission an independent study as an input into the evaluation (Provisional title: “*Study to assess the contribution of the Chia Se Poverty Alleviation Programme to community empowerment and grassroots democracy in Vietnam*”).

3. Objectives

The *objective* of this assignment is to evaluate the performance of the Chia Se programme from 2003–2008, making use of the standard OECD criteria as set out in the Sida Evaluation Manual:⁷³

Effectiveness: The extent to which a development intervention has achieved its objectives, taking their relative importance into account.

Impact: The totality of the effects of a development intervention, positive and negative, intended and unintended.

Relevance: The extent to which a development intervention conforms to the needs and priorities of target groups and the policies of recipient countries and donors.

Sustainability: The continuation or longevity of benefits from a development intervention after the cessation of development assistance.

Efficiency: The extent to which the costs of a development intervention can be justified by its results, taking alternatives into account.

4. Scope of work

In order to narrow the focus of the evaluation, and make the best use of resources, this assignment will focus on a number of key questions and themes. The themes have been taken from the recent SAT Annual Review report 2008.

⁷³ *Looking Back, Moving Forward: Sida Evaluation Manual*, Sida, Stockholm, Sweden, 2004, page 25.

(A) *Policy context and rural development (relevance):*

- To what extent has the Chia Se Poverty Alleviation Programme met the needs and priorities of the target groups and the policies of Vietnam and Sweden?
 - To what extent does Chia Se address the priorities of the Government of Vietnam (policies and programmes), the poverty trends and the perspectives of the poor?
 - To what extent does Chia Se meet the strategic priorities and policies of the Embassy of Sweden/Sida and the Swedish government?

(B) *Performance of the provincial projects (effectiveness, impact):*

The approved logical framework (2005/06) states that the overall objective (purpose) of the entire Chia Se programme is that: “*Poverty is alleviated and growth is sustainable*”. This provides the goal for the provincial and national projects, whose objective (purpose) is: “*Poor households have good access to poverty alleviation resources*”.

The key questions for the evaluation are therefore:

- To what extent has the programme had an impact on *poverty alleviation and contributed to sustainable growth* (programme goal)?
- To what extent has Chia Se improved access to poverty alleviation resources by the poor (provincial project objective)? In particular, what has been the contribution to:
 - Community empowerment and local democracy?
 - The equity of women and ethnic minorities?
- To what extent have the outputs been achieved:
 - Institution building and capacity development (Output 1)?
 - Local Planning and Management for Development (Output 2)?
 - The Local Development Fund (Output 3)?
 - Policies for poverty alleviation (Output 4)?

Theme	Questions	Comments
Impact of the rights-based approach	To what extent has Chia Se resulted in “grassroots democracy” (empowerment, equity)?	There have been positive signals that the approach of Chia Se, by working with GoV structures but operating at the village level (bottom-up) has empowered people to address local poverty. The issue is whether CS has been able to alter the local political economy, so that progress in terms of democracy and rights can be sustained.
Poverty impact	To what extent has Chia Se really contributed to poverty reduction (short vs. medium term)?	It is said that there is strong evidence to show direct poverty reduction especially for individual households in the short term (e.g. through the provision of a buffalo). The more difficult issue is whether Chia Se has been able to contribute to medium term poverty alleviation and growth, such as through support to production, market access etc.
Crosscutting issues	Have gender equity and environmental issues been adequately addressed?	Many development projects struggle with operationalising core values around gender and the environment – which often get mainstreamed into non-existence. Chia Se claims to have reached further and achieved more in terms of gender equality, though.

(C) Performance of the National Project (effectiveness, impact):

The objective of the National Project, according to the 2005/06 logical framework is: “National support to poverty alleviation is effective”, respectively. The focus of the project has therefore been on supporting the provincial projects and the mainstreaming of lessons into policy and other programmes.

- To what extent has the NP provided effective national-level support to poverty alleviation through:
 - Support to implementation by the provincial projects?
 - Support to lesson learning and feeding into policy?
- To what extent have the outputs been achieved:
 - Policies for poverty alleviation (Output 4)?
 - Dissemination of policies for poverty alleviation (Output 5)?
 - Information systems for poverty alleviation (Output 6)?
 - Management of poverty alleviation resources (Output 7)?

Theme	Questions	Comments
National Project	How effective has the National Project been in terms of (i) supporting operations, and (ii) policy change? What lessons can be learned from the design and implementation of the National Project, especially for CS phase II?	Over the years, the National Project has been criticised as underperforming. While some perceive the NP as having a role in influencing policy change, its actual design objectives are to support the provincial operations and to feed lessons into the policy realm. Even on these grounds, the structure of five SPMU ministries has made it difficult to be truly responsive to provincial and lower level requirements.
Longer-term influence	Has Chia Se really influenced ‘policy and thinking’: To what extent is this the result of a long line of Swedish cooperation? To what extent have other factors behind Vietnam’s economy & society been instrumental?	There is a view that CS has only been possible as a result of a long collaboration between the Swedish and Vietnam governments – both in terms of learning lessons of past cooperation, and the relationship of trust that has developed. Would other donors have been able to implement Chia Se? It may also be true that CS has only been effective because of other changes in Vietnam’s economy, politics and society over the past 5+ years.

(D) Chia Se as a model for poverty alleviation (sustainability)

- To what extent has the approach of Chia Se been replicated and mainstreamed at national and provincial levels into:
 - Government processes and policy (SEDP, etc)?
 - Development programmes (P135/2, NTP-PR, etc)?
- To what extent are the community-led interventions funded through the LDF sustainable in terms of:
 - Institutions (village-level planning, management and supervision)?
 - Infrastructure (operations and maintenance)?
 - Environmental mitigation and impact?

Theme	Questions	Comments
Chia Se as a model for poverty alleviation	Has Chia Se been a “successful” model for alleviating poverty & empowering the poor and marginalised?	Chia Se aims to alleviate poverty, but claims to be more effective because of its rights-based approach that promotes empowerment and bottom-up planning. As such, it is central to the evaluation to assess CS’s contribution to community empowerment and local democracy.
Sustainability & replication of the model	Is Chia Se a sustainable model that could be replicated and adapted by other programmes, and by GoV? What lessons from CS have changed, or been adopted, by policy?	Chia Se has achieved a lot in only 6 districts in Vietnam, and with a high level of support through TA and resources for capacity building of project and GoV staff. The central concern is whether elements of the CS approach can be sustained beyond the life of the programme – and whether other programmes and the GoV can realistically adopt them (at a lower cost).
Operations & Maintenance	Have LDF funded activities sufficiently addressed financial and institutional sustainability through O&M?	There has been a concern that many LDF activities have led to new infrastructure being build (local roads, irrigations channels, etc) but without sufficient provision for their on-going maintenance (e.g. through user fees, user groups, etc).

(E) Programme design and management (efficiency)

- An assessment of the design and management of Chia Se in terms of:
 - Programme design and evolution
 - Planning and implementation capacity
 - Capacity Building
 - Technical Assistance performed
 - Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)

5. The approach

The evaluation will mainly be reviewing secondary data (including the above) and ‘validating’ it through field interviews. The evaluation will draw extensively on existing data, studies and research, and especially those that have been undertaken in the last year of the Chia Se programme. Several of these studies are the result of in-depth research and larger samples than could be undertaken through the external evaluation. These include:

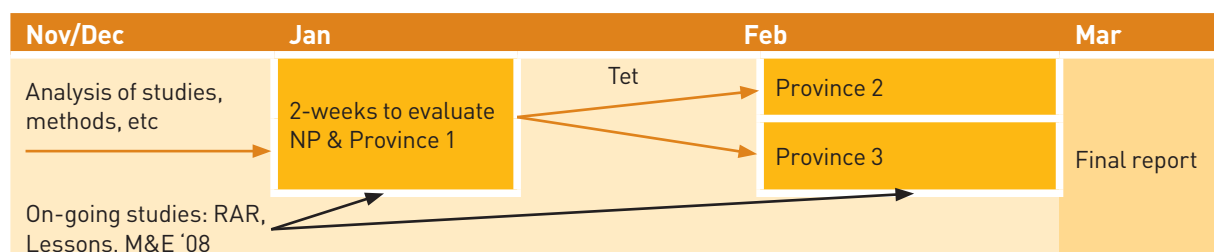
- The baseline data
- GSO Household Impact Survey 2008
- Chia Se monitoring system
- Results Analysis Report
- Lesson learning exercise
- Special studies, conducted by ILSSA, the Institute of Sociology and IPSARD
- Other studies, including the Management Review and the review of Technical Assistance

The SAT will undertake a two-stage evaluation process which enables the results of additional studies to be incorporated towards the end of the process. The two stages are:

Before Tet (January 2009): Meeting with study leaders of the ‘special studies’; evaluation and interviews of the National Project; 1-week assessment of one Provincial Project (at province, district, commune and village levels).⁷⁴

After Tet (February 2009): The team splits to work in parallel on the two remaining Provincial Projects.

The period *between* Tet can be used to refine the methodologies for the studies of the Provincial Projects, draw out initial findings, and also interview some past project staff and stakeholders.



6. The team

The team will consist of: Chris Barnett, Lotta Nycander, Michael Green, Dang Van Minh, Dang Ngoc Dung and Ms Phuong. The responsibilities for team members are provisionally allocated as:

	Focus Areas	Deliverables
Chris Barnett	Replication & mainstreaming Monitoring & evaluation	Assessment of the replication and mainstreaming of Chia Se into other policies and programmes, such as SEDP and P135/2 [Section 6.1] Assessment of the monitoring and evaluation system, its strengths and weaknesses, lessons and use by management [Section 7.5] Methodological approach [Section 2] Contribution to key findings, lessons and recommendations [Section 8]
Michael Green	National project Capacity Building Technical Assistance	Assessment of the performance of the National Project (effectiveness, impact), in terms of the support provided to Provincial projects (TA, capacity building) and the lessons fed into policy. [Section 5] Assessment of the effectiveness of Chia Se's approach to capacity building and TA [Sections 7.3 and 7.4] Key findings, conclusions and recommendations
Dang Ngoc Dung	Programme management Finances	Assessment of other donor approaches/interventions to rural development, and differences/similarities of Chia Se as a modality [Section 3.2] Assessment of the design, evolution, planning and implementation of Chia Se, including financial disbursement [Sections 7.1 and 7.2] Contribution to key findings, lessons and recommendations [Section 8]

⁷⁴ Yen Bai may be selected first as it is relatively close to Hanoi and provides a ‘middle view’ by representing one of the mountain regions (ethnic minority issues), and is probably somewhere between Ha Giang and Quang Tri in terms of general educational levels and prosperity.

	Focus Areas	Deliverables
Lotta Nycander	Community empowerment Equity and gender Swedish policy (Lotta will oversee the commune and village level fieldwork, with Minh and Phuong)	Assessment of the performance of the provincial projects (effectiveness, impact), in terms of their contribution to achieving the logframe objectives (access to resources, empowerment, equity, sustainability, community monitoring & evaluation) [Section 4; section 6.2] Assessment of relevance of Chia Se to Swedish policy over the period, and the past 40 years [Section 3.3] Contribution to key findings, lessons and recommendations [Section 8]
Dang Van Minh	Community empowerment Production & rural development	Commune and village level data collection (perspectives of the poor), to assess the effectiveness and impact of Chia Se (access to poverty alleviation resources, empowerment, equity, sustainability, community monitoring & evaluation) [Section 4; section 6.2] Assessment of the relevance of Chia Se to rural development in Vietnam over the past 5 years – context, socio-economic trends, underlying causes of poverty [Section 3.1] Contribution to key findings, lessons and recommendations [Section 8]
Ms Phuong	Community empowerment Participatory planning & monitoring processes	Commune and village level data collection (perspectives of the poor), to assess the effectiveness and impact of Chia Se (access to poverty alleviation resources, empowerment, equity, sustainability, community monitoring & evaluation) [Section 4; section 6.2] Contribution to key findings, lessons and recommendations [Section 8]

[Section numbers refer to draft Table of Contents for evaluation report]

7. Reporting

A de-briefing in which the SAT presents its initial findings shall be held at the end of each visit.

The (draft) main report (annual review) should be available for comments by 9th March 2009, comments given within ten working days of this date, and finalised by 6 April based on the partners' feedbacks.

8. Time schedule

The mission shall be undertaken during 2 weeks in the period of 9–23 January 2009 in Vietnam, with a second visit provisionally during mid/late February. The SAT shall include visits cooperating provinces and relevant project areas, including visits to all three provinces, at least one district in each province, and a sample of 2 communes and 2 villages in each commune. The total sample will be:

- 3x Provinces
- 3x Districts
- 6x Communes (including Non-Chia Se communes)
- 12x Villages (the number of households to be confirmed)

The SAT shall inform their detail time schedule to relevant bodies and projects before starting to work.

Annex 2 Approach and Methodology

This annex sets out the approach and methodology used by this evaluation. In broad terms, the evaluation makes use of the standard OECD criteria as set out in the Sida Evaluation Manual. These can be summarised as:⁷⁵

Effectiveness: The extent to which a development intervention has achieved its objectives, taking their relative importance into account.

Impact: The totality of the effects of a development intervention, positive and negative, intended and unintended.

Relevance: The extent to which a development intervention conforms to the needs and priorities of target groups and the policies of recipient countries and donors.

Sustainability: The continuation or longevity of benefits from a development intervention after the cessation of development assistance.

Efficiency: The extent to which the costs of a development intervention can be justified by its results, taking alternatives into account.

Intervention logic

One of the challenges for this evaluation was the lack of a clear logical framework, with the subsequent evolution of the programme not always being reflected revisions to the objectives or indicators. For this reason, the evaluation team drew up an implied intervention logic, setting out the de facto causal logic of the programme. This was used to inform the development of the evaluation framework and the process and priorities for the evaluation. See below.

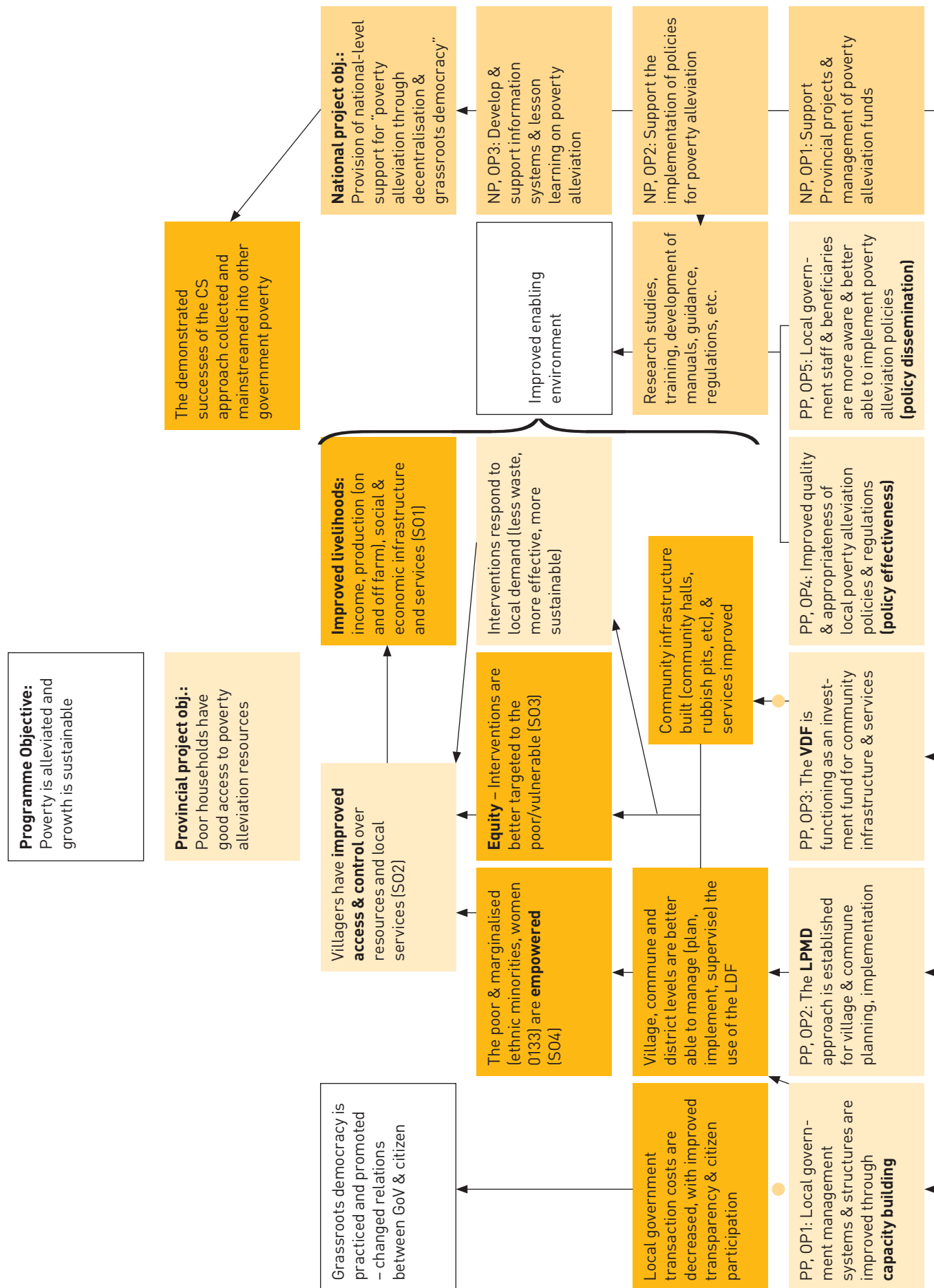
Secondary data

The overall approach of the evaluation was to make use of secondary data and studies wherever possible, and validating these findings through stakeholder interviews and field visits to provinces, districts, communes and villages. Indeed a reasonable number of studies were undertaken during the latter part of the programme, including special research studies undertaken by ILSSA, the Institute of Sociology and IPSARD. Chia Se has also been subject to independent reviews (mid-term, annual) by the Sida Advisory Team. The principle sources of secondary evidence included:

- Chia Se monitoring system
- GSO Household Impact Survey 2008
- Results Analysis Report – a summary of achievements compiled by the PS and TA
- The Lesson learning exercise – conducted in all provinces
- Six special studies, conducted by ILSSA, the Institute of Sociology and IPSARD
- The Management Review
- Quality Assurance Reports undertaken by Orgut of the TA
- SAT Mid-term Review and Annual Reports, 2007 and 2008
- Fforde’s studies on “*Options for Sida support to rural development in Vietnam*” and “*Reflections on the Chia Se project – participation, empowerment and democratisation*”
- The study on “Chia Se in the Vietnamese Policy Context” by De Vylder and Warfvinge.

⁷⁵ *Looking Back, Moving Forward: Sida Evaluation Manual*, Sida, Stockholm, Sweden, 2004, page 25.

Diagram showing the underlying intervention logic of Chia Se

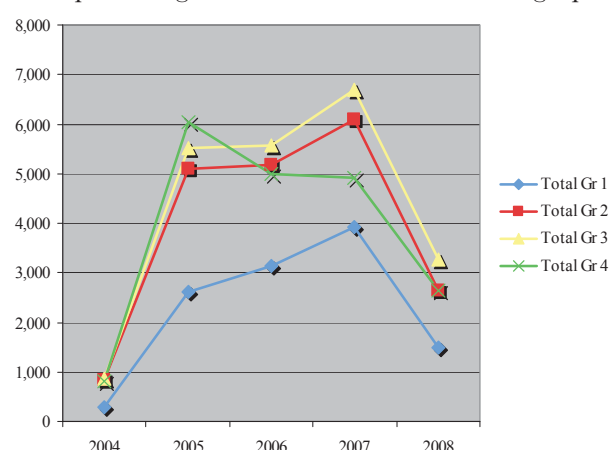


In reviewing the evidence, less weight was given to the monitoring data as this was found to have a number of obvious weaknesses, and reliability somewhat questionable. For example: (i) the Poverty Assessment data; and (ii) the illiteracy rates for women.

Table 1. Poverty Assessment data

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Total Group 1	287	2,607	3,136	3,909	1,490
Total Group 2	835	5,086	5,179	6,079	2,651
Total Group 3	867	5,529	5,558	6,685	3,274
Total Group 4	823	6,034	4,992	4,912	2,647
Total All Groups	2,812	19,256	18,865	21,585	10,062

While the figures in Table 1 are drawn from the relative (self-assessed) measures of poverty – and therefore not strictly comparable – the figures do not seem correct at the “total number of households” have such extreme fluctuations. One would expect that if one group (categorised from 1 to 4) increases, another should decrease; so ideally some households from the poorest group (Group 4) should ‘move’ to Group 3 or higher and some vice versa. See graph.

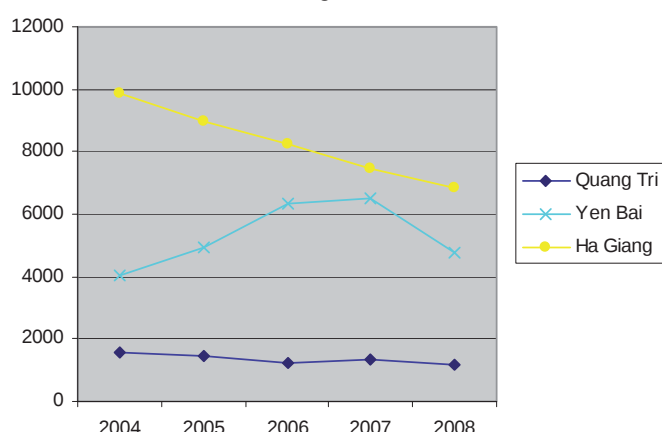


A second example shows that illiteracy rates fell remarkably during the five year period, but also that for Mu Cang Chai the rates appear to have risen – an obvious anomaly (i.e. it doesn't seem possible that people have become more illiterate during the period). See table 2, and the graph below.

Table 2. Number of Illiterate Women aged 15 and above

Province/ District name	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	Change (2004–08)	%age change
Quang Tri	1570	1439	1221	1331	1184	-386	-24.59
– Gio Linh	549	483	336	443	296	-253	-46.08
– Vinh Linh	1021	956	885	888	888	-133	-13.03
Yen Bai	4035	4950	6363	6531	4777	742	18.39
– Van Chan	2329	2216	2520	2295	1600	-729	-31.30
– Mu Cang Chai	1706	2734	3843	4236	3177	1471	86.23
Ha Giang	9854	8998	8255	7473	6836	-2381	24.16
– Bac Me	5306	4994	4621	4284	4284	-1022	19.26
– Hoang Su Phi	4548	4004	3634	3189	2552	-1996	43.89
Total	15459	15387	15839	15335	12797	-2662	17.22

Number of illiterate women, aged 15 and above



While these are more obvious errors, they do highlight a fundamental problem with the monitoring data – that it is too unreliable to be used to form evaluative judgements.

The main implication of this for the evaluation is that there has been more reliance on other studies. While some of these studies have conducted separate surveys and field visits, many of these studies rely heavily on qualitative findings from interviews. Some of the studies are over reliant on interviews and do not give an objective basis against which to show achievements of the programme – particularly in terms of access to resources and poverty reduction. This is further compromised by the lack of a base-line, and with the only ‘impact survey’ undertaken being reliant on people’s ability to recall income and other changes for the periods 2004 and 2007 (GSO Impact Survey 2008).

Evaluation framework

In order to provide a more objective assessment of the programme, the evaluation team utilised an evaluation framework which sets out the main evaluation criteria based on the TOR questions, and the logical framework objectives and indicators. This framework provides a systematic basis to assess the programme, with team members inserting evidence to justify their judgement of performance. See full framework attached.

Example of the Evaluation Framework template

Criteria	Rating (1 to 5) ⁷⁶	Evidence (to justify the rating)	Other remarks	Who (to complete)
Entire Programme Logical Framework				
Poverty is alleviated [GO]				Chris
Growth is sustainable [GO]				Chris

The evaluation framework also provided the basis for developing checklists for stakeholder interviews and the proforma for the village field visits.

Data collection and analysis

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with stakeholders at the national, provincial, district and commune levels. Field visits were made to all three provinces (Ha Giang, Yen Bai and Quang Tri), one

⁷⁶ Rate each criteria for the extent to which it has been achieved. Rating scale: 5 = Very Good; 4 = Good; 3 = Satisfactory; 2 = Poor; 1 = Very Poor.

district per province (3 in total) and three communes per district (9 in total; with 6 from Chia Se communes and 3 from non-Chia Se communes). A checklist of questions/topics was used for all interviews – adapted to the language and relevance of the interview.

Topic Checklist – Province, District & Commune officials

[Introduce the meeting as an opportunity for self-assessment of Chia Se over the past 5 years – as “evaluation” tends to be translated as “inspection”. Encourage +ve/–ve points, and lessons learned. Ask for examples and evidence, with questions to crosscheck what is meant by a particular change/result.]

Name/Job Title/Department

What has been your role in Chia Se?

Since when?

(1) Successes:

- Name 2 key successes of Chia Se from the past 5 years? [*“Newspaper Headlines”*]
- Name 2 aspects of Chia Se that didn’t work so well?

(2) Results:

(a) What has CS achieved in terms of:

- Poverty reduction?
- Access to infrastructure/services/production?
- Empowerment?
- Equity (women & ethnic groups)?
- Local government capacity?

[Check answers: What do you mean by? Give an example of the difference made? Etc]

[The focus is on the last three – as these are more nuanced terms, with multiple meanings.]

(3) Integration & replication:

- Given what you mention above, what of CS has been adopted by the:
 - Government cadre (e.g. management practices)?
 - Other development programmes (govt, donors)?
 - Polices?

(4) Sustainability:

- What of Chia Se will continue after it ends? Explain ...
- What benefits will continue in the longer term?

(5) Management:

- What lessons have you learned from Chia Se?
- If you were to do it again, what would you do differently next time?
 - M&E (GSO, community supervision)
 - Technical Assistance
 - Financial management
 - PMU structures

In total, 200 interviews were conducted with stakeholders both within and outside the Chia Se programme, with 44 (22%) at the national/international level, 41 (21%) at the provincial level, 25 (13%) in districts, 34 (17%) at the commune level, and 56 (28%) with villagers. The full list of interviews is given in Annex 3.

Table 3. Summary of stakeholder interviews, by level

Level	National Project	Ha Giang	Yen Bai	Quang Tri	Other ⁷⁷	Grand Total
National/International	23				21	44
Province		15	17	9		41
District		12	4	9		25
Commune		12	18	4		34
Village		26	15	15		56
Grand Total	23	65	54	37	21	200

Another important part of the evaluation was to gain the views of the beneficiaries – i.e. villagers that are meant to participate in, and benefit from, the programme. In total 12 villages were visited and group discussions held with village leaders, members of the Village Management Groups and Village Supervision Groups, plus households from the different poverty categories – such as “Group 4”, the poorest. The discussions were based around a checklist of questions and the results from each village written up as a Village Report (see attached).

The evaluation team then compiled summary findings based on an analysis of the secondary evidence, and the verification achieved through stakeholder interviews and village visits. The first step of this process was to complete the evaluation framework, showing the supporting evidence and judging performance on a 5-point scale. These ratings were used for internal purposes only, and as a tool to help ensure that all team members reached a definitive judgement based on the evidence available.

The evaluation team then used the framework as a basis to write their respective sections for the report.

SAT Assessment Matrix (based on Chia Se logframe objectives)

Criteria	Rating (1 to 5) ⁷⁸	Evidence (to justify the rating)	Other remarks	Who (to complete)
Entire Programme Logical Framework				
1 Poverty is alleviated [GO]				Chris
2 Growth is sustainable [GO]				Chris
3 Quality of programme design				Dung
National Project Logical Framework				
4 Effective national support for the implementation of the provincial projects ⁷⁹ [OJ]				Michael
6 Policies for poverty alleviation make use of Chia Se model/approach ⁸⁰ [OP 1/OJ]				Michael
7 Policies for poverty alleviation are better disseminated [OP 2]				Michael
8 Operational systems for sharing lessons learned from province to national government ⁸¹ [OP 3]				Michael

⁷⁷ This covers stakeholders that are not part of the National Project, such as the Research Institutes (IPSARD, ILSSA, Institute of Sociology), and donors operating in rural development in Vietnam.

⁷⁸ Rate each criteria for the extent to which it has been achieved. Rating scale: 5 = Very Good; 4 = Good; 3 = Satisfactory; 2 = Poor; 1 = Very Poor.

⁷⁹ Actual NPLF objective states: “National Support to poverty alleviation is effective”.

⁸⁰ Actual NPLF output 1 states: “Policies for poverty alleviation more effective”.

Criteria	Rating (1 to 5) ⁷⁸	Evidence (to justify the rating)	Other remarks	Who (to complete)
9 Operational monitoring (M&E, MIS) systems used by management [OP 3]				Chris
10 Systematic review and evaluation of the programme [OP 3]				Chris
11 Effective programme management ⁸² [OP 4]				Michael/Chris
12 Technical Assistance ⁴ [OP 4]				Michael
13 Capacity Building ⁴ [OP 4]				Michael
14 Financial management ⁴ [OP 4]				Dung
15 Replication of the Chia Se model				Michael
Provincial Project Logical Framework				
16 Empowerment of households ⁸³ [OJ]				Lotta
17 Gender equality [OJ]				Lotta
18 Equality of Ethnic Minorities [OJ]				Lotta
19 Environmental mitigation and impact [OJ]				Minh
20 Improved sustainable livelihoods of the poor – income generation [OJ]				Lotta
21 Improved sustainable livelihoods of the poor – agricultural production [OJ]				Minh
22 Improved access/use of infra-structure & basic services [OJ]				Lotta
23 Improved access/use of social services (health, education) ⁶ [OJ]				Lotta
24 Improved local government capacity [OJ]				Lotta
25 Effective project management systems and structures [OP 1]				Dung
26 Effective Local Planning and Management for Development (LPMD) [OP 2]				Lotta
27 Effective Local Development Fund (LDF) [OP 3]				Dung
28 Effective contribution of Chia Se to policies ⁸⁴				Chris
29 Sustainability of the Chia Se approach (process)				Lotta/Minh
30 Sustainability of Chia Se investments (operations and maintenance)				Lotta/Minh

Key:

EPLF = Entire Programme Logical Framework

NPLF = National Project Logical Framework

PPLF = Provincial Project Logical Framework

GO = Goal

OJ = Objective (outcome-level)

OP = Outputs

⁸¹ Actual NPLF output 3 states: “Information systems for poverty alleviation are more effective”.

⁸² Actual NPLF output 4 states: “Management of poverty alleviation resources is more efficient”.

⁸³ Actual PPLF objective states: “Poor households have good access to poverty alleviation resources”. These criteria are based on the OVIs and monitoring system.

⁸⁴ Actual PPLF states for Output 3: “Policies for poverty alleviation are more effective”, and Output 4: “Policies for poverty alleviation are better disseminated”.

Checklist of questions for villagers

Topic 1: Access to resources, benefits and learning

Individual or household benefits:

Have you received anything through the Chia Se Project (resources, benefits, involvement in adult literacy training, skills training, other)? What? When?

Has Chia Se made any difference to your life and/or your family's life (explain in which way)?

Benefits to the village and commune:

Do you think there were any benefits to the village/commune, as a whole? If yes, what are these?

Do you know whether there are any persons, or groups of persons, who have not received resources, or who have not benefited (or not benefited enough) from Chia Se? If yes, who are they and what are the reasons?

Participatory planning:

Have you participated in the meetings and in making the village plans?

If yes, did the activities carried out reflect the priorities the village plan meetings? Explain ...

Are you aware of VMGs? Explain ...

Topic 2: Village negotiators

If there are differences in opinions or tensions about VDF resources – how is this resolved?

Are there people in your village who resolve disagreements about Chia Se activities (even outside the LPMD meetings)? Who are they?

Which VDF activities that have come up, get rejected?

Topic 3: Empowerment and gender equality

Empowerment:

Who, specifically, has become more empowered as a result of the Chia Se?

How did they become empowered, and what are the “signs” that they are empowered?

Give examples of before/after Chia Se ...

Have local/village leaders become more empowered as a result of the Chia Se? How?

And if so what are villagers' views about this? (Good, not good ...?)

Gender issues:

Have activities involving women/girls helped them in practical ways (equipments, accessing water for domestic use, improved sanitation, animals, access to health and reproductive services, other)?

Have activities involving women/girls changed the strategic situation for women in any other ways? (This relates to women's strategic roles: Decision-making at home or in village meetings, have they become leaders in groups or strengthened as leaders)?

What can you say about how Chia Se has influenced the lives of women and girls? Explain ...

Topic 4: Supervision of Chia Se activities

How have villagers supervised the implementation of activities?

This relates to supervision of: Distribution of resources from VDF (if funds were given to the right people)? Quality and quantity of infrastructure and activities? Procurement of services outside the village? The selection and work of contractors? Operation and maintenance (O&M) of infrastructure?)

Any examples of good, or bad supervision?

Topic 5: Sustainability

Try to find out how life will go on in the village after the end of Chia Se. What will they continue to do that was started by the Chia Se? Explain:

How will structures that have been made (irrigation schemes, water tanks and pipes, roads, meeting halls, schools) be maintained (taken care of)?

Are there any problems for the villagers to maintain what has been built? (explain...)

Table of Contents for Village Reports

Background

Province:

District name:

Commune name:

Village name:

Chia Se (VDF) start and end dates: __/__/__ to __/__/__

Date of SAT interview(s):

1. Access to resources, benefits and learning

1.1 Individual or household benefits:

From the interviews, summarize the extent to which poor people have benefited from Chia Se (with examples, and quotes). Also, which activities appear to be most successful:

1.2 Benefits to the village and commune:

From the interviews, summarize the extent to which the village and commune have benefited from Chia Se (also identifying people or groups that did not benefit):

1.3 Participatory planning:

From the interviews, summarize the extent to which villagers have participated in Chia Se meetings (or not) and whether the plans reflect poor people's needs:

2. Village negotiators

From the interviews, summarize how differences in opinion about Chia Se activities are resolved, and who helps to negotiate and reach agreement:

3. Empowerment and gender equality

3.1 Empowerment:

From the interviews, summarize what people mean by empowerment, with examples (or 'signs') from before and after Chia Se:

3.2 Gender issues:

From the interviews, summarize how Chia Se activities have helped women/girls in their practical needs and in their role(s) as decision-makers or leaders. Give examples.

4. Supervision of Chia Se activities

From the interviews, summarize how activities have been supervised by the villagers, with examples of 'good' and 'bad' practices:

5. Sustainability

From the interviews, summarize what benefits will continue after the end of Chia Se, and how investments will be maintained (with examples):

6. Conclusions

In your own (SAT) view, has the Chia Se project in this village...

... improved the livelihoods of poor people	A lot	Some	Little
Give reasons for your assessment... (refer to sections 1.1 and 1.2)			

... improved the lives of women/girls in the village	A lot	Some	Little
Give reasons for your assessment... (refer to section 3.2)			

... helped poor people have a greater voice in decision-making	A lot	Some	Little
Give reasons for your assessment... (refer to sections 1.3 and 3.1)			

... improved the transparency	A lot	Some	Little
Give reasons for your assessment.... (refer to sections 4)			

... left lasting benefits that will continue into the near future	A lot	Some	Little
Give reasons for your assessment... (refer to sections 5)			

7. Recommendations from villagers

(if any)

List of interviewees

Annex 3 List of People Consulted

National-level stakeholders:

Name	Job Title	Job Title, Organisation
Binh Tran Nam	Programme Officer, Development Cooperation	Sida/Embassy of Sweden
Johanna Palmberg	First Secretary, Development Cooperation	Sida/Embassy of Sweden
Rolf Samuelsson	Former First Secretary, Development Cooperation	Sida/Embassy of Sweden
Mr. Do Xuan Thong	Deputy Director	National Secretariat, Ministry of Planning & Investment (MPI)
Mrs. Nguyen Thanh Phuong	Specialist	National Secretariat, Ministry of Planning & Investment (MPI)
Mrs. Nguyen Lan Hue	Financial Manager	National Secretariat, Ministry of Planning & Investment (MPI)
Mr. Dang Huy Hung	Programme Officer	National Secretariat, Ministry of Planning & Investment (MPI)
Mr. Vu Hoai Minh	Programme Facilitation Advisor	Orgut Consulting
Mr. Torbjorn Ockerman	Chief Technical Assistant	Orgut Consulting
Gus Edgren	Policy Advisor	Orgut Consulting
Steffen Weidner	M&E Advisor	Orgut Consulting
Pham Ngoc Tien	Director	Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs
Ms. Ha	Accountant	Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs
Mr Du	Team Leader for fieldwork assessment	Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs
Mrs Thanh	Manager	Planning and International Cooperation Dept., Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs
Tran Duc Trung	Programme Officer	Ministry of Finance
Ms. Vu Thi Hai Yen	Deputy Director	Expenditure Department, Ministry of Finance
Mr. Tran Viet Hung	Deputy Director	State Budget Department, Ministry of Finance
Mr. Nguyen Huu Hiep	Deputy Director	State Treasury, Ministry of Finance
Ms. Toan Thi Ngoan	Specialist	Accounting and Auditing Department, Ministry of Finance
Ngo Thi Nhung	Director	Statistical Documentation Center, General Statistics Office
Mr. Vinh		Agricultural Planning Institute, MARD
Nguyen Van Nghiem		Cooperative and Rural Development, MARD
Nguyen Van Mon		Cooperative and Rural Development, MARD
Nguyen Thanh Huong		Cooperative and Rural Development, MARD
Hang		Information Statistics Centre, MARD
Mr Lang	Researcher	IPSARD
Mr Duang	Director	IPSARD
Mr Vu Manh Loi	Assistant Professor, PhD in sociology	Institute of Sociology
Dr. Liam		Institute of Sociology
Ms. Thai Phuc Than	Manager	Planning and International Co-operation Dept., Institute of Labour Science, Invalids & Social Affairs
Jan Rudengren		SPM consulting

Name	Job Title	Job Title, Organisation
Lars Rylander		SPM consulting
Jan Olaf Agrell	Former Head of Development Cooperation (2002–2006)	Sida/Embassy of Sweden
Mr. Vo Thanh Son	Rural Development Operations Officer	World Bank
Le Dai Nghia	Programme Officer	Finnida/Embassy of Finland
Le Thi Thu Huang	Programme Coordinator	Finnida/Embassy of Finland
Nguyen Viet Ha	Project Coordinator	CARE International
Vu Cuong	Consultant	T&C Consulting
Nguyen Tien Phong	Assistant Country Director, Head of Poverty and Social Development Cluster	United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
Nguyen Quoc Viet	Senior Programme Manager	AusAID, Embassy of Australia
Ms Huang	Consultant	
Nguyen Van Dung	Director	Center of Environment and Technology
Hoang Xuan Thuy	Researcher	Center of Environment and Technology

Yen Bai Province:

Name	Job Title	Job Title, Organisation
Mrs. Pham Thanh Tra	Vice Chairwoman	Provincial People's Committee, Yen Bai
Mr. Nguyen Van Trong	Deputy Head of Economic Board	Provincial People's Council, Yen Bai
Mr. Nguyen Van Hong	Director of External Department	Provincial People's Committee, Yen Bai
Mr. Duong Van Tien	Vice Director	DPI, Yen Bai
Mr. Bui Ngoc Hung	Vice Director	Provincial Project Management Unit
Ms. Hoang Anh	Accountant	Provincial Project Management Unit
Ms. Pham Thi Van Anh	Programme Officer	Provincial Project Management Unit
Mr. Dinh Van Dang	Interpreter	Provincial Project Management Unit
Mr. Nguyen Cong Vang	Vice Director	DOLISA, Yen Bai
Ms. Hoang Thi Luu	Specialist	DOLISA, Yen Bai
Mr. Vu Thuong Toa	Vice Director	Planning Department, DARD, Yen Bai
Ms. Vu Thi Vinh	Specialist	External Dept., DPI, Yen Bai
Mr Huong	Statistics Officer	Provincial Statistics Office, Yen Bai
Mrs Lang	Vice Chair	Women's Union, Yen Bai province
Mr Khang	Chairman	Fatherland Front, Yen Bai
Mr Huang	Chairman	Farmers Union, Yen Bai
Colm Ross	Yen Bai Provincial Advisor	Orgut Consulting
Mr Ha Van Don	Vice Chairman	District People's Committee, Mu Cang Chai district
Mr Dong Manh Hung	Specialist	Bureau of Agriculture and Rural Development (BARD), Mu Cang Chai district
Mrs Nyung	Vice Director	Women's Union, Mu Cang Chai district

Name	Job Title	Job Title, Organisation
Mr Song	Director	Farmers Union, Mu Cang Chai district
Mr. Giang Chu Ly	Chair	Commune People's Committee, La Pan Tan Commune
Mr Ho Cho Su	Chair	Commune People's Council, La Pan Tan Commune
Mr Hang Nha Vang	Chair	Farmers Union, La Pan Tan Commune
Mr Ly Chong Di	Vice Chair	Commune People's Committee, La Pan Tan Commune
Mrs Ly Thi Dong	Chair, Member of Commune Supervision Group	Women's Union, La Pan Tan Commune
Mr. Ly A Tu	Chair	Fatherland Front, La Pan Tan Commune
Mr Giang Xu Tu	Security Officer	La Pan Tan Commune
Mr Ly A Chu	Village Head	Trong Pao village, La Pan Tan Commune
Mr. Giang A Thinh	Land Administration Officer	La Pan Tan Commune
Mr. Giang Pua Thao	Vice Chair	Commune People's Council, La Pan Tan Commune
Mr. Hai Te Dua	Commune Accountant	La Pan Tan Commune
Mr Giang A Cua	Chairman	Commune People's Committee, Che Cu Nha Commune
Mr Giang A Khu	Chairman	Commune People's Council, Che Cu Nha Commune
Mr. Giang A Do	Vice Chair	Commune People's Committee, Che Cu Nha Commune
Mr. Thao A The	Chairman	Commune People's Council, Nam Khat Commune
Mr. Ly Cho Khay	Chairman	Commune People's Committee, Nam Khat Commune
Mr. Giang Bua Su	Chairman	Fatherland Front, Nam Khat Commune
Mr. Nguyen Van Tinh	Accountant	Nam Khat Commune
Mr. Ly Bo Ky	Cultural officer/ Member of VSG	Village Supervision Group, Trong Tong Village, La Pan Tan Commune
Mr. Ly Cho So	Youth Union Secretary/ Member of VSG	Village Supervision Group, Trong Tong Village, La Pan Tan Commune
Mr. Hang Lung Lau	Deputy Head of Communal Detachment	Village Management Group, Trong Tong Village, La Pan Tan Commune
Ly A Gio	Male, (Category 2)	Nam Khat commune, Mu Cang Chai district, Yen Bai province
Giang Du Cau	Male, (Category 3)	Nam Khat commune, Mu Cang Chai district, Yen Bai province
Ly Hu Thenh	Male, (Category 4)	Nam Khat commune, Mu Cang Chai district, Yen Bai province
Hoang Thi men	Female, (Category 4)	Nam Khat commune, Mu Cang Chai district, Yen Bai province
Thao Hoang Pan	Male Head of Village Management Group	Nam Khat commune, Mu Cang Chai district, Yen Bai province
Giang Cung Pao	Male Head of Village Supervision Group	Nam Khat commune, Mu Cang Chai district, Yen Bai province
Hoang Thi Gio	Female	Nam Khat commune, Mu Cang Chai district, Yen Bai province
Giang San Lanh	Male, (Category 4)	La Pan Tan commune, Mucang Chai dist. Yen Bai province
Giang Vang Tung	Male, (Category 3)	La Pan Tan commune, Mucang Chai dist. Yen Bai province
Giang A Ninh	Male, (Category 3)	La Pan Tan commune, Mucang Chai dist. Yen Bai province
Giang Song De	Male, (Category 2)	La Pan Tan commune, Mucang Chai dist. Yen Bai province
(unknown name, 25 yrs)	Female, (Category 3)	La Pan Tan commune, Mucang Chai dist. Yen Bai province

Ha Giang Province:

Name	Job Title	Job Title, Organisation
Be Xuan Dai	Director, Vice Director of DPI	Provincial Project Management Unit
Dang Thi Ngoan		Provincial Project Management Unit
Ms. Dao Le My	Financial officer	Provincial Project Management Unit
Mrs Vo Thi Binh	Vice Director	DOLISA, Ha Giang Province
Mr. Pham Tien Dung	Vice Director	DARD, Ha Giang Province
Mr. Pham Ngoc Trung	Specialist	DOLISA, Ha Giang Province
Mr. Nguyen Minh Van	Vice Director	DPI, Ha Giang
Mr. Pham Duy Hien	Vice Director	Agriculture Planning Dept., DPI, Ha Giang
Mr. Nong Thanh Kim	Vice Chairman	Fatherland Front, Ha Giang
Mrs. Xin Thi Bich	Vice Chairman	Farmer Association, Ha Giang
Mrs. Nguyen Kieu Yen	Vice Chairman	Woman Union, Ha Giang
Hoang Dinh Tram	Vice Chair	Provincial People's Committee (and Steering Committee on Poverty Reduction)
Do Trong Thuc	M&E Officer	Provincial Project Management Unit
Le Duc Quang	Statistics Officer	Provincial Statistics Office
Lars Jonsson	Ha Giang Provincial Advisor	Orgut Consulting
Mrs. Au Thi An	Vice Chairman	District People's Committee, Hoang Su Phi
Mrs. Hoang Thi Minh	Chair	Women's Union, Hoang Su Phi District
Mr. Le Duy Manh	Chair	BARD, Hoang Su Phi District
Mr. Ma Chan Chiu	Chair	Farmers Association, Hoang Su Phi District
Mr. Vuong Duc Thanh	Vice Director	Preventive Medical Center, Hoang Su Phi District
Ms. Tran Thi Nguyet	Specialist	BONRE, Hoang Su Phi District
Mr. Then Ngoc Minh	Director	District Project Management Unit, Hoang Su Phi
Mrs. Lu Thi Hoi	Vice Director	District Project Management Unit, Huang Su Phi
Mr. Nguyen Tien Linh	District Facilitator	Huang Su Phi District
Mr. Trinh Duy Hien	District Facilitator	Huang Su Phi District
Mr. Chu Duc Cuong	Orgut consultant	District Project Management Unit, Huang Su Phi
Mr. Do Duy Son	Facilitator	District Project Management Unit, Huang Su Phi
Mr. Vuong Dao Tong	Chairman	Ban Luoc People's Commune, Hoang Su Phi
Mr. Ly Van Tuong	Vice Chairman	Ban Luoc People's Council, Hoang Su Phi
Phan Thanh Phuc	Accountant	Ban Luoc People's Council, Hoang Su Phi
Vuong Van Thanh	Commune Facilitator	Ban Luoc Commune, Huang Su Phi
Mr. Hoang Quoc Toan	Chairman	Commune People's Committee, Tu Nhan, Huang Su Phi
Mr Nguyen Trung Kien	Commune Facilitator	Nam Dich Commune, Huang Su Phi
Miss To Thi Hong Hue	Accountant	Commune Project Management Unit, Nam Dich Commune, Huang Su Phi
Mr Hoang Tien Rom	Chair	Commune People's Committee, Nam Dich Commune, Huang Su Phi
Mr. Quac Thon	Director	Commune People's Committee, Tu Nhan, Huang Su Phi
Mr Kien	Commune Facilitator	Nam Dich Commune, Huang Su Phi
Miss Hue	Accountant	Commune Project Management Unit, Nam Dich Commune, Huang Su Phi
Mr Hoang Tun Rom	Chair	Commune People's Committee, Nam Dich Commune, Huang Su Phi

Name	Job Title	Job Title, Organisation
Dang Tien Thanh	Male, Village Head, (Category 3)	Banh Van 2 village, Ban Luoc commune, Hoang Su Phi Dist.
Ly Van Quang	Male, (Category 4)	Banh Van 2 village, Ban Luoc commune, Hoang Su Phi Dist.
Dang Tien Ngoc	Male, Village Supervision Group, (Category 3)	Banh Van 2 village, Ban Luoc commune, Hoang Su Phi Dist.
Ly Ngoc Tinh	Male, (Category 2)	Banh Van 2 village, Ban Luoc commune, Hoang Su Phi Dist.
Vuong Ngoc Vinh	Male, Village Head, (Category 3)	Ban Luoc village, Ban Luoc commune, Hoang Su Phi Dist.
Vuong Van Nghi	Male, (Category 4)	Ban Luoc village, Ban Luoc commune, Hoang Su Phi Dist.
Vuong Van Nghia	Male, (Category 3)	Ban Luoc village, Ban Luoc commune, Hoang Su Phi Dist.
Dang Thi Pay	Female, (Category 3)	Ban Luoc village, Ban Luoc commune, Hoang Su Phi Dist.
Vuong Van Hoan	Male, (Category 4)	Ban Luoc village, Ban Luoc commune, Hoang Su Phi Dist.
Dang Thi Lo	Female, (Category 5)	Ban Luoc village, Ban Luoc commune, Hoang Su Phi Dist.
Vuong Van Mien	Male, (Category 5)	Ban Luoc village, Ban Luoc commune, Hoang Su Phi Dist.
Hoang Xuan Dao	Vice People's Commune Council	Hoang Ngan 4 Village, Nam Dich Commune, Hoang Su Phi
Hoang van Phuong	Commune's Farmer Association	Hoang Ngan 4 Village, Nam Dich Commune, Hoang Su Phi
Ma Thi Truong	Commune's Women's Union	Hoang Ngan 4 Village, Nam Dich Commune, Hoang Su Phi
Hoang Van Ky	Vice Secretary Communist Party of the Commune	Hoang Ngan 4 Village, Nam Dich Commune, Hoang Su Phi
Ninh Van Song	Headman & Head Village Management Group	Hoang Ngan 4 Village, Nam Dich Commune, Hoang Su Phi
Hoang Thi Doan	Head Village Supervision Group	Hoang Ngan 4 Village, Nam Dich Commune, Hoang Su Phi
Hoang Thi Ngan	Female, (Category 4)	Hoang Ngan 4 Village, Nam Dich Commune, Hoang Su Phi
Hoang Thanh Hieu	Female, (Category 4)	Hoang Ngan 4 Village, Nam Dich Commune, Hoang Su Phi
Hoang Van Duong	Village Headman	Hoang Ngan 9 Village, Nam Dich Commune, Hoang Su Phi
Hoang Van Hoi	Head Village Management Group	Hoang Ngan 9 Village, Nam Dich Commune, Hoang Su Phi
Hoang Van Phuong	Male, (Category 2)	Hoang Ngan 9 Village, Nam Dich Commune, Hoang Su Phi Dist. Ha Giang
Hoang Thi Vien	Female, Village Supervision Group, (Category 4)	Hoang Ngan 9 Village, Nam Dich Commune, Hoang Su Phi
Hoang Van Duc	Male, (Category 4)	Hoang Ngan 9 Village, Nam Dich Commune, Hoang Su Phi
Thao Seo Sung	Male, (Category 3)	Hoang Ngan 9 Village, Nam Dich Commune, Hoang Su Phi
Hoang Van Loan	Male, (Category 3)	Hoang Ngan 9 Village, Nam Dich Commune, Hoang Su Phi

Quang Tri Province:

Name	Job Title	Job Title, Organisation
Mr. Hoang van Suu	Director	Provincial Project Management Unit (Vice Director, Provincial People's Committee)
Nguyen Trieu Thuong		Planning and Investment Department, Quang Tri Province
Pham Quang Hung		Operation staff, Quang Tri Provincial Secretariat (PPMU)
Le Quang Truong		Accountant, Quang Tri Provincial Secretariat (PPMU)
TiiaRiitta Granfelt	Quang Tri Provincial Advisor	Orgut Consulting
Mr. Chinh	Vice Chairman	Provincial People's Committee, Quang Tri Province
Mr. Phan Van Diem	Vice Director	General Co-ordination Office, DPI, Quang Tri Province
Mr. Nguyen Tri Thanh	Vice Director	DOLISA, Quang Tri Province
Mr. Lam Thien Chi	Specialist	Planning and Financial Dept., DARD, Quang Tri Province
Mr. Phan Van Hoa	Vice Director	DPMU, Gio Linh District
Mr. Nguyen Dang Phuc	District Facilitator	DPMU, Gio Linh District
Mr. Phong	District Facilitator	DPMU, Gio Linh District
Mr. Hoang Van Luc	Chairman	Farmer Association, Gio Linh District
Mrs. Nguyen Thi Luong	Chairman	Woman Union, Gio Linh District
Mr. Nguyen Thanh Binh	Director	BOLISA, Gio Linh District
Mr. Tran Duc Hien	Vice Director	BoFP, Gio Linh District
Mr. Hoang Minh Thien	Director	BARD, Gio Linh District
Mr. Duong Ba Cuong	Chairman	Commune People's Committee, Gio Hoa Commune
Mr. Hoang Thanh	Vice Director	CPMU, Gio Hoa Commune
Mr. Nguyen Huu Than	Principal	Primary School, Gio Hoa Commune
Mrs. Tran Thi Hien	Principal	Kinder Garden, Gio Hoa Commune
Mrs. Nguyen Thi Thanh	Head	Health Station, Gio Hoa Commune
	Headman & Head Village Management Group	
Nguyen Hiep Hoa		Lan Dinh village, Gio Phong Commune, Gio Linh Dist.
Tran Thi Lu	Female, (Category 4)	Lan Dinh village, Gio Phong Commune, Gio Linh Dist.
Nguyen Thi Mien	Female, (Category 4)	Lan Dinh village, Gio Phong Commune, Gio Linh Dist.
Nguyen Thi Loan	Female, (Category 3)	Lan Dinh village, Gio Phong Commune, Gio Linh Dist.
Tran Thi Tam	Female, (Category 4)	Lan Dinh village, Gio Phong Commune, Gio Linh Dist.
Nguyen Hoang	Male, (Category 3)	Lan Dinh village, Gio Phong Commune, Gio Linh Dist.
Nguyen Loi	Male, (Category 2)	Lan Dinh village, Gio Phong Commune, Gio Linh Dist.
Nguyen Thi Xuan	Female, (Category 2)	Lan Dinh village, Gio Phong Commune, Gio Linh Dist.
	Headman & Head Village Supervision Group	
Nguyen Huu Luat		Dai Tam village, Gio Hoa Commune, Gio Linh Dist.
Nguyen Dang Duc	Male Head of Village Supervision Group	Dai Tam village, Gio Hoa Commune, Gio Linh Dist.
Nguyen Cao Chien	Male Communist Party Secretary of the Village	Dai Tam village, Gio Hoa Commune, Gio Linh Dist.
Tran Minh Nghia	Village Farmer's Union	Dai Tam village, Gio Hoa Commune, Gio Linh Dist.
Le Nam Dan	Commune Facilitator	Dai Tam village, Gio Hoa Commune, Gio Linh Dist.
Nguyen Ngoc Dung	Male, (Category 4)	Dai Tam village, Gio Hoa Commune, Gio Linh Dist.
Nguyen Thi Be	Female, (Category 4)	Dai Tam village, Gio Hoa Commune, Gio Linh Dist.

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Annex 5 Review of Aid Modalities in Rural Development

The present Official Development Assistance (ODA) for rural development in Vietnam comprises of a mix of general budget support (e.g. PRSC), sector budget support (particularly in health and education), sector programmes (e.g. in rural transport) and projects (e.g. Chia Se, RUDEP). In line with commitments under the Paris Declaration, most donors have shifted upstream and out of projects, and with greater emphasis on policy dialogue, budget support and support through Technical Assistance (TA). A few donors, notably AusAID and Finnida, have a clear policy to remain engaged in implementation projects in order to continue learning and be more effective partners in the policy arena.

Yet, while the HCS and commitments under the Paris Declaration have influenced donor thinking in recent years, there remain many different rationales for the continuing proliferation of aid modalities. Some donors (including Sida) argue that to promote “ownership and alignment”, the only way is to carry out specific projects or programmes in Vietnam (for example, Chia Se has promoted the ownership of the local levels, especially in empowering villagers and communes in the project areas). Others argue that they are able to use “more of the national system” but that it is not necessary to use a budget support modality, while a third group (like the World Bank, DFID and Danida) assert the need to move away from project modalities towards budget support. This latter group has supported P135-2 through targeted budget support, and Danida support to Agriculture and Rural Development (ARD) through sector budget support. The table below shows a selection of donor interventions in rural development, comparing their aid modalities with the Chia Se programme.

The table shows that a number of donors use a more traditional project-type modality, for example NMPRP and Chia Se that have a Project Management Unit (PMU) system and a separate financial mechanism from that of the GoV system, stand-alone TA and use of donors guidelines and requirements (donors cost norms and instructions). In general, these projects have started prior to the Paris Declaration (PD) commitments and the HCS, though during implementation, donors and the GoV have attempted to incorporate in PD/HCS commitments with the promotion of local ownership, alignment and harmonisation with the recipient country. Chia Se for instance is not strictly a parallel PMU, as it makes significant use of the government cadre. There have also been attempts towards greater integration of management structures.

Several donor interventions occupy the middle ground of the ‘traditional – non-traditional’ spectrum, combining elements of both project-modalities and budget support arrangements in similar measure. Some of these interventions have been significantly re-formulated during their mid-term so as to reflect the changed donor priorities and ways of working. AusAID, for example, has adapted its approach significantly in recent years, particularly with regard to its RUDEP programme. Earlier phases of RUDEP were significantly ‘project-oriented’, but AusAID has moved in RUDEP Phase III to increased provincial government leadership and use of government systems, especially in implementation activities. While the new design can be classified as a form of targeted provincial budget support, with support to enhance the implementation of the government’s own P135 programme, RUDEP continues to offer a mix of programme modalities. For instance, with funding provided in parallel to regular government funds and with long-term stand-alone TA provided in the form of an Implementation Support Project (ISP) – a structure which AusAID views as an effective instrument to support capacity building and innovation.

In recent years, a number of donors have designed interventions that are closer to a ‘non-traditional’ modality. Typically these interventions are newly formulated and have not emerged through the re-formulation of an existing project or programme. IrishAid make widespread (but not exclusive) use of programmatic approaches in their aid interventions and their VOICE programme is based on a form of provincial targeted budget support. This design makes significant use of local government structures and systems. At the same time, the design also makes use of a number of project-type components and stand-alone TA (such as for M&E), with IrishAid issuing its own guidelines and oversight.

Overview of aid modalities in rural development, Vietnam

Project/ Programme	Donor(s)	Partner(s)	Year(s)	Value	Aim/Objective	Modality type
NMGRP	WB/DFID	MPI	2002–2007	US\$ 132.5 million	To increase income and well-being of the rural poor living in six northern mountain provinces.	Conventional WB project modality, except direct to six provinces (no central bank account), and commune-as-investor absorbed 15% of funds.
Chia Se programme	Sida	MPI and HG, YB & QT PPC	2003–2008	SEK 310 million	The over-all objective of the Programme is long-term poverty alleviation. The achievement of the over-all objective shall be manifested in four related areas: a) improved sustainable livelihoods, b) access and control over resources, c) equitable distribution of resources and benefits, and d) empowerment through effective capacity to communicate and to manage the resources.	Project/Programme-type modality at province with separate project management and financial mechanisms, separate donor requirements and guidelines and stand-alone TA, but it is partly integrated with GoV system (it involves some GoV staff)
RUDEP	AusAID	Quang Ngai PPC	Phase I & II (2001–2007); Phase III (2008–)	AUS\$ 33 million	To identify the content and approach for a programme that could sustainably address, among other objectives, poverty alleviation, rural development, governance, poverty reduction, improved strategic infrastructure and environmental protection.	RUDEP phase I & II (2001–2007) follow the programme type modality with parallel PMU and financial system and long term TA, but Phase III (2008–) of intervention hybrid comprising TBS at the provincial level but still using a long-term stand-alone TA component.
P135 II	WB-AusAID-Finida-IFAD-IA-DFID	45 provinces	2006–2010	US\$921.86 million	Radically accelerate production, promote an agro-ecomic structural shift in the direction of market-driven production; sustain improvement of spiritual and material living conditions of ethnic people in extremely difficult communes and villages, and narrow the development gap between ethnic groups and other regions. By 2010, basically there are no hunger-stricken households in the targeted areas and the number of poor households drops below 30% of the poverty line.	TBS modality, following the GoV guidelines and instructions, and using government system to implement.
VOICE	Irish Aid	Bac Kan PPC	2008–2010	Euro 2.9 million	To support local sustainable poverty reduction through further decentralisation of investment management to the commune and village level, while strengthening local government and empowering local people.	Provincial TBS and project-type modalities with significant use of government systems but following donor guidelines and with stand-alone TA component.
ARD	Danida	MARD /PPCs	2007–2012	DKK 230 million	To reduce rural poverty, especially among the ethnic minorities, through sustainable agricultural and rural development focusing on uplands.	SBS/TBS at provincial level using government systems, but with stand-alone TA component.

Danida has also been moving towards programmatic approaches in its agriculture sector support activities in recent years. ARD marks Danida's boldest step to-date in adopting a sector or Targeted Budget Support (TBS) modality at the provincial level. The intervention uses government systems, staff and structures to a significant degree. At the request of both the donor and GoV a number of project-oriented elements have remained, however, such as a PMU-type project structure, parallel funding arrangements for donor funds and stand-alone TA components.

Approaches to Identification, Design and Planning

To a large extent, the use of government systems in projects/programmes correlates with the type of modality used; with project-type instruments typically making less use of government systems for planning than a TBS-type instruments. The distinction is however not always straightforward, as most 'traditional' project-type interventions have been moving towards greater alignment with government systems in recent years. A number of TBS-type interventions also continue to display significant donor intervention, including the use of separate donor guidelines at the planning stage. Table 5 summarises these distinctions.

Identification and Design

Intervention	Donor(s)	Procedures for Identification, Design and Planning
NMPRP	WB/DfID	Overall identification and design led by WB and consultants in dialogue with GoV. Detailed planning and investment choices were, however, decentralised to GoV province, district and commune levels.
RUDEP	AusAID	Identification, design and planning of Phase I and II followed by donor guidelines but Phase III largely follow GoV procedures and are conducted by GoV staff. PPC and line departments now incorporate donor guidelines inherited from earlier phases of RUDEP (such as village level participatory planning) into their regular planning cycle. TA support provided to support this.
Chia Se	Sida	Identification, design and planning follow donor guidelines. The identification and design involved by many stakeholders (donor and GoV staff, consultants). The project planning is using the bottom-up approach but try to integrated this approach into regular GoV planning process at the project last year.
P135	WB, DFID, AusAID, Finida, IFAD, IA	Identification, design and planning follow GoV procedures and are conducted by GoV staff. Some donor TA support provided (for example to design a project logical framework), project annual planning is integrated into regular GoV planning activities.
VOICE	Irish Aid	Identification, design and planning follow donor guidelines and are conducted by GoV staff in accordance with the regular planning cycle. Capacity assessment by the donor during the design phase led to a requirement for TA support and a separate Board of Implementation and Management to enhance programme coordination.
ARD	Danida	Mix of donor and GoV procedures and guidelines used for identification, design and planning. Planning conducted by GoV staff but with TA support and additional guidelines from the donor, particularly with regard to village-level participatory planning. Initial programme scoping work organized by the donor with provincial stakeholders.

Of above six interventions, Chia Se and the World Bank's NMPRP rely most on donor guidelines and resources in planning, while AusAID's RUDEP III and Danida ARD follow TBS-type programmes that emphasise the use of government systems over donor procedures (but continue to follow donor guidelines).

Management Structures

Of the projects mentioned previously, they all continue to display elements of intervention-specific PMU structures. The reasons for this are varied, including reasons specific to the targeted sector, reasons resulting from issues of coordination and government capacity, and reasons relating to modality-preferences on the part of GoV among others.

The World Bank project, Danida ARD and Chia Se are interventions that use explicit project-specific PMU management structures (typically within a provincial Department). Danida ARD is an example of TBS-type instrument which, in its management structures, maintains elements of a more traditional modality. Programme implementation is managed, at the central level, by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) and, at the provincial level, by Departments of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARDs). Within each DARD there is a steering committee and a PMU to coordinate and oversee implementation at the sub-provincial level and in each district there are coordination committees. Danida ARD is similar to Chia se with 4 projects: a National Project and three Provincial Projects, with the National Project managed by National Project Secretariat and consisting of SPMUs from MPI, MARD, MoF, MOLISA and GSO.

IrishAid VOICE and AusAID RUDEP also align with existing GoV PMU structures (by “piggy-backing” on the P135-2 PMU). These structures, to an extent resemble PMU-type arrangements, comprising a programme-specific provincial steering committee, commune development boards and village development teams. They are however ‘programmatic’ to the extent that they are typical of the structures established by government on a national basis to support the long-term objectives of P135-2, and are integrated into the existing government work plans of regular government departments, as well as using government structures, procedures and resources for programme implementation.

At IrishAid’s request, however, the province established a Board of Implementation and Management (BIM) to improve coordination between responsible departments. The BIM is programme-specific and bares a surface resemblance to more traditional PMUs, but unlike these structures it is not directly responsible for carrying out implementation activities; these tasks are delegated to sub-provincial levels. The BIM is also heavily province-led with limited direct involvement from IrishAid. IrishAid provides one or two representatives to the BIM and acts in a supervisory role providing advice and oversight of proposals raised by the BIM.

The main exception to this is the Implementation Support Project (ISP – so called for RUDEP Phase III) PMU, a stand-alone structure within the provincial DPI which aims to build local government capacity and systems to enhance implementation of P135-2. For the donor, this arrangement combines a more widespread and thorough use of government management structures for implementation with a stand-alone PMU component to provide TA and long-term capacity building support, enables the programme to achieve the objectives of increased government ownership, alignment and sustainability on the one hand, while providing a mechanism by which it can achieve the aims of innovation and improvements to government systems and capacity on the other.

The Flow of Funds and Disbursement

Finance for all the projects mentioned have been through financial contributions of donors and GoV. Donors typically provide 80%–90% of total budgets, while GoV contributes the balance as counterpart funds. P135-2 is an exception, where the GoV finances 72% of the total programme budget. For Chia Se, GoV contributes 10% of the total Swedish contribution in cash, and a further 5% of the total Swedish contribution in kind, equivalent to 13% of total programme budget.

Chia Se uses a Bank accounts and replenishing mechanism for cash flow and disbursement based on the approval plans and budgets. Normally Sida transfers twice a year (first tranche for using funds of 1st and 2nd Quarters, second tranche for 3rd and 4th Quarters). But financial disbursement and management of Chia Se have been more decentralised into district level. Sida channels the funds directly to each levels (national, provincial and district) by each level's requests. For example, District PMUs are able to request their funds directly from Sida, but not through the approval of the provincial or national level. The fund has been directly transferred to district by Sida following the approval plans and budgets.

Procurement Methods

Sound procurement policies and practices reduce corruption and increase the efficiency and effectiveness of interventions. Donors have traditionally specified their own procurement policies and practices for their projects, but now some are applying the GoV procurement law and others have chosen a mixture of GoV procurement procedures with "safeguards".

The table below shows the procurement approaches adopted by the different interventions. There are three different types of main procurement procedures. The first is when donors introduce their own procurement procedure (e.g. WB procurement guidelines as applied to NMPRP). The second donor group, which includes RUDEP3 and P135-2, is using the GoV procurement law and cost norms. The last group have selected a mixture of both donor and GoV procurement procedures which consists of Chia Se, VOICE and ARD SPS.

Overview of procurement procedures

Intervention	Donor(s)	Procurement procedure type
NMPRP	WB-DFID	WB procurement guideline ⁸⁵ , where it applies many procurement methods: the International Competitive Bidding, Limited International Bidding, National Competitive Bidding, Shopping (with three quotations requirements), Direct Contracting, Community Participation in Procurement etc, but the competitive procurement is encouraged. The selection and employment's consultant is recruited by some specific procurement procedures: Quality and Cost-Based Selection (QCBS), Quality-Based Selection (QBS), Least-cost Selection, Single-Source Selection (SSS) etc. The Bank uses no objection letter system for procurement plan.
Chia Se	Sida	Both donor/government procurement guidelines/procedures. Used the GoV and EU/UN cost norms for expenditure. Stand – alone TA recruited by International Competitive Bidding. Applied the "no objection letter" system (Sida).
RUDEP III	AusAid	GoV procurement procedure and cost norms but long term stand-alone TA have been procured following Ausaid Procurement Guidelines: International Competitive Bidding.
P135-II	WB, DFID, AusAID, Finida, IFAD, IA	GoV procurement procedure and cost norms
VOICE	IrishAid	GoV procurement law and cost norm but allow to apply EU/UN cost norm for international TA procurement
ARD SPS	Danida	Central component: EU/UN cost norm for international TA procurement and oversee training/study tours etc., Provincial component: GoV procurement law and cost norm

⁸⁵ <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/PROJECTS/PROCUREMENT/0,,contentMDK:50002392~pagePK:84269~piPK:60001558~theSitePK:84266,00.html>

Reporting and M&E

Donors frequently cite regular government procedures for M&E, and to a lesser extent reporting, as being particularly weak in Vietnam. Under the Paris Declaration, donors and partner governments have jointly agreed to develop results-oriented reporting and assessment frameworks and have agreed to integrate a number of manageable indicators into these frameworks for which data are cost-effectively available.

In general, donors express concern about the limited extent of output and outcome-orientation in GoV procedures for reporting and M&E. Regular GoV procedures are typically focused on tracking project and programme inputs rather than the outputs, outcomes and broader impacts of these interventions. Donors typically face a choice between compromising on good international practice, and making the GoV system meet new and harder M&E standards (just for donor-supported interventions). For donors, this should require reflection about the difference between a good or *high quality* M&E system, and one that is adequate or *sufficient* (such as for own-country reporting requirements). Typically, however, this is not done and instead the onus is thrust upon the GoV to move towards some vaguely specified international “good practice”.

Monitoring and evaluation of different donor interventions

Intervention	Donor(s)	Procedures for Reporting, Monitoring and Evaluation
NMPRP	WB/DfID	Reporting and M&E follow WB specifications, including MIS and baseline household survey. Stand alone TA inputs support CPMU and six provincial PMUs.
Chia Se	Sida	Reporting, Monitoring and Evaluation follow both donor/GoV guidelines and standard formats. M&E conducted by project PPMU/DPMU staff. Moving toward to integrate into government system.
RUDEP	AusAid	Reporting, monitoring and evaluation follow GoV procedures coordinated by the implementing department and People’s Councils. M&E conducted by GoV staff. Separate ex-post impact evaluation commissioned by donor.
P135	WB, DFID, Ausaid, Finida, IFAD, IA	Reporting, monitoring and evaluation follow GoV procedures. Reporting and M&E conducted by government staff.
VOICE	Irish Aid	Reporting, monitoring and evaluation follow GoV guidelines and are coordinated by the executing department and People’s Councils. M&E conducted by GoV staff. Additional on-going oversight provided by a Board of Implementation and Management.
ARD	Danida	Combination of donor and GoV procedures for reporting, monitoring and evaluation. Central level PMU under MARD follows GoV frameworks but with additional donor criteria to enhance output-orientation of M&E for central components. Province-level components expected to follow GoV procedures. All M&E conducted by GoV staff.

The World Bank interventions use donor-specified guidelines for reporting and M&E. The other budget support interventions rely primarily on GoV procedures for reporting and M&E, with varying degrees of assistance and “add-ons”. Within VOICE, reporting and M&E is the shared responsibility of the executing department and the People’s Councils and reports are produced in line with existing P135-2 procedures, and an agreed budget has been allocated to fund local consulting company inputs to assist M&E design and report drafting. In Chia Se and Danida ARD, reporting and M&E are expected to follow a combination of government procedures and donor-issued guidelines.

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WORKING BEYOND THE GRASSROOTS: AN EVALUATION OF THE CHIA SE POVERTY ALLEVIATION PROGRAMME 2003 TO 2008

By working at village level (i.e. beyond the lowest tier of the administrative system), the Chia Se programme has demonstrated that with the right support, investments can be decentralised and used to empower local people. While there have been shortcomings in the design and management of the programme, many stakeholders and beneficiaries see clear benefits from the approach. Chia Se could be said to be at the forefront of rural development in Vietnam with its pro-poor orientation and decentralisation to the village level, but less innovative in terms of management and its aid modality – a mixture of experimental and conventional. The approach of Chia Se is considered to be well suited to address persistent poverty in Vietnam. The design process of Chia Se is seen as innovative within the Vietnamese context; using workshops at the provincial level to design the programme from the bottom-up, based on local demands.

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