

Decentralized Development Planning

A regional seminar in 2003 with attendance of planning departments from 9 provinces and the Ministry of Planning and Investment was the starting point of a nationwide “VDP Network”, which stimulated testing and development in donor assisted provinces and has influenced several revisions of the national legislation on decentralized planning.

The component Decentralized Development Planning has two major aspects:

- participatory village development planning, which identifies development objectives and priorities of villagers, which are then reflected in the annual Village- and Commune Development Plan (VDP / CDP).
- mechanisms and processes, which ensure that a VDP / CDP is budgeted through integration in district and province Socio-Economic Development Plans (SEDP), or is budgeted through donor funds.

The DDP provides an opportunity for people (including ethnic minorities) to contribute with their ideas, needs and own resources to planning and plan implementation. At commune level, village plans are aggregated, and commune plans are then aggregated at district level. The process of aggregation and harmonization at each administrative level happens in a participatory manner and is being steered by the Peoples Committee (PC). During these processes, priorities of villages are being scanned against available budgets for services and infrastructure development.

Communes are the lowest formal administrate level in Vietnam. The former conventional commune planning and budgeting approach did not match the needs and concerns of people to the resources delivered from government. The former planning has now been officially changed to “Village and Commune Development Planning” (VDP-CDP).

The Product DDP in RDDDL Dak Lak

In Dak Lak the integration of VDP- CDP into Socio-Economic Development Plans was strongly demanded by the provincial DPI. Every 5 years an extensive village development planning process over a time period of 3 days is supported by the commune, and integrated into the socio-economic development plans at commune and district level as a consolidated VDP / CDP. In between the 5 years an annual update is being organized by the commune in each village with a one day planning exercise.

The initial introduction of the VDP / CDP process and its integration into SEDP in 2 districts was rolled out to the other districts of the province towards the end of the project, after the Province PC had issued the Decision 2134 for the province wide application. The approach in Dak Lak towards integrating village based needs and concerns into commune-, district- and provincial SEDP is felt a marked difference to the conventional approach of planning and budgeting. Particularly ethnic minority groups have now a means to participate not only in planning, but also in implementation and monitoring of their own contributions and the contributions from government. About 60% of items prioritized by villagers in regard to services and infrastructure are covered by budgets from government.

DANIDA and ADB have started using DDP concepts and practical trainings after a coordination meeting on bottom up planning in Dak Lak province. DPI ensures that training courses for decentralized participatory development planning are an integral part of regular in-service training for planning and administration staff at district and province level.

Capacity Development

Participatory decentralized development planning in Dak Lak province was successfully introduced and institutionalized. Most of the project interventions targeted raising capacities of people and offices at all levels of the planning and budgeting systems in the province.

The introduction of the new planning method soon generated requirements for extension at planning offices at commune, district and province level. This ensured from the start a systematic demand oriented capacity building process.

After development and testing of training material along newly introduced techniques and procedures, upcoming requirements for training and facilitation were met with numerous courses on Training of Trainers (ToT) at district and province level, and courses on training of facilitation skills mostly at commune and village level. All training courses, which addressed knowledge and skills of people, as well as the creation of facilitation competences, incorporated improved communication at and between the various levels of administration. An important aspect was the creation of specific skills for communes with a significant number of ethnic minorities’ groups.

Training courses for decentralized development planning have become a regular part of in-service training for administration and planning staff in the province. As a result, district and commune staff of the Peoples Committee and the DPI is able to monitor the application of VDP / CDP in district SEDP in terms of quality, respective budget flows and replication. The District PC in all districts link decentralized budget planning and allocation with VDP / DCP. Horizontal communication and awareness raising was further supported through visits and study tours across and beyond the province.

Participatory decentralized development planning has become an integral part of the government system throughout the province. Government and other donors from outside the province learned from the experiences and achievements of Dak Lak province through study tours. RDDDL always supported those interventions with facilitation, making appointments, and designing visitors’ programs. DDP became a regular topic in communication with neighbor provinces, which generated a lively interaction on technical issues, procedures and necessary capacities to be built, that generated an important learning ground for further mutual learning and improvements. Government staff, which is involved in DDP at commune and district level, receives greater appreciation by villages and experience participatory planning as an added value to the relationship with villagers.

Efficiency

The VDP / CDP integration into SEDP has reached the state of assured institutional anchoring and roll out. There are also signs that government would further add on quality, but that process has not yet started. Important results achieved under product development and product roll out include

- Public Investments meet development demands of villagers with an enhanced role of villagers in planning for budget utilization
- Higher effectiveness of government steered plan implementation
- Rising participation, self-determination and own investment by villagers
- Rising monitoring quality through villagers and government at all administrative levels

The new approach was approved by the provincial government (PPC) as standard planning procedure and integrated into the regular provincial training programs. Since 2009, the new approach has been applied in 100 % of the communes of the province, whereby public budgets are provided for at least 40% of the prioritized activities by villagers. Government through the provincial DPI took full responsibility and ownership, and decision making by the DPI was always felt professional and supportive to a speedy development and utilization of the product. On the investment side comparatively little had to be contributed by the project. Initially, it took substantial time and resources to develop the product, since it needed adaptation in several rounds. The first draft product was too complex and expensive for government for wider application. But roll out and up-scaling by government happened largely without significant contributions from the German partner.



Lessons Learned from RDDDL in Dak Lak



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Impact

There are clear indications that during the project life time overall poverty in the province has been substantially reduced and the socio-economic situation in the province has improved. By 2009, the overall poverty rates in the province could be reduced from 18% to 13%. The decision of provincial government in 2007 for roll out the instrument of integrated participatory decentralized development planning was a major factor to this end. It facilitated better utilization of financial means from National Targeted Programs 132, 135 and 134 at district level, which in turn increased the impact on people's livelihood with the VDP-CDP incorporation into District SEDP.

Also, the socio-political situation has changed. Particularly poor ethnic minority groups developed a sense of belonging to decision making processes and feel being supported for their incorporation into government development programs. This helps their integration into mainstream development and adds to an improved overall security in the province. Horizontal communication flows between villagers and villages are increasing through meetings and producers' networks.

Sharing and learning cycles with DANIDA, ADB, and others in terms of concept development and capacity building was an important factor for leveraging the project achievements. Interaction with other donors in Dak Lak province was governed by a strong demand from national level that other donors in Dak Lak follow the procedures developed by RDDDL. The revision of planning guidelines at national level and to strategies for making better use of National Targeted Programs 134 and 135 on the basis of improved consolidated planning documents at district level are important complementary outputs. The contributions from RDDDL to those changes are clearly given: The focus on provision of communication opportunities and capacity development strategies for partners and partner structures at all levels opened new channels and modalities for learning. Throughout the three phases the contributions from the project aimed at higher effectiveness of government steered participatory planning and plan implementation. On the other hand mechanisms, structural changes, and procedures for rising participation and investments by villagers were strongly supported. The strategic orientation of the project along with steering competences of the DPI contributed to the important harmonization of bottom up planning procedures with centrally organized budget flows. It was clear to all partners from the beginning that long term benefits can only be assured if the bottom up procedure meets with sufficient budgets, including the contribution from local people.

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