

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 Viet Nam. 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).

Product DDP in SMNR-CV, Quang Binh

The integration of the extensive VDP / CDP into the conventional SEDP was not feasible due to its demands on scarce government budgets. The VDP / CDP method, therefore, was simplified and aligned with the financial means of the district and commune authorities. For streamlining and cost-saving the participatory planning exercise was shifted from the village to the commune level with the participation of village representatives. This version of VDP / CDP integration into the SEDP was named “Participatory Socio-economic Development Planning” (PSEDP), and is no longer dependent on funds from outside government budgets.

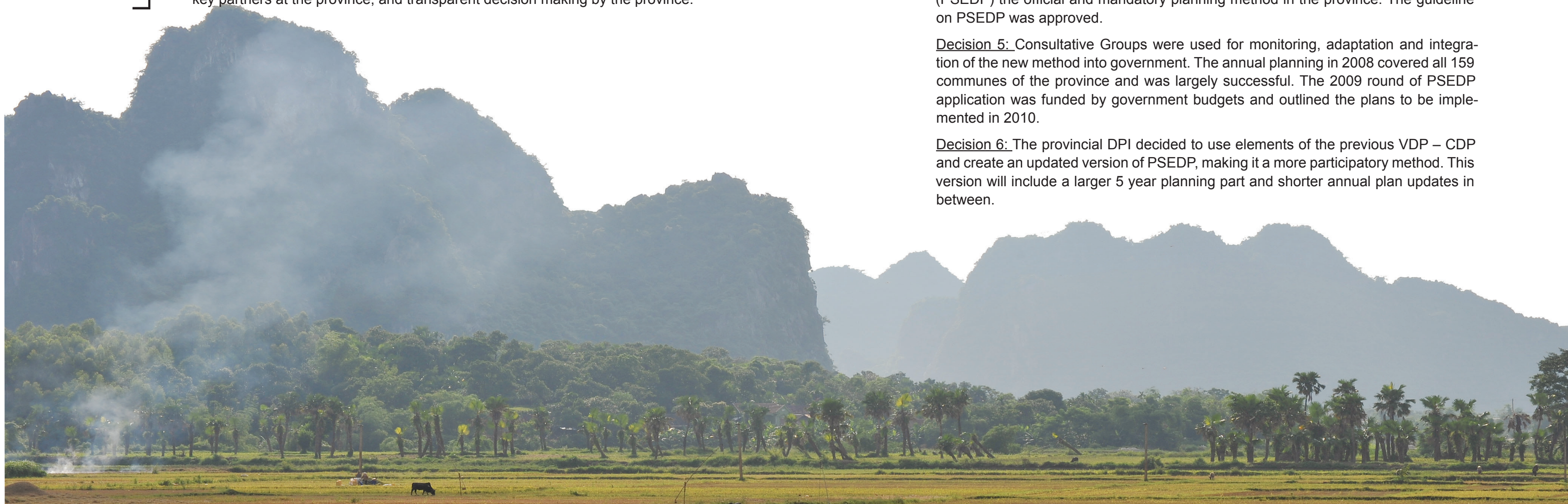
The revised method PSEDP was approved by the Provincial People’s Committee in 2007 and, after an extensive piloting phase, used for all communes of the province in 2008 along official public guidelines, and in 2009 with financial resources only from the public sector. Both, the more elaborate donor dependent VDP / CDP and the partner integrated PSEDP are felt as a decisive difference to the conventional top down planning approach. The partner integrated PSEDP approach, though much slimmer, suffices the requirements for mobilizing local people’s contributions and directing government’s resource flows. Approximately 60 % of peoples’ priorities are being addressed with government funding. The VDP – CDP approach is being used by other donor funded large scale projects in the province, such as ADB, IFAD, and a number of NGOs. Government would, on the long run, also need a more profound and elaborate village planning exercise once in 5 years.

Flexibility

Compared with the conventional top down planning procedures, the initial VDP – CDP approach, though cumbersome for government structures, was rather innovative in terms of:

- Development of planning contents based on needs by people instead of needs by the government system
- Aggregation of planning contents from the bottom to the top instead of dissemination from top to bottom
- Involving the level of villages into the planning process, which are not part of the administrative system
- Adapting budget allocations to established plans instead of adapting plans to existing budget allocations

The dilemma of integrating an innovative and relatively costly approach into a rather rigid and financially poorly equipped government machinery became obvious soon. At this point, the project was left with 2 options: either to bury the approach as non feasible and leave further utilization to donor funded projects, or to radically change and adapt the approach to a feasible shape, which meant sacrifices in terms of quality, standards and expected impact. The project organized institutional engineering through delegating and resourcing necessary negotiations to political processes “behind the curtain”: the installation and support of a Consultative Group of key persons from partner institutions. This was a decisive step and vehicle for smoothing the path to institutionalization without using official procedures. Sacrificed levels of quality and innovation by the project opened up potentials for ownership and scaling up through government, a process, which again was capacitated, monitored and resourced by the project. That in turn generated a desire by government for higher effectiveness and impact. Important during the course was a trustful and collegial relationship with key partners at the province, and transparent decision making by the province.



Effectiveness

The project developed initially an elaborate approach to a village based participatory bottom up planning system, which was overly detailed, time consuming, and expensive for government to be integrated into the conventional SEDP. Through various stages of learning and adaptation for higher effectiveness the project eventually contributed successfully to the development and province wide application of the provincial guideline on PSEDP.

Decision 1: The VDP-CDP method had been introduced and implemented by the project on a limited scale. An interprovincial workshop in 2004 generated the decision of the Provincial PCs in Quang Binh and other 2 provinces to establish “Provincial VDP Working Groups”, which were to implement participatory planning exercises based on the VDP-CDP method.

Decision 2: The pilot implementation of VDP – CDP during 2005-2006 covered all communes in selected pilot districts of Quang Binh (more than 500 villages). An assessment of the VDP-CDP method in the beginning of 2007 concluded that the full integration of the VDP-CDP method into the conventional SEDP could realistically not be expected.

Decision 3: The provincial government decided to align participatory decentralized development planning methods with the administrative requirements and financial means of the provincial DPI, district and commune authorities. The new method was labeled “Participatory Socio-economic Development Planning” (PSEDP). The PSEDP was applied in the planning cycle of 2007 on a larger scale in all communes in 4 districts.

Decision 4: The project supported the provincial DPI with further capacity development measures, tight monitoring, and financial contributions for testing and wider application. In 2008, the Provincial PC of Quang Binh declared “Participatory SEDP” (PSEDP) the official and mandatory planning method in the province. The guideline on PSEDP was approved.

Decision 5: Consultative Groups were used for monitoring, adaptation and integration of the new method into government. The annual planning in 2008 covered all 159 communes of the province and was largely successful. The 2009 round of PSEDP application was funded by government budgets and outlined the plans to be implemented in 2010.

Decision 6: The provincial DPI decided to use elements of the previous VDP – CDP and create an updated version of PSEDP, making it a more participatory method. This version will include a larger 5 year planning part and shorter annual plan updates in between.



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Lessons Learned from SMNR-CV Quang Binh

Relevance and Sustainability

The provincial DPI took the opportunity provided by the project to fully use available resources for the development and institutionalization of the PSEDP approach along available government views, resources and development objectives.

The institutional sustainability of the approach PSEDP, including scaling up processes at provincial, regional and national level through government is apparent by

- The issuing of provincial guidelines on PSEDP by the Provincial PC in 2008
- The application of the PSEDP approach in all 159 communes if the province in 2008 and in 2009 without financial support from the project
- The ongoing revision the national law on planning by MPI with inputs from Quang Binh province

The provincial DPI is aware that long term benefits from participatory planning are only assured if the bottom up procedure meets with sufficient budgets. In this regard, DPI manages the resource flows from available National Targeted Programs at district level for different aspects of rural development, and monitors that their utilization is integrated into the PSEDP. An important issue here is higher transparency about available funding for villagers and the commune planning division at the time of plan establishment at lower levels. The District is aware of those National Targeted Programs and can plan their utilization at the time of balancing expected costs of aggregated commune PSEDPs at district level.

Participatory planning opens up new communication channels for people. The administration is aware, that two way communication is key to the necessary awareness of priorities and competences of village people and thus to a more effective and sustainable use of public resources. The initiated processes of higher transparency generate their own momentum towards peoples' empowerment to voice their concerns and know their rights.

The process of involving people in decision making procedures will further develop in quality. The DPI has started action towards enriching the slim and reduced participation of village people in PSEDP by means of introducing a more elaborate VDP – CDP process every 5 years, which would involve the coordinated inputs from mass organizations, associations, local people, and local authorities. Additional requirements would include more ToT courses and resource persons for coaching staff during the aggregation processes at district and province level.

Publisher

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