

## Component Participatory Agricultural Extension

Traditionally, the agricultural extension system in Viet Nam has been based on a supply oriented top down approach with very little room to adapt extension messages to specific physical, socio-cultural, or market conditions of local stakeholders. The conventional system is based on the 2 principles: transfer of advanced technologies, the definition of which was left to government officers, and the promotion of key farmers, who rarely became models for the larger farming community.

In 2004 a national demand for good practices in approaches to participatory agricultural extension and the need for advanced techniques for market integrated agricultural production generated the development of Participatory Agriculture Extension Methods (PAE) in Quang Bin and Dak Lak provinces with the help of GTC. Today it is the official approach for agricultural extension throughout the provinces. PAE is defined as an approach, which mobilizes farmers' maximal active participation and ownership in decision making processes from the first phases of need assessment, plan preparation, and activity implementation to the final stage of monitoring and evaluation of extension activities. With PAE the role of farmers in agricultural extension change from being the receiver of extension messages to the partner and client in the extension system. PAE supports high adoption rates of agricultural innovation, which has been tested and verified for being effective in terms of increased productivity and higher income of farmers.

### Product PAE in SMNR-CV, Quang Binh Province

PAE is officially acknowledged and was institutionalized by DARD Quang Binh in 2008 as the major extension approach of the province. The provincial Agriculture and Fishery Extension Center (PAFEC) is responsible for the establishment process of PAE. SMNR-CV initiated and established a Provincial Agricultural Consultative Group (PACG), which was mandated by the provincial government. The PACG is doing the innovative part, and was the driving force for getting PAE to the status of an official provincial agriculture extension approach. Final decisions were taken by the director of DARD. PAE is understood and practiced as a flexible response by the public agriculture extension system to farmers' requirements and resources. SMNR-CV produced a series of practical guidelines and technical training modules, which were published by DARD as the guiding training documents for the province. Field models became simple trials, which can be replicated by the farmers' own means, and are integrated as demonstration plots into technical trainings. SMNR-CV has exercised capacity development for the entire provincial agricultural extension system, including all districts and communes, so that PAE has become a provincial system. PAE has also in-built voluntary contributions from farmers in terms of time and capital, which is initially not easily understood when people are still used to the conventional extension system, which was based on instructions and subsidies.

For a successful application of PAE, the implementation process is driven by the motivation and initiatives of local people. Their collaboration and coordination with government extension staff encourages the process of joint learning. Farmers themselves can become trainers, which further raises the efficiency of PAE. Farmers have realized the importance of the new roles agricultural extension has taken and the positive impact of its work on their livelihood. PAE is being discussed also in neighboring provinces, a process, which has contributed to influence national level discussions and policy formulation.

## Capacity Development

Raising capacities of people: Extension officers from the provincial level down to commune level have been trained and upgraded with managerial and technical skills with the main focus on the flexible adoption of PAE principles and methodologies. This capacity building happened through 3 different trainings: Training of master trainers, ToT and training of key farmers as trainers. This was the major training on the job in field days.

The systems approach: PAE can be described as a basket of integrated elements. The core element is the agricultural model approach, which is based on farmers' needs and capacities, and which is suitable for local practices and markets. Models are developed and further extended by farmers, who in turn get institutional and professional support from CEWs. CEWs are the backbone and sit at the lowest level of a provincial extension set-up, which is headed by PAFEC and generates knowledge and innovations through ongoing monitoring, two-way communication and networks. The systems approach in the implementation of PAE from village to provincial levels is both: a condition for its success and an outcome in terms of practical achievements at grassroots level. The inbuilt generation of extension innovations through PAE requires and produces changes in the mindset and perception of leaders in the entire agricultural institution DARD. The required change of mindsets is huge: a change from instructions and control to listening and facilitation.

With better competence of grassroots extension workers, the quality of the overall extension service has increasingly improved. At the level of district staff the initial capacity enhancement has generated a situation, in which over 90% of agricultural extension staff organize trainings for themselves based on topics produced by the system. The management is motivated and supportive to practical application, learning and further improvement of the method for wider application.

Frequent transfer of extension and managerial staff causes constraints to the improvement of systems and processes. Transfers can partly be balanced by on the job training and coaching. Apart from formal training courses, coaching has to happen through a number of extension cycles. Only repeated application produces sufficient confidence and abilities to react flexibly to changing conditions.

## Impact

For reaching and measuring impact a decisive strategic input was an inbuilt results monitoring system. Farmers and government staff at all levels in the agricultural extension system start using qualitative impact indicators for measuring success. Before introduction of PAE only numbers had been used for activity and output monitoring.

SMNR-CV has, amongst other achievements, managed to generate following key impacts:

- Raising farmers' confidence and capacity in analyzing, evaluating and proper selecting technical solutions and modes of production matching their conditions,
- Improvement of communication systems contribution to farmers' knowledge building and farmers' capacity to deal with innovations and opportunities coming from outside,
- Improvement of farmers' ownership of processes dealing with innovation and ability to share new knowledge with the community,
- Raising farming communities' capacities in sustainable production,
- The government extension system has become responsive. Farmers started to trust in government ability to respond, which in turn stimulates their participation in extension programs.

Farmers have realized the changed role and increased impact of the revised extension set-up and see the effects on their livelihoods: PAE has improved efficiency and effectiveness of knowledge transfer, resulting in increased crops yields, land productivity, income for farmers, and more sustainable use and improved status of their natural resources. With the strategy of continuous capacity development as an integral part of PAE, and with the mechanism of slowly intensifying collaboration and cooperation between extension staff and farmers, farmers are able to adopt new appropriate technologies in agricultural production.





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### Lessons Learned from SMNR-CV Quang Binh

#### Relevance and Sustainability

Relevance to the policy of provincial and national levels has been maintained, if not increased, with the expansion and implementation of PAE in other provinces in the region. The development of competences of the interrelated system of extension workers and the government agricultural extension set-up started to generate additional energy for new learning and further improvement of professional capacities.

Sustainability of PAE is supported by the high level of relevance and the starting replication of its implementation. Models are being replicated based on farmers' available resources, new technologies are integrated into production practices, while the role of the public sector is changed to provision of information, guidance and coaching. At the same time, the application of PAE changes farmers' capacity to understand and apply correctly advanced farming techniques. Sustainability is achieved by the combination of several aspects:

- the approach of the extension system PAE results in changed mindsets of extension leaders and in a more efficient and effective knowledge transfer,
- developed capacities of the provincial public agricultural extension set-up and grassroots extension workers creates a system of continuous learning, generation of new knowledge and additional skills of extension officers and people,
- the challenge of necessary cost reduction might further motivate management and to seek for systems with less government and more private sector participation.
- PAE has created sufficient energy to be applied under changed conditions after termination of the project support.

The establishment of the Provincial Agriculture Extension Consultative Group (PACG) with representation from relevant provincial agricultural institutions and its effective counseling for DARD will stay as a key mechanism for PAE. The PACG will continue to mobilize the collective energy of relevant offices for the institutionalization of PAE into the provincial extension system. The PACG will continue to introduce new elements to PAE and transport further improvements of participatory approaches into the agricultural extension system. The ability of PAE, to respond to a changed environment is one of the integral properties of the system, and will stay as a precondition and result of its effectiveness and sustainability.

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