The Social Forestry Support Programme, Vietnam 1994-2002

Capitalisation of 8 years of experiences

Hanoi, July 2003

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CPRGS	Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy
DARD	Department of Agriculture and Rural Development
ETSP	Extension and Training Support Project
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations
FDS	Forestry Development Strategy
FMLG	Forest Management Learning Group
FSSP	Forestry Sector Support Programme
HRD	Human Resource Development
ICRAF	International Centre for Research in Agroforestry
LCTM	Learner-Centred Teaching Methods
LWRM	Land and Water Resource Management
MARD	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development
MoET	Ministry of Education and Training
NISF	National Institute for Soils and Fertilisers
PCD	Participatory Curriculum Development
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
PTD	Participatory Technology Development
RECOFTC	Regional Community Forestry Training Centre
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SEANAFE	South East Asia Network for Agroforestry Education
SFSP	Social Forestry Support Programme
SFTC	Social Forestry Training Centre
SFTN	Social Forestry Training Network
UNDCP	United Nations Drugs Control Programme
WFP	World Food Programme
WPI	Working Partner Institution
XMFU	Xuan Mai Forestry University

P ham Thanh Dong is a farmer, making his living with his family in Ca Mau in the Mekong Delta of southern Vietnam. Hoang Huu Cai is a teacher at the University of Agriculture and Forestry, Thu Duc, Ho Chi Minh City. Together they have recently been involved in a process of participatory technology development in which they developed thinning methods to improve the productivity of mangrove and the living conditions of shrimps

Mangrove and shrimp ponds in Ca Mau. (left) Extensionist Ly (left) supporting the learning of innovative farming practices in Hoa Binh province. (right)

N guyen Hong Ly works in the Hoa Binh Extension Centre, about 70km west of Hanoi. Together with her extensionist husband Nguyen Truong Giang and other colleagues, she has helped farmers in Dup village to introduce a system of farmer-to-farmer training, which has enabled them to pass on their learnt knowledge and skills to others. She describes this work as "giving the farmer a fishing rod"; farmers are being empowered to plan and develop their own communities. In Dup village, farmers have expanded production of a non-timber forest product called the "wood-ear". By improving their livelihoods from sustainable forest management activities, farmers realise the importance of forests and the need for conservation.

D r. Bao Huy is Vice-Dean of the Agriculture and Forestry Faculty of Tay Nguyen University in the Central Highlands of Vietnam. Dr. Dinh Duc Thuan is Director of the Social Forestry Training Centre at the Forestry University of Vietnam in Xuan Mai, near Hanoi. They have both been teachers for many years, but in the last ten years they have worked very closely with farmers, extensionists, researchers and local forest management institutions to develop new strategies which allow householders to manage forestlands in

Thuan and Huy (third and forth in the left) and other SFTN members. (left)

Dr. Tam (second on the right)supporting learning through field-based research. (right)

a sustainable way. Now they work together as members of the Social Forestry Training Network in Vietnam, which supports universities teaching forestry in Vietnam to develop and improve their curricula, and to use innovative methods of teaching and learning.

D r. Tran Thi Tam is Vice Director and a researcher with many years experience at the National Institute of Soils and Fertilisers, close to Hanoi. As a result of working with farmers, extensionists and university teachers in Vanh Village in Hoa Binh Province, she has helped farmers to understand the importance of controlling soil acidity when developing a system of intercropping hedgerows. The increases in food production have already led to a reduction in clearance of local forests.

What do all these people have in common, and what has brought them together?

A ll of them are engaged in what has become known in Vietnam as "social forestry". And, they have all been involved in collaborative activities sup-ported by the Social Forestry Support Programme (SFSP), which began in 1994, and ended in 2002. This brochure provides a brief guide to the SFSP, highlighting its history, the main outcomes achieved, the challenges faced and some important lessons learned regarding the process and approach of the programme.

THE INHERITANCE OF THE PAST AND A MOVE TOWARDS THE FUTURE

The history of Vietnam is fascinating, complex, and, certainly since the 1960s, familiar to people throughout the world. Following the military struggles of the 1960s and 1970s, the newly unified nation embarked on a journey informed by the guiding principles of Marxism-Leninism, and steered by the ideology of President Ho Chi Minh. By the mid-1980s, amidst a context of rapid economic growth in neighbouring countries in South East Asia, the Government began to explore ways of opening up the country to economic cooperation with other nations, whilst at the same time maintaining the socialist political ideology. A major shift in strategy arrived with the introduction of the *"doi moi"* (renovation) policies of the Government of Vietnam in 1986, which brought dramatic economic, political and social change to the whole country. All sectors of society and the economy have since been affected, with increasing emphasis placed on the market economy, decentralisation, democracy and co-operation. Vietnam is shifting gradually from a state-planned to a state-regulated market economy, applying multi-sectored economic development policies.

Deforestation: a serious problem in Vietnam for many years. Education could make a vital contribution to its reduction.

These wider policy reforms have had a profound impact on the whole area of natural resource management. Forestry, in particular, has become a key focus for improvement, in an effort to meet the challenges shown in the box below.

Challenges facing the forestry sector of Vietnam

■ 70% of the country consists of sloping highland areas (forest land is classified as land having more than a 25 degree slope, as well as where flat land is covered with trees) with very little good arable land outside the coastal strip and the Mekong Deltaa

■ a high population density of 200 persons/km^2 but an average of 0.10ha cultivable land per capital in forest land areas (compared with a world average of 0.97ha per capita)

■ national forest cover has increased (33.2% in 1999) but forest volume and quality has steadily decreased, in part due to illegal logging

■ of 19million ha classified as forestland, 10million are without forest ("bare hills"), mainly located in the northern upland areas of the country

■ tenure for forestland is less secure than for agricultural land where allocation has been more rapid and better coordinated

■ the loss of trees (biomass) for subsistence use is greater than for commercial exploitation due to high dependence of upland people on forest for their livelihoods

■ upland areas (with mainly forestland) are characterised by low living standards, ethnic diversity, increasing population pressure, shifting cultivation practices, poor infrastructure and risk-prone farming systems in newly occupied lands; soil degradation, erosion and flooding are common in many areas

(Figures from FSSP consolidated survey of the Vietnam forestry sector, 2000)

Recognising many of these problems and realising that action was needed urgently, the Government of Vietnam developed a concept in the early 1990s which would underpin future forest management activities. This concept became known as "social forestry", sometimes interpreted as "socialisation of forestry".

A farmer plants tree seedlings. Social forestry enables farmers to manage forest land and gain benefit for themselves and their communities.

MAKING THE MOVE – A NEW CONCEPT OF "SOCIAL FORESTRY" IN VIETNAM

Social (and community) forestry is a well-established concept in many countries, but in Vietnam it has taken on a very special meaning, influenced strongly by the political and social context of the nation. Until 1993, the management of forests and forest land fell directly or indirectly under governmental institutions. The disadvantages of such a management system - decrease of forest areas, unsustainable management practices, excessive forest exploitation, insufficient forest protection, inefficient processing - became quickly visible. Since the early 1990s, state-managed forestry began a shift towards "social forestry" (*lam nghiep xa hoi*) or "people's forestry" (*lam nghiep nhan dan*) forestry of the people carried out by local people for their own benefit.

The State recognises that farmers, previously regarded as responsible for the destruction of the forests, are now the force that can best protect the forests and secure the best use of the forest land. This indicates an underlying political ethos, whereby the population is assigned a clear responsibility for strengthening and furthering the interests of the nation, in this case through sustainable forest land-use management. Social forestry therefore has strong implications for the political context of Vietnam.

Farmers cultivating newly allocated forest land. They need to supplement their existing knowledge and skills with alternative technologies to establish sustainable land use systems.

A key element of social forestry in Vietnam is the transfer of responsibility for land management from the State to the communities, with allocation of forest land on long term (50 years), cost-free and renewable leases to individual farmers, households or organisations. This allows the lease-holder to enjoy the full benefit obtained from the land. The allocation process has proceeded rapidly in some Provinces and often innovatively through participatory land-use planning processes. Management of certain types of forest (e.g. special use and protection forest) still remains with the State. Increasing emphasis is being placed on reforestation (e.g. through the Government's 5 Million Hectare Reforestation Programme, as well as on conservation of renewable natural resources. Special attention is being given to biodiversity conservation, reflecting the amazing wealth of flora and fauna still existing in parts of Vietnam's forests.

Considerable efforts have been made by the Government, with support from many donors, to improve the livelihoods of people living in upland areas where most forestland is located. In addition to land allocation, these have included:

■ encouraging the strengthening of household-based production units

■ making available new market opportunities (e.g. specialist timber, non-timber forest products) that have resulted primarily from increased spending power in urban (provincial and district) centres.

■ providing new sources of capital for investment in agriculture and forestry from donor programmes and the banking sector.

■ launching important programmes in rural infrastructure improvement

■ strengthening grassroots democracy in rural areas

■ rapidly increasing access to new forms of media, information and contacts with the wider world during the 1990s.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE SOCIAL FORESTRY APPROACH FOR HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT: FORESTRY TRAINING, EXTENSION AND RESEARCH

"We teach students to become foresters who know how to interact with the farmers, how to improve their livelihood and how to manage conflicts"

The evolution in approach and modality of forest land management in Vietnam have implications going beyond laws and policies. Large numbers of well-trained people are needed to fulfil the new institutional requirements of the forestry sector during this period of rapid change and development and to fit with the concept of shared responsibility between rural households, extension services, research institutes, universities and the Government. A new form of education and training for forestry is needed if an adequate human resource base is to be created.

University students take part in a participatory rural appraisal (PRA) activity in a village. Innovative teaching and learning approaches make a vital contribution to the improvement of forestry education.

The reorientation of agriculture and forestry practices in many countries has created a requirement for different sets of skills, knowledge and attitudes in those persons who must deal effectively with the demands from farmers and rural people, as well as from other interest groups such as environmentalists. In the case of forestry, training has until recently been strongly technology oriented. Now, an interdisciplinary capacity is needed by foresters and extensionists, encouraging an understanding of social principles and processes. Forestry training programmes need to become more relevant and flexible, diverse and yet well integrated. A wide range of stakeholders are emerging with different interests in what forestry education can and should achieve. The participation of different stakeholders in meaningful ways in forestry and in forestry education has become vital.

Participants at the Sa Pa workshop on Changing Learning and Education in Forestry get the message across about "walking the talk".

Changing Learning and Education in Forestry

In April 2000, SFSP co-organised a major international workshop entitled "Changing Learning and Education in Forestry" in Sa Pa, Viet Nam. The workshop gathered professionals from 19 countries concerned with the actual state of forestry education to examine the nature of the forestry profession, share experiences of educational change, explore mechanisms to bring about practical change in learning and education in forestry, and suggest strategies which might bring about real change. At the end of the workshop, all participants endorsed a joint statement which states that:

■   "given the multipurpose nature of forestry including social, economic and ecological services:

■   forests will only persist as a consequence of intentional collective action;

■   forestry institutions are increasingly challenged by changing demands, lack of funding and lack of perceived relevance to society; and there is now a prevailing shift in educational philosophy from teacher-centred to a learner-centred focus,

and believing that:

■   there should be a shift in emphasis from education of foresters towards education for the broader domain of forestry; and

■   forestry education at all levels should foster repeated critical examination of its context, values and informed actionthere is an urgent need to support fundamental reforms of educational institutions and curricula through involvement of all stakeholders inthe domain of forestry."

(Adapted from the "Sapa workshop agreement" – April 2000)

Bringing about real change in education is complex, however, and is always a long-term effort. The need for support for this change process was the basis of the Social Forestry Support Programme (SFSP), a cooperation programme between the Vietnamese Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, the Ministry of Education and Training and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, implemented by Helvetas, Swiss Association for International Cooperation.

MAIN ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE SFSP

*"Now the student is the centre of the learning process, there is active learning, with
conversation and discussion between teachers and learners."*

SFSP was a multi-faceted programme, evolving from an initial strategy of building capacity by linking training, research and extension activities, then becoming an integrated programme involving human resources development, generation of knowledge and information exchange. It was characterised by flexibility and a dynamic process. Excellent professional and personal relations were built up between counterparts, a very important factor for success in Vietnam.

Some key achievements of SFSP

As a result of SFSP, there is a core group of teachers, researchers and extensionists from the seven partner institutions and a wider circle of interested people around them who:

■ are committed to Social Forestry,

■ are using Participatory Curriculum Development (PCD), Learner Centred Teaching Methods (LCTM), and Participatory Technology Development (PTD) effectively,

■ are recognised as innovators in their Faculties, Universities and organisations,

■ have developed practical and conceptual competences in Social Forestry,

■ are utilising their competence in ground-breaking field activity that is improving the welfare of disadvantaged farmers and their families, and furthering the development of Social Forestry,

■ are being approached by Social Forestry Projects for consulting services,

■ are promoting Social Forestry as a promising future as professionals,and

■ have access to the international community through the Internet and through the SFSP website.

(Source : Final report of the Evaluation of SFSP Phase 2 – January 2002)

Inputs on curriculum development and teaching methods were well-received and acknowledged as priority areas by SFSP partners, particularly in response to the strategy of MARD for a reorientation of forestry teaching towards social forestry. Great interest was shown in training activities, the National Training Needs Assessment (1996) , the National Workshop on Social Forestry Training (1996), and ultimately the introduction of new social forestry teaching programmes (1998 – 2002). Seven subjects were remodelled through a collaborative process and taught in the 5 faculties. After teaching, these improved curricula were evaluated, and revised accordingly.

University forestry students learn actively in the classroom: learner-centred teaching methods have been widely appreciated in Vietnamese training institutions.

To support the actual teaching process, a network of lecturers/promoters of social forestry was established and is operational. The use of improved pedagogical methods by the lecturers teaching social forestry is gradually increasing, through:

- more active and participatory pedagogy (LCTM),
- use of teaching / learning materials (transparencies, flip-charts..)
- knowledge and skills in how to teach large classes
- increased importance of field-based learning
- preparation and use of specific case studies
- application of methods for analysing teaching skills, including lesson planning and classroom observation

New approaches and methodologies which support social forestry teaching, extension and research are understood and used by the 7 partners. The efforts on capacity building within the 7 partners have shown some promising results and other projects and institutions are now demanding consultancy services. Key advances have been made in:

- better understanding of the field realities

- improved communication and facilitation skills

- improved pedagogy

- more structured approach for research activities

- regular collaboration with the various extension agencies

- improved networking at a national and regional level

- improved capacity in English language

- enhanced access to international knowledge resources (literature, training, seminars, etc.)

The first results/findings/innovations of field based activities were made visible and documented, for example, in the following areas:

- land allocation and land use / management

- anti-erosion practices

- improved or innovative agroforestry practices

- forest management and forest improvement

- use of Non Timber Forest Products

- income generating activities (rattan, bamboo, durian, litchi, mushroom...)

Measuring the growth rate of a fruit tree as part of a field-based learning activity supported by SFSP. (left)
Sale of craft products made from rattan and bamboo can make an important contribution to the incomes of farmers living in forested areas. (right)

Farmers in Hoa Binh Province produce white mushrooms on straw during a PTD initiative supported by SFSP. Farmers and extensionists learned together and helped improve the livelihood of local households.

SFSP – a collaborative learning process

Field-based learning activities were an important part of SFSP. For example, farmers in Cai village Hoa Binh, prioritised an experiment on white mushroom cultivation on rice straw during a Participatory Technology Development (PTD) initiative supported by SFSP. The experiment aimed to find the correct techniques and seasons for white mushroom cultivation that are suitable to local conditions. Five households were involved and were provided with tools and materials not available in the village as well as support to purchase the mushroom spores. The farmers provided straw and shelters. The farmers with support from extensionists involved in SFSP compared techniques for mushroom production and discovered the most appropriate growing conditions that yielded the most appetising mushroom for their local environment. The experiment attracted much interest from the local authorities and farmers in and outside the village. Many visitors came to learn from the experiences of Cai village and extensionists have helped with the sharing of what has been learned with people in neighbouring villages in Hoa Binh. Farmers and extensionists have learned together and helped to improve the livelihoods of local households.

These results have been included progressively in the various curricula. Information about SFSP activities and approaches has also been made available in a regular programme newsletter and through the dedicated SFSP website, which is still an important resource.

Students, institutional stakeholders (researchers, extensionists, managers, policy makers) and targeted beneficiaries (farmers, community leaders and organisations) are aware of the change in approach to forestry education promoted by the SFSP and are appreciative of it. The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) and the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) recognise these achievements as highly significant and in line with their overall change programmes and policies. This makes the possibility of scaling up some key approaches of the programme more likely. The building of capacity of teachers, researchers and extensionists to support learning processes more effectively should have a long-term, positive impact on the development of the forestry sector in Vietnam. Also a number of "local networks" have been initiated around the field activities of the research/ training sites of the universities, and these will, in the future, provide a sound basis for working to support the development needs of local communities in the fields of agriculture and forestry.

Farmers in the Central Highlands of Vietnam contribute their own skills and knowledge of forestland management to the development of forestry training programmes.

The SFSP had two phases, from 1994-1997, and 1997-2002. The programme had its beginnings in 1991, when the Government of Vietnam, recognising the need for intense support to change in forestry education and training in Vietnam approached the Swiss Government to sponsor the creation of a training institution similar to the Regional Community Forestry Training Centre (RECOFTC), in Bangkok. SFSP was totally financed by the Swiss Government (SDC), with a total budget of CHF 14,340,000, and implemented by Helvetas, Swiss Association for International Cooperation. In Vietnam, the former Ministry of Forestry, now merged within the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD), was responsible for the project coordination

SFSP 1

The SFSP began officially in July 1994, with the following overall goal for the first phase:

> *To contribute to a sustainable and equitable management of forest and tree resources by equipping people with the required professional skills and knowedge.*

This goal gave SFSP its character as an education support programme within the forestry sector, rather than a forestry support project. The main development objectives of SFSP 1 were to:

- *broaden the knowledge bases of social forestry through research and faculty development*

- *integrate permanently the new knowledge into education and training through support to ongoing refresher training and curriculum development*

- *support the development of appropriate organisational arrangements enabling and supporting the achievement of the first two objectives*

Starting up in November 1994, the project was located 35km from Hanoi at Xuan Mai Forestry College, the main provider of forestry education and training under the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (in Vietnam, education and training institutions fall under a number of different Ministries, depending on the sector which they serve). By July 1995, MARD (formerly the Ministry of Forestry) created a new institution for the project to work with at the Forestry College; the Social Forestry Training Centre.

A training event at the Social Forestry Training Centre at Xuan Mai Forestry University; an important venue for a wide range of activities in SFSP. (left)
Mr Hai (second on the left), a forestry teacher at Xuan Mai Forestry University, demonstrates techniques on establishing a tree nursery to farmers in Hoa Binh Province. (right)

SFSP 1 was conceived with an action-research basis, and a relatively open framework. This allowed the project to explore possibilities and develop key areas of focus along the way. The framework that emerged was based around the classic three-way linkage of:
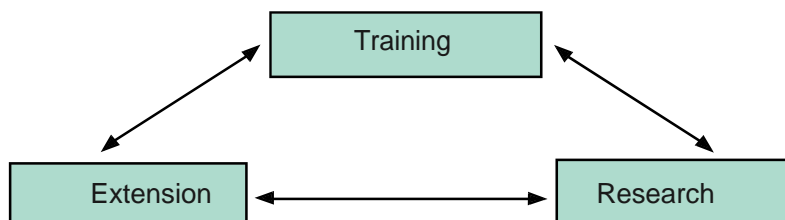
A "working group" for each of these areas was established at Xuan Mai. Members of these groups were drawn from faculties across the entire Forestry College. A very wide range of activities were carried out, some of which are described below.

By 1997, the demand for a second phase was clear, as was the recognition that this should build on the growing relationships between universities offering forestry

Map of Vietnam showing the location of the SFSP partner institutions
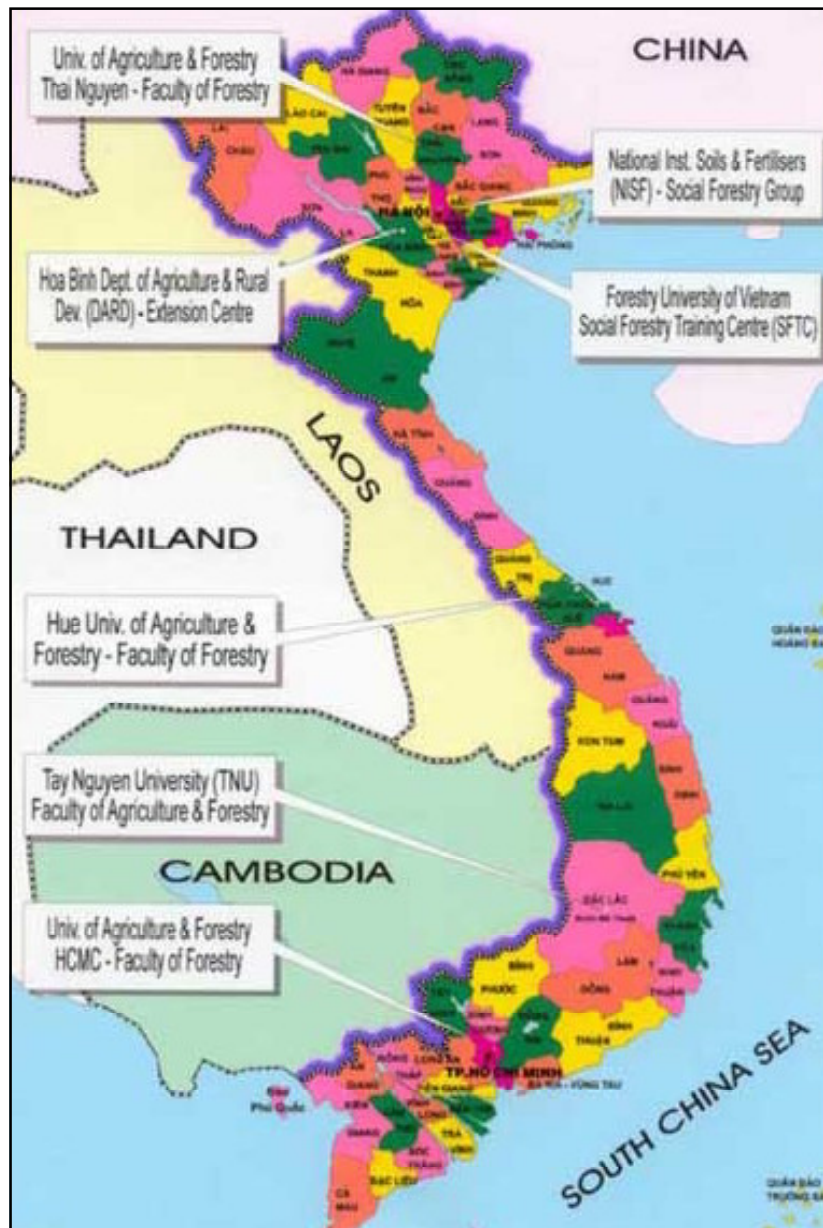
The programme had a nationwide coverage.

SFSP 2

SFSP 2 began in 1997, a four and a half year programme, which involved a significant expansion of the scope and scale of its activities. The new phase involved seven Working Partner Institutions (WPIs). Five of these were the tertiary level educational institutions offering degree courses in forestry that had collaborated in the formation of the Social Forestry Training Network during SFSP 1:

- Forestry University of Viet Nam (formerly Xuan Mai Forestry College)

- University of Agriculture and Forestry, Thu Duc, Ho Chi Minh City

- Thai Nguyen Agriculture and Forestry University, Thai Nguyen Province

- Tay Nguyen University, Dak Lak Province

- Hue Agriculture and Forestry University, Hue

In addition, and to ensure that the new education system would take into account the field reality, one national research centre, the National Institute for Soils and Fertilisers (NISF) and the provincial extension centre of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, Hoa Binh, were also supported. The intention was to create the necessary synergies between extension, research and training which had not been fully achieved during SFSP 1.

With the inclusion of four new university partners, all of which fall under the administration of the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) the coordination structure was different to that in SFSP 1.

The development objective (derived from government policy) of SFSP 2 was:

> *To establish social forestry, in order to have a more effective management of forest lands and renewable natural resources to upgrade the living standards of rural people.*

Organisation Structure SFSP-2

Government of Vietnam

Government of Switzerland

MPI   MoET   MARD
People's Committee Hoa Binh

SDC

PROGRAMME STEERING COMMITTEE

Implementing Agency HELVETAS

SFSP Support Unit CTA/CO

Social Forestry Training Center Forestry University of Vietnam

Dept. LWRM National Institute for Soils and Fertilizers NISF

Extension Center DARD Hoa Binh Province

NETWORK

Faculty of Forestry Thu Duc University

Faculty of Forestry Thai Nguyen University

Faculty of Forestry Tay Nguyen Universty

Faculty of Forestry Hue University

The SFSP coordination structure reflected the relationship between the programme and two Ministries with responsibility over university forestry education.

The SFSP 2 objective (1997 – 2001) was:

To develop an effective forestry training capacity which is responsive to the demands of implementing sustainable and participatory forest land management.

The specific objectives of SFSP 2 covered 3 main sectors:

■ Human Resources Development

The 7 WPIs have a nucleus of trained people who:

❖ have adjusted their professional responsibility to a changing policy environment

❖ work willingly with farmer-based and interdisciplinary approaches

❖ incorporate in their work social, economic and environmental concerns for sustainable management of renewable natural resources.

■ Generation Of Knowledge

Farmer-centred sustainable approaches and technologies are generated and adopted to make the management of forests and the management of agriculture more sustainable, particularly on sloping land.

■ Information Exchange

The collaborative working relations among the WPIs, especially for curriculum development, sharing / screening / analysis of information, and knowledge building, are strengthened and institutionalised.

SFSP partner representatives developing curricula using a participatory curriculum development process. SFSP helped teachers integrate knowledge generated through field-based learning activities into university forestry curricula.

A bridging phase…..

SFSP led to significant improvements in forestry education in Vietnam, but also faced many major challenges. Some expected results were not fully achieved, and some approaches still needed more time to really bear fruit. Consequently, a one-year "bridging phase" (January – December 2002) was added to SFSP2, which would incorporate some outstanding SFSP activities and also the planning of a new project which would build on the outcomes and lessons learned from SFSP. This planning was linked not only to the findings of an evaluation of SFSP but also to the emergence of a strong policy framework for forestry at a national level.

…..leading to a new project

The success of SFSP has led to the initiation of a new project, the Extension and Training Support Project for Forestry and Agriculture in the Uplands (ETSP), a further cooperation between MARD and SDC, also implemented by Helvetas. This new project, starting in January 2003, will build upon the achievements of SFSP. It will ensure that the capacities built in forestry education and training can be used to serve the emerging needs of people in rural areas for extension and training in agriculture and forestry. The objective of ETSP is to address more directly poverty alleviation in remote and disadvantaged areas of Viet Nam.

The SFSP involved a very wide range of activities throughout both phases, reflecting the complexity of the concept of social forestry, and the importance of building capacity, integrating both theory and practice. Although some support was given for materials and infrastructure, the majority of activities in SFSP 1 were related to human resource development, especially research and extension, curriculum development and teaching methods, networking and collaborations, and related capacity-building activities. Many of these activities continued in SFSP 2, but now seven partner institutions were involved. The range of activities became wider and even more complex, divided overall into three categories; human resource development, generation of knowledge, and information exchange.

HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES (HRD)

As well as supporting many specific HRD activities, SFSP 2 promoted a more strategic approach to HRD, through a complex organisational development process involving key representatives of the partner institutions. This continued throughout the duration of SFSP 2, and was intended to guide the identification, prioritisation and planning of specific activities. In general, many HRD activities were implemented by a combination of training/workshop events, followed by field-based learning activities in some chosen communes and villages, during which the core members of the program were exposed to "reality" together with local stakeholders. Very often the teachers could carry out the activities directly with their students and make joint learning experiences (for example through the integrated social forestry practicum). It was also important to coordinate joint SFSP activities effectively with their application at individual partner level.

A very wide range of training and experiential learning programmes were organised to meet the specific objective for HRD, including:

■ Intensive short training courses organised at WPI institutions

■ Intensive short courses organised centrally in Hanoi

■ Short courses outside Vietnam (e.g. RECOFTC, SEANAFE/ICRAF)

■ Conferences and workshops both inside and outside Vietnam

Members of SFSP partners institutions exchanging experiences with local people in a village in Bangladesh: study tours were a valuable feature of the learning process.

■ Study tours within Vietnam and outside the country (e.g. Nepal, Thailand, Philippines, China, Bangladesh).

The scale of training and workshops involved in SFSP was remarkable. A total of 574 events (trainings, workshops, study tours) were organised from October 1997 to December 2002. A total of 692 participants who were closely linked with SFSP partners were involved in these events over the same time period, and many more participants attended from other organisations. The biggest focus (127 events) was participatory curriculum development but many events were devoted also to technical training, HRD planning, LCTM training, management and research activities. Throughout the life of SFSP 2, teachers and administrators from the universities, researchers from NISF and extensionists from Hoa Binh all had opportunities for structured learning and reflection experiences. These benefited them directly, as well as benefiting the students, farmers and other stakeholders with whom they collaborated in social forestry teaching, research and extension.

A selection of activities supported during SFSP 2

■ Technical issues for forestry and sustainable natural resources management:
  ❖ Forest Land Allocation
  ❖ Participatory community forest management
  ❖ Forest resource evaluation and participatory planning
  ❖ Sloping land management research methods
  ❖ Indigenous knowledge
  ❖ Human Ecology
  ❖ Law in forestry management
  ❖ Non-timber forest products
  ❖ Biodiversity conservation
■ Agroforestry
  ❖ Research methodology and skills
  ❖ Literature reviews
  ❖ Writing research proposals
  ❖ Research methods
  ❖ Writing skills for research
■ Extension methods and skills
  ❖ Facilitation and communication
  ❖ Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA)
  ❖ Participatory Technology Development (PTD)
  ❖ Forest Management Learning Groups (FFLG)
  ❖ Media production for extension
■ Education
  ❖ Participatory curriculum development (including stakeholder analysis)
  ❖ Training needs assessment
  ❖ Short course design
  ❖ Learner-centred teaching methods (LCTM) and facilitation skills
  ❖ Learning materials development and production
  ❖ Curriculum evaluation and assessment
  ❖ Practicum, and thesis writing by undergraduate and postgraduate students
■ English language (beginner and intermediate levels)
■ Mainstreaming gender concerns
■ Competency based human resource development strategies and methods
■ Organisational management practices (financial management, information management, library skills, computer use)

GENERATION OF KNOWLEDGE

"The curriculum has a participatory approach; once the students graduate, they can use this approach towards the farmers".
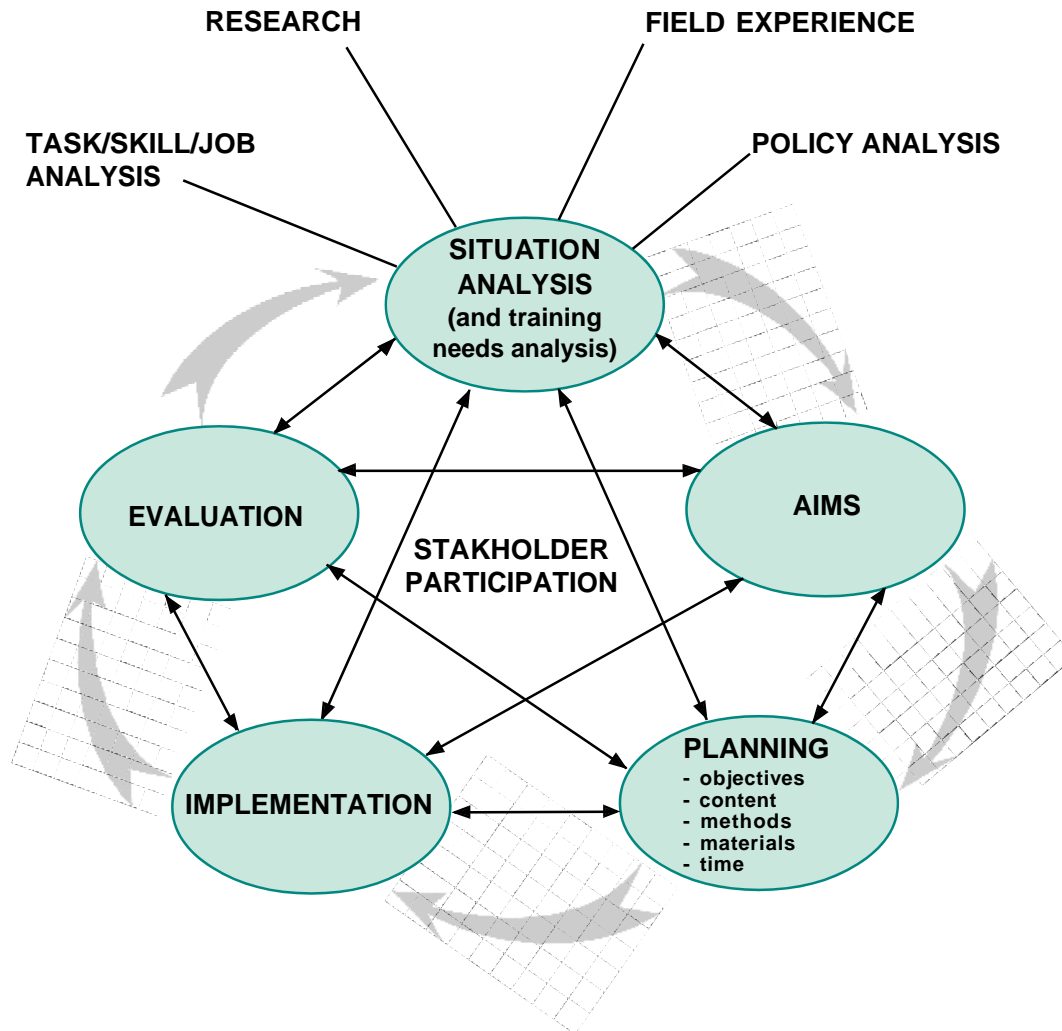
B uilding on existing and new capacities of the partner institutions and their staff, SFSP 2 supported not only the development, delivery and evaluation of new curricula but also a wide range of field-based learning activities. These helped to feed information and experiences into the curriculum development process, and also created a kind of "field laboratory" for the collaborative exploration of new technologies, approaches and methodologies related to social forestry.

Teachers from SFSP partner institutions learn together with farmers in collaborative research activities.

The Social Forestry Support Programme, Vietnam 1994-2002

The Participatory Curriculum Development cycle

RESEARCH

FIELD EXPERIENCE

TASK/SKILL/JOB
ANALYSIS

POLICY ANALYSIS

**SITUATION
ANALYSIS
(and training
needs analysis)**

EVALUATION

AIMS

**STAKHOLDER
PARTICIPATION**

IMPLEMENTATION

PLANNING
- objectives
- content
- methods
- materials
- time

The development of new curricula for the universities followed a participatory curriculum development approach that was largely innovated during SFSP 1 and 2. This approach integrates the content and methods of teaching as well as learning materials, and engages stakeholders at relevant steps of the curriculum development process.

SOME KEY ACTIVITIES OF SFSP

Through a participatory process involving the collaboration of all seven WPIs, and based on the results of training needs assessments and field-based learning experiences, seven new social forestry-related subjects were developed for teaching in all five universities (introduction to social forestry, agriculture and forestry extension, social forestry project management, agroforestry, biodiversity conservation, forest management and non timber forest products).

Through field-based learning activities such as participatory technology development (PTD) and participatory rural appraisal (PRA) many opportunities were provided for developing an understanding of the "reality" of forest land management, as well as creating the possibility for interaction with a wide range of stakeholders in social forestry. Learnings from the field through extension and research activities helped to adapt the content of the curricula developed in the universities. The new subjects were also taught and evaluated by teachers, students and other stakeholders, and updated and revised as needed. In addition, a social forestry major was developed and has been implemented at the Forestry University of Vietnam, Xuan Mai. Numerous shortcourses were designed and run by all the university partners with support from SFSP, as well as by the Hoa Binh Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.

A farmer records data as part of a Participatory Technology Development initiative supported by SFSP.

Quality assurance for delivery of the curriculum was also supported intensively by SFSP. In addition to numerous training events and inputs to encourage the use of learner-centred teaching methods, universities were assisted in developing means of monitoring the quality of the teaching and learning process, through systematic classroom observation and the establishment of teaching "quality groups".

Members of SFSP partners institutions examine new teaching and learning materials developed with the support of SFSP.

INFORMATION EXCHANGE

To help achieve the specific objective dedicated to information exchange, activities included:

- establishing the SFSP website www.socialforestry.org.vn and an SFSP Newsletter, *"Social Forestry"* (published in Vietnamese and English)

- development of documentation centres and information management facilities at each WPI

- creation of a training network in the field of social forestry (5 faculties representing more or less a hundred lecturers / researchers).

- creation of an information network in the field of social forestry.

This element of the programme was very important in enabling members of SFSP partner institutions to gain access to information from many different sources inside and outside the country, to share information with each other about their activities, and also to provide information to other institutions and projects in Vietnam who could learn from SFSP approaches and methods.

SOME IMPORTANT CHALLENGES FOR SFSP

Every programme faces challenges of different kinds. SFSP was no exception, but overall the project was rather successful in rising to meet these. In SFSP 1, the open and exploratory nature of the project led to some very clear achievements but also a number of difficulties. Differences in expectations and perceptions about objectives and responsibilities, and over institutional and financial management, led to a temporary breakdown. Even so, by the time the project resumed with a new institutional set-up, interest was again high, and many activities were planned and carried out.

Social forestry was a rather new approach in Vietnam, and was seen as exciting by many teachers, although it was less well understood in the rural areas themselves. The question of "*what is social forestry?*" was debated extensively on many occasions, and uncertainty about the nature of social forestry extended to questions of content during the development of curricula. Enthusiasm was high, but experience of "social forestry" was in short supply; this gap in understanding and knowledge meant that the anticipated links and feedback between research, extension and training did not really materialise. Constraints were seen also in availability of personnel and management, with less time available from teachers to work with the project than had been originally anticipated.

The basic training-research-extension framework for the project was helpful, but it was clear quite quickly in SFSP 1 that research and extension were new activities for forestry teachers. Progress of the working groups for research and extension was rather slow, and although a considerable amount of training was provided, this did not really translate into action. Results from research capacity-building activities in particular were disappointing. Also the national extension system – officially created in 1993 - was completely new, and concepts and methods of extension were almost unknown, even by staff of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) in the Provinces. Still, the working groups were a popular innovation because they allowed staff from across the Forestry College to engage in the project, creating the potential for an inter-disciplinary approach.

In SFSP 2, the main challenges came from the scale and complexity of the programme. All partners were part of institutions that had much wider objectives and were engaged in

activities other than SFSP. They did not always have the required time availability to conduct SFSP activities. The large number of activities on one hand, and of partners on the other hand (7 institutions representing more than one hundred collaborators whose profiles, needs and expectations are very different) required a large degree of flexibility.

As a result of these institutional complexities, management of SFSP was a considerable challenge. The programme needed to work with specific components (or departments) of larger, complex institutions (e.g. faculties of forestry within universities of agriculture and forestry, department of social forestry within forestry faculties, etc.)

Mr. Ha (first on the left), forestry teacher from Xuan Mai forestry university facilitates a PRA in a village in Hoa Binh Province. Participatory approaches were critical elements of SFSP field-based learning activities.

For example:

University (Agriculture and Forestry)
Faculty of Forestry
Social Forestry team (SFSP)
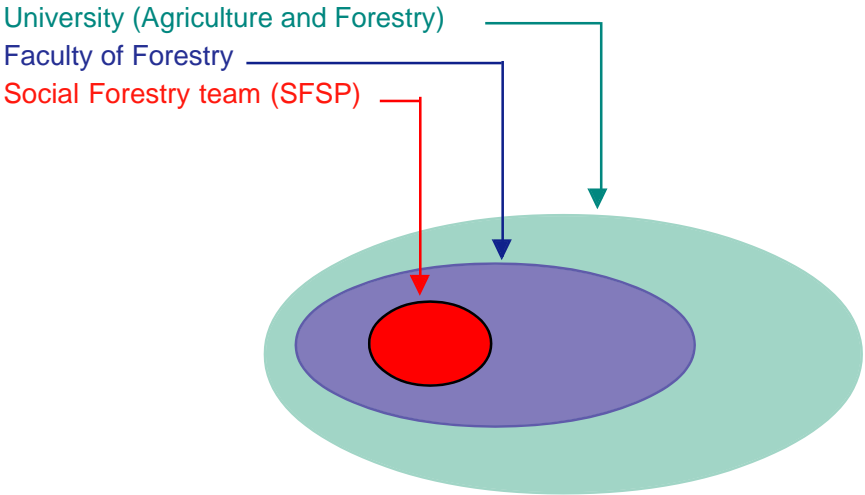
SOME IMPORTANT CHALLENGES FOR SFSP

For some activities (mainly HRD and PCD), tensions arose within the institutions, or between SFSP collaborators and their colleagues, with difficult decisions on who should be involved in specific events. Stability of persons involved in the different teams that SFSP supported was variable (arrival of new members, departure for training abroad, retirements, etc.). Additional capacity building of key persons with management responsibilities within the Working Partners could have been addressed more proactively to facilitate planning, implementation and evaluation of many activities. Also, a huge planning effort was made throughout the HRD process, but it was very lengthy and very demanding on resources. As a result, the institutional and individual HRD plans were finalised only by the end of SFSP 2, and thus were too late for support to its implementation.

The approaches introduced in SFSP were often challenging in themselves. Participatory approaches usually require new sets of attitudes and value systems, which may be understood differently by different stakeholders. Such changes take time and often are rather complex, and were demanding on the programme. To support the change process, it was necessary often to use external resource persons, but it proved difficult to find consultants with specialised knowledge and experience in their fields, very good facilitation skills, and an adequate understanding of the specific context of Vietnam. Language itself was sometimes a barrier to effective cooperation. All important documents had to be translated both into Vietnamese and English, which caused delays and additional costs. Some terms and concepts were sometimes difficult to translate into Vietnamese (e.g. "extension", "motivation", "participation", "dynamic", "mission", etc.). This created additional difficulties for direct follow-up support for technical advisors.

"The students really like it. Especially new topics like gender issues and human ecology."

Many lessons have been learned from the experience of SFSP. Some of these highlight areas of the programme which could have been addressed in different ways, or still require further attention, whilst some reflect a number of successes achieved as a result of the programme.

A programmatic approach was certainly appropriate for the complex nature of SFSP, but due to the very many people and activities involved, it was difficult to develop a truly systemic way of working. The institutional cooperation framework of the programme was designed primarily around the "training-research-extension" relationship used in SFSP 1, and this was probably too simplistic. As a result, roles and tasks of partners were not always clear nor well understood, and could have been better defined before and during the programme.

Students during a group work.

SFSP 1 was rather open-ended and outcomes were not very clearly specified. Establishing processes was a vital component; effective processes were a key outcome of the first phase. SFSP 2 presented the possibility of achieving a more well-defined set of outcomes (building of a range of key competences, improved curricula and teaching methods, research strategies and activities, information management systems), but there were some difficulties in moving from a more process-oriented approach to one where key outcomes were needed and monitored. This affected aspects of planning and implementation, and discouraged the establishment of an effective monitoring system. As a result, for major elements of the programme such as PCD and information exchange, there was an insufficient knowledge of the use of inputs and real costs (time, resources, etc.) in relation to the actual outcomes, leading to a perception of some inefficiency in the programme.

Some expected results for SFSP 2 were not fully achieved by the end of the phase, particularly in the area of research (research strategy and activity development, development of technologies and approaches), organisational development practices and support to post-graduate students. Some aspects of these were addressed during the bridging phase, and through the new project.

Many programme activities were initiated by the Support Unit, and reducing "dependency" by SFSP partners on the programme was difficult. The Social Forestry Training Network (SFTN), always envisaged as a means by which ownership of processes and products could be transferred from SFSP to individuals and institutions, was slow to form. Although the SFTN is now officially formed, it still needs to develop a strong role or character that will allow it to support and make a strong contribution to human resources development for the forestry sector in Vietnam.

The focus of SFSP was on "education", but in the light of the development of the government's Forestry Development Strategy, there was a huge potential for action and innovation going beyond the university education sector. A key challenge needed was to build on the achievements of SFSP but to provide a more targeted means of support at field level, especially within the framework of the new extension system.

Efforts were made to ensure that educational experiences and interventions provided by the SFSP in the early stages of the programme were both effective and appropriate. This provided a positive message to the SFSP partner institutions. Based

institutional level, a consensus that the programme had brought useful approaches in the Vietnam context, and as a result of forming this new perspective, became open and receptive to the ideas presented. This was absolutely critical for the learning process, and seemed to be one of the most powerful motivations for change.

Having reached consensus and been exposed to new approaches and methods through a programme of awareness-raising, training and different experiences (involvement in research, fieldwork, study visits etc.) the SFSP partners were able to identify and articulate their own needs more clearly as the programme continued. The programme tried to respond swiftly and effectively to these newly articulated needs and demands, by providing further training, coaching and support. Individuals in the partner institutions were thus willing and able to engage more actively with concepts and methods ranging from the simple to the complex, and made a real effort to understand, adapt and apply them.

Finally, SFSP personnel worked hard to develop a sense of familiarity and empathy with the Vietnamese context, and especially with individuals who were involved in key activities. The establishment of good personal relationships may have been one of the most critical factors influencing the successful outcomes seen during the life of the programme.

University teachers and extensionists learn together how to develop effective forestry training materials.

"SFSP is a key project active in the field of HRD in MARD"
(Vice Minister Nguyen Van Dang, SFSP External Evaluation, 2001)

Although assessing the impact of a programme is always difficult, the achievements and collaborations of SFSP do seem to be making a direct contribution to human resource development in Vietnam, in the forestry sector, and more widely. The building of capacity of teachers, researchers and extensionists to support learning processes more effectively should have a long-term, positive impact on the development of the forestry sector in Vietnam. A new project, the Extension and Training Support Project (ETSP) aims to address some of the key HRD support needs of the Government's Forestry Development Strategy, and also will contribute to achievement of the aims of the Vietnam Government's Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy (CPRGS).

The multi-partner Forest Sector Support Programme (FSSP), which complements the Government's Forest Development Strategy 2001-2010, has a specific result area 8 that aims at:

"An integrated system of demand-driven research, technology development, extension, education and training is developed and implemented."

As stated in the Forest Sector Support Programme framework document:

"Currently there is no overall institutional road map that clearly shows how forestry sector institutions in training, education, extension and research should interact in an integrated and collaborative manner, responding to demands for services at various levels. This is particularly acute at community and farm level where there is a strong need for an integrated extension service that combines a capacity to provide information/communication, technology and training to local people. Institutions with different responsibilities for training, education, extension and research function more or less completely independently. Overall this results in an inefficient and ineffective use of resources, particularly at field level. Also it very often means that there is very little synchronicity between the different institutions in the methods and approaches used in providing services, as well as in the content. In addition, most institutions do not respond to demands from their

clients. Instead, very often they have to respond to demands from higher level organisations that provide them with funding as well as detailed instructions for how they should direct and deliver their services. Extension is the logical vehicle for integrating training and technology development, and the current system of an integrated extension system for agriculture and forestry makes best use of economies of scale as well as addressing interrelated issues arising out of Commune Action Plans". (FSSP, 2001)

ETSP aims to respond to this required orientation for effective and efficient support to human resource development in rural, upland areas of Vietnam. Although the partners, geographical areas and objectives of both projects are different (ETSP is extension-oriented with a priority on poverty alleviation, giving a leading role to district and commune authorities), there are strong links. In particular:

■ In both projects, capacity building and sustainable natural resources management are the main areas of intervention

■ A priority is to better link research and extension with education and training

■ The partner institutions of SFSP are still involved in ETSP, not as "service receivers" but as "service providers", utilising competencies developed through the support of SFSP to meet the demands arising through ETSP

■ The main guiding principles of SFSP (flexibility, learning-orientation, innovation, networking, teamworking, quality assurance, participation and self-reliance) continue to apply in ETSP.

ETSP also includes space within which some key elements of SFSP may be scaled up, and increases the possibility of impact of the programme. For example,

■ the Ministry of Education and Training has expressed an interest in PCD being used as the basis for development of "curriculum standards" for all degrees in Vietnamese universities. With support from ETSP, a set of guidelines have been prepared for use by MoET which will help this complex process;

■ the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development is implementing a series of training workshops for representatives of all its 39 agriculture and forestry professional and vocational schools in "learner-centred teaching methods";

■ PTD approaches and other participatory methods introduced in SFSP will also feed into the framework of activities of ETSP.

■ SFSP has been an extraordinary learning experience for everyone involved. Although its main focus was university level education, the programme interventions involved stakeholders ranging from policy makers, to researchers, to extensionists, to teachers and students, and to farmers at the "grassroots". The spirit and achievements of SFSP will now be capitalised upon by the ETSP, continuing this journey of partnership and collaboration, and contributing to the improvement of livelihoods of people living in the rural uplands of Vietnam.

Farmers learn about a forest plant propagation technique. Extension will be a key focus of the Extension and Training Support Programme (ETSP)

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Websites

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SDC Vietnam	www.sdc.org.vn
Helvetas Vietnam	www.helvetas.org.vn
SDC Switzerland	www.deza.ch
Helvetas Switzerland	www.helvetas.ch

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