

REFORMING AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION AND PRODUCTION POLICIES: TOWARDS POVERTY REDUCTION IN ETHNIC MINORITY COMMUNITIES

**SUMMARY OF SURVEYS IN LAO CAI, HOA BINH,
NGHE AN, QUANG TRI, DAK NONG, NINH THUAN
AND TRA VINH PROVINCES, VIETNAM**

Hanoi, January 2017

**PRO POOR
POLICY
MONITORING**





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ABBREVIATIONS

3EM	Project for the Sustainable Economic Empowerment of Ethnic Minorities in Dak Nong province (funded by IFAD)
ACEP	Advancement of Community Empowerment and Partnership (a Vietnamese non-governmental organisation)
AEC	Agricultural Extension Centre
CDF	Commune/Community Development Fund
FFS	Farmer Field School
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
Irish Aid	Irish Agency for Cooperation and Development
KOICA	Korea International Co-operation Agency
NTP-SPR	National Targeted Program on Sustainable Poverty Reduction
NTP-NRD	National Targeted Program on New Rural Development
MARD	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development
MOLISA	Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs
MPI	Ministry of Planning and Investment
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
Program 135	Social-Economic Development Program for the Poorest Communes in Ethnic and Mountainous Areas
Program 30a	Support Program for Sustainable Poverty Reduction in 61 poor districts (currently 64 districts)

PSARD	Public Service Provision Improvement Program in Agriculture and Rural Development (in Hoa Binh and Cao Bang provinces, funded by SDC
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
TOT	Training of trainers
VietGAP	Vietnam Good Agricultural Practices



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Agricultural extension and production support in the 15 communes surveyed in Oxfam's Pro-Poor Policy Monitoring project have achieved significant outcomes over the past three years (2014-2016), however they continue to face many difficulties and limitations. Participatory socio-economic development plans have not yet been used as a common foundation to link production support and other types of livelihood support in a project-based approach. Production support activities implemented by commune-level authorities mainly consist of the one-off provision of seedlings and agricultural materials. A community development-based approach to poverty reduction has not yet been widely applied. The budget for agricultural extension is low and is consistently declining in the majority of survey locations. The lack of funding is a common obstacle and, more importantly, budget resources for agricultural extension have not yet been used in an effective manner, while provincial authorities have not yet broadly applied agricultural extension methods that are suited to poor people in ethnic minority areas. Due to limitations in terms of results frameworks, funding, methods, and division of tasks among multiple stakeholders, monitoring and evaluation is still a weak point of agricultural extension and production support activities financed by the state budget.

According to the results of the evaluation of 44 agricultural production and extension models carried out in the 15 survey communes during the past three years, about 40 percent of the models are considered effective, with relatively good maintenance and replication by commune officials and residents. The two lowest ranking aspects of the models are "market linkages" and "group linkages". Notably, the aspect "level of benefit of the

poor and near-poor" was higher in the majority of the models considered to be less effective. This is mainly because in these models, poor people often benefit from the free distribution of seedlings and agricultural materials, but there is a lack of coordinated assistance over a sufficient period to help poor people to sustainably improve their livelihoods.

The Prime Minister's Decision 1722/QĐ-TTg, dated September 02, 2016, makes important revisions to the implementation mechanisms of the production support and livelihood diversification components of the National Targeted Program on Sustainable Poverty Reduction (NTP-SPR) from 2016 to 2020. Key aspects of the new approach include: (i) harmonising the mechanisms and procedures applied consistently in the projects and sub-projects of the NTP-SPR; (ii) promoting the self-reliance of the people and the community in poverty reduction, and applying a community-based approach; (iii) supporting production development and livelihood diversification with regard to agriculture, forestry, fisheries, and rural industries and services; (iv) implementing the mechanism to support creating livelihoods for poor households, near-poor households and those who have just escaped poverty, through projects proposed by communities themselves; (v) using a part of the support funding or livestock from the state budget to set up a rotating fund in the community, suited to each project and the specific conditions of each beneficiary.

Based on the successes, limitations and lessons learned in the survey sites, we provide some main recommendations to national and provincial agencies to improve the effectiveness of production support, livelihood diversification and agricultural extension in

implementing new mechanisms for sustainable poverty reduction during the period from 2016 to 2020, as follow:

1. Provincial agencies should use participatory commune-level socio-economic development plans as a basis for combining production support activities and other livelihood support into targeted projects. Livelihood improvement projects should have a duration of at least two to three years or crop cycles, with priority given to the most disadvantaged beneficiaries and localities.
2. Provincial agencies should apply a community development-based approach to poverty reduction in production support and livelihood diversification, with the following three pillars: promoting communication and building the capacity of the community; building and strengthening farmer cooperative groups and existing community institutions at the village level; and implementing community-based sub-projects with the aim of improving the effectiveness of supporting resources and promoting the community's internal power. We also recommend developing specific criteria for prioritising groups led by women or with many women participants.
3. MARD should provide instructions on the overall criteria and procedures for evaluating the effectiveness, implementation process and methods, success factors, replication conditions, and dissemination channels of poverty reduction models in each locality, as a basis for recommending subsequent support measures and developing projects to replicate the models.
4. Provincial authorities should revise agricultural extension policies in tandem with new policies on production support and livelihood diversification, prioritising

"agricultural extension for livelihoods" targeted to poor residents and poor localities, and applying agricultural extension methods that suit poor ethnic minority people. These methods include agricultural extension sub-projects, the Farmer Field Schools (FFS) approach, group-based agricultural extension, and development of grassroots agricultural extension networks following the "pioneering and diffusion" approach from farmer to farmer within the community.

5. Provincial authorities should develop coordinated plans based on the synthesis of different capital sources (local budgets, national targeted programs (NTPs), and other projects and programs, including donor-supported projects and programs) for information and communication activities; enhance the capacity of commune officials using training of trainers (TOT) methods and the provision of hands-on guidance for each step in the implementation of production support and livelihood diversification; increase funding for regular inspection and monitoring, technical assistance, and the timely handling of risks during the project implementation process for commune officials and organisations at the commune and village levels (i.e. costs for commune officials and organisations at the commune and village levels should account for at least 50 percent of project management costs).
6. Provincial authorities should develop concrete policies to promote the provision of agricultural extension services, farmer cooperation and value chain development by mass organisations, non-governmental organisations and businesses.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Vietnam has attained significant achievements in poverty reduction. However, many of the members of Vietnam's 53 ethnic minority groups still face numerous difficulties in their livelihoods. According to the 2011-2015 income poverty line, the poverty rate among ethnic minority groups in 2015 was about 3.3 times higher than the country's overall poverty rate.¹ According to the 2016-2020 multidimensional poverty line, the poverty rate in late 2015 was 50.43 percent in 64 poor districts under Program 30a with large ethnic minority populations, while the national poverty rate was 9.88 percent.² About 75 percent of the income of poor ethnic minority people comes from agriculture, the backbone sector of the economy. However, this sector has been growing slowly compared with other sectors in the economy.³

The Government has put forward many policies, projects and programs to support the development of agricultural production and extension, targeting poor people and poor localities in ethnic minority areas. These policies and programs have made positive impacts, contributing to developing agricultural production, ensuring food security, raising incomes and reducing poverty among ethnic minority communities during recent years. However, studies have shown that many of these policies and programs have overlapped, suffered from a lack of resources or cohesion, and faced difficulties in integration. The implementation and focus of these policies and programs have not yet been suitable to the characteristics of each locality and to the demands of the specific target groups, particularly in the case of poor ethnic minority communities.⁴

With the aim of addressing various causes of poverty and promoting the internal power and dynamism of each locality, of each community and of the poor in ethnic minority areas, there is an urgent need to reform the support policies for agricultural production and extension.

As a contribution to the overall discussion on sustainable poverty reduction, Oxfam has conducted a policy analysis initiative on "agricultural production and extension policies in ethnic communities", as part of its "**Pro-Poor Policy Monitoring and Analysis**" project during the period from 2014 to 2016,⁵ funded by Irish Aid and SDC. This is the third in a series of three evaluation reports repeated annually in 15 rural communities in seven provinces throughout the country, namely Lao Cai, Hoa Binh, Nghe An, Quang Tri, Dak Nong, Ninh Thuan and Tra Vinh.

1.2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

The **objective** of this study was to "*monitor and analyse policies and their effectiveness in supporting agricultural production and extension in a number of representative residential communities over the past three years (2014-2016), thereby providing analysis and recommendations for designing and implementing agricultural production and extension policies for poverty reduction in ethnic communities.*"

The study employed a **participatory qualitative research methodology** to conduct research the understanding of related stakeholders, best practices and models, and reports and statistics on agricultural production and extension work at the survey sites.

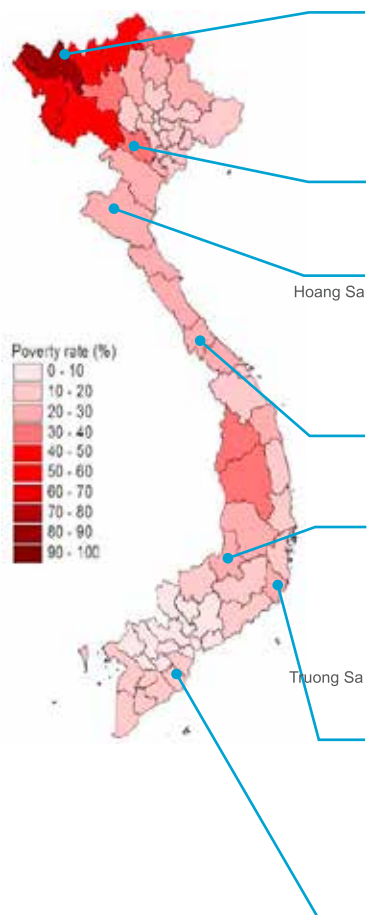
The **analysis framework** applied for monitoring and analysing agricultural production and extension policies aims to provide insight into key policy issues (challenges and limitations) and to put forward recommendations regarding three major research questions, as follows:

- What are the changes in policies and mechanisms related to agricultural production and agricultural extension at the national and local levels during the past three years (2014-2016)?
- Are the policies that support agricultural production and extension effective for local citizens, particularly the poor in ethnic communities? What are the strengths, limitations and barriers of these policies?
- What are the recommendations to improve agricultural production and extension policies in order to contribute to local development and sustainable poverty reduction in ethnic minority communities?

Survey sites: The Pro-Poor Policy Monitoring Project does not aim to provide representative statistical data for the whole country, but rather to provide empirical evidence from a set of survey sites that is representative of poor districts and provinces nationwide. The survey sites were chosen based on this purpose. They represent the livelihoods and poverty conditions found in each of the selected provinces, while also reflecting the diversity of conditions in poor districts and provinces throughout the country. (Table 1).



Table 1. Survey sites⁶



Province	District	Commune	Major ethnic groups	Distance to district centre (km)	Under Program 135, phase 3	Under Program 30a	Rate of poor households (%)		
							Late 2013	Late 2014	Late 2015
Lao Cai	Muong Khuong	La Pan Tan	Hmong, Dao	32	Yes	Yes	55.7	48.59	77.62
		Ban Xen	Nung, Day, Tu Di	35	No	Yes	20.1	13.45	29.76
Hoa Binh	Da Bac	Tan Pheo	Tay, Dao, Muong	45	Yes	Yes*	53.0	46	72
		Hien Luong	Muong, Tay, Kinh	4	No	Yes*	33.0	26.7	43.74
Nghe An	Quy Chau	Chau Thang	Thai	10	Yes	Yes*	46.1	40.1	56.86
		Chau Hanh	Thai	1	Yes	Yes*	47	43	25
Quang Tri	Dakrong	Mo O	Kinh, Van Kieu	2	No	Yes	28.0	15.6	39.2
		Dakrong	Van Kieu	8	Yes	Yes	36.3	31.07	62
Dak Nong	Dak Glong	Dak Som	Ma, Kinh, Hmong	18	Yes	Yes*	67.1	61.19	69.99
		Quang Khe	Kinh, Ma	51	No	Yes*	42.0	35.7	54.65
Ninh Thuan	Bac Ai	Phuoc Dai	Raglai, Kinh	1	Yes	Yes	33.0	23.3	53.6
	Ninh Phuoc	Phuoc Hai	Cham, Kinh	15	No	No	12.5	10.57	18.49
	Ninh Hai	Vinh Hai	Kinh, Raglai	25	No	No	2.9	2.42	9.97
Tra Vinh	Cau Ke	Chau Dien	Khmer	5	No	No	25.3	11.53	11.92
		Tam Ngai	Khmer	8	No	No	5.1	4.12	3.47

Source: People's Committees in the 15 survey communes

(*) Communes in disadvantaged districts that receive infrastructure development support equal to 70 percent of the support to poor districts in Program 30a (according to Decision 615/QĐ-TTg dated April 25, 2011 and Decision 293/QĐ-TTg dated February 5, 2013 by the Prime Minister).

Oxfam and its local partners⁷ selected one district in each province for pro-poor policy monitoring and analysis. Two communes were selected in each district: one better-off commune located near the district centre, and one poorer commune located away from the district centre and with less favourable conditions. In each commune, one village with a high concentration of ethnic minorities was selected. The exception to this was Ninh Thuan province, where three districts were selected, but only one commune in each district. In total, **seven provinces, nine districts, 15 communes and 15 villages** participated in the monitoring of rural poverty reduction policies. Among the 15 participating communes, seven communes are covered by Program 135, five communes are in poor districts covered by Program 30a, and six communes are in disadvantaged districts which enjoy the same policies as poor districts under Program 30a. Annex 1 describes basic characteristics of the 15 survey villages in 2016.

A **Core Group** was established in each province to participate in the Pro-Poor Policy Monitoring Project. This core group consists of five to seven members, including:

- Representatives from provincial-level agencies such as the Department of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs, the Department of Planning and Investment, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, and the Ethnic Minority Council, and from district agencies.
- Representatives from Oxfam's local partners.

The core group is responsible for carrying out research in each of their respective survey sites. They are in control of the entire process, including planning, collection of information, and writing field reports⁸. The core groups received training, capacity building and technical assistance from Truong Xuan (Ageless) Consulting Company and from Oxfam program officers.

Annual survey: Oxfam's Pro-Poor Policy Monitoring Project conducts iterative annual surveys on

multiple research topics. Annually, the core group returns to selected locations and conducts discussions with local officials working for different agencies and at different levels, as well as group discussions and in-depth interviews with local people who participated in the previous rounds. Outstanding cases who were interviewed in the first round in 2014 and the second round in 2015 were again interviewed in 2016 as part of the third round. As a result, the core group was able to compare changes in livelihoods as well as transformations in access to and effectiveness of production support and agricultural promotion policies from year to year.

The third round of Poverty Reduction Policy Monitoring and Analysis was conducted between **April and June 2016**. The fieldwork lasted for seven days at each of the survey sites.

Information was collected using the **following tools:**

- Group discussions were conducted with representatives of provincial, district and commune authorities, with key informants, and with local people, in order to gain a better understanding of advantages and difficulties encountered in the implementation of poverty reduction policies at different levels of governance, and to collect people's feedback on service access and delivery. In total, there were **187** group discussions conducted with **689** local people and government officials. **441** people in the group discussions were male and **248** were female. **308** were from the Kinh ethnic group and **381** were from ethnic minority groups. During group discussions, participants discussed key issues with facilitation provided by the researchers. Participatory visual tools were applied during these group discussions, such as timelines, problem trees, grading, listing and ranking.
- In-depth interviews were conducted with representatives of provincial, district and commune authorities, with key informants and with local people to better

understand people’s opportunities to access policies, and the effectiveness of this access. In total, **177** in-depth interviews were conducted with local people and with government officials at provincial, district, and commune levels. **105** of the interviewees were male and **72** were female. **23** were from the Kinh ethnic group and **154** were from ethnic minority groups. Repeat interviews were conducted among **76** outstanding cases from 2015, including **40** males and **36** females. **12** of these interviewees were from the Kinh ethnic group and **64** were from ethnic minority groups. In-depth interviews were based on a list of open questions, and were often conducted at the interviewee’s house together with direct observation of household conditions.

- Photographs: The research team took photographs of household living conditions, livelihood activities and facilities at the survey sites (asking for permission where necessary) with the aim of collecting additional visual information.
- A desk review of legal documents, reports, and statistics collected at the central and local levels was conducted to provide an overview of the different research topics.
- Consultations with ministries and sectors were conducted through conferences and workshops on reforming commune-level planning. Technical assistance was provided to MPI on amending the management regulations of the NTPs, and to MoLISA and MARD on the preparation of a planning manual for the implementation of the NTPs.

The information collected through qualitative research methodologies was verified during information analysis and reporting through triangulation of different data sources, including local reports, group discussions, in-depth interviews, and observations by the research team.





2. MECHANISMS AND POLICIES TO SUPPORT AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION AND EXTENSION

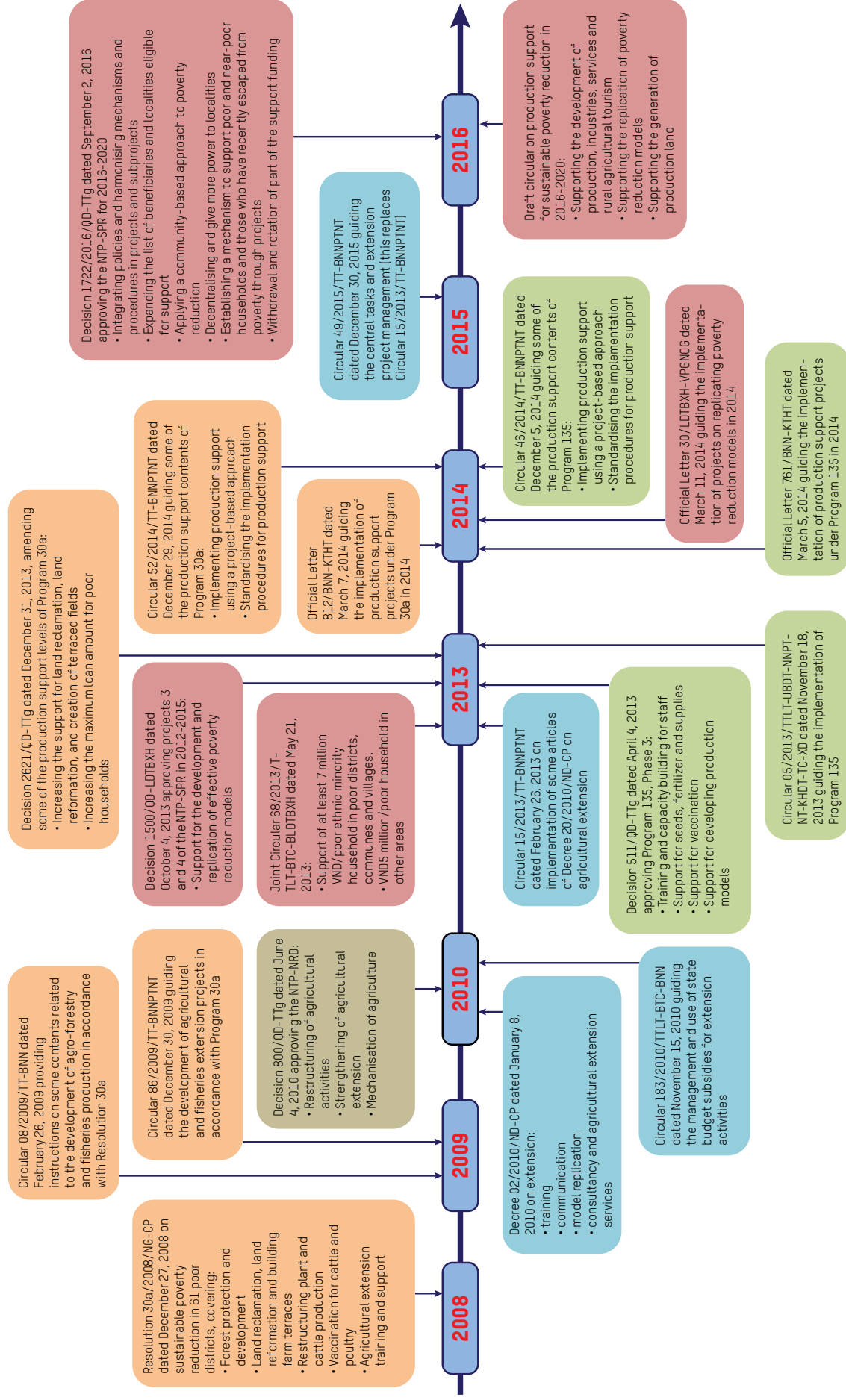
2.1. POLICY CHANGES DURING THE 2014-2016 PERIOD

Agricultural production policies

At the central level, three new documents related to agricultural production policies have been issued during the past three years (2014-2016). These are MARD Circular 46/2014/TT-BNNPTNT dated December 5, 2014, guiding the

implementation of Program 135; MARD Circular 52/2014/TT-BNNPTNT dated December 29, 2014, guiding the implementation of Program 30a;⁹ and Decision 1722/QĐ-TTg of the Prime Minister dated September 2, 2016 approving the NTP-SPR for the period from 2016 to 2020. (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Timeline of legal documents on agricultural production and extension policies



Decision 1722/QĐ-TTg sets out basic changes in the support mechanisms and policies for agricultural production and the replication of poverty reduction models in the period from 2016 to 2020, as follows:

- Harmonising the mechanisms and procedures, and applying them consistently in the projects and sub-projects of the NTP-SPR;
- Adding near-poor households and households who have just escaped poverty to the list of recipients of support (instead of only supporting poor households, as was previously the case), prioritising poor ethnic minority households and women from poor households; including communes in coastal areas and islands facing extremely difficult circumstances, and communes beyond Program 30a and Program 135, in the beneficiaries of policies for support to agricultural production and the replication of poverty reduction models;
- Supporting the development of production and the diversification of livelihoods in the agriculture, forestry, fisheries, and rural industries and service sectors;
- Promoting the self-reliance of people and communities in poverty reduction, and applying a community-based approach to poverty reduction;
- Implementing the mechanism to support creating livelihood for poor households, near-poor households and those who have just escaped poverty, through projects proposed by communities themselves and approved by authorised agencies;
- Using a part of the support funding or livestock from the state budget to set up a rotating fund in the community, suited to each project and the specific conditions of each beneficiary.

At the local level, all of the survey provinces have issued their own agricultural production policies during the past three years (Annex 2). Some new points in these local policies include the integration of planning for Program 135 and the production support components with commune level socio-economic development planning (Hoa Binh and Quang Tri), the building of post-investment support mechanisms (Lao Cai and Hoa Binh), the provision of support for the replication of effective models (Nghe An and Ninh Thuan), and the concentration of production support resources for households committed to escaping poverty (Quang Tri). However, these are still individual initiatives taken by each province, and it is difficult to replicate them due to the lack of legal frameworks and specific instructions from the central level.

Agricultural extension policies

Agricultural extension activities continue to be based on three main documents: Government Decree 02/2010/ND-CP dated January 08, 2010 on agricultural extension; Joint Circular 183/2010/TTLT-BTC-BNN dated November 15, 2010; and MARD Circular 49/2015/TT-BNNPTNT dated December 30, 2015.¹⁰ Decree 02 is scheduled to be revised in 2018, but MARD has not yet made a plan to do this. As a result, some agricultural extension policy issues related to poverty reduction that were mentioned in first and second agricultural extension reports of the Pro-Poor Policy Monitoring and Analysis project¹¹ still exist. These include:

- In agricultural extension programs, there has not been a clear differentiation with specific priority orientations between “agricultural extension for livelihoods” (targeting poor residents and poor localities) and “agricultural extension for commodity production” (targeting more advantaged localities).

- There is not yet a single system of policies on agricultural extension methods (and associated budgets and human resources) that is suitable to the demands of poor ethnic minority people, such as a micro-project-based approach with projects lasting at least two to three years, a FFS approach, farmer-to-farmer agricultural extension or group-based agricultural extension.
- There is no guidance on how to use agricultural extension funds for information dissemination, training and support for group-based extension, or replication of models.
- Efforts to improve capacity, develop job descriptions, and plan activities for commune-level agricultural extension officers and village-level volunteers remain very limited.
- There is a lack of specific regulations on coordination between multiple stakeholders on planning, combining agricultural extension with other types of livelihood support, and monitoring and evaluation of agricultural extension activities in the same locality.

2.2. INTEGRATION OF POLICIES AND RESOURCES

Integration of policies

Officials at all levels in the survey sites said that in the recent past, policies at the central level have not been integrated, leading to numerous difficulties for local authorities in the implementation of projects and programs. Small assistance schemes require a lot of effort for implementation, however their efficiency has not been as high as expected.

“Support from Decree 42 and Decision 755¹² is really small and ineffective. It would be better for the people if those support sources were integrated into one.”

(Male, official of the Division of Agriculture and Rural Development, Bac Ai district, Ninh Thuan)

“There should only be one poverty reduction support program. Projects and programs are now rampant, but they have relatively similar support mechanisms. Just one focal agency would be sufficient. The current situation has led to a really big waste of resources, as a lot of training classes are organised in the same locality during the same year by the agricultural extension, New Rural Development, and poverty reduction programs, by businesses, by development projects, and by mass organisations. All of these programs wish to fulfil their plans, resulting in overlaps. The different projects and programmes need to be incorporated.”

(Male, official of the provincial Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, Tra Vinh)

During the period from 2016 to 2020, all NTP-SPR projects and sub-projects (including Program 30a and Program 135) will implement the components on production support and the replication of poverty reduction models according to a common framework guided by MARD. However, as of April 2017, with half a year having passed since the approval of the NTP-SPR for 2016 to 2020, MARD has not yet issued any circular guiding production support or the replication of poverty reduction models, making it difficult and confusing for local authorities to implement the new regulations. There are not yet any regulations available on the integration of production support policies between the NTP-SPR and the NTP-NRD. During the period from 2016 to 2020, these two NTPs are sharing the same steering committee, the same implementation areas, and the same policy to accelerate decentralisation to the commune level, however differences in the beneficiaries of production support and in the

content, norms and mechanisms are likely to cause certain difficulties for local authorities during the implementation process.

Integration of resources

During the past three years, some survey sites have made efforts to focus their resources on specific target beneficiaries and localities. For example, in Bac Ai district (Ninh Thuan province), anti-drought support funds, Program 30a activities and agricultural extension programs have been integrated through the development of production

models, notably including green bean cultivation and cow breeding models in Phuoc Dai commune and a rice cultivation model in Phuoc Chinh commune. In Dakrong district (Quang Tri), support for agricultural production is integrated from many different sources, with a focus on “address-based” support for households committed to escaping poverty. Provinces such as Hoa Binh, Quang Tri and Dak Nong have concentrated their program and project funding to support poverty reduction in some of the most disadvantaged villages in the province. (Box 1).

Box 1. Experiences in integrating resources by beneficiaries and by locality

Integrating resources by beneficiaries

Solution 39/PA-UBND dated May 16, 2012 of the District People’s Committee of Dakrong (Quang Tri Province) on the development of a pilot support model for households committed to sustainably escaping poverty was implemented from 2012 to 2015 in three communes: Huong Hiep, Mo O and A Ngo. The total funding for Solution 39 was around 1.1 billion VND, including funding from Program 30a, Program 135, Program 134 (in 2012), Forest Plantation Project 661 and non-business state funding for Dakrong district. These funding sources were pooled together to invest in long-term projects for sustainable poverty reduction with a duration of two to three years. The participating households were each provided with regular technical training, two cows, elephant grass varieties, and a sum of money to cover cage construction, vaccination costs, medicine, land reclamation, long-term breeding plants, short-term breeding plants, and agriculture materials.

Integrating resources by locality

The Quang Tri People’s Committee developed Project 814/DA-UBND for sustainable poverty reduction in remote communes and villages, and in regions facing extreme difficulties with a high poverty rate. The scheme was implemented from 2012 to 2015, covering nine communes and 23 villages. The total investment capital for the project was over 177 billion VND, which was mobilised from Program 135, the New Rural Development program, the National Targeted Program on Education, support policies for residential land, production land and water for daily activities, local budgets, loans from credit institutions, and capital raised from benefactors and donors. The integrated capital sources were invested in three areas, including production support (22.63 percent), infrastructure construction (66.24 percent), and capacity building (7.92 percent). Due to the implementation process, provincial departments highly valued the importance and effectiveness of this project for local poverty reduction.

However, these resource integration initiatives are isolated efforts, depending largely on the availability of funding sources at each point in time. In fact, in most of the survey communes, agricultural production support activities implemented at the commune level mainly included the one-off allocation of seedlings and agricultural supplies (possibly accompanied by a short training session), and did not yet follow a project-based approach, with concentrated and coordinated assistance, to achieve the goals.

"It would be more effective if production support components are implemented based on a project approach, because there would be specific locations and beneficiaries for evaluating the results. In fact, however, implementation at the commune level is usually 100 percent subsidies. The district level cannot provide advice because the commune level correctly follows the rule of basing activities on 'bottom-up recommendations'."

(Male, official from the provincial Agricultural Extension Centre (AEC), Lao Cai)

"The province recently issued a document to minimise subsidies of seeds and agricultural supplies when implementing support for the people. However, when communes submit their implementation plans, it is still mainly about subsidies. If we could, even though management is decentralised, we should have a regulation that communes should implement models. If communes are not able to do that, it should be reassigned to the district level. Working this way would be more effective."

(Man, official of the provincial Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, Hoa Binh)

Over the past three years, the use of commune-level participatory socio-economic development plans as a common basis for resource integration has remained limited. The first cause for this is that planning is not integrated. None of the survey provinces have issued manuals or guidelines on the integration of planning for implementation of NTPs and other programs with commune-level socio-economic planning.¹³ Secondly, the commune

level tends to be passive in terms of utilising resources, except in relation to funding sources that have clear capital decentralisation mechanisms and stipulate specific annual support levels for the commune level, such as Program 135. The new point in the NTP-SPR and the NTP-NRD in 2016-2020 is to require the integration of participatory planning and commune-level socio-economic planning (integrating market issues, gender equality, disaster risk reduction, and climate change adaptation). The expected resources for the commune level are also expected to rise due to the announcement of clear allocation criteria and the expected amount of medium-term investment capital. If appropriate guidance is provided and coordinated measures are taken, the new mechanism will facilitate resource integration at the commune level in the near future.

"The New Rural Development plan needs to be integrated into the commune Socio-Economic Development Plan. It is almost as if the planning for the New Rural Development program provides a basis for developing the Socio-Economic Development Plan. But they are still two separate plans at present. People still see New Rural Development as just being a part of the agricultural sector. If integration is done well, projects and programs will be easily and smoothly implemented. However, conflicts in resources are now preventing this integration from being carried out."

(Man, official of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, Hoa Binh)

2.3. AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION SUPPORT USING A COMMUNITY-BASED APPROACH

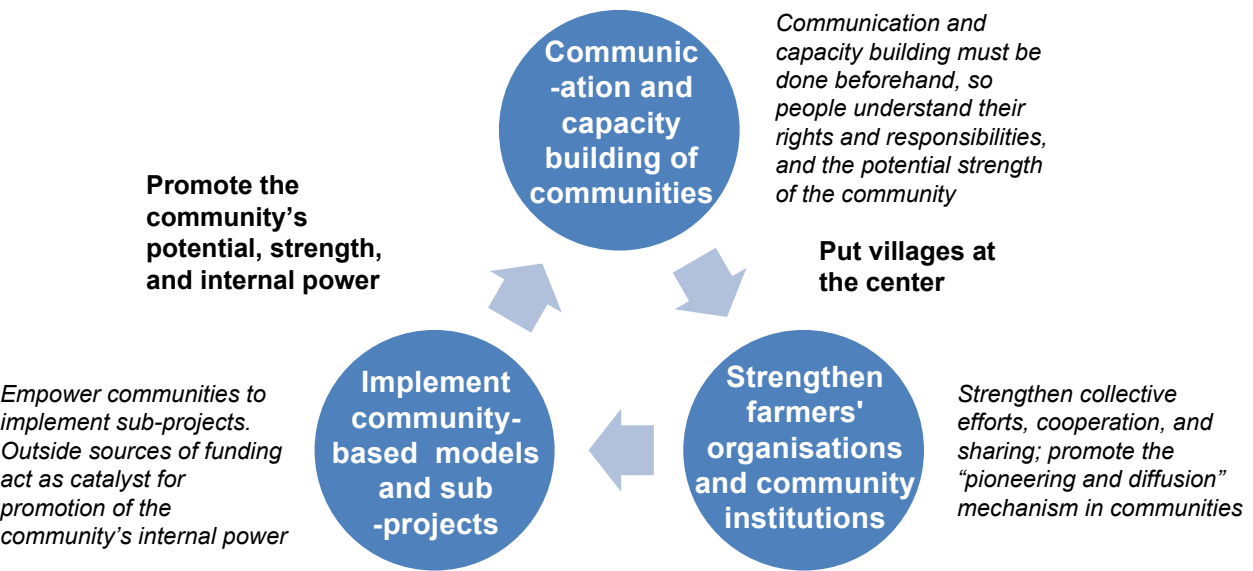
In the survey provinces, **agricultural production and extension activities funded from the state budget have not yet prioritised the application of a community development approach.** This is the approach to poverty alleviation and integration promotion that helps to turn a "sleeping community" into a "community of action," and contributes to the

development of a “self-reliant community.” External interventions help to strengthen the community’s knowledge and skills so that the community can define priority issues, devise implementation plans, and supervise development activities by themselves.

Experiences from other development projects have shown that in order to apply a community development approach, it is important to foster communications and capacity building within communities. This can help communities to

clearly understand their rights, responsibilities, potential and strengths (which should be the first step). It is also important to build and strengthen farmers’ cooperative organisations and community-based institutions within the villages (very important for social capital among poor ethnic minority people), and to implement community-based sub-projects, with the aim of enhancing the efficiency of the resource utilisation and promoting the community’s internal power. (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Three pillars of a community development approach



The NTP-SPR from 2016-20 has the stated principles of “promoting the self-reliance of people and communities in poverty reduction”; “community-based poverty reduction” and “prioritising poor women and ethnic minority women” which are important premises for applying a gender-sensitive community development approach to poverty reduction in the future. The next issue needing to be addressed is the provision of specific guidelines for the wide application of a gender-sensitive community development approach within agricultural production and

extension support components funded by the state budget.

Communication and capacity building

During the past three years, some local government agencies have come up with initiatives to reform the dissemination of information on agricultural production and extension policies. In Lao Cai province, the provincial AEC has been cooperating with Commune People’s Committees and District Agricultural Extension Stations for years to

carry out consultation and communication activities on agricultural production at the local markets and festivals of ethnic minority people. This is an effective means of communication, and people have responded positively. In Tra Vinh province, policy information and technical advice are provided to each farmer group. Provincial and district agricultural extension officers provide advice to people in these groups on demand. This helps to enhance the professional skills of the agricultural extension officers as well as to increase the number of people who benefit from farmer group activities.

In poor districts under Program 30a, district and commune authorities interviewed by the research team consider the policy of assigning young educated personnel to supplement the local commune staff to be quite effective. For example, in Bac Ai district (Ninh Thuan) during the period from 2009 to 2015, the District People's Committee recruited 80 young educated personnel to work with Program 30a working groups at the commune level, and was assigned eight young educated personnel to serve as vice chairpersons of Commune People's Committees, pursuant to Project 600.¹⁴ Based on the assessment of the local authorities, these supplementary staff have demonstrated a sense of responsibility, promptly becoming familiar with the work and interacting actively with local people, which has made it easier for them to perform their assigned tasks. The current challenge is the lack of appropriate mechanisms for staff assignment and recruitment to maintain this young workforce after they complete their working term under Program 30a.

Another challenge at present is that the budget for communication and capacity building allocated to each village remains limited.¹⁵ Training methods have not yet been reformed. Many training courses have been implemented for commune and village leaders, however the efficiency of these courses remains low as the TOT method is not applied, theory and practice are not integrated, and there is a lack of hands-on guidance to develop skills (as has been widely applied in donor-funded projects in the survey locations). There is also a lack of close coordination between projects and programs through a consistent provincial capacity building initiative to avoid overlap, scattering of resources, and waste.

Implementing community-based models and projects

Accelerating the decentralisation of funding to the commune level is an important premise for the implementation of community-based models and projects. In the survey sites over the past three years, the majority of production support funding under Program 135 and part of the production support budget under Program 30a has been allocated to the commune level for distribution to projects, with an increasing level of decentralisation over time. Even those districts that did not strongly decentralise production support capital for communes in the period from 2014 to 2015 have already decentralised the entire funding for 2016. For example, in Quy Chau district (Nghe An), production support capital was only decentralised in only four out of 10 communes under Program 135 in 2014, however by 2016, this funding source had been decentralised in all 10 communes.

Commune officials at the survey sites voiced their wish for production support funding to be decentralised, which would help communes to take the initiative in planning and implementing production support activities that are closely aligned with the needs and conditions of the people in each village. However, concerns remain among provincial- and district-level officials as current production support operations at the commune level still mainly focus on the “distribution of subsidised seedlings and agricultural materials”. They are worried that funding will not be used efficiently if it is fully decentralised to the commune level without clear regulations and guidelines on the contents, beneficiaries, procedures, and monitoring, and without capacity building for commune officials.

“All assistance eventually has to pass the commune level. Previously, the district’s mountainous areas development board took charge, so the workload at the commune level was reduced. But if it’s given to the commune to do, it will be more proactive and support will be concentrated more effectively.”

(Male official of Chau Hanh commune,
Quy Chau district, Nghe An)

“If production support activities are assigned to the commune, this would be more appropriate to people and their needs. If the district does it, it won’t be so close to the people. The commune is closer and would reduce a lot of intermediary costs.”

(Male official of Hien Luong commune,
Da Bac district, Hoa Binh)

“Program 30a should have projects where the district is the investor. If everything is brought to the commune level, there’s a risk it will all be used for subsidies. The district should be the investor for projects on structural transformation to establish commodity production zones.”

(Male official of Muong Khuong district’s
agricultural extension station, Lao Cai)

Most of the survey provinces have successfully implemented the all-in investment decentralisation mechanism in the form of commune or community development funds (CDF) in donor-funded projects. The CDF mechanism allows the allocation of funds to villages so that they can proactively make plans and implement sub-projects suited to the needs of the people. The CDF mechanism is quite successful in supporting groups of ethnic minority women, with the active involvement of the Women’s Union. In fact, donor projects have all established criteria for women’s participation and access to production support activities under the CDF mechanism.

Some provinces, such as Hoa Binh and Ha Giang, have boldly institutionalised the CDF mechanism using local funding. (Box 2). However, a full legal framework for the CDF mechanism does not yet exist at the central level, so it is difficult to replicate this approach in other localities. A new mechanism is being proposed by MARD for pilot implementation in the near future as part of the New Rural Development Fund.

Box 2. Community Development Funds in Ha Giang province

In 2013, the Ha Giang People's Committee issued Decision 3048/2013/QĐ-UBND on the implementation of a Local Development Fund under the NTP-NRD. Accordingly, two funding sources were established in each commune, one for the commune level and one for the village level. This model was piloted in 82 villages of 41 communes covered by the NTP-NRD during the period from 2011 to 2015. The support level from the state budget for the village development funds was 30 million VND per village. By the end of 2015, the village development fund model had been expanded to 432 villages across the province, an increase of 5.2 times in the number of villages and 10.65 times in terms of funding.¹⁶

After a period of effective implementation, the Ha Giang People's Committee issued Decision 25/2015/QĐ-UBND dated December 31, 2015 regulating the management and use of commune, community and village development funds across the province during the period from 2016 to 2020. According to this Decision:

- Village development funds may be established using funds from a variety of sources, including supplementary state budget allocations, development projects and programs, production support resources in other NTPs, programs or projects implemented based on the capital investment recovery model, maintenance costs, supplementary allocations for irrigation fees or forest protection zoning of the community, contributions from local people, or donations and support from individuals and organisations.
- Village development funds may be lent to households or groups of households in the village for the purposes of income generation, developing the household economy, job creation, payments for people taking charge of maintenance, maintaining transport and irrigation facilities, or protecting the forest.

Conditional support is one aspect of a community-based agricultural production support approach. It aims to integrate people's rights and responsibilities. The mechanism of people contributing to revolving funds and of withdrawing and rotating the community portion of the support funding or livestock from the state budget, is clearly reflected in the NTP-SPR for the period from 2016 to 2020. Contribution, withdrawal and rotation of funds or livestock in livelihood support projects are strongly supported by the majority of people in the survey sites. However, contributions to the revolving fund and the manner of the withdrawal and rotation also depend

on the type of model and the specific local conditions. For example, cattle raising models should operate on the basis of withdrawal and rotation in kind, whereas short-term seedling models should use small contributions to the revolving fund that are suitable to poor people.

"Households will be more responsible if the State only lends cattle to them. This will prevent households from selling the cattle in the future. It is okay to rotate. If any household wants to keep the cattle to raise them, they should pay the household that has the next turn."

(Woman, Thai ethnic group, Xet 2 village, Chau Thang commune, Quy Chau district, Nghe An)

"It is easy for well-off households to contribute money immediately, but this takes time for poor households. Contributing about 20 percent of the value is okay. Making the contribution makes us more responsible. If the pigs or cows die, it means that we also lose our money".

(Woman, Van Kieu ethnic group, K'lu village, Dakrong commune, Dakrong district, Quang Tri)

2.4. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

In the survey sites, there is no regular monitoring of agricultural production and extension components of the projects and programs of district and provincial agencies. Monitoring is only done when agencies can arrange human resources and a budget or when they can combine monitoring activities with their working trips to the grassroots level. An evaluation of post-investment efficiency (for example, one or two years after the end of the model) has not yet been carried out in any locality. At the commune and village levels, the monitoring of models within the locality by grassroots staff and community monitoring boards is very limited, due to the lack of plans, specific assignments and budget for monitoring). Meanwhile, local residents would like to have regular inspections and monitoring in order to learn more about production techniques and to address difficulties and risks that may arise. Regular inspection and monitoring also help to ensure that households fulfil their commitments during the implementation of the model.

"Many households sell the cows they borrow. Only I and one other household are trying to raise our cows, for fear that we will have no money to pay our debt if we sell the cows. If officials had regularly come to inspect the project, the other households might not have dared to sell their cows, because they would have been afraid of being fined by the State. I also expect officials to come so that I could ask them about some things that are unclear to me."

(Poor female, Khmer ethnic group, O Mich village, Chau Dien commune, Cau Ke district, Tra Vinh)

"Close inspection and monitoring are very important. It is essential for commune officials to conduct regular inspections. Sometimes I wish that someone would come to the village for inspection so that I could have my questions clarified."

(Woman, Van Kieu ethnic group, K'lu village, Dakrong commune, Dakrong district, Quang Tri)

A project-based approach is an effective way to apply monitoring and evaluation at the grassroots level. Monitoring and evaluation are particularly important in projects that apply the approach of revolving funds or livestock to support production and scale up poverty reduction models. A typical example is the cattle raising project implemented by the Farmers' Association of Tam Ngai commune (Cau Ke, Tra Vinh) with the form of capital withdrawal and turnover. The project is highly appreciated by commune officials and villagers thanks to its close monitoring, clear mechanism for the assignment of responsibilities, and allocation of monitoring and management funding to all participating levels. (Box 3). However, the practice in Tam Ngai is not common. Limitations in funding, methods and the assignment of tasks between parties have meant that monitoring and evaluation remains a weak point of projects and programs financed by the state budget.¹⁷

Box 3. Experience in monitoring the cattle raising model of Tam Ngai Farmers' Association

In Tam Ngai (Cau Ke, Tra Vinh), the commune Farmers' Association implemented revolving loans to households for cattle raising, with total capital of 350 million VND from the provincial Farmers' Association. The beneficiaries were selected through voting at village meetings, based on their needs, conditions and commitment to participating in the project. In particular, the monitoring and evaluation mechanism was strictly implemented. Within 30 days of disbursement, officials of the commune Farmers' Association carried out an inspection to verify whether the households were using the capital for the correct purpose. They then conducted periodic supervisions every three to six months. The village management board and the head of the cattle raising group were responsible for regular monitoring and prompt reporting to the commune Farmers' Association about any issues that arise.

After two years of implementing the cattle raising model in Ngai Nhat village, the commune recovered all of the principal and interest, and transferred them to the group in Ngoc Ho village. According to commune officials, inspection and monitoring was done well due to the clear assignment of responsibilities for each level and the budget arrangements for monitoring and management. This budget was deducted from the loan interest, as follows: out of the total monthly interest rate of 0.7 percent, 0.21 percent was allocated to the village level, 0.18 percent to the commune level, 0.15 percent to the district level, and 0.12 percent to the provincial level.

2.5. THE AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION BUDGET AND NETWORK

The budget for agricultural extension is low and declining

The difficulties and limitations in the mechanism for the allocation and use of the agricultural extension budget that were noted in the seven provinces during the previous survey rounds in 2014 and 2015 continued to be evident during the third round in 2016.

The agricultural extension budget is low and decreasing in most of the survey sites.¹⁸ Specifically, provincial AEC budgets in six of the seven survey provinces decreased in 2015 by as much as 30 percent compared to 2014. Each district agricultural extension station is typically allocated a maximum of 200 to 300

million VND per year, which is less than the production support budget for a commune facing especially difficult circumstances under Program 135. AEC staff in the survey provinces all said that the current mechanism for selection of central agricultural extension projects in accordance with Decree 02 is not reasonable and fails to facilitate direct access to the central agricultural extension budget by the provincial AECs.¹⁹

Working out reasonable implementation mechanisms and agricultural extension methods for effective use of funding remains a big challenge. A number of initiatives have been implemented in the survey provinces with the aim of overcoming limitations and shortcomings in the current allocation and use of agricultural extension budgets. These initiatives suggest possible directions for the finalisation of a policy framework on agricultural extension in the future.

- The Nghe An Provincial People's Committee has approved a plan to implement an agricultural extension model for the poor in the period from 2016 to 2020,²⁰ according to the orientation of restructuring the state agricultural extension budget based on the clear differentiation between "agricultural extension for livelihoods" (targeting poor people and poor localities) and "agricultural extension for commodity production" (targeting more advantaged localities).
- The Ninh Thuan Provincial People's Committee has approved a project on policies to support the replication of effective models in the period from 2015 to 2020.²¹ Accordingly, people will be supported with seeds, preferential loans and interest rates for buying machinery and equipment, information and communications, advertising, training, field day seminars, and summaries of effective models for crop production, livestock raising, and the mechanisation of local agriculture.

The agricultural extension network

The organisation of the agricultural extension network in the survey provinces has remained virtually unchanged over the past three years. Most provincial AECs still directly manage the district extension stations (except in Hoa Binh, where the district extension stations are under the management of the District People's Committees). Commune-level extension workers are managed either by the Commune People's Committees or by the district extension stations, depending on each locality. (Annex 3).

Commune officials often refer to low allowances as a basic factor that adversely affects the stability, enthusiasm and operational efficiency of grassroots extension

workers. In this context, some localities have allocated additional resources from their local budgets to pay part-time commune extension workers in order to maintain a stable network and to promote their role.

- Lao Cai province has a policy of recruiting commune agricultural extension officers under the same conditions as civil servants. This means that the officers receive wages based on their education qualifications, and receive five million VND per year for their regular activities.²²
- Nghe An province combines the positions of commune agricultural extension officers and veterinary and plant protection officers. These staff receive an allowance of 160 percent of the minimum wage (of which 80 percent is for agricultural extension work and 80 percent for veterinary and plant protection tasks).²³
- Quang Tri province supports two agricultural extension officers in each commune considered "extremely disadvantaged" (and one officer in other communes). The agricultural extension officers receive an allowance equal to the minimum wage, as well as support for 50 per cent of the cost of social insurance and health insurance.²⁴
- Tra Vinh province has not developed its own agricultural extension staff, instead hiring additional officers for the commune agricultural staff (two additional persons per commune) who serve as civil servants in charge of agricultural extension work in the commune. They are paid based on their educational qualifications.²⁵

Agricultural extension workers at the village level can play an important role in the implementation of extension activities in mountainous ethnic minority areas, due to their proficiency in the language, production practices and culture of the local ethnic

minority group or groups. However, villagers in the survey sites do not yet appreciate the role of these village extension workers, as their capacity and operational efficiency remain low. For example, in Bac Ai (a district in Ninh Thuan province that is part of Program 30a), village extension workers have an intermediate or higher education level and are Raglai ethnic people from the locality. However, these agricultural extension workers are still young and lack practical production experience. They have not yet taken the lead in production because there is no mechanism to link them with the implementation of demonstration models. In addition, they are yet to play a leading role in local agricultural groups or clubs.

Measures to improve the capacity of village extension workers, to develop job descriptions and to provide guidance on effective operational planning, monitoring and evaluation remain very limited. Recently, some localities have undertaken initiatives to enhance the practical skills of these staff. In Dak Nong province, for example, the

integration of capacity building for village extension workers into the basic vocational training program over a three-month period in 2016 and 2017 (instead of short-term training of just a few days each year) has been a notable experience.

A key lesson learned from efforts to develop the grassroots agricultural extension network in the survey sites is to focus on developing qualified agricultural extension staff with satisfactory remuneration. Particularly, the “pioneering and diffusion” approach should be applied flexibly in building the extension network at the village level, based on the specific diffusion channels in each community. Implementing agricultural extension work (including the dissemination of information, sharing of production experiences, provision of technical advice, and guidance on the application of appropriate and effective livelihood models) at the village level is not only a role of fixed extension workers, but is also an important role of core farmers, groups or clubs, business outlets, village heads and deputy heads, and staff of mass organisations.





3. EFFICIENCY OF AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION AND PRODUCTION POLICIES IN ETHNIC MINORITY COMMUNITIES

This section provides a detailed analysis of the efficiency of training activities, support for the provision of seedlings and agricultural materials, and the development and replication of models, as a basis for identifying lessons, difficulties, policy limitations and solutions to exercise agricultural production and extension policies for sustainable poverty reduction in ethnic minority communities.

3.1. TRAINING

In the survey sites, **opportunities to participate in training classes are relatively equal between poor households and others.** This is because most training classes are now organised at the village level, so all people from the village who are interested can attend. Over the past three years, a large number of

training courses have been organised through the agricultural extension system in some of the survey provinces (Lao Cai, Nghe An and Hoa Binh), with thousands of classes per year. It is estimated that poor people make up around 25-30 percent of the participants on average, and around 50-60 percent in some places like Lao Cai. This is an equivalent or higher level than the official poverty rate in these localities (Table 2). In localities with a large ethnic minority population, ethnic minority people make up a high percentage of the participants in the training classes. The survey provinces do not report on the percentage of participation of women in the training classes (the AEC staff often say that women participated more in some classes and less in some other classes, so a general estimate is unavailable).

Table 2. Summary of agricultural extension training courses in the survey provinces, 2013-2015

Province	Number of training courses			Number of participants			Ratio of poor participants (%)	Ratio of ethnic minority participants (%)
	2013	2014	2015	2013	2014	2015		
Lao Cai	2,079	2,228	2,328	64,418	78,456	76,878	50-60% (*)	>80%
Hoa Binh	1,551	1,852	855	44,892	52,543	32,391	20-25% (*)	~ 90% (*)
Nghe An	1,000	1,000	1,000	70,000	70,000	70,000	~ 30% (*)	16.9%
Quang Tri	220	235	300	8,400	9,000	10,000	N/A	N/A
Dak Nong	147	175	146	5,117	5,904	5,452	N/A	40.1%
Ninh Thuan	105	90	190	3,599	3,000	7,229	20-25% (*)	~ 70% (*)
Tra Vinh	631	563	322	17,114	20,000	9,251	~ 30% (*)	~ 30% (*)

Source: Summary reports from the AECs in 2013, 2014 and 2015 and estimations (*) by AEC officers in the survey provinces.

The FFS approach has proven to be a suitable and effective agricultural extension method, especially for poor women and ethnic minority people. The FFS method focuses on teaching skills, integrating theory with practice, and promoting peer learning right in the farming fields and at breeding facilities at each growth stage of the plants or animals that are the subject of the training course. Therefore, poor people and ethnic minority women who have low levels of literacy can grasp and apply the skills that are being taught. For example, in Hoa Binh province during the period from 2011 to 2013, nearly 1,000 FFS classes were organised for farmers.²⁶ A survey of 1,300 farmers who participated in the FFS classes in Hoa Binh in 2013 showed that 95 percent of FFS students applied the knowledge learnt in their household production activities after training, while 87 percent of the learners increased their household productivity and product quality and reduced diseases after applying knowledge and skills from the FFS classes. Implementing the FFS method also helps to enhance the capabilities of commune extension workers.²⁷ The FFS method has been widely applied in agricultural training for ethnic minority communities in Hoa Binh province.

High costs have often been cited as the main difficulty in widely applying the FFS approach. Another reason is that a FFS often lasts for a long time (once per week over a three-month period, meaning around 12 meetings), so farmers may miss some classes or send other household members to attend in their place. This makes it less effective. Given this fact, Hoa Binh organises only four to five FFS classes during important plant growth stages, which has significantly reduced costs and made it easier for more farmers to attend the classes.²⁸ The current problem is that at the central level and in most of the survey provinces, there are no policies to institutionalise the FFS approach, no capacity building programs for FFS teachers, and inadequate funding to turn FFS into a major agricultural extension approach in ethnic minority communities.

In some survey sites, close linkages between enterprises and farmers on training, technical guidance and the purchase of products have brought about good results. Businesses regularly send technicians to support people on cultivation techniques and care, preservation, and preliminary processing of their products. Local purchasing sites established by these enterprises also provide as technical advice and supply fertilisers and pesticides. For example, in Lao Cai, the tea cultivation techniques of people in Phung Tao village (Ban Xen commune, Muong Khuong district) have reached the VietGAP standards (i.e. considered as good Vietnamese agricultural practices) for tea farming, and most of the tea they produce is purchased by businesses as Class A tea. The village's tea cultivation area has also increased over the years and has gradually formed a specialised tea growing area. In Tra Vinh, companies have trained farmers in Chau Dien commune (Cau Ke district) with advanced rice cultivation techniques, resulting in higher yields with lower production costs (for example, planting one seedling per cluster instead of five or six seedlings per cluster as was previously done, thus reducing the cost of seeds).

"The company has a tea purchasing site in the village, headed by a company employee. Pesticides can be purchased there according to company regulations. When I began growing tea, the company sent a worker to train me. I can also ask for information at their purchasing site."

(Man, Nung ethnic group, Phang Tao village, Ban Xen commune, Muong Khuong district, Lao Cai)

Peer learning and the sharing of production experiences between people helps to spread knowledge and skills within the community. This is a very effective "farmer-to-farmer" communication channel that helps to facilitate poor people's access and to promote the pioneering role of core farmers through mass organisation and farmers' group activities in the community. Moreover, when they have received further training on teaching skills,

core farmers can definitely play the role of “farmer trainers” in agricultural extension training courses and agricultural vocational training classes.²⁹

“People still help each other to build houses and do farm work. Usually neighbours help each other, and sometimes friends. While helping each other, people share their farming experiences and learn from each other.”

(Woman, Khmer ethnic group, Ngoc Ho village, Tam Ngai commune, Cau Ke district, Tra Vinh)

“Farmers here are sometimes more competent than agricultural engineers. Some models have been implemented better by farmers than by agricultural officers.”

(Male official of Chau Dien commune, Cau Ke district, Tra Vinh)

However, the survey also recorded continuing difficulties and limitations in training activities in the survey sites over the past three years.

The coverage of agricultural extension training in mountainous and ethnic minority communities is still low. Training activities take up 20 to 30 percent of the total budget for agricultural extension in the survey provinces. Each class has 30 to 40 learners on average. However, compared extension to the total number of rural workers in each province, the coverage of agricultural training is uneven from locality to locality.

There is an apparent difference in the number of training classes between the delta and the mountainous ethnic minority areas. The limited number of training courses held each year in survey communes in mountainous ethnic minority areas is not enough to cover all of the villages in each commune. This is mainly due to the lack of funding and the limited capacity of commune extension workers to serve as teachers (except in Hoa Binh). Meanwhile, dozens of classes are organised each year in the delta communes of Tra Vinh province. For example, in Chau Dien commune

(Cau Ke district), 55 classes were conducted in 2014 and about 50 classes in 2015. More than half of these classes were organised by companies supplying seeds, fertilisers and pesticides, while the remainder were run by the agricultural extension system, institutes, universities, organisations and other projects and programs. The problem in these delta communes is that while people may be supplied with many training opportunities, they lack intensive training. Some training classes are even combined with product advertisements, which may affect the type of information that is provided.

“Some people attend so many similar training courses that they refuse to participate when I come to invite them for training. The number of training courses should be reduced so that people can receive intensive training and know which approaches are advantageous for them to follow.”

(Male, official of Tam Ngai commune, Cau Ke district, Tra Vinh)

The attitude that “women work, men study” or “women study, men decide” still exists in relation to agricultural extension training. Gender stereotypes still exist that men outrank women in social affairs and in making decisions on production within the family. In mountainous ethnic minority communes, participants in agricultural extension training are mainly men, although farm work is mostly undertaken by women. Some ethnic minority women are illiterate. Meanwhile, there is a lack of “hands-on guidance” through the delivery of courses in the fields where farming actually takes place, and using local ethnic languages so illiterate women face challenges in learning about production methods. In contrast, in lowland communes, the percentage of women attending training courses is quite high. However, in many cases they do not have an equal voice with their husbands in making decisions on agricultural production issues. In these cases, the training courses are not effective.

"Meetings have more female than male participants, who go to the field. But it is my husband who participates in the training classes, not me, because I'm illiterate. After the training, he tells me what to do and I follow it, but I cannot memorise everything."

(Woman, Ma ethnic group, Village 3, Dak Som commune, Dak Glong district, Dak Nong)

"On average, each training class has at least 50 people, with a larger number of female participants than males. As they are the direct workers within the household, it is more effective if women attend training courses. They participate actively in group discussions and attend classes more regularly. But the problem is that it is the husbands who decide on what plants the household should grow and what animals they should raise."

(Man, staff of Tan Pheo commune, Da Bac district, Hoa Binh)

Agricultural extension trainings in most areas are still carried out in a tradition manner.

Traditionally, FFS training classes often last for a half or full day. The focus is on pictures and videos to illustrate the practices being taught, together with hand-outs and interaction between trainers and learners. However, there is little or no time allocated to field practice. In mountainous communes with large ethnic minority populations, people face limitations in grasping and retaining "classroom knowledge". Those ethnic minority people who cannot read or write in Vietnamese or do not understand technical terms in Vietnamese are seldom selected to participate in training courses, and may themselves be reluctant to attend; meanwhile the use of local ethnic languages in training classes is still limited.

"My husband attends training classes in the commune; it is difficult to memorise everything because there is too much information. I love direct training in fields instead of in classes, because villagers are illiterate. It would be easier to understand if the training was in local language."

(Woman, Hmong ethnic group, Tin Thang village, La Pan Tan commune, Muong Khuong district, Lao Cai)

"I'm illiterate, so I'm not invited to training courses. My husband doesn't go either. Even if we did, we probably couldn't get anything from it. We just keep doing farm work and learn from each other."

(Woman, Raglai ethnic group, Ma Hoa village, Phuoc Dai commune, Bac Ai district, Ninh Thuan)

An obstacle to the successful implementation of training courses is the attitude of a small percentage of people in some of the survey sites that "we only participate if we get paid." Local staff explained that it could be due to ***differences in the level of reimbursement offered by different programs.***

"Training programs organised by donor-funded projects offer higher compensation to participants, as much as 40,000-50,000 VND per person per day. When we were planning a training class, the farmers asked us if they would receive the same amount of money as other programs. We didn't dare open the class, instead we only provide information in village meetings."

(Woman, agricultural extension staff, La Pan Tan commune, Muong Khuong district, Lao Cai)

3.2. SUPPORT FOR SEEDLINGS AND AGRICULTURAL MATERIALS

According to regulations, poor households are identified as the priority beneficiaries of the production support components of poverty reduction programs-projects such as Program 135, Program 30a, the poverty reduction model replication project, and Decision 102.³⁰ The clarification of priority beneficiaries has provided opportunities for poor households to receive more benefit from the production support activities of these projects and programs.

Support for seedlings and agricultural materials accounts for a large proportion of the budget for production support activities, however the efficiency of this support has not been high. Statistics show that over the past three years, 70 to 80 percent (and as much as 90 to 100 percent in some provinces) of the production support funding under Program 135 in the survey provinces has been allocated to supporting the provision of seedlings and agricultural supplies by the communes. Support in the form of seedlings and agricultural supplies may be accompanied by a brief training session, but is not accompanied by hands-on guidance, the development of production models, close monitoring, or other complementary assistance. The implementation of Decision 102 in all of the survey sites has also taken the form of the one-off distribution of seedlings and supplies to individual households.

Public sharing of information and the application of democratic principles in the selection of poor households to be supported remain weak in a number of localities. In some densely populated areas, the wide dissemination of information and the organisation of village meetings to decide

on the beneficiaries for production support activities are still limited. Beneficiaries are decided by the Commune People's Committee or by village management boards. This also means that some poor households may be overlooked in access to production support policies.

"Two households in the village were provided with cows from the Viettel company. The commune informed the beneficiary households, and no one else knew until the two households took the cows back to the village. The village head asked the deputy head, and the deputy head asked the village veterinarian, but none of them had any idea about that cow breed. If the situation is like that, the commune should take charge of village management instead of organising the election of the village management board."

(Man, Van Kieu ethnic group, member of the core group of K'Lu village, Dakrong commune, Dakrong district, Quang Tri)

"I only know whether my household is selected as a beneficiary when the village head informs me. If I am not informed, it means that other households have been selected. I don't ask for further information either. There is no village meeting, so I just wait until I am informed."

(Woman, Ma ethnic group, village 7, Quang Khe commune, Dak Glong district, Dak Nong)

Seed quality is not guaranteed, and it is not provided at appropriate times. In some survey sites, the kinds of seeds that are provided do not match with people's needs, or the late delivery of seeds and their short expiry date means that they cannot be kept for the next crop. Farmers often throw those seeds away, leading to a waste of resources. For long-term crops, the seed quality is poor, affecting people's investment costs. In those cases, people do not want to continue receiving similar support.

"They said the avocados would be firm, but after growing them for three or four years, they were all watery and too small. The tea seedlings provided recently had poor roots, and many plants died. Now if they provide avocado varieties, we will never take them."

(Woman, Ma ethnic group, village 7, Quang Khe commune, Dak Glong district, Dak Nong)

"People grow maize in April, but the seeds are not delivered until October. It is impossible to keep the seeds for the next crop because they expire in December. So farmers have to plant them right away."

(Woman, staff of Ban Xen commune, Muong Khuong district, Lao Cai)

Commune officials do not properly monitor people's use of the supplied seeds or agricultural supplies. There is no document stipulating that beneficiary households must make and strictly implement commitments to guarantee the effectiveness of the support. Also, there are no regulations on the roles and responsibilities of commune and village leaders or mass associations in providing support, monitoring and supervision following distribution. When interviewed, many poor people also said that after support was provided, they rarely saw any officers coming to inspect the crops or livestock or provide advice on how to care for the seedlings or animals that were provided.

In the short term, the distribution of seedlings and agricultural supplies helps the poor to reduce part of their production costs. This one-off delivery is "quick and simple" and can be evenly divided among many beneficiaries. Therefore, this kind of support is less likely to raise questions or lead to comparisons among different recipients than project-based forms of support, and this approach is often chosen by commune and village officials. However, **one-time direct assistance is less effective and does not help to sustainably improve livelihoods and increase the incomes of poor people.** Many local officials in the survey

sites also share the viewpoint that inefficient and one-time assistance (such as the policy under Decision 102 to support production costs at a level of 80,000–100,000 VND per person per year, depending on the locality) should be reduced, in order to concentrate resources on other agricultural production and extension policies that can lead to sustainable improvements in people's livelihoods.

"In 2015, there was little change to the production support under Program 135, which still mainly focused on the allocation of materials, with only three models being developed. But when there was seedling support, the people said to me frankly that they do not like this type of support but prefer to implement models. To be honest, there are too many subsidies. I also want to implement models or other types of assistance, but this has not yet been allowed."

(Man, official of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, Da Bac district, Hoa Binh)

"Now support for seedlings must be included. It doesn't do any good to give each household some fertiliser, seeds, or chickens. In my opinion, the implementation approach under Resolution 39 (which focuses on supporting households committed to escaping poverty in Dakrong district) is reasonably effective, as it has been providing relatively substantial support and supervision, and asks for a commitment from poor households."

(Man, staff of Mo O commune, Dakrong district, Quang Tri)

In the survey sites, a number of poor households have not adequately utilised the support that was provided (that is, they have not care for the plants or animals properly), or have utilised this support for the wrong purpose (selling the supplies to traders or exchanging them for something else). These unanticipated effects should be addressed by reforming the relevant policies.

"Most of the musk ducks provided by the project died. There were four left, but I slaughtered them for food. I was happy to receive musk ducks, but I didn't see any difference in my situation once most of them died."

(Man, Hmong ethnic group, Tin Thang village,
La Pan Tan commune, Muong Khuong district,
Lao Cai)

"Households here were provided with one cow each. At first, these households raised the cows so that they would give birth to calves. But after they sold the calves, they sold the cows as well. This practice was then imitated by other cow recipients later on. It makes it difficult to escape poverty."

(Woman, Van Kieu ethnic group, Phu Thieng village,
Mo O commune, Dakrong district, Quang Tri)

"Fragmented policies should be integrated into a single overall policy. Providing support in the form of a few plants, as was done under Decision 102, is not effective at all. People don't even want to care for those types of plants, so many of them died. Planting avocado, jackfruit and durian trees only provides enough to eat, not to sell."

(Man, official of the Department of Agriculture and
Rural Development, Dak Glong district, Dak Nong)

3.3. DEVELOPMENT AND REPLICATION OF MODELS

During the past 3 years, many models have been successfully implemented in the survey sites and replicated by local people. As can be seen in Table 3 below, the replication rate varies among provinces, ranging from 80 percent in Lao Cai to 50 percent in Nghe An and about 30 percent in Ninh Thuan, Dak Nong and Tra Vinh. However, these figures are based on reports or estimates from the provincial AECs, rather than on information from local officials or residents, or from an independent, objective third-party evaluation. Official data also does not allow in-depth analysis of factors leading to the success or failure of the models.



Table 3. Number of models implemented and percentage of models replicated in survey provinces

Province	Number of models implemented	Percentage of models replicated
Lao Cai ³¹	339 models (2006-2012): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plants: 132 models (40%) Cattle: 87 models (25%) Aquaculture: 51 models (15%) Forestry: 39 models (11%) Rural services and other models: 30 models (9%) 	274/339 of the models replicated (80.8%): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plants: 107/132 models (81%) Cattle: 77/87 models (89%) Aquaculture: 43/51 models (84%) Forestry: 22/39 models (56%) Rural services and other models: 25/30 models (83%)
	98 models (2010-2015)	About 80% of models replicated
Hoa Binh ³²	282 technical demonstration sites (2013) 214 technical demonstration sites (2014) 261 technical demonstration sites (2015)	About 30% of the technical demonstration sites replicated (*)
Nghe An ³³	20 models per year on average 17 models (2015)	About 50% of the models replicated (*)
Quang Tri ³⁴	33 models (2014) 25 models (2015)	About 40-50% of the models replicated (*)
Dak Nong ³⁵	24 models (period 2004-2013) 3 models (including 13 models set up in 2015)	About 25-30% of the models replicated (*)
Ninh Thuan ³⁶	129 models (2008-2014): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plants: 47 models Cattle: 40 models Aquaculture: 11 models Mechanics: 19 models Forestry and salt production: 12 models 	21/129 models have potential for replication (16.3%): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plants: 8/47 models (17%) Cattle: 3/40 models (7.5%) Aquaculture: 5/11 models (45.5%) Mechanics: 2/19 models (10.5%) Forestry and salt production: 3/12 models (25%)
	5 models (2015): Plants: 1; Cattle: 3; Mechanics: 1	About 80% of the models have potential for replication (*)
Tra Vinh ³⁷	16 models (2013)	5/16 models replicated (31%)
	13 models (2015)	About 30-35% models replicated (*)

Source: Final reports from provincial AECs and estimations (*) by AEC staff

For more detailed analysis of the effectiveness of production support and agricultural extension models in the 15 survey communes with ethnic minority communities, a “grading-scoring” exercise was conducted on 44 models (or commune-level models, supported by the same project and having the same implementation mechanism) carried out in the same area over the past three years together with the commune staff. Later, these models were discussed in more detail with village core

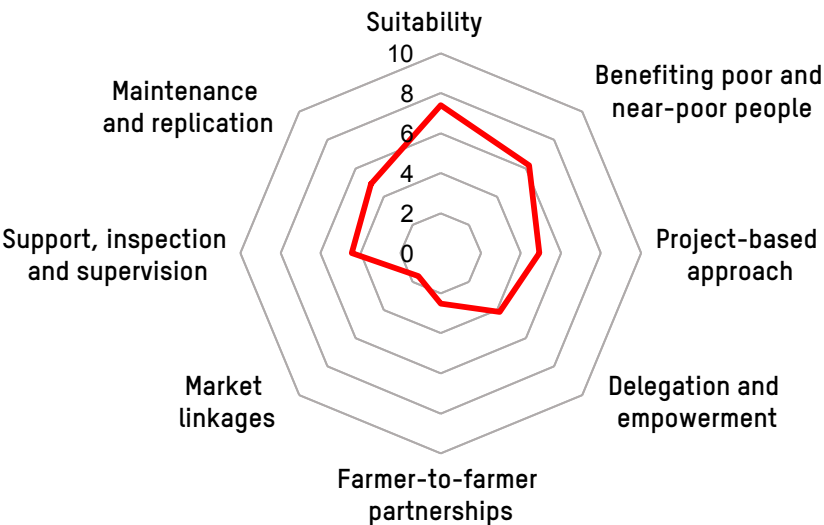
groups and local people who participated in the models. The models were rated and scored (on a scale of 0-10) according to nine criteria:

- Suitability: The suitability of the model to the poor and to local production conditions.
- Poor and near poor people benefit: Proportion of the poor and near poor benefited compared to the total number of beneficiaries in the model.

- Applying a project-based approach: combining the allocation of materials, the provision of additional training, integration with other activities or resources, and synchronous follow up over a period of at least two to three years.
- Delegation and empowerment: the level of participation and empowerment of people and communities in the model (following the six rungs on the “participation ladder”: One-way Information, Consultation, Making Decisions Together, Working Together, Delegation, Empowerment).³⁸
- Farmer-to-farmer partnerships: whether or not the model was linked to groups, clubs, or cooperative groups, and the level of activity of these groups.
- Market linkages: whether the models develop market chain linkages associated with the consumption of goods by businesses, and the effectiveness of these links.
- Support, inspection and supervision: the level of regular support, inspection and close supervision by local officials.
- Maintenance and replication: the level of sustainable maintenance and replication of the model within the local area at the time of the assessment.
- Overall effectiveness: an overall assessment of the model’s effectiveness in terms of economic, social and environmental aspects.

Summing up the scores of the key 44 production support and agricultural extension models in the 15 survey communes, ***nearly 40 percent of the models were evaluated by grassroots officers as having relatively good overall effectiveness*** (with a score out of ten of six or higher). Figure 3 shows that, in general, the models received the highest ratings on two criteria, including “suitability” (with an average score of 7.4/10) and “poor and near poor people benefit” (with an average score of 6.2/10). The two criteria with the lowest ratings were “market linkages” (with an average score of 1.6/10) and “farmer-to-farmer partnerships” (with an average score of 2.5/10). The remaining criteria were rated as moderate or below average. (Annex 4).

Figure 3. Evaluation of production support and agricultural extension models according to eight specific criteria

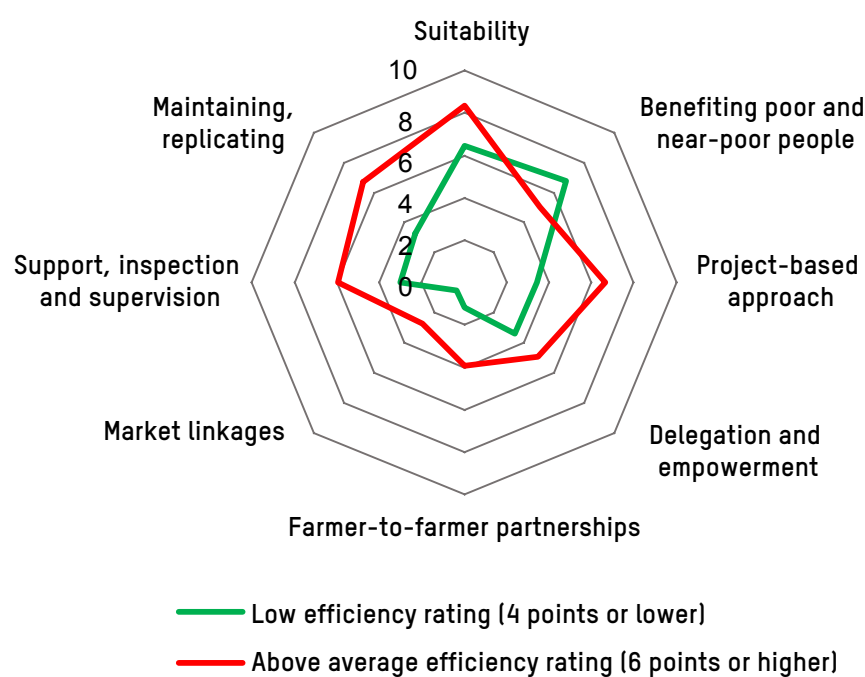


Source: Local officials in the 15 survey communes

Figure 4 compares models that received relatively high ratings (six points or higher) with models that received low ratings (four points or lower). It is clear that the models rated as being more efficient overall were evaluated as being better on most of the specific criteria, especially on the criteria of “a project-based approach” and “support, inspection and

supervision”. The criteria for “Benefiting poor and near-poor people” received higher scores in the models with lower overall ratings. These are noteworthy findings with policy implications that are further clarified in the following sections.

Figure 4: Comparison between modes with low efficiency and relatively high efficiency



Source: Local officials in the 15 survey communes

Suitability of the models

The suitability of the models is strongly correlated with their effectiveness: in general, the more suitable a model is, the more effective it is. In the survey communes in ethnic minority areas, “suitable” models are easy to implement, are not labour-intensive, require less investment, are suitable with local production, land and water conditions, harmoniously combine new and indigenous knowledge, and have stable local market demand. In fact,³⁹ the survey results show that most of the crops or livestock covered by the models that were assessed as being suitable have been farmed by ethnic minorities for

many years. These models provide guidance on applying technical measures to increase productivity and product quality. Models with high suitability ratings (nine or ten points) include models for rice and tea farming (Ban Xen commune, Lao Cai), models for bamboo reforestation and fish cage farming in the Da River Reservoir (Hien Luong commune, Hoa Binh), a coffee re-cultivation model (Dak Som and Quang Khe communes, Dak Nong), the “one necessity and five things to reduce” rice model (Phuoc Hai commune, Ninh Thuan), and a VietGAP-certificated grape model (Vinh Hai commune, Ninh Thuan). These models are associated with specific local potentials and strengths.

On the contrary, models with low suitability typically suffer from significant investment requirements for intensive farming that exceed the capacity of ethnic minority households, are unsuitable to local land and irrigation conditions, and are not associated with local market demand for the products. Of the surveyed models, the two models with the lowest suitability, due to not matching the weather and production conditions of poor ethnic minority households, are the pig and goose raising model in La Pan Tan commune, Lao Cai (which requires intensive farming and industrial bran feed, whereas ethnic minority people usually make use of local feed) and the chicken raising model in Phuoc Dai commune, Ninh Thuan (which has been suffering from serious drought, and the chickens were provided during hot weather). Discussions with local people about other models implemented in recent years show that some of these models also encountered similar issues.

"I raise five black pigs, then sell four and just keep one sow. I sell the pigs twice a year. Previously, I also raised Mong Cai pigs but they died; probably they could not cope with the cold weather. Black pigs are easy to raise. I feed them vegetables."

(Man, Hmong ethnic group, Tin Thang village, La Pan Tan commune, Muong Khuong district, Lao Cai)

"The model for raising white pigs failed as all pigs died due to the insecure condition of their cages. The commune brought the pigs in, and I just received them. They provided pigs to two households. According to traditional farming practices, pigs are not raised in cages. Locals do not raise pigs in cages and feed them only with bran. Only local pigs should be raised."

(Man, Ma ethnic group, village 3, Dak Som commune, Dak Glong district, Dak Nong)

The empirical lesson learned from choosing a "suitable model" is that models should not be imposed from higher to lower levels, but should be based on bottom-up proposals given to higher levels in order to promote the

potential and strength of local communities, in line with indigenous knowledge and the practical experience of the local people. Through a participatory planning process, models are proposed by local people and communities, with consultation and appraisal from the commune and district levels, so that the selected models fit with local production plans and agricultural restructuring.

"While developing the Program 135 model in 2015, the district agricultural extension station provided consultation to the commune on planning, with advice on providing support at the appropriate time and choosing appropriate models. During the selection of the models, locals were consulted for suggestions. The station has staff who have already worked closely with the local areas, so we know which models are the most suitable."

(Man, agricultural extension staff, Da Bac district, Hoa Binh)

"Officials should prepare a plan in advance and offer several options from which local people can choose. Models must be chosen by the local people. If models are imposed from the higher levels, they may not fit the local conditions, making them impossible to implement. For example, in the previous bee farming model, flowers could not blossom due to a prolonged drought lasting seven months, and even wild bees were rare. Now, we would not participate in another beekeeping model even if it were offered."

(Man, Raglai ethnic group, Da Hang village, Vinh Hai commune, Ninh Hai district, Ninh Thuan)

Benefit levels of the poor and near poor

Poor households are more involved in supporting production models but less willing to participate in agricultural extension demonstration models. Production support policies in poverty reduction programs have prioritised poor households (for example, the production support component of Program 135, and the project on replication of poverty reduction models under the NTP-SRD). However, poor ethnic minority people face

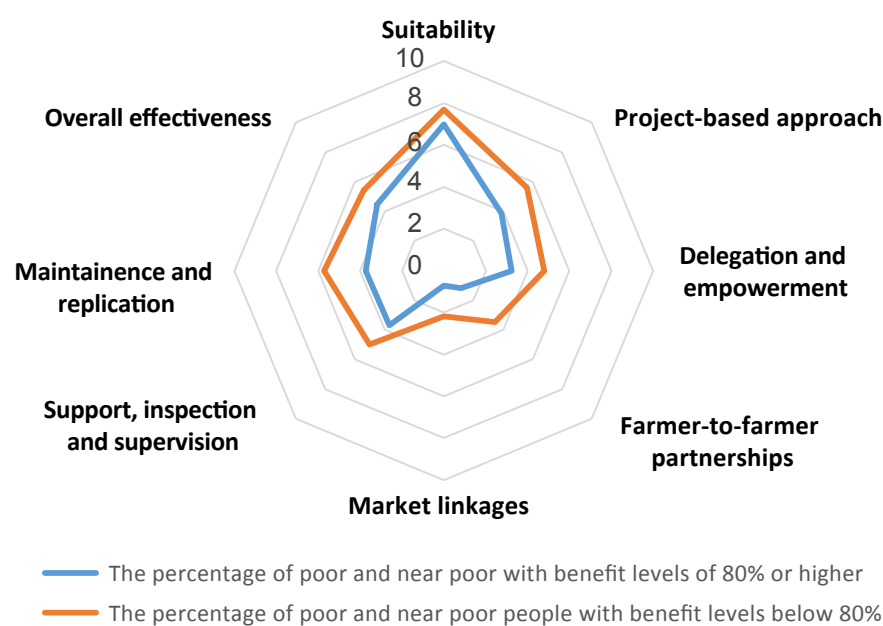
many limitations and disadvantages in terms of geographic location, education, language, labour, land and capital, reducing their access to agricultural extension demonstration models. Local officials said that, while poor households were prioritised for the provision of production support on breeding, seedlings and fertilisers, when implementing agricultural extension models, it is often preferable to choose a “better-off” household in order to reduce risk. The lack of appropriate agricultural extension models for the poor limits their opportunities to participate.

Production support policies of the provinces often aim to apply new technologies and new breeds, to produce commodities at a certain minimum scale, or to support post-training investments or require high levels of counterpart funding (for example, prioritising the support of intensive farming and animal husbandry facilities, supporting Oolong tea plantations, and supporting fish farming in cages). As a result, most poor households

are unable to participate. One example is Decision 11/2015/QĐ-UBND dated February 2, 2015 by Ninh Thuan Provincial People’s Committee on supporting the replication of effective models. This decision sets out a progressive policy, however it requires a high level of co-funding (for cultivation models, the required contribution is 70 percent in delta communes and 60 percent in mountainous and disadvantaged communes; for cattle raising models, the contribution rate for purchasing a bull is 50 percent). With co-funding accounting for 50 to 70 percent of the total cost of meeting the technical requirements of the models, poor ethnic minority households in the survey districts and communes did not register to participate.

It is noteworthy that *those models where poor and near-poor people receive high benefit levels underperformed on all criteria compared to models where they received lower benefit levels.* (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Comparison of models with different benefit levels of the poor and near poor



Source: Local officials in the 15 survey communes

Of the 18 models where the poor and near poor enjoyed high benefit levels (8 points or more, equivalent to 80 percent or more), there were 10 models (55 percent) rated as having low efficiency (4 points or less). The main reason is that these models tended to providing seedlings and agricultural supplies with a lack of ongoing support and close monitoring over a period of two to three years to sustainably improve livelihoods.

"In 2015 my family received support in the form of pigs. They said the pig support was for poor households. Pigs were raised and then rotated among three households. After the pigs were delivered, there was no training and no testing at all. After a few months, the pigs died. I reported it to the veterinarian. He arrived and just made a record saying that they died of disease. We knew nothing about the reasons. Later, if they support us with pigs again, there should be directions on how to prevent diseases that kill the pigs. If they just provide pigs and then the pigs get sick, I still do not know how to prevent it. I'm also afraid that they will spread disease to the other pigs I'm raising now."

(Man, Muong ethnic group, Bon village, Tan Pheo commune, Da Bac district, Hoa Binh)

"I developed a model to support rice cultivation in Ma Hoa, providing training and seeds to local people, but then there were no funds for monitoring and supporting farmers during the next cropping cycle. After the first crop, the local people did not follow that approach anymore. It was just a demonstration model, it couldn't be maintained and replicated."

(Man, staff of Phuoc Dai commune, Bac Ai district, Ninh Thuan)

Some projects and programs have stipulated that a certain proportion of non-poor households should join poor households within farmers' groups (for example, the rule on a maximum of 20 percent of non-poor households joining farmer groups in phase 2 of

Program 135). The problem is that, in addition to the participation of non-poor households (that is, those with experience in production and community responsibility) to lead the groups and to share with and support poor households when implementing the models, there should be a policy to strongly increase "soft" expenditures such as the cost of applying the FFS method, funding to support the establishment and operation of the farmers' group, and funding for local officials to carry out regular support, inspection and supervision (as has been applied in many donor-funded projects).

"The teams in the model projects defined that 50 percent of farmers' groups should consist of poor and near poor households, while the rest were those with good production taking the lead in supporting other households. For that reason, the groups worked effectively. Also, the project was done right at the scene. The FFS approach was brought down and then local people just followed it."

(Man, officer of the Division of Agriculture and Rural Development, Ninh Phuoc district, Ninh Thuan)

Applying a project-based approach

There is a strong correlation between a project-based approach and the effectiveness of the surveyed models: **the more the models apply a project-based approach, the more effective they are**. Of the 44 the surveyed models, only a few (five out of 44, or 11 percent) received a high score on the application of a project-based approach (eight points or more). These models were evaluated as being very effective (an average score of seven).

The project approach is implemented with consistent ongoing support for a period of at least two or three years (or two or three

production cycles in the case of short-term crops or animal raising), including technical training; provision of seedlings, animals and agricultural supplies; ensuring conditions for production; support to farmer groups; support for market access; and close monitoring and supervision. However, in the survey sites, this approach has only been implemented in donor-funded projects and has been seen as less applicable to projects and programs using State funding.

“At every meeting, we were told that these programs overlapped. If there could be just a single guidance document, one level of support, and one mechanism to disburse the fund, then it would be great. It would be easier to monitor. When we look for legal documents, it is very difficult to locate the correct one, and sometimes they are all very general, making it difficult for the local community.”

(Man, officer of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, Dak Nong province)

“Support must go together with strong commitments and supervision. Don’t just give out some ducks without caring about who raises them. Raising pigs and killing them is only enough for a few meals.”

(Man, Thai ethnic group, Khe Han village, Chau Hanh commune, Quy Chau district, Nghe An)

Some models in the survey sites have been associated with an appropriate recovery or revolving mechanism to ensure the efficient use of capital and multiply the support to assist many beneficiaries. One example is the case of a well-maintained cow raising group in Dakrong district (Quang Tri) supported by Advancement of Community Empowerment and Partnership (ACEP), a Vietnamese NGO, which combined commitments on rotating cows with regular support and close supervision from project staff. (Box 4).



Box 4. Implementing a project-based approach with close monitoring and clear commitment: support for cow raising in the ACEP project in Quang Tri

The cow raising team in Ku Pur village, Dakrong commune (Dakrong, Quang Tri) was established with support from ACEP in 2007. Although the project was completed in 2011, all 14 households that joined the project are still maintaining their cow raising activities as of 2016. Mr. N., a member of the group, said that this has been a very successful project because of appropriate support, monitoring and management, which have helped to reduce losses and risks compared to other projects and programs.

Regarding project implementation, ACEP provided the cattle in the form of a loan. The group was lent 27 cows and two bulls. Each household raised one or two cows, depending on their conditions. Households were assigned to collect grass and to raise the bulls. The project supported the provision of materials for cage construction and a veterinary medicine cabinet, and provided veterinary training to one member to support the whole group. When a cow gives birth, the first calf belongs to the household who raised the cow. From the second calf onwards, if the family wants to raise it, they only have to pay 50 percent of the market price of the calf. The mother cow is then returned to the project to support other groups.

Regarding management, each participating household must commit to raise their cows. If a cow dies and the household does not report it, or if they sell their cow, they would have to return the full value to the project. The project also dispatched staff to provide ongoing monitoring and supervision once or twice per week. Therefore, the number of cows was maintained and increased without any cow being sold or not being cared for. Prior to the project, no household owned a cow. As of 2016, all households participating in the farmers' group have from three to seven cows per household.

"We only dare to sell the cows given by the State, not the cows in the project, as they were closely managed. The cows were lent from ACEP for us to raise them, they weren't given to us free of charge, so no one dared to sell them."

(Woman, Van Kieu ethnic group, member of the cow raising team
at Ku Pur village, Quang Tri)

Delegation and empowerment

The level of delegation and empowerment in the majority of the surveyed models was rated as moderate (at the level of “consultation” or “making decisions together”, equivalent to four to six points). No model achieved the highest level (“empowerment” of the community, equivalent to nine or ten points).

Models that were assessed as having a relatively high level of delegation and empowerment included the models supported by donor-funded projects, such as goat and pig raising models supported by the Korean International Co-operation Agency (KOICA) project (Mo O commune, Quang Tri), and the cow, goat, chicken, rice, maize and silkworm models of the 3EM and World Bank projects (Quang Khe and Dak Som communes, Dak Nong). These projects use a community development approach, in which real ownership is delegated to communes, a participatory planning approach is applied, and farmers’ groups are established to improve food security, nutrition and livelihood diversification. The typical group size is 10 to 20 households, and groups are established on the basis of voluntary participation of member households. Teams develop their own proposals for livelihood development (“livelihood subprojects”) that the project appraises, approves and puts into practice. The overall effectiveness of these highly delegated and empowered models is also assessed as fairly high.

“The 3EM Project was done methodically. Teams were set up and trained, and they followed people’s suggestions. Then we discussed the most suitable things to support. If they just gave us things like durian and avocados, there wouldn’t have been any change at all.”

(Man, Ma ethnic group, Dak Som commune,
Dak Glong district, Dak Nong)

In contrast, in models assessed as having a low level of “delegation and empowerment”, local residents were just informed or registered to receive support. The role of the community and of farmers’ groups in the implementation of these models was very limited. The models mainly provided agricultural seeds and supplies, not applying a project-based approach, and these models were also often assessed as having a low level of delegation and empowerment, since local residents were in the position of passive beneficiaries.

Farmer-to-farmer linkages

Farmer-to-farmer linkage was one of the criteria that ranked the lowest for the surveyed models. Among 44 surveyed models, nearly 50 percent only provided support to individual households without forming farmers’ groups, or groups were formed but were inactive.

Some prominent farmers’ groups in the survey sites have maintained regular activities to benefit group members. The models that involve these groups are also highly valued for their performance. These groups often receive sponsorship from foundations, corporations, or donor-supported projects. (Box 5).

Box 5. Experiences from the implementation of the cow support model of the Farmer Assistance Fund

In the project on “Renovating and improving the operational efficiency of the Farmer Support Fund during the period from 2011 to 2020”, the Farmers’ Association chapters in the survey sites have supported farmers to receive loans for livelihood development. The innovative point of this project is the focus on providing capital to help farmers to develop production and business activities to build and expand cooperative groups and groups of households, farms, and small enterprises. One of the reasons leading to the fund’s relatively effective operation has been close monitoring from Farmers’ Association chapters at all levels. At the commune level, the Farmers’ Association regularly coordinates with village leaders and team leaders to inspect the models and provide appropriate support when risks arise. As a result, most of the households have effectively used funds for the correct purposes and have fully repaid the loans.

For example, in the cow raising model in Chau Hanh commune (Quy Chau district, Nghe An), the Farmers’ Association Fund supported 19 households (with a loan amount of 20 million VND per household for a three-year term). In Quang Khe commune (Dak Glong district, Dak Nong), the Farmers’ Association provided loans from the central Farmers’ Association fund worth 400 million VND with a three-year term to 10 silk farming households. 10 tea farming households received loans from the provincial Farmers’ Association fund worth 200 million VND. These groups are highly rated by local officials and villagers due to the regular support and close monitoring and supervision provided by the commune Farmers’ Association and its village-level units.

On the contrary, many groups operated with low efficiency and even stopped functioning after a short operating period. The causes mentioned most by grassroots officials and local people include the formation of groups that are not really based on the members’ need to cooperate and share with each other (that is, the groups were mainly created to receive the project support). In other cases, group leaders have weak capacity or responsibility, groups fail to hold regular activities, or the lack of collective action from lower to higher levels that bring real benefits to group members. Unless such groups make a timely change in the way that they operate to meet the needs of the group members and to respond to the movements of the market, their operations are unlikely to be sustainable.

“My family joined an interest group and was given geese. There was a team leader, but now I can’t remember who the team leader was. The group never met, and there wasn’t any training. At first, every two to three weeks, there was a trainer who came to instruct us how to raise geese and how to make cages, but then he stopped coming.”

(Man, Hmong ethnic group, Tin Thang village, La Pan Tan commune, Muong Khuong district, Lao Cai)

Agricultural officials from the survey provinces also said that many cooperative groups were established during the past three years. However, they estimate that only 30 to 40 percent of the groups are operating well, while the rest are less effective or only exist on paper and are no longer active.

Experiences in the survey sites during the past three years show that to successfully build and operate farmers' groups, the following factors should be taken into account:

- Linking group activities to mass organisations such as the Farmer's Association or the Women's Union, in order to have a focal point for regular follow up and support, as well as for timely handling of any difficulties and problems that arise during group activities.
- Focusing on consolidating existing farmers' groups, rather than necessarily establishing new groups (in fact, many new groups were only set up to receive support from a project, and then disbanded at the end of the project).
- Providing support to groups for at least two to three years through production support and agricultural extension projects. Projects need to be flexible to respond to the needs proposed by group members. The groups can then act as the focal point for the implementation of production support and agricultural extension activities in other projects and programs that are implemented in the locales, with support from relevant stakeholders.
- Groups must be based on voluntary participation and on real collaboration needs of the members (and not just established to receive project support or in response to promotion by local authorities to fulfil the criteria for "New Rural Areas"⁴⁰). Group participants must be those who really need support and commit to implementing the agreed regulations of the group.
- Choosing a group leader is especially important. An enthusiastic, competent, well-trained and motivated leader will motivate the operations of the team. The "pioneering and diffusion" characteristics of the leader and the core farmers in the group should be promoted.

- Training, field trips and working sessions with group members should be organised to increase their knowledge and skills and to enhance the voice and confidence of members (especially members from poor households and women).
- There should be close monitoring and supervision from commune and village leaders, mass organisations, and project staff during group operations, including on by-laws, members' commitments, and handling risks. Monitoring and supervision should be carried out regularly and continuously over a long period of time, even after the project ends, to ensure that groups are in good order.
- Group members should be linked by different forms of economic interest, such as pooling of funds, lending/borrowing and rotation of group funds, labour exchange, and joint purchasing. Collective activities that bring benefits to all members should be organised, meeting the evolving needs of the members.

A key problem is the lack of specific mechanisms, policies and guidelines, accompanied by an appropriate budget allocation structure for production support and agricultural extension components, so that the lessons that have been learned on the development of farmers' groups can be widely applied. The provision of group-based support has been included in the production support policy, but has not yet been included in the agricultural extension policy. There are also no specific provisions for support to the establishment, management and operations of farmers' groups.⁴¹

Market linkages

Together with farmer-to-farmer partnerships, ***the criteria of market linkages is one of weakest aspects of the surveyed models.*** The majority of the surveyed models (about 70 percent) were evaluated as ineffective in

helping people to improve market linkages. However, there are some effective models on market linkages among the surveyed models, such as tea cultivation models in La Pan Tan commune and Ban Xen commune (Muong Khuong district, Lao Cai), bamboo forest restoration and rattan cultivation in Chau Thang and Chau Hanh communes (Quy Chau district, Nghe An), lemon grass in Mo O commune (Dakrong district, Quang Tri), and grape farming in Vinh Hai commune (Ninh Hai district, Ninh Thuan). These models are evaluated as generally effective.

A common feature of models with high market linkage is the leading role of enterprises in providing technical support and in purchasing local products. For example, in Muong Khuong district (Lao Cai), the VietGAP tea farming model, Program 30a, and support from tea companies helped to turn tea into a key local product. In Quy Chau district (Nghe An), with the participation of enterprises as well as projects on bamboo forest restoration, local purchasing and preliminary on-site processing of products helped to restore and develop bamboo forest, increasing the incomes of local people. (Box 6).

Box 6. Market linkages and the role of enterprises

VietGAP tea farming in Ban Xen commune (Muong Khuong district, Lao Cai)

The safe tea production project in Muong Khuong district was developed from 2011 to 2015 with the aim of cultivating 1,000 hectares of VietGAP-certified tea. The model was carried out by the Thanh Binh Tea Company in collaboration with the District People's Committee, using funding from Program 30a.

- *Technical support:* The Thanh Binh Company sent technical staff from its factory to local villages to provide direct training for the first tea crop. When disease affected the tea trees, farming households informed the purchasing agencies, and the company sent technicians to inspect and handle the problem. In addition, there was monitoring support from agricultural extension staff at the commune and village levels. The project built tanks for collecting pesticide packaging, developed regulations, and printed and distributed materials on the VietGAP tea farming process.
- *Purchasing products:* The company contracted directly with each household at the beginning of the cropping cycle on the quantities to be purchased. In villages with large tea farming areas, the company set up purchasing points right in the villages (there were six purchasing points in Ban Xen commune), with company workers in charge of managing the purchasing. Households received money directly at the purchasing points once a month.
- *Regarding support:* For those who were just beginning to grow tea, the company provided tea varieties and fertilisers during the initial three-year period from the Program 30a budget (in coordination with the District People's Committee). For households with tea trees entering harvesting age, the company provided loans for fertilisers and organic pesticides at the beginning of the cropping cycle and deducted the cost when farmers harvested and sold their tea.

By the end of 2015, 400 households (out of 904) in Ban Xen commune had been granted VietGAP certification over a tea farming area of 200ha. Production of tea in accordance with VietGAP standards has helped to increase tea yields by five to ten percent, equivalent to 2-2.5 tons of tea buds per hectare per year. The price of fresh tea buds increased by 500 VND per kilogram to an average of 5,500 VND per kilogram as of June 2016. The annual frequency of pesticide spraying decreased by two to three times. Thanks to tea, many poor households have a stable life and have escaped from poverty.

Bamboo forest restoration and rehabilitation model in Chau Thang commune (Quy Chau district, Nghe An)

Restoration and rehabilitation of the bamboo forest in Quy Chau district was supported by a project of Green Trade (2011-2013), Oxfam (2013-2016), and Duc Phong company, in collaboration with the District People's Committee. Previously, people cut bamboo freely, leading to the degradation of the forest. The Green Trade and Oxfam projects and the Duc Phong company have supported several models for bamboo forest restoration and rehabilitation and bamboo value chain development. As a result, many households know how to survey, cultivate and protect the bamboo forest through fertilising, clearing vegetation, applying the correct techniques when harvesting, uprooting bamboo to expand the forest area, as well as preventing pests and diseases.

Duc Phong Company built a workshop in the commune for on-site processing before the processed products are moved to its factory in Vinh for refining. On average, the workshop collects about six tons of bamboo per day, accounting for about 70 percent of local production. The company also set up several purchasing points at the village level. The price of bamboo sold in 2016 averaged 40,000 VND per kilogram, higher than in 2015 (when the average price was 36,000 VND/kilogram). Commune staff estimate that about 40 to 50 percent of the households in the commune have planted bamboo, generating an average income of 200,000 VND per day.

In the survey sites over the past three years, there have been many cases where production linkages were not successful, leading to the declining efficiency of models and weakening the effectiveness of group operations. There are many reasons for this, including price volatility, natural disasters accompanied by a reduction in productivity and quality, the lack of a large enterprise to act as a focal point, the limited role of local governments in fostering

business linkages, lack of local support for the purchase and classification of products by enterprises, and a lack of commitment of people to contractual commitments. According to local officials, in mountainous areas and areas where transportation is difficult, production support and agricultural extension models have provided almost no support on market linkages and have lacked participation of businesses.

Regular support, close monitoring and supervision

The level of support, inspection and supervision by local officials and the effectiveness of the models are relatively closely correlated. ***The effectiveness of a model is generally higher when there is more frequent and close support, monitoring and supervision from local officials and projects.***

Models that are highly appreciated by commune officials and villagers often have regular support and close monitoring from commune officials, linked to group activities such as the recovery and rotation of support funds or revolving loans from group savings. The application of “conditional support” mechanisms—such as charging interest to the households participating in the model—provides a basis for the provision of regular technical assistance, close monitoring and inspection, and the timely handling of risks, thereby improving the efficiency of the models.

“Teams must have regular activities, financial contributions, and a team leader. Monitoring tasks should be assigned to agricultural extension staff and village heads, without depending on community facilitators.”

(Man, staff of La Pan Tan commune, Muong Khuong district, Lao Cai)

“At that time, I was the head of the village and had to regularly monitor the groups, but there was no financial support for this at all. It was only when I had to work at the district, far from my home, that the project supported me, and that was only for the gasoline cost. It would be better if there were money to support people in the village and commune to do direct monitoring, because travelling long distances to complete paperwork and to monitor the project’s progress also has costs for gasoline. If there were support, staff would be more enthusiastic and will provide more timely monitoring.”

(Man, Van Kieu ethnic group, Ku Pur village, Dakrong commune, Dakrong district, Quang Tri)

“It is necessary to provide information and training and to monitor every one or two weeks. It is not effective for officers to just talk to the households, they have to visit each family, otherwise, people will have already forgotten the information by the time they leave the meeting. Staff must be positive. If they only give us things and leave without monitoring, then people won’t do it.”

(Man, Raglai ethnic group, Da Hang village, Vinh Hai commune, Ninh Hai district, Ninh Thuan)

“It is better to work in groups. There must be a fundraising mechanism and close monitoring by authorities, with a little funding.”

(Woman, staff of Quang Khe commune, Dak Glong district, Dak Nong)

Comparing effective and ineffective models with similar levels of support and implementation mechanisms reveals the important role of regular technical assistance and close monitoring and supervision. (Table 4).

Table 4. Comparison of successful and unsuccessful cow raising models funded by the Project for the Replication of Poverty Reduction Models in Ninh Thuan province

Criteria	Successful model: Support for raising breeding cows in Vinh Hai commune, Ninh Hai (2011-2014)	Unsuccessful model: Support for cow fattening in Phuoc Hai commune, Ninh Phuoc (2005-2008)
Selecting beneficiary households	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The commune made a list of poor households and held village meetings to select households eligible to join the groups The selected households must be eligible for livestock farming (hard-working households with sufficient labourers) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Groups were developed based on the list of poor households established by the commune The selected households were required to be eligible for livestock farming (hard-working households with sufficient labourers)
Support methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provision of cows (with a value of 10 million VND per household), chosen directly by the commune’s cow selecting team and beneficiaries. After three years, the original cows will be recovered to rotate to other households 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provision of one pair of fattening cows to each household (with a value of 12 million VND per household), bought by the district to distribute to the local people After 3 years, the cows will be recovered to rotate to other households In the first 4 months, farming households had to pay 10,000 to 20,000 VND per month in interest, but after that period, interest was no longer collected (due to a document issued by the province requesting that the interest should not be collected)
Group activities and technical support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organising annual training Holding monthly group meetings Providing information and instructing local people about the care and prevention of diseases on cows 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Did not organise training or regular group activities
Supervising, monitoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commune veterinarians regularly checked and managed the cow-raising households to ensure that the cows were well looked after 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular inspections did not occur (the district paid the village head 200,000 VND per month for carrying out inspections but the work was only maintained for the first two months)
Effectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 25 poor households were provided with loans to buy breeding cows The cows developed well, giving birth to two to three offspring. Only one cow died; a new cow was provided to the farming household. Some households have sold their first new-born calves, collecting enough money to repay the group. All households are able to repay. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Farming households did not repay or compared themselves with others, because some households paid while others didn’t (only three households returned the full money provided by the group after selling their cows, while 12 other households only returned three to five million VND out of the total amount per household of 12 million VND, and the remaining 38 households did not return any money to the group). Therefore, the group did not recover the initial capital.

There are many cases in the survey sites where poor households received a lot of support, such as support for breeding, and preferential credit loans. However, due to inefficient production practices, their lives have not improved, and in some cases, they have even gone deeply into debt (including debts existing for many years), making it very difficult for them to get out of poverty. Aside from subjective reasons

attributed to the households themselves, an important reason for this situation is that in previous years, many simple “models” mainly focused on the distribution of breeds and materials without including hands-on instructions and regular monitoring to assist households to handle risks. (Box 7).

Box 7. Receiving support but still unable to escape from poverty

Mrs. N.’s family in O Mich village, Chau Dien commune (Cau Ke district, Tra Vinh) is one of the poor Khmer households who have received a lot of local support. However, her family’s finances have not improved. She said that they have not learned much from the training classes while she and her husband have joined many ones. The use of Khmer language in training classes is limited. Since they do not read Vietnamese, they could not understand much or read the training materials that were provided.

“They taught in Vietnamese and spoke so quickly that I only understood a little bit. After visiting the farming models, I could not follow them. They have a lot of capital and raise large numbers of pigs, fifty or sixty of them. I have no money to buy food and bran for pigs.”

Mrs. N’s family is currently burdened by a debt initiated 10 years ago due to risks faced during the implementation of a model. In 2006, her family was lent a pair of cows worth 10 million VND. However, after the cows were delivered, no officer visited to offer technical guidance on how to care for them. After one cow had been fed for a year, it died after slipping into a ditch. Mrs. N shared:

“After the cow died, I went on my motorcycle to inform the group head, but after that no one came to check. If they had come quickly, I could still have sold the whole cow to regain some money, but I had to cut the meat to eat it, only selling part of the cow.”

Since the cow died, her family has been paying monthly interest (140,000 VND per month), while the original loan has not been repaid. In addition, her family was enabled to borrow 15 million VND from the Social Policy Bank in late 2015 to invest in production, but due to hot weather and many diseases, repayment has been difficult.

When commodity production models bring new seedlings to a locality, the risk is quite high due to the potential of encountering new problems related to weather, soil, diseases and pests. Because the seedlings are new, and local on-site experience is not available, the role of technicians in supporting local people is more important. However, funding for technical

assistance, monitoring and evaluation during the “post-model” stage is currently not available, and agricultural extension agencies have not yet paid much attention to this issue. As a result, many models introducing new seedlings and breeds in the survey sites were not as successful as expected.

Maintaining and replicating models

Compared to other factors, the level of model maintenance and replication is correlated strongly with the efficiency of the models. This is understandable, as the extent to which people sustainably maintain and replicate the models is the most accurate measure for assessing the model's success. Models with higher levels of maintenance and replication are also the ones that are highly valued in terms of relevance, a project-based approach, delegation and empowerment; farmer-to-farmer partnerships, market linkages, and support, inspection and monitoring.

The two models that score most highly on maintenance and replication (nine points out of 10) among the 44 surveyed models are the tea cultivation model in La Pan Tan and Ban Xen communes (Lao Cai) and the "one necessity and five things to reduce" rice cultivation model in Phuoc Hai commune (Ninh Thuan). For the tea model, local authorities and tea enterprises are very active in replicating the model through the regular organisation of training courses to improve the farmers' techniques and through the provision of seeds and fertiliser for newly-cultivated areas. People who observe the effectiveness of the model maintain and replicate it by themselves.

"I see that tea trees are more stable than other plants. In the case of tea, farmers only need to plant once and then tea can be collected. It can withstand disasters. The State gives us improved strains and training, too. Every year there are training sessions. I've already been to some, but I still want to join more courses. Now my fields are full of tea. I want to plant more but there is no more land."

(Man, Nung ethnic group, Phang Tao village, Ban Xen commune, Muong Khuong district, Lao Cai)

For the "one necessity and five things to reduce" rice cultivation model, because it reduces costs (of seeds, fertiliser, pesticide, irrigation and post-harvest losses) while increasing paddy yields (by an average of 10 to 20 percent), local farmers are very responsive in replicating the model. Ninh Thuan (along with Nghe An⁴²) has introduced new policies to support the replication of effective production models, including the "one necessity and five things to reduce" rice cultivation model. This provincial policy is more advanced than the policy on model replication from the central level. In Ninh Thuan, replication has been developed into a scheme with accompanying support measures. (Box 8).

Box 8. Policy on supporting the replication of production models in Ninh Thuan

To replicate effective and advanced production models in the province, Ninh Thuan Provincial People's Committee issued Decision 11/2015/QĐ-UBND in February 2, 2015, with the following provisions for supporting the replication of models:

- Support for replication of a cultivation model: the budget will cover either 30 percent (in lowland communes) or 40 percent (in mountainous and disadvantaged communes) of the costs for rice, maize, vegetable, grape, apple and garlic varieties.
- Support for artificial insemination of cattle: 100 percent of the cost of artificial insemination supplies will be covered for livestock producers to breed cows. The level of support shall not exceed two doses of bull sperm per cow per year.
- Supporting for breeding bulls: one-off support of 50 percent of the breeding bulls' value will be provided to farmers in areas with difficult conditions. The support level shall not exceed 20 million VND per bull, and the bulls must be 12 months or older.
- Support to purchase breeding male goats or rams: either 30 percent (in lowland communes) or 40 percent (in mountainous and disadvantaged communes) of the cost for buying improved strains to improve goat and sheep herds will be covered.
- Loans for the purchase of machinery and equipment: supporting loans worth 100 percent of the value of the goods will be provided, with a zero percent interest rate for the first two years and 50 percent of the regular interest rate for loans from the third year onwards.
- Support for field seminars and reviewing models: the support level is defined under Decision 2255/2010/QĐ-UBND dated November 22, 2010. Expenditures for dissemination and replication of models: funds will be provided for the dissemination of information, advertising and the organisation of field seminars to a level of 15 million VND per model.

Despite facing difficulties in budgeting for the implementation of Decision 11 (in fact, only 2.4 billion VND was allocated from the NTP-NRD budget in 2015, compared to the planned amount of 19.8 billion VND), many effective models in the province have received support for replication, including the "one necessity and five things to reduce" rice model.

The "Pioneering and diffusion" mechanism is an important factor in the maintenance and replication of effective models in the community. During the past three years, there have been many examples of this "pioneering and diffusion" mechanism in the survey sites. For example, after farmers in Chau Dien commune (Tra Vinh) observed that the VietGAP rice production model helps to reduce the required number of seeds with fewer pests over two to three cropping cycles, more than 20 households with rice fields adjacent to the VietGAP fields also gradually learned and applied this approach. According to

a representative from the VietGAP team, as of 2016 most of the households with fields neighbouring the VietGAP fields have applied the same techniques and used similar pesticides. In Tin Thang village, La Pan Tan commune (Lao Cai), tea trees have been cultivated since 2013, and about 15 out of the 49 households in the village were cultivating tea by 2015. On seeing the practical benefits of cultivating tea from the initial group households, by 2016 most of the local households had registered to receive seedlings for tea cultivation.

"At first, people said that the local climate is not suitable for cultivating tea. Now some households have gotten benefits. I'm sure that many people will register to plant tea this year."

(Man, Hmong ethnic group, Tin Thang village, La Pan Tan commune, Muong Khuong district, Lao Cai)

Sharing between Kinh and local people and between migrants and local ethnic minority people has also helped local ethnic minority households to learn new techniques and implement new models. For example, in Quang Khe and Dak Som communes (Dak Glong

district, Dak Nong), many ethnic minority households have learned how to grow tea and raise silkworms from Kinh households and from ethnic minority households from the northern region that now live near them (Box 9).

"Previously, only local ethnic minority people lived here. Now people from Bao Loc have moved here, and they have had an effect on local production activities. Local people learn from them and follow their techniques."

(Man, staff in Quang Khe commune, Dak Glong district, Dak Nong)

Box 9. The "pioneering and diffusion" mechanism and tea cultivation in Quang Khe commune, Dak Nong

The family of Mrs. K.N., a Tay woman in Village 7 of Quang Khe commune, was one of the first households to get involved in tea cultivation following the project of the commune Farmers' Association. Her family planted tea on two "sao" of land (over 700 square metres) around Mrs. K.N.'s home. She was given technical training on preventing and treating insects and mould on tea trees. Currently, her tea is growing well. The household harvests tea three times a month with an average of about two tonnes each time. With current market prices, her family earns about six to seven million VND per month from tea trees. She said that tea planting does not take as much investment as coffee but generates a regular stable income, so it is very suitable for poor households. Since 2016, a tea factory has been established in Quang Khe, so local people have more advantages in selling tea leaves to the factory. Recognising that tea growing generates a stable income, some local ethnic minority households have come to Mrs. K.N. to learn about tea cultivation. She said that local ethnic minority people are able to grow tea; however, it is important to note that growing tea is more labour intensive than coffee, despite the fact that tea growing is not as hard as coffee farming.

While exchanging labour with their neighbours, being hired to do jobs, and visiting fields, local people learn from the experiences of high-performing households. Competition in production activities is also one factor that promotes learning and sharing of experiences between households, particularly among relatives, neighbours, and households with adjacent fields.

"When people watch others farm, they often share their experiences. They also compete with each other. They may feel ashamed if the productivity of their fields does not equal adjacent fields. If their fields have more grass, they also will be mocked, like this: "Why does your field have so many antennas?" If traders come to buy their products and see grass on their fields, they also set the price lower, by about 10-20 VND per kilogram. Even when the grass in the fields is cut, people worry that grass seeds may be carried to other fields."

(Man, Khmer ethnic group, O Mich village, Chau Dien commune, Cau Ke district, Tra Vinh)

However, there are currently limitations on the implementation of policies and solutions to support effective maintenance and replication of models. According to many district and commune officials in the survey sites, the planning and implementation of models follows the annual budget allocation, so models are usually only carried out once in each location, making it difficult to support continuous maintenance and replication in subsequent years. These officials propose the development a mechanism that allows planning and implementation of models to be carried out over a longer period, so that the model actually “infiltrates” into the community, helping people to understand and apply it.

“Currently, planning is only done once a year. Foreign projects are carried out periodically in a single area over a four- or five-year period. However, local projects are carried out in different areas every single year, so they are not effective. Just as people get to know us, we have to move to other areas. For that reason, it is difficult to maintain and replicate the models. Long-term planning is essential to ensure long-term effectiveness.”

(Man, staff at Da Bac District
Agricultural Extension Station, Hoa Binh)

The current selection of households to implement models is mainly based on the conditions of the households, rather than on

the application of a “pioneering and diffusion” mechanism, although this mechanism has proved effective in the diffusion of models within the broader community. In the survey sites, there is still a conflict between intensive concentrated support (where only a small number of initial beneficiaries are supported) and support for diffusion of models within the broader community, or the diffusion of support on a wider scale. Current policies and documents on production support and agricultural extension do not clearly show a preference for concentrated rather than scattered investments.

Moreover, current policies and documents do not contain guidelines on the criteria and budget for evaluating the effectiveness, procedures and implementation methods, replication conditions and diffusion channels of a “successful model” or an “advanced production model”. The concept of “replication” itself in the current agricultural extension policy is simply “transferring scientific and technological results on a broader scale”, so funding for the replication of models only covers “the provision of information, advertising, and organising field seminars” to provide replication “recommendations”. This limitation should be overcome when designing production support and agricultural extension policies in the coming time.



4. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the analysis in this report, the major recommendations on the reform of production support, livelihood diversification and agricultural extension for sustainable poverty reduction and integrated development in ethnic minority areas during the period from 2016 to 2020 are as follow:

FOR THE CENTRAL LEVEL:

1. ***MARD should take the lead and coordinate with MOLISA, the Committee for Ethnic Minority Affairs (CEMA) and other relevant agencies to promulgate documents guiding the implementation of policies on production support, livelihood diversification and the replication of poverty reduction models to promote resource linkages and the adoption of project-based and community-based development approaches.***

- ***Integrated planning:*** Guidance should be provided on the use of commune socio-economic development plans, developed through a participatory approach, as the basis for decision-making on all forms of production support and other livelihood support at the commune level.
 - Support for production development should be integrated into activities related to agricultural extension, vocational training, credit, support to cooperatives/cooperative groups, and other livelihood support activities, based on the commune-level plan and integrated into the plans of related district divisions and provincial departments.
 - Guidance should be provided on the integration of beneficiary- and location-based resources into production development support projects, prioritising the beneficiaries and areas facing the greatest difficulties.

- ***Community development and project-based approaches:*** Guidance should be provided on the application of a community development approach in association with a project-based approach to production development support (in NTPs and other projects and programs):
 - Guidance should be provided on the uniform application of production development support principles over a period of at least two to three years or production cycles, focusing on concentrated support linked to household commitments to escape poverty (with associated forms and specific implementation processes).
 - Guidance should be provided on the development of recovery and rotation mechanisms for financial support or livestock sourced from the State budget, based on community proposals that are suitable to each project and to the specific characteristics of each area. Conditions and household commitments and responsibilities should be associated with the receipt of support by households, and a risk management mechanism should be applied.
 - Specific priority criteria should be developed for women-headed farmers' groups and groups with a substantial proportion of female members. Additional items on assistance with group formation, group management and operations, and training for team leaders should be added within project budgets.
 - Funds should be allocated for communication work and capacity building for grassroots staff and community representatives based on the training of trainers (TOT) method,

a hands-on approach, and integration of theory and practice during the implementation of production development support projects.

- **Replication of poverty reduction models:**

- Guidance should be provided on the overall criteria and procedures for evaluating the implementation effectiveness, processes and methods, success factors, replication conditions, and diffusion channels of poverty reduction models, as a basis for proposing further support measures and developing projects to replicate these models.
- Additional support should be provided to cover the costs of surveys, evaluations and assessments of the potential for replication; set out consistent provisions for support to the replication of models.

- **Monitoring and evaluation:**

- The responsibilities of project management units, local authorities and staff of mass organisations for regular supervision and risk management should be clearly set out (accompanied by instructions on procedures, methods, forms and funding), as prescribed in each Production Development Support project developed based on community proposals and approved by relevant authorities.
- The responsibilities, plans and specific assignments of the commune project management units, village development boards and mass organisations for regular supervision, the promotion of implementation, and risk management support for the production development support projects should be clearly defined. Increased funds should be allocated for monitoring and supervision of the project implementation process

by grassroots officers and the mass organisations at the commune and village levels (accounting for at least 50 percent of the budgeted project management costs).

- Add an ex-post evaluation component and required budget (at least one production cycle after the completion of the model), attaching great importance to documenting and sharing information on good examples and successful lessons.

2. ***MARD should be in charge of promoting the revision of Decree 02 on Agricultural Extension***, in line with new policies on production development support, with a focus on the following issues related to poverty reduction:

- Clarifying and orienting the specific priorities for agricultural extension programs at all levels of "agricultural extension for livelihood promotion" targeting poor people and localities, and "agricultural extension for commodity production" targeting more advantaged locations.
- Applying the agricultural extension sub-project approach for a period of at least two to three years; institutionalising the FFS approach and group-based agricultural extension methods; providing consistent support to effectively replicate agricultural extension models; and providing guidelines on the structure of agricultural extension fund utilisation, aiming to significantly increase funding for these methods.
- Developing a specific mechanism for coordination among concerned parties for orienting, consultations, planning, and linking agricultural extension with other forms of livelihood support, as well as the overall monitoring and evaluation of agricultural extension activities within the same locality.

- Developing a grassroots agricultural extension network based on a “pioneering and diffusion” approach from farmer to farmer in the community. Extending the concept of “grassroots agricultural extension” at the village level to develop the roles of agricultural extension workers, farmers’ groups, good farmers, village heads and deputy heads, and staff from mass organisations at the village level that are concurrently doing agricultural extension work (with added allowances).
- Developing professional guidelines for grassroots agricultural extension, including job descriptions, operational planning, monitoring and provision of technical assistance during the implementation of production support and agricultural extension projects at the local level.

FOR THE PROVINCIAL LEVEL:

3. Provincial People’s Committees should renew the implementation of production support and agricultural extension components in line with the policies and programs of the central and local levels, closely following the central regulations and guidelines (according to Recommendations 1 and 2 for the central level above) and in accordance with local conditions, with a focus on:

- Summarising experiences and lessons learned from the implementation of the production support and agricultural extension components during recent years in State budget- and donor-supported projects and programs. Based on this, specific guidelines for production support and agricultural extension should be developed within the framework of new central level policies (related to the delegation and allocation of capital, the specific support levels, instructions for participatory planning, resource linkages, the application of a project-based

approach, group- and community-based support, and mechanisms for recovery and rotation of support).

- Developing a project to replicate effective models within the province, with the coordinated solutions. Prioritise the replication of models on developing indigenous and local products, climate change adaptation, and coping with other risks faced by poor people in ethnic minority areas, and cooperative and farmers’ group development models.
 - Developing a common framework for capacity building for management staff at all levels, for commune officials, and for community representatives, in line with TOT methods and the integration of theory and practice within community-based production support projects. Project and program funding resources should be integrated into capacity building programs.
 - Developing a detailed plan and allocating sufficient funds for information and communications as well as monitoring and evaluation of production support, prioritising poor areas with many ethnic minority people.
- 4. Provincial People’s Committees should set up projects to enhance effective operations of the local agricultural extension system.**
- Increasing the budget for provincial agricultural extension programs; linking agricultural extension programs with production support components of the NTPs and other projects and programs (based on planning using a participatory approach); developing a mechanism to encourage the participation of enterprises in production support and agricultural extension activities in the areas from which their raw materials are sourced.
 - Prioritising the allocation of funding

for agricultural extension in poor areas by developing “pro-poor agricultural extension” projects.

- Institutionalising agricultural extension approaches suitable for poor people in ethnic minority areas, such as the FFS method (focusing on capacity building for FFS trainers, and issuing guidelines on the financial structure of FFS classes), and the “group-based agricultural extension” method (guiding the processes for group establishment and operations, and measures to support group management and operations).
- Improving the remuneration policies for agricultural extension staff in ethnic minority areas (the staff support policy,

and the policy on paying salaries based on training levels). Implementing a capacity building program for commune agricultural extension workers to develop their skills on advising, encouraging and working together with people. Focus on nurturing and supporting core farmers to promote their “pioneering and diffusion” role in spreading good practices within the community. Developing concrete policies to promote the provision of agricultural extension services, farmer cooperation and value chain development by mass organisations, non-governmental organisations and businesses.



ANNEX 1. SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF THE 15 VILLAGES IN THE PRO-POOR POLICY MONITORING PROJECT

Province	Lao Cai		Hoa Binh		Nghe An		Quang Tri		Dak Nong		Ninh Thuan		Tra Vinh		
District	Muong Khuong		Da Bac		Quy Chau		Dakrong		Dak Glong		Bac Ai	Ninh Phuoc	Ninh Hai	Cau Ke	
Commune	La Pan Tan	Ban Xen	Tan Pheo	Hien Luong	Chau Thang	Chau Hanh	Mo O	Dakrong	Quang Khe	Dak Som	Phuoc Dai	Phuoc Hai	Vinh Hai	Chau Dien	Tam Ngai
Village	Tin Thang	Phang Tao	Bon	Dung	Xet 2	Khe Han	Phu Thiang	K'Lu	Village 7	Village 3	Ma Hoa	Thanh Tin	Da Hang	O Mich	Ngoc Ho
Under the second phase of Program 135?	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Topography	Mountain	Mountain	Mountain	Low Mountain	Mountain	Mountain	Valley	Valley	Highlands	Highlands	Delta	Delta	Delta	Delta	Delta
Number of households	50	86	78	50	118	64	98	137	188	186	200	967	73	453	822
Main ethnic group	Mong (100%)	Day (25%), Nung (75%)	Dao (90%), Muong, Tay	Muong (85%), Tay, Dao, Kinh	Thai (100%)	Thai (97%) Kinh (3%)	Van Kieu (97%)	Van Kieu (96%)	Kinh, Ma	Ma, Kinh, Tay, Muong	Raglay (95%), Kinh (5%)	Cham (100%)	Raglai (96%), Kinh (4%)	Khmer (99%)	Khmer (63%)
Distance to the commune centre (km)	1.7	1	6	3.5	2	6	0.5	2	5	0.5	2	3	3	3	3
Distance to the nearest all weather road (km)	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0
Distance to the nearest clinic (km)	3	1	6	3.5	3	7	2	3	5	0.3	2	3	3	3	1.5
Distance to the nearest primary school (km)	1.7	1	2	0	2	3	0.5	2	4	0.3	0.5	0.1	0	3	1
Distance to the nearest lower secondary school (km)	3	1	6	3.5	2	6	2	2	5	0.3	1	3	3	3	1
Distance to the nearest secondary school (km)	3	1.2	11	9	13	6	4	10	5	20	1	10	37	6	1.5
Distance to the nearest market (km)	4	1	6	9	4	6	4	10	4	20	2	0	3	6	1
Main sources of income	Corn, rice	Corn, tea, animal husbandry	Rice, corn, cassava	Corn, cassava, aqua culture, forestry	Rice, working away from home	Rice, forest, animal husbandry	Rice, cassava, peanuts	Rice, corn, cassava	Coffee	Coffee, cassava, corn	Corn, beans, rice, working away from home	Rice, working away from home	Rice, Dairy and Beef production contract work	Rice, working away from home	Rice, cow, working away from home

Province	Lao Cai		Hoa Binh		Nghe An		Quang Tri		Dak Nong		Ninh Thuan		Tra Vinh		
Poverty rate by the end of 2013 (%)	55	30	45	57	43	59	25	41	60	45	34	12	36	25	7
Poverty rate by the end of 2014 (%)	51.02	10.46	43.58	47.91	37.74	41.97	24.5	29.5	54.92	48.66	27.5	8.37	28.67	11.73	5.96
Poverty rate by the end of 2015 under the new multi-dimensional poverty rate (%)	54	29.4	44.5	-	54.6	65.1	44	56.49	31.37	51.87	61.8	20	70.51	11.39	5.6
% of households with electricity (*)	100	100	100	98	100	100	100	100	75	100	100	100	100	100	95
% of households with tap water (*)	100 (running water)	100	60	98	50	0	30	84	30	0	70	60	56	96	36
% of households with hygienic latrines (*)	10	35	86	98	90	100	85	88	23	90	25	70	41	80	70
% of households with a TV set (*)	40	35	50	98	90	100	85	88	100	85	75	100	90	99	95
% of households with motorbikes (*)	70	93	70	80	60	95	70	91	100	100	80	80	41	80	70
% of households with telephones (*)	60	100	90	50	100	100	90	93	100	100	90	99	100	100	100
Production area per capita (m ²)	N/A	2,213.3 (corn, cassava, rice)	5,250 (corn, cassava, rice)	7,767 (corn, cassava)	9,034.3 (sugar cane, cassava, rice)	10,502 (corn, cassava, rice)	1,566 (corn, cassava, rice, green bean, peanut)	740 (rice, corn, cassava)	2,188 (coffee)	6,400 (coffee, cassava, corn)	2,774 (corn, cassava, rice)	589.7 (rice, vegetable)	1355.3 (rice, vegetable)	1829.5 (rice, vegetable)	915.4 (rice, fruit, vegetable)
% of households with sales in the past year (*)	100	100	100	100	100	100	95	100	100	100	100	90	100	90	100
% of households with remittance in the past year	0	0	13	24	17	6	3	4	10	0	25	40	22	10	35

Source: Village questionnaires, 2016

ANNEX 2. OUTSTANDING PRODUCTION SUPPORT POLICIES IN THE 7 SURVEY PROVINCES, 2014-2016

Province	Document name	Content	Policy highlights
Hoa Binh	Decision 2715/QĐ-UBND dated February 16, 2015	Approving the key agricultural extension projects of Hoa Binh province from 2016 to 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prioritising investment in agricultural extension models for highly efficient crops and livestock
	Decision 492/UBND-NNTN dated April 25, 2015	Guiding the implementation of the production support component of Program 135	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prioritising groups of households with a maximum level of support at 1.1 times higher than that of individual households The contents and resources for production support must be updated in the commune's annual socio-economic development plan
	Decision 73/QĐ-UBND dated January 20, 2014	The overall project to support the 36 villages in Hoa Binh province facing the greatest difficulties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focusing and integrating resources to support the most difficult villages and putting villages at the centre, providing support in line with each village's conditions, through a participatory approach The development of production support contents is carried out by collecting feedback from the community on direct support for households or groups of households, depending on the type of support.
	Decision 10/2015/QĐ-UBND dated April 27, 2015	Encouraging the development of fish cage farming in the Hoa Binh Hydropower Reservoir areas from 2015 to 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Post-investment support in cash (people contribute capital to implement, and the province provides support after checking and taking-over)
	Decision 11/2015/QĐ-UBND dated April 27, 2015	Promulgating the regulations on a number of mechanisms to support the development of commodity production in the cultivation sector in Hoa Binh province from 2015 to 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support for key seedling varieties according to the provincial planning and restructuring plans Post-investment support in cash (people contribute capital to implement, and the province provides support after checking and taking-over)
	Decision 12/2015/QĐ-UBND dated April 27, 2015	Support for the development of traditional crafts, craft villages and traditional craft villages by 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Post-investment support in cash (people contribute capital to implement, and the province provides support after checking and taking-over)
	Decision 73/QĐ-UBND dated January 20, 2014	Project on investment and support for 36 villages facing extreme difficulties in the province	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Integrating funds from projects and programs to support 36 villages facing extreme difficulties in the province
	Decision 1780/UBND-NLN dated November 18, 2009	On the use of FFS as the official method of agricultural extension activities in the province	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Institutionalising the FFS method in agricultural extension activities

Province	Document name	Content	Policy highlights
Lao Cai	Decision 14/2016/QĐ-UBND (in replacement of Decision 38/2014/QĐ-UBND)	Policy on development of agro-forestry production in the province	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post-investment support, after completion of acceptance tests as regulated and evaluated by competent authorities • A focus on supporting the key crops of the province
	Decision 28/2015/QĐ-UBND dated June 22, 2015	Regulation on the subsidised bank loan interest rate for investment projects on production development and processing of agricultural products in poor districts and districts with high poverty rates in Lao Cai province	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 100% of the bank interest rate supported for projects on production development in poor districts • All loan interest of the supported projects will be paid by the provincial budget directly to the lending banks
Nghe An	Decision 44/2015/QĐ-UBND dated September 25, 2015	Specifying special policies, promotion and incentives for investment in agriculture and rural areas in Lao Cai province from 2015 to 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enterprises are entitled to incentives, exemptions or subsidies for land rent, water surface rent, land use fees, and investment support for production • Implementation of post-investment support
	Decision 3736/QĐ-UBND dated August 25, 2015	Approving the plan for the implementation of agricultural extension models for the poor in Nghe An province from 2016 to 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing concentrated and continuous support under the project for two years. • Closely monitoring and supervising each household
Quang Tri	Decision 87/2014/QĐ-UBND dated November 17, 2014	Specifying some policies on investment in rural and agricultural development in Nghe An province	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support to develop and replicate effective models • Focused on high value commodity crops
	Decision 2462/QĐ-UBND dated November 06, 2014	Approving the plan for reforming and developing forms of cooperative economic organisation in agriculture in Quang Tri province from 2014 to 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integration of funding sources for the implementation of cooperative economic models in agricultural production, especially the model on linking production with processing and consumption of agricultural products through economic contracts.
	Decision 21/2015/QĐ-UBND dated September 14, 2015	Regulations on interest rate support, loans for production and business development during implementation of the NTP-NRD in Quang Tri province from 2015 to 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting 50% of the interest rate for short-term loans • Supporting 50% in the first 2 years, and 30% from the 3rd year onwards for medium- and long-term loans
	Resolution 06/2012/NQ-HĐND dated April 13, 2012	Approving the Sustainable Poverty Reduction Scheme in remote and extremely difficult communes and villages with high poverty rates.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrate funding from projects and programs to support 9 communes and 23 villages with a high poverty rate of over 50%
	Option 39/PA-UBND dated May 16, 2012 by People's Committee of Dakrong district	Developing a pilot model to assist households with sustainable poverty reduction commitments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integration and focusing of resources from different programs to invest in poverty reduction • Project-based concentrated and continuous support during a 3-year period • A written commitment between households and communes on escaping poverty (if not currently classified as poor, households will not receive further support in the upcoming time) • Commune officials are assigned to closely supervise and inspect each household

Province	Document name	Content	Policy highlights
Dak Nong	Decision 03/2015/QĐ-UBND dated January 26, 2015	Defining the contents and funding support levels for the development of VietGAP models in agriculture, forestry and fishery sectors in the province	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Covering the full cost of developing VietGAP standards for products
	Decision 1598/QĐ-UBND dated October 16, 2015	Training plan for agricultural extension staff and workers in Dak Nong province for 2016-2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Training and capacity building for agricultural extension staff and workers
Ninh Thuan	Decision 11/2015/QĐ-UBND dated February 02, 2015	The scheme on policies to support the replication of effective production models in association with the NTP-NRD in Ninh Thuan province until 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implementation resources are coordinated through projects and programs supporting production in the area, such as Program 135, Program 30a, and the Project to Replicate Poverty Reduction Models Distinguishes the level of support between delta communes and mountainous and disadvantaged communes
Tra Vinh	Decision 01/2015/QĐ-UBND dated January 8, 2015	Specifying the criteria for the minimum size of large-scale fields and specific support for large-scale field construction in the province	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specifying the size and area of large-scale fields that are suitable with local practice
	Decision 658/2016/QĐ-UBND dated March 29, 2016	Specifying the specific support levels when participating in the construction of large-scale fields in the province	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support for plant protection costs and seedlings for crops during large-scale field construction
	Decision 05/2012/QĐ-UBND dated May 4, 2012	Policy to support the development of rice seed production and commodity rice in the province	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Post-investment recovery: 30% of the cost

ANNEX 3. ORGANISATION, PERSONNEL AND BUDGET OF THE NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SYSTEM IN THE 7 SURVEY PROVINCES, 2014-2016

	Provincial AEC	District agricultural extension stations	Commune agricultural extension officers	Agricultural extension workers in villages
Lao Cai	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 27 officers The expenditure on the agricultural extension activities was 4.396 billion VND in 2015, a reduction of 0.97% (the figure was 4.439 billion VND in 2014)⁴³ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Managed by the provincial AEC Have the total number of 45 officers (5-7 officers per station) The costs on the model building: 200-300 million VND per year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Managed by the district agricultural extension station 152 agricultural extension officers in the province (getting benefits from cadre system with salary paid based on educational qualifications) A regular budget of 5 million VND per year for the commune agricultural extension officers Organise stations for advisory services on transactions on agricultural supplies in several communes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 544 agricultural extension workers in districts in Program 30a (with an allowance level of 0.5 times the base salary)
Hoa Binh	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 27 officers The expenditure on the agricultural extension activities was 6.931 billion VND in 2015, down 23.5% (the figure in 2014 was 9.062 billion VND)⁴⁴ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Managed by the district People's Committee Have the total number of 133 officers (10-13 officers per station) The costs on the model building: 200-300 million VND per year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Managed by the Commune People's Committee 210 agricultural extension officers in the province (with an allowance level of 0.8 to 1 times the base salary) Organise stations to provide services on veterinary and plant protection in several communes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> None
Nghe An	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 58 officers The expenditure of the agricultural extension activities in 2015 was 13.396 billion VND, up 13.05% (in 2014 the figure was 11.849 billion VND)⁴⁵ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Managed by the provincial AEC Have the total of 116 officers (6-7 officers per station) The costs on the model building: 250-300 million VND per year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Managed by the Commune People's Committee Restores 467 commune agricultural extension officers in 2015. They also take charge of veterinary and plant protection work (in 2014 the province deleted the title of commune agricultural extension officer) In 2015, the commune agricultural extension officers have an allowance level of 1.6 times the regular allowance (due to of their work in the two fields), which is higher than the support level of 0.6 times in 2013 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5,443 agricultural extension workers across the province (each is given an allowance of 50,000 VND per month)

	Provincial AEC	District agricultural extension stations	Commune agricultural extension officers	Agricultural extension workers in villages
Quang Tri	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 24 officers • The expenditure on the agricultural extension activities in 2015 was 4.208 billion VND, down 8.06% (in 2014 the figure was 4.577 billion VND)⁴⁶ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managed by the provincial AEC • 33 officers (3-4 officer per station) • The costs on the model building: 150-200 million VND per year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managed by the commune People's Committee • 185 agricultural extension officers in the province, communes with special difficulties have 2 people (with an allowance level of 1.0 times the base salary) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1,065 agricultural extension workers in the province (with an allowance level of 0.3 times the base salary)
Dak Nong	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 26 officers • The expenditure on the agricultural extension activities in 2015 was 8.759 billion VND, down 4.19% (in 2014 the figure was 9.143 billion VND)⁴⁷ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managed by the provincial AEC • Have the total number of 32 officers (4 officers per station) • The costs on the model building: 200-300 million VND per year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managed by the agricultural extension station • 71 agricultural extension officers in the province (1 officer per commune, 2 officers per commune with special difficulties, with an allowance level of 0.8 of the base salary) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 777 agricultural extension workers in the province (with an allowance level of 0.4 times the base salary)
Ninh Thuan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 38 officers • The expenditure on the agricultural extension activities in 2015 was 2.424 billion VND, decreasing 30.64% (the figure was 3.495 billion VND in 2014)⁴⁸ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managed by the provincial AEC • Have a total of 28 officers (3-5 officers per station) • Some stations receive 100-200 million VND per year from the district People's Committee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managed by the Commune People's Committee • The agricultural officers are also responsible for the agricultural extension work (civil servants, paid based on educational qualifications) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 38 agricultural extension workers in districts in Program 30a (with an allowance level of 1.0 times the base salary)
Tra Vinh	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 46 officers • The expenditure on the agricultural extension activities in 2015 was 2.255 billion VND, dropping 15.52% (in 2014 the figure was 1.952 billion VND)⁴⁹ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managed by the provincial AEC • Have the total of 39 officers (5 officers per station) • The costs on the model building: 50 million VND per year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managed by the Commune People's Committee • Each commune has 3 agricultural officers in charge of the agricultural extension work. One is a civil servant from the Commune People's Committee and the remaining two are employed by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and paid based on educational qualifications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None

Source: Provincial AECs in the 7 survey provinces, 2016

ANNEX 4. ASSESSMENT AND SCORING OF THE 44 MAIN PRODUCTION SUPPORT AND AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION MODELS IN THE 15 SURVEY COMMUNES

Province	District	Commune	Model	Scoring criteria								General	
				Suitable province	Benefiting the poor and near poor	Project-based approach	Delegation and empowerment	Group linkages	Market linkages	Support, monitoring and supervision	Maintenance and replication		
Lao Cai	Muong Khuong	La Pan Tan	Tea farming (Program 30a, Thanh Binh Tea Company	8	5	6	3	2	8	5	9	8	
			Pig and goose raising (poverty reduction in northern mountainous provinces)	4	8	2	2	0	0	2	1	3	
		Ban Xen	Rice farming (Farmers' Association)	9	9	6	2	0	0	4	7	7	
			Tea farming (Program 30a)	10	8	8	5	0	8	7	9	9	
			Pig raising (Program 135)	7	10	2	2	5	0	2	0	4	
Hoa Binh	Da Bac	Tan Pheo	Rice farming (Program 135)	7	10	5	5	3	2	3	2	5	
			Bamboo reforestation (AEC)	9	6	7	6	3	0	7	7	6	
	Hien Luong		Supporting acacia and spruce varieties (Da River Reservoir development)	8	3	2	6	0	0	3	4	3	
			Fish cage farming (Da River Reservoir development)	9	4	7	6	5	0	5	8	6	

Province	District	Commune	Model	Scoring criteria								General	
				Suitable province	Benefiting the poor and near poor	Project-based approach	Delegation and empowerment	Group linkages	Market linkages	Support, monitoring and supervision	Maintenance and replication		
Nghe An	Quy Chau	Chau Thang	Bamboo reforestation (Oxfam)	8	4	6	4	6	8	5	6	6	
			Pig raising (Program 135)	6	8	2	2	0	0	3	3	4	
			Rattan production (Program 30a, Duc Phong Company)	8	7	7	5	6	8	7	8	7	
		Chau Hanh	Local black sow raising (Program 135)	6	8	2	2	0	0	3	3	4	
			Bamboo reforestation (Oxfam)	7	3	3	4	3	6	4	5	5	
Quang Tri	Dakrong	Mo O	Rattan production (30a, Duc Phong Company)	7	6	4	4	3	5	2	4	4	
			Lemon grass farming (Program 135)	8	2	8	4	3	8	5	5	6	
			Goat and pig raising model, (KOICA)	7	6	8	8	8	4	8	6	6	
		Dakrong	Supporting cows (Viettel)	8	10	3	2	0	0	7	4	5	
			Supporting pigs and goats (Program 135)	7	10	2	2	0	0	3	4	3	
			Rattan reforestation (afforestation project)	8	5	6	5	2	0	7	6	6	

Province	District	Commune	Model	Scoring criteria								General
				Suitable province	Benefiting the poor and near poor	Project-based approach	Delegation and empowerment	Group linkages	Market linkages	Support, monitoring and supervision	Maintenance and replication	
Dak Nong	Dak Glong	Dak Som	Coffee replanting (provincial budget)	9	1	8	4	0	0	4	6	7
			Cow raising (Thien Tam Foundation)	8	9	2	4	0	0	3	4	3
			Cow, chicken, tea, coffee and avocado models (3EM)	8	4	5	6	8	0	8	6	6
			Cow, goat, chicken, rice, maize and silkworm models (Poverty reduction project in the Central Highlands)	8	4	7	7	8	0	9	7	7
			Support for fertiliser, salt, seeds, avocado and durian (Decision 102)	7	8	2	2	0	0	3	3	4
		Quang Khe	Chicken, goat, tea, cow, pig and gac models (3EM)	8	3	6	6	8	0	6	6	7
			Coffee replanting (provincial budget)	9	1	8	4	0	0	4	6	7

Province	District	Commune	Model	Scoring criteria								General	
				Suitable province	Benefiting the poor and near poor	Project-based approach	Delegation and empowerment	Group linkages	Market linkages	Support, monitoring and supervision	Maintenance and replication		
Ninh Thuan	Bac Ai	Phuoc Dai	Chicken raising (30a)	3	6	4	6	5	0	5	3	4	
			Sheep raising (Tam Nong)	6	6	7	5	6	0	7	3	5	
			Hybrid maize (Tam Nong)	5	8	5	3	0	0	2	2	3	
			Rice model (Tam Nong)	5	8	4	3	0	0	2	2	3	
			Green bean (Government's funds against drought)	7	5	5	2	0	0	3	3	3	
	Ninh Phuoc	Phuoc Hai	Safe vegetable cultivation (AEC)	8	3	5	6	3	2	5	8	4	
			'One necessity and five reductions' (AEC)	9	5	5	5	0	0	3	9	5	
	Ninh Hai	Vinh Hai	Cow support (poverty reduction model replication)	7	10	5	5	5	0	3	5	5	
			Goat and sheep raising (Tam Nong)	7	6	5	3	3	0	3	3	4	
			Grape model (AEC)	9	5	5	3	5	5	5	7	5	

Province	District	Commune	Model	Scoring criteria								General	
				Suitable province	Benefiting the poor and near poor	Project-based approach	Delegation and empowerment	Group linkages	Market linkages	Support, monitoring and supervision	Maintenance and replication		
Tra Vinh	Cau Ke	Chau Dien	Breeding cows (NRD)	8	7	5	4	3	0	3	6	7	
			Pig raising (135)	7	10	5	3	0	0	3	3	4	
			VietGAP-certified rice (ICOFARM Company)	8	10	5	5	5	3	7	6	6	
			Egg-laying duck raising (NRD)	7	10	5	3	3	0	3	4	4	
	Tam Ngai		High quality rice (provincial budget)	7	3	5	5	0	3	4	5	4	
			Cow raising (NRD)	8	10	5	6	0	0	6	5	5	
			Chicken and pig models (NRD)	7	0	2	4	0	0	3	3	3	

Source: Officials in the 15 survey communes

Note: Criteria are evaluated on a 10-point scale

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5. The "Poverty Reduction Policy Monitoring and Analysis" Project implemented by Oxfam and its partners in the hope of making timely contributions to the government on qualitative research information along with policy recommendations on sustainable poverty reduction in Vietnam. We work closely with our partners from relevant government agencies to learn about the implementation process, as well as the impact of poverty reduction policies on people's livelihoods. This process is conducted annually in nine provinces and cities across Vietnam. The stories and ideas collected during the study will be aggregated into thematic reports, used as documents in policy dialogues at all levels and other advocacy activities with concerned stakeholders, such as governmental agencies from local to central levels, development agencies and media organisations, to mobilise for more effective and sustainable poverty reduction policies.
6. The attached map is a poverty map produced in 2012 using the Vietnam Household Living Standards Survey (VHLSS 2012). The darker the colour, the higher the poverty rate in a province. Source: World Bank, 2012, 'Well begun, not yet done: Vietnam's remarkable progress on poverty reduction and the emerging challenges', Washington DC.
7. Oxfam has established partnerships with key government agencies in each province for this project: Lao Cai Department of Agricultural and Rural Development; Hoa Binh Department of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs; Nghe An Province Department of Foreign Affairs, Quang Tri Department of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs; Dak Nong Department of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs; Ninh Thuan Department of Planning and Investment; and Tra Vinh Provincial Office of Poverty Reduction.
8. Women represent 32% (14/44) in the core groups of the seven survey provinces. Members of the core groups are mostly Kinh people (except in Hoa Binh there is one member from the Muong ethnic group, and in Nghe An there is one member from the Hmong ethnic group). Language barriers emerge mainly in Hmong/Dao populated villages (in Lao Cai). These barriers were overcome by mobilising commune staff and village key informants who are fluent in Hmong or Dao languages during fieldwork.

9. Circular 46/2014/TT-BNNPTNT dated December 05, 2014 of MARD, guiding the implementation of the contents on production development support regulated in Decision 551/QĐ-TTg dated April 04, 2013 of the Prime Minister on the approval of Program 135 on infrastructure investment and production development support for communes facing extreme difficulties, border communes, safety zone communes and villages facing extreme difficulties. Circular 52/2014/TT-BNNPTNT dated December 29, 2014 guiding the implementation of contents on production development support regulated in Decision 2621/QĐ-TTg dated December 31, 2013 of the Prime Minister on adjusting and supplementing the support on production development regulated in Resolution 30a/2008/NQ-CP dated December 27, 2008 of the Government of Vietnam.
10. Government Decree 02/2010/ND-CP dated January 8, 2010 of the of Vietnam on agricultural extension; Joint Circular 183/2010/TTLT-BTC-BNN dated November 15, 2010 guiding the management and utilisation of the State expenditure on agricultural extension; MARD Circular 49/2015/TT-BNNPTNT dated December 30, 2015 (replacing MARD Circular 15/2013/TT-BNNPTNT dated December 26, 2013) regulating the implementation of some articles of Decree 02/2010/ND-CP.
11. Oxfam, "Agricultural extension and poverty reduction: Strategic choices in ethnic minority communities", round 1 Report in 2014; and "From fragmentation to integration: Reforming agricultural extension and production policies for poverty reduction in ethnic minority communities", round 2 Report in 2015.
12. Government Decree 42/2012/ND-CP dated May 11, 2012 on management of the use of paddy land; Decision 755/QĐ-TTg dated May 20, 2013 of the Prime Minister approving the support policies for residential land, productive land, and water supply for poor ethnic minority households and poor households in communes and villages facing extreme difficulties.
13. In some provinces such as Hoa Binh and Cao Bang, there are guidelines on integrating the planning for Program 135 into the participatory annual commune socio-economic development plans; however, there is no guidance on integrating the NTP-NRD planning. In particular, Dakrong district (Quang Tri) has issued regulations on integrating production support planning of Program 135, 30a and NTP-NRD into the process of participatory annual commune-level socio-economic development plans.
14. Report 2009/BC-SNV dated August 21, 2015 by the Department of Home Affairs of Ninh Thuan on the implementation of the Government's Resolution 30a/2008/NQ-CP dated December 27, 2008 in Bac Ai district for the period from 2009 to 2015.
15. In the sustainable poverty reduction program, the budget for capacity building accounts for 4.5 percent of the budget for Project 2 (Program 135), and 1.1 percent (in line with the monitoring and evaluation component of Project 5) of the program's total budget. The budget for Project 4 on communication and poverty reduction in information represents 1.2 percent of the program's total budget. In the NTP-NRD, capacity building and capacity building are just two spending lines among many capital streams.
16. Report 51/BC-VPDP dated September 20, 2016 of Ha Giang Provincial NRD Program's Coordination Office on the implementation of the NTP-NRD in Ha Giang.

17. During the period from 2016 to 2020, Decision 1722/QĐ-TTg regulates the restructuring of approximately 1.1 percent of the total budget from the State budget for the Sustainable Poverty Reduction Program granted for Project 5 on capacity building and monitoring and evaluation, which is not proportional to the importance of this work. In the field of agricultural extension, expenditures on development of projects and programs, inspection and supervision only accounts for about two percent of the annual agricultural extension expenditure of the localities. For units directly implementing the models, expenditures on management, direction, inspection, supervision and other expenses must not exceed three percent of the model's total budget (and not exceeding four percent in disadvantaged or poor districts). In addition, the provinces issued many separate production support policies but did not allocate associated monitoring and evaluation budgets.
18. On a national scale, the total expense of the provinces on annual agricultural extension was about 400 billion VND per year during the period from 2011 to 2013, reflecting an 80 percent increase compared with the budget in 2010. However, in both 2014 and in the 2015 plan, the total agricultural extension budget has reduced by an average of 10 percent per year. Provincial investments in agricultural extension are at different levels. There are five cities and provinces investing over 10 billion VND per year, 15 cities and provinces with an investment of five to 10 billion VND per year; 23 cities and provinces investing two to five billion VND per year; and about 20 cities and provinces having an investment amount of under two billion VND per year. Out of these, several provinces only invest less than 500 million VND per year, such as Cao Bang, Bac Can, Ninh Thuan, Thai Nguyen, Ha Tinh and Bac Lieu. (Source: <http://tapchitaichinh.vn/nguyen-cuu-trao-doi/trao-doi---binh-luan/dau-tu-kinh-phi-cho-hoat-dong-khuyen-nong-mot-so-van-de-dat-ra-69452.html>).
19. Provincial units find it difficult to compete with institutes and schools in the selection of agencies responsible for implementing central-level agricultural extension projects because they are unlikely to be able to carry out projects involving three or more provinces.
20. Decision 3736/QĐ-UBND dated August 25, 2015 of Nghe An Provincial People's Committee approving the plan for the implementation of agricultural extension models targeting the poor in Nghe An province during the period from 2016 to 2020.
21. Decision 11/2015/QĐ-UBND dated February 02, 2015 of Ninh Thuan Provincial People's Committee promulgating the scheme on support for the replication of effective production models in association with the NTP-NRD in Ninh Thuan province until 2020.
22. Decision 39/2009/QĐ-UBND dated December 08, 2009 by Lao Cai Provincial People's Committee on improvement of the grassroots agricultural extension staff network.
23. Decision 99/2014/QĐ-UBND dated December 19, 2014 of Nghe An Provincial People's Committee regulating the operations of commune-level agricultural extension staff in the province.
24. Decision 04/2008/QĐ-UBND dated January 30, 2008 of Quang Tri Provincial People's Committee on local agricultural extension.
25. Decision 28/2012/QĐ-UBND dated October 08, 2012 of Tra Vinh Provincial People's Committee on the issuance of the project on domestic training for human resources with postgraduate qualifications in the province during the period from 2012 to 2016.
26. Decision 1780/UBND-NLN dated November 18, 2009 of Hoa Binh Provincial People's Committee regulating the use FFS as the official method in agricultural extension activities in the province.

27. Helvetas, 2013, Mid-term Review Report on the Outputs of the PSARD Project in Hoa Binh and Cao Bang provinces.
28. In Hoa Binh, the budget estimate for opening an FFS class is about 2.7 million VND/class, equivalent to 10.8 million to 13.5 million VND for four to five classes (Document 1049/SNN-KNKN of the Hoa Binh Department of Agriculture and Rural Development providing guidance on the management and implementation of the FFS approach. FFS rates are established based on the rates in Circular 183/2010/TTLT-BTC-BNN and Decision 07/2013/QĐ-UBND). In the Hoa Binh PSARD project, the cost of one FFS class lasting for four days is reduced to only 2.29 million VND. The reason is that the FFS classes in the PSARD project do not support meal allowances for trainees. Communal agricultural extension staff can directly take the class so the costs for trainers are reduced.
29. Referring to the model of “farmers teaching farmers” launched by the Central Committee of the Vietnam Farmers’ Union (<http://www.hoinongdan.org.vn/>).
30. Decision 102/2009/QĐ-TTg dated August 07, 2009 of the Prime Minister on the direct support policy for poor households in disadvantaged areas. The Prime Minister assigned MARD to combine the support policy in Decision 102/2009/QĐ-TTg with the production development support policy for poor and ethnic minority households in the period from 2016 to 2020.
31. Report 284/BC-SNN on the evaluation of the implementation of models in Lao Cai from 2006 to 2012; Report on agricultural extension work during 2010-2015 period of Lao Cai AEC.
32. Report on results of agricultural extension in 2015, and directions and tasks for 2016, of the Hoa Binh AEC.
33. Report on agricultural extension work in Nghe An dated July 06, 2015; Report on the results of agricultural extension activities in 2015, and the directions and tasks for 2016, of Nghe An AEC.
34. Evaluation report on agricultural and fishery extension in 2015 and the deployment of tasks for 2016 by Quang Tri AEC.
35. Estimates based on the 10-year review report of agricultural extension of Dak Nong province AEC; The report on agricultural extension work in 2015, and the directions and tasks for 2016, of Dak Nong province AEC.
36. Report of Ninh Thuan Provincial Department of Agriculture evaluating the model implementation from 2008 to 2014; Final report on agriculture-forestry extension in 2015, and the orientation and tasks for 2016, of Ninh Thuan AEC.
37. Report of Tra Vinh province AEC in 2013; Report on results of agricultural and fishery extension in 2015 and the directions for operations in 2016.
38. Incremental participatory levels are interpreted as follows: “One-way information”: The community is notified of the activity; “Consultation”: the community is consulted; “Making decision together”: The community is involved in discussion and decision-making process; “Doing together”: The community has an important voice in making decisions and contributes a part to activity implementation; “Delegation”: the community proposes and to be assigned and tasked with supervision; “Empowerment”: The community is financed in a package and makes plans, implements works, and monitors development activities by itself. Referring to: http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/docs/icb.topic980025.files/Wk%203_Sept%2016th/Arnstein_1969_Ladder%20of%20Participation.pdf.

39. See also: Oxfam and AAV, 2013b, Poverty alleviation models in some typical ethnic minority communities in Vietnam - Case studies in Ha Giang, Nghe An and Dak Nong.
40. According to the New Rural Areas Criteria #13 that "the commune must have a farmer cooperative and a model linking production with the market" (National New Rural Areas Criteria in period 2016-2020 by Prime Minister's Decision 1980/QĐ-TTg, dated 17 October 2016).
41. MARD has been tasked to amend Decree 151/2007/ND-CP dated October 10, 2007 on the organisation and operation of cooperative groups, with the orientation of formulating effective support policies and measures for the establishment and operations of cooperative groups in the coming time.
42. Decision 87/2014/QĐ-UBND dated November 17, 2014 of the People's Committee of Nghe An Province regulating support policies for economic model replication: Provision of expenditures on communication and organising field meetings with a rate of 20 million VND per model; Providing 30 percent of the costs for key supplies and fertilisers; Providing 30 percent of the costs for animal feeds, mostly for livestock raising and aquaculture models.
43. Lao Cai AEC, Report on the performance of 2015 tasks and the plan and key tasks for 2016.
44. Hoa Binh AEC, Report on the results of agricultural extension work in 2015 and directions and tasks for 2016.
45. Nghe An AEC, Report on the use of the agricultural extension budget in 2015.
46. Quang Tri AEC, Report on agricultural and fishery extension work in 2015 and tasks for 2016.
47. Dak Nong AEC, Report on summarising agricultural extension activities in 2015 and orientation for 2016.
48. Ninh Thuan Agro-Fishery Extension Centre, Report summarising agriculture-fishery extension work in 2015 and directions and tasks for 2016.
49. Tra Vinh AEC, Report on results of agricultural and fishery extension activities in 2015 and orientation for operations in 2016.
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