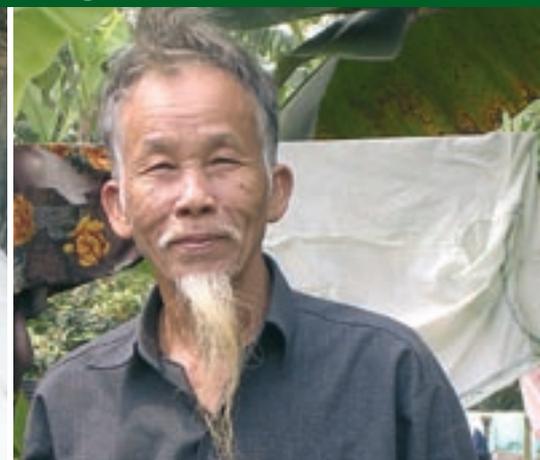


Reducing Poverty in Quang Tri



Success Stories in Vietnamese Rural Development

Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland



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Quang Tri Catches Up With the Rest of Vietnam

Vietnam has made good progress in reducing poverty, and has already achieved the first of the United Nations Millennium Goals: Vietnam has reduced by half the number of those living below the poverty line. In 1993, 58% of the Vietnamese people lived in poverty. By 2002, that figure had dropped to 29%.

The average annual growth rate in Vietnam is currently 6-8%, but this is not spread equally throughout the country. The differences in economic growth between and within different areas are still great. Poverty is deepest in the mountainous areas of Central Vietnam, where most of the inhabitants belong to ethnic minorities. These minorities account for only 14% of the total population of Vietnam, but represent 30% of the poor.

The programmes the Government of Vietnam set up specifically to reduce poverty have bitten deep into the core of the problem. Funds channelled through the poverty reduction programmes have been used to improve basic infrastructure, and to set up social income transfer systems and micro-credit programmes. In recent years, the income level has indeed begun to rise even in the poorest areas of Central Vietnam.

Poverty reduction is the most important goal of Finnish Development Cooperation Policy. The great majority of the Vietnamese poor live in rural areas, and rural development is one of the primary areas of emphasis in development cooperation between Finland and Vietnam.

Beginning in 1997, Finland has supported a large development programme in the province of Quang Tri, in Central Vietnam. Through the Quang Tri Rural Development Programme (QTRDP), sustainable livelihoods have been facilitated and taken root in three districts: Hai Lang, Cam Lo, and Dakrong.

In addition, the Programme has facilitated improvements in rural basic infrastructure and in the capacity of local organisations to plan and carry out their own development. This capacity building, the 'software' of development cooperation, is the backbone of sustainable development and continuous poverty reduction, which is the main goal of the Programme in Quang Tri. The 'side-effects' of capacity building are the promotion of local democracy and the improvement of the position of women.

In Phase II of QTRDP, 31,000 households and 148,000 persons lived in the area covered by the Pro-

"The Programme has been very successful in improving people's living conditions. It has been possible to reduce hunger and poverty in the whole of Quang Tri. We have succeeded because the local rural population actively participated in taking initiatives and organising activities, and everyone worked hard together to achieve the goals they had set themselves."

The Chairman of the Hai Lang People's Committee, Tran Duc Tam.



"The new cultivation methods have benefited everyone, especially women, and the harvests have increased. The loans which the Programme has provided for agricultural investment have had an enormous impact on reducing poverty in the district."

*The Chairman of the Dakrong
People's Committee,
Nguyen Van Hung.*

In the mountains of Dakrong, the rice paddies are very small. Photo: Jussi Ojala

gramme. It is estimated that some 51,000 of these people participated directly in the Programme activities or otherwise benefited from them.

The Programme did not take on the task of directing development in the region. Instead, the aim of the Programme was to facilitate the people and authorities in the province and the districts to make and to carry out their own plans for social and economic development. Annual district plans are made by the local and district authorities using participatory methods. These district plans form part of Vietnam's national development plans. The idea is to fulfil the district's wishes for their own development. At the same time, these annual plans, and the participatory ways in which they are made and carried out, can provide models for other districts.

Rural Development Is Combined Action in Many Fields

Sustainable rural development requires action in many fields: activities are carried out to improve health care and education, ensure a supply of clean water, and provide environmentally friendly energy. In addition, the basic infrastructure needs to be developed, and a diversified economy with many different livelihoods needs to be facilitated through different financial schemes, including the provision of microloans.

In Quang Tri, poor families are offered financial support in the form of small loans. Such loans, and other support provided to encourage growth of sup-

plemental livelihoods, has proven to be the crucial factor in creating sustainable rural development.

Phase II of QTRDP showed that the participation of local people in the process of development led to good results. Local people are the ones who know best what their own development needs are. They are more than willing to improve their living conditions by participating in small projects, if they are only given the chance. The active participation of the people also promotes two other important goals of development cooperation: it guarantees that the technology used is suitable for local conditions; and through building the capacity of the local people in learning by doing, it ensures that the new production methods will be sustainable. At the same time, participatory methods create a working dialogue between and among the rural poor, their own organisations, the local leaders, and the district and provincial decision-makers.

Education and capacity building were combined in Phase II of QTRDP with the introduction of participatory methods of development. This was the method for facilitating farmers in carrying out many small projects to improve rural livelihoods and the rural infrastructure. This combination of capacity building with participatory processes has proven to be very efficient and very effective in reducing rural poverty. The 'hardware' of project results that can be seen and touched needs to be combined with the 'software' of capacity building and education for the results to be sustainable. The effects of capacity building continue to be felt even after the roads and schools are built and the larger harvests are gathered in.



A great deal of time was spent in the Quang Tri Rural Development Programme on participatory planning sessions. Photo: Jussi Ojala

Poverty in Quang Tri has clearly been reduced – from 24.5% to 12.4% – during the years of QTRDP Phase II, 2000-2004. With an annual growth rate of 8%, Quang Tri is no longer one of Vietnam's poorest provinces.

Active Organisations Lead the Way in Capacity Building

Rural poverty in Quang Tri was reduced by the local people themselves, working through their own local organisations. It made sense for QTRDP to use the channels that were already there.

The responsibility for designing and carrying out the projects facilitated under QTRDP lay with the local people and their organisations. This meant that both participation and capacity building improved. The local farmers' unions, and the women's and youth unions, were given microloans; and extension education and vocational training courses were facilitated, so that people could supplement their incomes and improve their living conditions themselves. Training was facilitated for agronomists, agricultural advisors, and the leaders of the local organisations, to help them be more effective in turn in facilitating the rural people to work in their own development.

QTRDP started up in 1997 in Hai Lang. Badly devastated by the Vietnam War, work on reconstruction in Hai Lang had been going on for decades, but there was still much that needed to be done. For example, part of the area's rice paddies lie in a geographical depression below sea level, and floods had been a continuous problem. In 1999 the 'flood of the century' caused widespread damage. Under QTRDP, canals have been built which serve both as irrigation and as flood control channels when needed. After the flood, these same channels help drain the land.

Phase II of QTRDP ended in June of 2005, and was followed immediately in August with Phase III. The new phase will place even more emphasis than the other two phases on improving rural livelihoods, and on developing markets and marketing. Participatory processes and improved capacity building will continue to be a major part of the Programme, which will be extended to include 44 new districts.

Improvements in Rural Infrastructure Reduce Poverty

In the start-up for Phase II of QTRDP, c. 60% of the budget was used as the local people had asked, for improvements in basic infrastructure. Irrigation canals, roads, and schools were built.

Improving infrastructure was not a goal in itself, but a means to facilitate development. A road runs both ways – crops and goods are taken to market, and things the farmers need can be brought home.

Basic construction projects reduce poverty in two ways: a fast way and a slow way. The canals and roads are the fast way, the schools are the slow way. It takes much longer to see the results of capacity building. Schools create sustainable development by bringing to poor areas the necessary intellectual, psychological, and social capital that development needs to be sustainable.

Of course, construction projects can be shown to people from other regions and to authorities and decision-makers. This provides encouragement and a boost to development: both authorities and local peo-



Having their own schools improves the self-confidence of the ethnic minority groups. Photo: Jussi Ojala.

ple become even more committed to the Programme. However, the ‘abstract’ results of capacity building, which are more difficult to see, are also important.

In the mountainous areas of Dakrong District, QTRDP facilitated the building of schools, primarily for the ethnic minorities which comprise 80% of the population. Especially for young school-age children, having their own school, with instruction in their own language, raises their self-confidence and encourages them to participate in their own development while increasing their capacity to do so. The villagers recognise the importance of education and capacity building: the school maintenance fund was organised and is run by the local people, who also contribute to the fund.



Literacy Rates Rising

Literacy rates in the mountains of Dakrong are much lower than elsewhere in Quang Tri. The majority of those who cannot read and write belong to ethnic minority groups. QTRDP has facilitated several projects which promote literacy and are being carried out by the Department of Education of Dakrong District. These literacy projects are aimed at people 25-35 years of age, who have attended primary school at some time, but who have had to leave school. The pupils are on different levels in their ability to use the Vietnamese language. Their mother-tongue is the minority language Van Kieu, which has no written form and thus no written literature: Van Kieu exists only as an oral language with an oral literature. Education in Vietnamese includes practice in speaking, reading, and writing, as well as

Language skills in Vietnamese are important for Ho Ta Dang, whose own mother-tongue is the minority language, Van Kieu. Photo: Gladys Savolainen

basic arithmetic. The teacher is bilingual and speaks both Vietnamese and Van Kieu fluently.

Ho Ta Dang was a pupil in the literacy programme. Despite his limited skills in reading and writing, he had been working for ten years as a person responsible for the health of the population of the village of Klu. He related how the literacy courses had helped him in his work:

“In my job, I receive documents from our District Office concerning community health. I have to read them first before I can give the information to the villagers. And I also have to write, and send monthly reports to our District Office on the local health situation, such as how many cases of communicable diseases we’ve had, the number of pregnant women, and things like that. Previously, I had difficulty understanding the documents and preparing the reports. Things have been a lot easier since I participated in the training. It certainly has improved my capacity to give out valuable information in the village.”

Ho Ta Dang, like all of the people who participated in the literacy courses, also farms. Being able to read and do basic math has also helped him sell his farm produce in markets outside his own village.

“Now I can read documents written in Vietnamese much better. I can understand what people say. I have more knowledge. I go to the markets in Dong Ha and Khe San to sell farm produce. There, I am now able to do business and bargain in Vietnamese.”

The Wide Range of the Women's Union

The Women's Union is similar to the Youth Union and the Farmers' Union, with activities reaching down to grassroots. Through projects carried out in the villages, the organisation has increased its membership. In Dakrong District, according to District Leader, **Nguyen Thi Ha**, as many as 60% of the women over 18 have registered as members of the Women's Union. Nguyen Thi Ha related her experiences:

"The first Programme-sponsored activity that I took part in was the PRA (participatory rural appraisal) done to map the development priorities of villagers. I think PRA is good, because using PRA we can reach out to the local people, better understand their expectations, and help them prioritise their needs.

The Women's Union has facilitated a wide range of projects supported by QTRDP II, such as providing credit access to poor households, arranging training in gender awareness, facilitating development for farmers, beekeeping, illiteracy eradication, vegetable gardening, and introducing improved techniques in crop production and animal raising. Some of these are carried out with other government offices, such as the Plant Protection Station and the Veterinary Station."

Nguyen Thi Ha thinks that working with QTRDP has made her a better leader for the Women's Union.

"Through my work with the Programme, I learned many things about management, especially formulating and managing projects. This has improved my capacity as leader of the Women's Union. At first project formulation was hard to do. However, with all



Nguyen Thi Ha, the leader of the Dakrong Women's Union, wants to be able to offer the rural poor possibilities to work to change their own lives. Photo: Glays Savolainen.

our work with the Programme, and mentoring from Technical Officers, I have got new skills in project formulation. I learned a lot of new things, such as financial credit and beekeeping. I also have to prepare the lessons myself when I am the trainer. If we have an outside trainer, I guide them through the content and supervise the training course."

According to Nguyen Thi Ha, development cooperation has also had results in promoting the well-being of the local people.

"The goal of QTRDP is to reduce poverty. Working with the Programme, I have had the chance to work with the very poor and households living just barely above the poverty line. Our projects have certainly contributed to poverty reduction in the district. Through the Programme and our work with other organisations, we have been able to give more choices to the poor people on ways to lift themselves out of poverty."



Participants in a district planning seminar.
Photo: Gladys Savolainen.

Gender Awareness Training Also for Men

Because QTRDP is based on the principles of Finnish Development Policy, the Programme also promotes gender equality. Gender equality is a cross-cutting principle found in all of the activities facilitated by the Programme. In addition, support is provided for special gender awareness courses. These courses are arranged by the Women's Union and the Youth Union for different target groups: youth and adults, men and women, decision-makers and poor farmers. In these courses, the participants learn about and discuss gender equality, gender roles, the role of women in society and family, women's rights, and practical issues related to housework and childcare.

One of the participants in a course arranged by the Women's Union was Mr Thon, the head of the village of Phan Xa. He spoke of his experiences in a gender equality course from the man's point of view.

"Fifty villagers participated in gender training, half of the participants were women and half men. The participants were mainly poor people. We learned many things, for example the definition of gender, what is a woman's workload, and the importance of gender equality. I think that the training was very interesting for both men and women. I've talked about what I learned with other men who didn't participate, and they also want to be trained."

Although one course will certainly not change deeply rooted ways and models of behaviour overnight, Mr Thon felt that the training had inspired new thoughts and created discussion, and he could already see changes in attitudes.

"Now the men in the village understand how hard women's work is, and they try to help their wives more with the work in the home. Men respect women more, and let them participate in social events and training courses. I can also see that family violence has decreased in the village. Of course, attitudes don't change very quickly, and we need more training and information on the gender issues."



Achievements of the Quang Tri Rural Development Programme in Phase II, 2000 – 2004

Several different indicators were used in monitoring and evaluating how well QTRDP achieved its goals in Phase II. In the first half of 2005, statistical data was collected and analysed, and a questionnaire was sent out to 800 farmers living within the area covered by the Programme.

- 81% of all farmers increased their farm output
- VND 87,142 million (36%) increase in gross output of agriculture from 2000 to 2004
- VND 2 million (17%) increase in value of agriculture production per hectare from 2000 to 2004
- 89% of all farm households (HH) adopted a minimum of one, and 63% three or more new or improved crop production techniques from 2000 to 2004
- 53% of all farm HHs adopted a minimum of one, and 7% three or more new or improved animal husbandry techniques from 2000 to 2004
- 71% of farm HHs had more income from off-farm activities from 2000 to 2004
- 38% of all farm HHs adopted new off-farm income activities from 2000 to 2004.
- 36 infrastructure projects handed over to end-users' organisations (communes and cooperatives)
- 93% of all HHs responded that their children's educational opportunities and conditions for learning had improved
- A 1.5 percentage-unit increase in the primary school enrolment rate (from 97.8 % to 99.3 %); an 11 percentage-unit increase in the secondary school enrolment rate (from 65% to 76%)
- 1,701 HHs benefited from new irrigation installations
- 92% of all farmers reported improved access to market from 2000 to 2004
- Programme workplans were integrated into district and commune workplans in all 3 districts and 37 communes
- 2,231 district, commune and village officers trained and now applying their newly acquired skills in their work
- 40 community learning and information centres set up in Quang Tri

Photo: Jussi Ojala



Better a Fishing Pole than a Fish

The Chairperson of the Dakrong Youth Union, **Bui Thi Nga**, related how working together with QTRDP had facilitated the activities of the organisation.

“At first, it was difficult to get used to new working methods with the Programme. But I got more experience with these methods, and I went to a lot of capacity building sessions and training courses like planning and managing projects, and Training of Trainers (TOT). Now I am more confident and I find it is easier to work together with the Programme and with other organisations. I am also much more confident working with foreigners and talking to them. I’ve used what I learned in the TOT course in training activities I have conducted with the Programme and with other organisations. The participatory techniques are very important.”

The Chairperson of the Dakrong Youth Union, Bui Thi Nga, on the far left, said she got new ideas from QTRDP on how to supplement her income. Photo: Gladys Savolainen

Through our partnership with the Programme, we have been able to introduce our members to other development initiatives in the country. For example, we had a study tour to the northern region of Vietnam. Before, this was only a dream.”

According to Bui Thi Nga, working with QTRDP has above all created numerous ideas for new activities, and encouraged the Youth Union to take action in carrying out these activities.

“Following the study tour, the Youth Union proposed to implement two brocade weaving training courses for young women in the district. The participants now have a job. They can earn money from weaving. But we need to move farther, for example, to help the women find markets for their products and use new designs, or help people find ways to increase their income by bringing weavers and tailors together.”

There is a bigger awareness among the people now than in the past about other income generating opportunities. In the past, the people just waited for the fish to be served to them. They did not want a fishing pole! Now the people prefer the fishing pole to the fish!”



Speeding Up the Flow of Information in Rural Areas

QTRDP has used the meeting places of local rural organisations as places to disseminate information. These local organisations and associations have set up 40 community learning and information centres in Quang Tri. Here, local farmers can get information on various topics, such as livelihood activities, marketing, better methods of cultivation and so on.

The information centres have been equipped with a small library and audio-visual equipment, which can be used to show films related to agriculture and other things of

interest. In the future, it is hoped that computers and an internet connection can be provided for the centres.

The initiative for setting up the information centres came from the Government of Vietnam, and the villagers themselves have provided the premises. When government officials realised the benefits of these centres, they began to use them to disseminate information as well. In this way, information channels have been created through which local people can learn about, for example, HIV/AIDS.

Photo: Jussi Ojala



Hearing the Voice of the Rural Poor

Local people need to be able to participate in discussions and decision-making that affect their own lives, their livelihoods and living conditions. It is important that the voice of the rural poor is heard at all levels of government.

In the province of Quang Tri, the Quang Tri Rural Development Programme (QTRDP) is seen as one development programme in which local people can make their voices heard. Project planning and design from the bottom up has proven very effective. The villagers who benefit from the projects have learned to know and understand their own goals for development, and they know how a project can help them achieve their goals.

The Finnish Embassy in Hanoi supports QTRDP in general, and in particular its projects that strengthen democracy at grassroots level. In the villages, the concept

of democracy is strengthened using community activities, such as folk dancing and singing, as well as village meetings, in which everyone participates. The goal is to increase possibilities for the rural poor to have an input in making national and local decisions that will affect their lives. Village meetings are held to plan how, for example, village funds will be used: for building a road, a school, or water supply systems. The meetings are chaired, and activities led, by a village head who is chosen in a democratic election.

When people better understand the basic principles of democracy, they are more willing to participate in discussions about planning, designing, and implementing projects. In this way, the ground is also paved for planning, designing, and implementing projects for the rural development of the province of Quang Tri.

Photos: Jussi Ojala

Better Diet, Better Income

Agriculture is the primary livelihood in Quang Tri, which needs to be facilitated to attain the goal of sustainable poverty reduction. Rice is of great importance in the lives of the Vietnamese people. QTRDP has taken note of that, and has also facilitated people in having a more varied diet, and growing new crops. Selling the surplus harvest also increases their incomes.

Food is now being produced in Quang Tri through the use of better methods of cultivation and the introduction of more robust varieties of rice as well as maize, cassava, green peas, and fruit. Raising domestic animals – pigs, goats, chickens and ducks – for food in Quang Tri is being facilitated by QTRDP through training programmes in animal care. The genetic make-up of the animals is improved through breeding programmes. Fisheries and beekeeping are facilitated by QTRDP through microloans.

Thanks to small dams and irrigation systems, the people living in the mountain valleys now get harvests up to ten times larger than they did before. The new irrigation systems also save women a great deal of work, and household incomes have doubled in some cases. The bringing of electricity to the mountains has also increased incomes in some areas by 30-40%.

The Xa Rui Dam in Dakrong District benefits 100 households which have been able to double their rice production thanks to the artificial irrigation systems facilitated by QTRDP. In the irrigated fields, harvests have risen by some 30%. The water flowing in the irrigation channels first waters the rice paddies, then brings water to the pig enclosure, and ends up in the fish cultivation ponds.

Building Capacity for Promoting Development

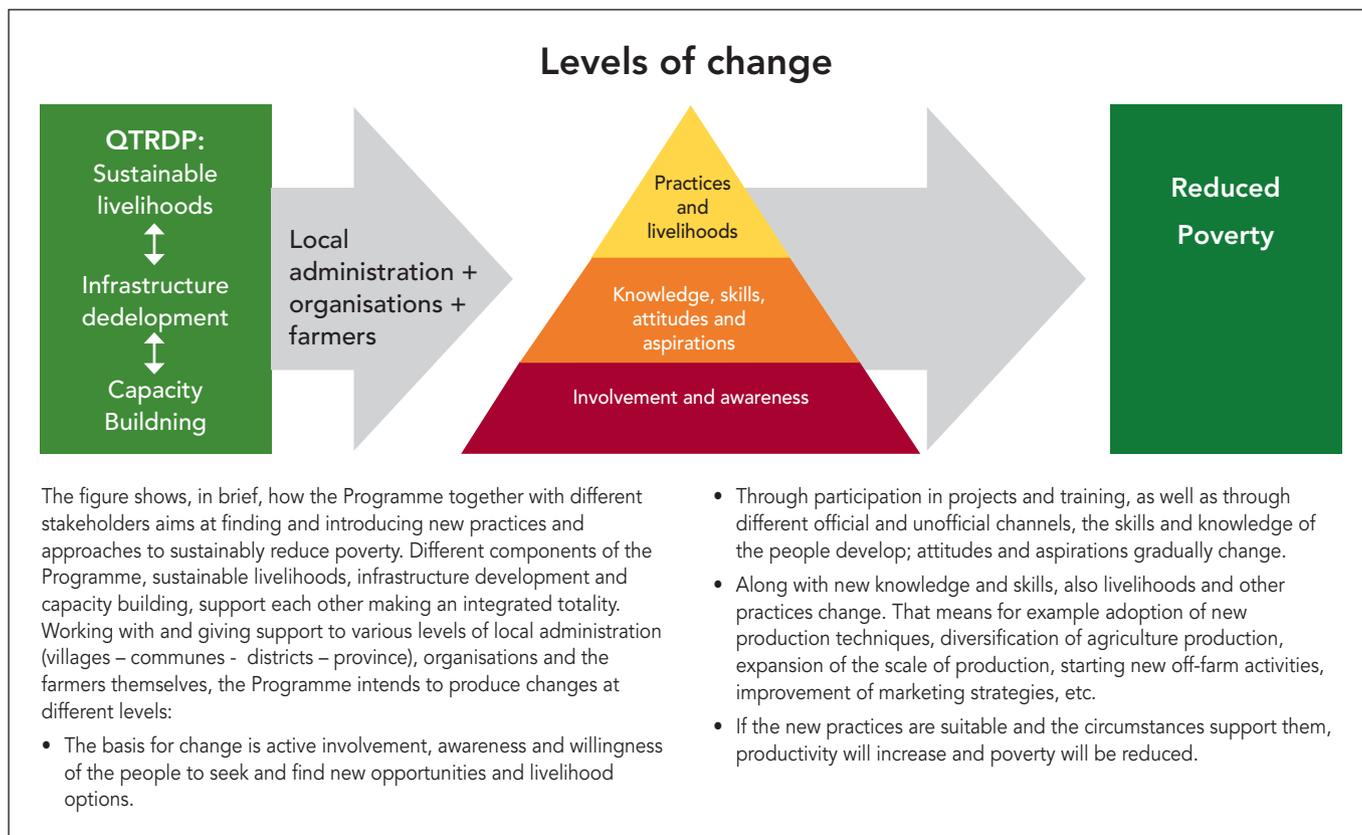
by Gladys Savolainen and Marjatta Paulamäki

The authors worked as Capacity Building Advisers in Phase II of QTRDP. Gladys Savolainen is currently working as an Institutional Planning Adviser for Phase III.

Capacity building is vital in promoting development; it is particularly vital in reducing poverty in the developing and least developed countries. Past experiences reveal that merely increasing crop yield or building a new bridge is not sufficient if genuine development is to take place. Human resource development should accompany these interventions.

Capacity building is a process. It is a slow process, in which individuals, groups, and institutions develop their abilities to start, carry out, and manage changes in their lives. It takes time to see the results of this vital process.

In Phase II of the Quang Tri Rural Development Programme (QTRDP II), the aim of capacity building was to strengthen the organisations closest to the poor, to assist these organisations in being proactive in developing the economic and social potential of the people. To do this, specific activities defined by the communities themselves were carried out to: 1) enhance the capacity of government organisations in managing development, 2) improve the capacity of district and commune level administration to plan and implement development projects, 3) improve the management capacity of cooperatives and other farm-



er-related organisations, and 4) increase the participation of women as well as men in short- and long-term training (e.g., vocational training) giving them new knowledge and skills and opportunities to find alternative employment.

Simply put, the capacity building plan advocated by QTRDP II was carried out using two strategies. The first strategy involved human resource development through on-the-job training, in those organisations (Women’s Union, Youth Union, Farmer’s Union, Economic Section, Agricultural Office,

cooperatives, and so on) whose mandate includes delivering services to the poorest of the poor. For some of these organisations, planning and implementing development projects did not come easy, because always before, projects had been simply packaged and handed down to them for implementation. In QTRDP II, as primary stakeholders, these organisations had to develop the project proposals themselves, working in close cooperation with the target beneficiaries. (See the Dakrong Women’s Union text box.) The Programme staff facilitated

this capacity building exercise with technical assistance and coaching. In addition, training activities were carried out on project proposal preparation, and on enhancement of management skills. The Programme also sponsored several training of trainers (TOT) courses to develop a cadre of trainers who could then continue the process of building capacity in their own localities.

The second strategy involved working directly with the beneficiaries. This was carried out by the district and commune level organisations. They organised practical activities for learning-by-doing that enabled women and men to improve farm and off-farm livelihoods as well as diversify sources of income. These activities included improved crop production methods, home vegetable gardening, animal husbandry techniques, agroforestry, aquaculture, and non-farm activities such as fish sauce making, rice pancake preparation, tailoring, carpentry, rural electrification, farm mechanics, brocade weaving, wood carving, and embroidery. All of these are relevant to the Vietnamese culture and economy. In many of these activities, the Programme provided the necessary tools and equipment, and access to credit and other resources to enable the beneficiaries to continue these economic activities after completing the training.

To support both these strategies, part of the Programme's capacity building efforts were aimed at strengthening social capital. Workshops, seminars and classes were organised in areas related to health and nutrition, adult literacy, learning ethnic minority languages, leadership, gender, Vietnamese policies, and other civic education. QTRDP II also sup-

ported the establishment of Community Learning and Information Centres in various communes to improve the people's access to information and provide a venue for community meetings.

Our experience in QTRDP reveals that when people realise their potentials and find channels to use their abilities, they are instilled with a sense of ownership and their self-confidence increases. This contributes to the sustainability of the project. Changes in knowledge and skills have also led to higher levels of impact at the community level, such as changes in long-established practices. Observations from the field show that farmers are more than willing to share new knowledge with others through informal, farmer-to-farmer exchanges. Such informal information sharing surely paves the way for multiplying impacts locally. We have also seen cases where beneficiaries start to dream of expanding their enterprises.

The preliminary results of the impact evaluation conducted by the Programme indicate a positive trend towards poverty reduction throughout Quang Tri Province, especially within the Programme area.

Limited capacity hinders development. The way forward is through capacity building. The Quang Tri Rural Development Programme has shown that an initial situation of limited capacity can be remedied by actively engaging local institutions and the people themselves in practical and strategic activities to build their capacity to take charge of and manage their own development.

Microloans Help Development Get Underway



New Maize Cultivars Give a Better Yield

One farmer in the village of Hai Vinh in Hai Lang, **Que Dinh Ta**, tried growing a new maize variety in his fields. Que Dinh Ta is a member of the Farmer's Union, which provided him with extension education on pest control and new methods of cultivation. He says he now gets better harvests with less work than before. He also belongs to the Tien Phong Dong cooperative, which has 900 members.

New cultivars and methods of cultivation have improved harvests and increased the incomes of village farmers. The new maize cultivars are pest-resistant. With the new cultivation techniques, it is now

The use of new methods of cultivation has clearly increased the maize harvests on Que Dinh Ta's farm.

Photo: Gladys Savolainen

possible for farmers to plant maize three times a year. Rice harvests now yield more than before, too. Que Dinh Ta has three children, all of whom he can afford to send to school. He has used his increased income to improve his house, and to buy a radio for his family, and more pigs to raise. He has also joined in the repair and maintenance of the local road.

The Dream of A Goat Farm

Ho Van Thao lives in the village of Mo O in Dakrong. He got a loan from the Women's Union to purchase seven goats, and attend a course in goat raising. He also received training on building a better goat shelter.

In six months, Ho Van Thao had twelve goats. He dreams of a goat farm where he would have at least 20 more goats than he has now. He needs another loan to make this dream a reality, and is thinking of getting



Ho Van Thao intends to buy more goats and to start growing fodder.

Photo: Gladys Savolainen

it as soon as he has paid off his current loan. The usual size of a loan is 3 million dong (150 euros), which most people manage to pay off in about three years.

Ho Van Thao also hopes to get training in cultivating grass for animal fodder. He now has to take the goats an hour's journey away to the forest to graze, and growing goat fodder on his own farm would save him a lot of time.

It is difficult for poor rural households to take a financial loan – even a microloan. Strategies have to be developed to improve their access to and control of resources to improve their living standards. In one of its projects, QTRDP provided the poorest families with a goat or a cow as a 'loan', along with training

on animal care and growing grass for fodder. Within half a year, recipients 'repay' the loan by giving a new calf or kid to the next family who needs such a 'loan'. The new cultivation methods and microloans have been of special benefit to women. Ho Thi Hui, a pig farmer, obtained a loan from the Women's Union to purchase pigs. In addition, the family took a loan of 7 million dong (350 euros) for a rice mill, which they use to create an income of 3 million dong a year. With their increased income, the family has been able to acquire more pigs, a television, and a motorbike.



Tran Thi Ha supplements her income selling honey, and wants to teach beekeeping to other women in her village. Photo: Gladys Savolainen.

Money from Honey to Send the Children to School

Tran Thi Ha is a member of the Women's Union in the village of Huong Hiep where she lives. She took part in a course in beekeeping arranged by the organisation, so she could learn a new livelihood and supplement her income.

The family's income level has clearly risen: they have earned two million dong (100 euros) from honey sales in less than a year. They used the increased income to repair and improve their house, and to buy small electronic home appliances. Tran Thi Ha also intends to save money for the education of her two children.

The rise in the standard of living of Tran Thi Ha's family has set an example for other families in the village. Many of them have become interested in being trained in beekeeping. Tran Thi Ha now also



Switching to biogas gives Nguyen Thi Duyen many more hours she can spend with her family. Photo: Gladys Savolainen.

works as a trainer, teaching other villagers the basic principles of beekeeping.

Biogas Saves Time for Women

A cooker that works on biogas has taken five hours off the working day of **Nguyen Thi Duyen**, who lives in the village of Hai Vinh. Two years ago, she spent five hours every day collecting firewood. Now she can make a meal for her family in just under an hour.

Mrs Nguyen was able to acquire 20 pigs with a loan she got through QTRDP. At least 6-7 pigs are required for the biogas cooker. She also gets additional income through selling pigs. The total price of the biogas system was under 4 million dong (200 euros).



Cattle farmer Le Thong thinks that 'loaning' a calf to another family is a good idea. This makes it possible for many of even the poorest families to start raising cattle. Photo: Gladys Savolainen.

Fodder Production in the New Cattle Raising Method

Le Thong is a 40-year old farmer who lives in the village of Tra Trin, Hai Xuan commune, with his wife and four children. He took part in a cattle raising project facilitated by QTRDP, which also included training in fodder production that was somewhat new to the area. This is an important innovation, because there is very little grazing land in the area where Le Thong lives, and the cattle graze wherever they can, including the edges of roads and fields. The participants in the training course also received financial support toward the purchase of their first cow. Le Thong had this to say about the project:

"I participated in a 4 day training course on cattle raising and feeding, and grass planting, organised by the Farmers' Union. After that, I bought a pregnant cow worth 3.6 million dong (about 180 euros), partly with the Programme's support and partly with my own money. Now the calf is 7 months old, and

my cow is already 4 months pregnant again. I will give the first calf to another household as part of the project, but the new calf and all the other new ones I will keep for myself."

Many poor families would have had difficulties in getting a loan to buy a cow because cattle raising only becomes profitable after some time. The risks are also great: if the animal dies, the family would have nothing left except the obligation to pay back the loan. Cattle are nonetheless something that people want, that they value highly. Cattle are capital, which can be sold if unexpected expenses come up, if the harvest is lost, or if a family member falls ill. Le Tong went on to say:

"This is the first time I have a cow. We also have a few pigs, some rice paddies, and other crops in the field. Our fields produce enough for our own needs, we have nothing left to sell. We used to get some money from selling pigs. We are a poor family, and I would not have dared to take a loan to buy a cow without the Programme's support.

I think that the model of giving the first calf born to my cow to another poor family is good, because I know that many poor households are in a similar situation as I am. This way as many as possible can benefit from the project and get started with cattle raising. I am also willing to train the farmer who gets the calf on how to take care of it, and how to grow fodder.

Although we would need extra money, I plan to keep the next calves and expand the production to have it on more stable ground. I know it takes time to make profit with cattle raising, but I wish to increase the income of my family and later on make our house better and improve our living conditions."



Mrs Quy says that raising pigs has clearly increased her family's income. Photo: Gladys Savolainen



Foto: Jussi Ojala

It Pays to Raise Pigs

Mrs **Quy**, who lives in the village of Quat Xan, is one of 75 women who took part in a pig raising project arranged by the local Women's Union. The women participated in a course facilitated by QTRDP, where they learned about the care and feeding of sows and piglets. Upon completion of the course, they were given their first pig as a 'loan' to start production. Mrs Quy's pig has so far had two litters. Mrs Quy gave one of the piglets from the first litter to another poor woman: this was the necessary requirement to pay off her 'loan' of the first pig. This method ensures that the project benefits as many people as possible. Mrs Quy is pleased with her new livelihood and says she wants to increase her pig raising activities.

"In the first litter the sow gave there were 11 piglets. I sold them all except the one that I gave to

another poor household. I got about 2 million VND (100 euros) from selling the piglets, and used 400,000 to build a second pen, so that I can expand operation. The second litter, the one the sow has now, has 12 piglets; and I plan to keep six and sell the rest."

Raising pigs on the family's small farm gives a relatively large income compared to simply cultivating the land. Mrs Quy has come to the following conclusion:

"Until now growing groundnuts for sale has been my main source of income. However, the pig raising is much better for making money. The piglets can be sold when they are 5 months old, so that even with only one sow, I can sell two litters of about 10 piglets each per year and earn 3-4 million VND (150-200 euros) annually. I'm very confident that pig raising will considerably increase the income of my family."



Farmers Share Their Know-how and Skills with Each Other

Hai Lang District has wide, nearly uninhabited areas of sandy soil. The Hai Lang District Administration works to promote and diversify farming in the district through the introduction of new cultivation methods. **Le Quang Binh** lives in one of these sandy areas, in the village of Van Van. He has lost an arm and is thus partly disabled. Despite what many would consider a severe handicap, he is a very active farmer and has participated in various training courses. This is how he described the support he has gotten from QTRDP:

“Earlier I only cultivated rice, watermelon and shallots. Then I learned about the Programme and received support to diversify my production, so I started pig raising and fish production. Through the Programme, I have also planted forest and fruit trees and cassava. I have already sold some pigs, fish and cassava. Thanks to the Programme’s support, my economic

“I will gladly share what I know with others and teach other farmers. I’ve shown the families that have just moved in how I grow rice and cassava, and how I’ve started farming fish,” said Le Quang Binh. Photo: Gladys Savolainen

situation has improved greatly. In just two years, my income from farm production has more than doubled. Previously, the financial situation of my family was difficult. My parents live four kilometres away and are old. I have to support them.”

Le Quang Binh is a good example of how supporting and training active ‘key farmers’ creates a ‘knock-on’ effect that reaches many people and affects many things in the community. Some of the indirect results of supporting ‘key farmers’ include an increase in seasonal farm employment, and improvement of the environment, as well as the more obvious transfer of knowledge from farmer to farmer:

“My sister and brother help me on the farm, but I also have to hire labour for cassava planting and harvesting. Through the project aiming at diversified farming in sandy areas, I received training in cassava and vegetable cultivation as well as pig and fish raising. I also participated in training on integrated pest management for rice, and on safe production of vegetables. Earlier I used a lot of pesticides, but now I have learned how to cultivate high quality crops free of chemicals.

I am willing to share my knowledge with other farmers and participate in farmer-to-farmer training. Recently, two families moved into our neighbourhood. I have talked to them about reducing the use of chemicals in rice cultivation, and I also shared my knowledge on growing cassava and farming fish.”



Lotus Flower Cultivation On Flood Plains

The cultivation of lotus flowers began only recently in Hai Lang District. The idea is to change some of the poorly producing rice paddies into lotus pools in areas which are often flooded, especially during the rainy season. The lotus flower seeds are gathered for sale, and the farmers get more income from the sale of these seeds than they would from growing rice on the same area. In 2004, **Ho Xuanh Anh** and **Nguyen Dang Hung**, who cultivate land in the village of Phu Kinh in Hai Hoa commune, took part in a project that supported the cultivation of lotus. Ho Xuanh Anh told us how the project worked out for him:

“In March 2004 I participated in the training on lotus seed production, after which I received lotus

“Expanded lotus flower cultivation would mean that farmers could increase their incomes. But the original investment needed is so great that most poor farmers don’t dare start without support,” said Nguyen Dan Hung.

Photo: Gladys Savolainen.

seedlings to be sown in the pond. I belong to a group of four farmers who work together growing lotus flowers in ponds that cover three hectares. We rented that area from the cooperative for five years. This year we farmers have rented four more hectares from the neighbouring commune, so that we can expand our lotus seed production.”

The two men are quite convinced of the benefits of lotus cultivation, despite having had a few problems. **Ho Xuanh Anh** related:

“Last year the lotus ponds were hit by sudden heavy rain and floods during the growing season. More than half of the lotus plants were damaged, and we had to take a loan and buy more fertiliser to save the rest of the crop. However, at the end of the season, we got a total crop worth 15 million VND (750 euros), which we divided among ourselves. That is still a higher profit than we would have gotten from growing rice in the same area.”

Nguyen Dan Hung continued: *“Most of the income we invested in expanding the lotus area. In a normal year we expect to get 10-12 million VND (500-600 euros) net profit per hectare of lotus farming.”*



Ho Xuanh Anh and two other farmers in the group are very poor. Nguyen Dan Hung is relatively well-off compared to them. Both men find that cooperation among farmers from different income groups is beneficial to all of them.

Nguyen Dan Hung said: *“By expanding lotus farming, people could get higher incomes and improve their living standards. However, the initial investment is very high, so most poor people are afraid to start it without support. In our lotus group of four farmers, three families are poor and only my family is relatively well-off. In this way I can help the poor families, by farming together with them, so they are encouraged to invest. First we planned to invest together in cattle raising, but we had difficulties to get a loan from the bank. Then we heard about the lotus production project, and we were selected to*

participate. Even though the other families are poor and I am not, we all invested the same amount, and share the profits equally.”

Ho Xuanh Anh went on: *“My family is poor. I have four children, and my house is in bad condition. I believe that my investment in lotus farming means I can lift my family out of poverty. I want to improve our living conditions and get a loan to invest in animal raising. All of my children are in school, and with a better income, I can invest more in their education.”*





Vegetables Without Chemicals

QTRDP has facilitated the chemical-free cultivation of vegetables for the past three years in Hai Lang District. Some 200 farmers have taken part in the training. The aim is to diversify cultivation and improve household nutrition, as well as to increase production for the markets of vegetables that have been grown without harmful chemicals. According to the Director of the Plant Protection Station of Hai Lang District, Nguyen Giap, most of the participants in this project are poor women. **Le Thi Mot** lives in Hai Thien, and has a beautiful, well-tended vegetable garden in the yard of her house. She said the training course had taught her a great deal about growing different kinds of vegetables.

“I attended the training in vegetable production in November 2004. After the training I received a pipeline for irrigation, nets to protect the plants from the sun and pests, and cucumber seeds and beans. I bought myself seeds for other vegetables, like toma-

Le Thi Mot grows vegetables as a welcome addition to her family's diet. “I've learned how to plant and cultivate vegetables, and how to safely use fertilisers and pest control agents.” she said. Photo: Gladys Savolainen

atoes and pumpkins. I used to plant only sweet potatoes in my garden for household consumption and for fodder. I think that without support and training I would not have known how to plant and take care of different vegetables. In the training I learned how to grow the seeds and how to use fertilisers and pesticides in a safe way. Now I only use organic fertiliser and biological pesticides.”

Le Thi Mot said that although the additional income she gets from such a small vegetable garden is not that significant, the availability of homegrown vegetables is a welcome addition to the family's diet.

“Besides the Programme support, I put my own money, about 600,000 VND (30 euros) into the garden. This year so far (May), I have earned about 2 million VND (100 euros) from selling vegetables. From around June-July until November, the weather is harsh. In the summer it's very hot and dry and in the autumn it rains heavily. Growing vegetables during these months is not possible.

I also have some rice paddies, and I raise some pigs. This year I converted a couple of rice paddies into maize fields with the support of QTRDP. I can get a higher profit from maize than from rice. I would like to expand my vegetable garden, but the problem is farm labour, as I am old and my children have already moved away from home.

I think pig raising still brings me more profit than vegetable growing. However vegetable produc-



tion provides some extra income, which I have used to buy new seeds and some furniture for my house. And of course we can now eat more vegetables than before. Many of my neighbours have come to see my garden, and they want to establish their own, but a lot of them don't have enough suitable land near their houses."

Traditional Fish Net Weaving Becomes More Productive

Tram Dai Dang Thanh lives in the coastal village of Tam Khen, one of Hai Lang District's poorest areas. There is very little agriculture in the area, and the villagers live mostly from fishing. Thanh, who is 42 years old, said he attended a course facilitated by QTRDP in which he learned how the traditional ways of weaving fish nets in the village could be made more productive.

"Net weaving and fishing are traditional occupations in our village, but the loom we used was very old

Tram Dai Dang Thanh weaves fish nets and intends to form a village cooperative to market the nets. New looms and new methods of weaving the nets have increased the weavers' income by up to three times what they made before. Photo: Gladys Savolainen

and productivity was low. That is the reason 36 of us weavers wanted a mechanised loom with higher productivity. But the price of a new loom was too high for us, and it is difficult to get and pay back that high a loan, too. Each household received the support of 3.5 million VND (175 euros), which is half of the price of a mechanised loom, the rest we paid ourselves. Besides receiving the loom, we took part in a training course that lasted 7 days, where we learned how to set up the loom and how to use it safely. We plan to establish a village net weaving cooperative or production group to facilitate buying of materials and work together to improve marketing of our product."

The new net weaving machine has brought a significant additional income to Thanh's family.

"Before receiving the new machine, my income from net weaving was only 10,000 to 12,000 VND (50-60 cents) per day, but now productivity has increased and my income is 2-3 times higher than before. In addition the machine saves time I can use for other livelihood activities, especially fishing. With the increased income from net weaving, my family has gotten out of poverty, and we can save money to educate our four children. If we hadn't gotten the support of the Programme, the risk of us falling back into poverty would have been really high. Now, if anyone in the family gets sick, we have enough money saved from the sale of nets to buy medicine."



Thanks to better equipment acquired through QTRDP, and new equipment she was later able to buy, Hoang Thi Tuyet can better preserve her chilli sauce. She also makes more sauce than ever before. Photo: Gladys Savolainen

Processing of Agricultural Produce Brings Additional Income to Women

QTRDP has also facilitated small-scale processing of agricultural produce. This gives farm families, and especially women, the chance to make additional income. In Hai Tang commune in Hai Lang, 20 women participated in a course on making chilli sauce. This project was organised by the Cau Nhi Cooperative, which now helps the women obtain licenses and brand names for their own chilli sauce. The Cooperative also supports the women in expanding their production and marketing of the sauce. **Hoang Thi Tuyet**, 40 years old, was one of the women who attended the course.

“I participated in the chilli processing project supported by QTRDP last year. After training I received some production material like plastic baskets, basins,

and plastic bottles to store the sauce. We have produced chilli sauce here for many years, but the training gave us the chance to work together and get training on how to produce a higher quality sauce with more hygienic methods.”

According to Hoang Thi Tuyet, cooperation among the women has continued even after the course was over:

“Each of us does the whole process by ourselves, but we meet now and then to share our experiences. We’ve taught others who weren’t in the course how to make chilli sauce. Soon it will be time for the chilli harvest, and we intend to rent a truck together and go around the neighbouring communes to buy chilli to make into sauce.”

Ms Hoang said that making the chilli sauce took four months. With new and better equipment she acquired through QTRDP, and equipment she was later able to purchase, she is able to preserve the

sauce for a longer time, as well as to bottle and sell it throughout the year, whenever the demand is high. The quantities of sauce she is able to produce have also grown considerably.

“Last year with the support of the Programme I managed to produce about 100 jars of chilli sauce. I sold part by myself directly and part through the Cooperative. In the past I produced only about 20 jars per year, so it is a big increase. I get about 3500-5000 VND (20-25 cents) per jar, depending on the size of the jars. I also save working time making the sauce, thanks to better production techniques. Next year after receiving the license and my own trademark, I plan to produce as many as 1000 jars, if I can get support from the Cooperative in buying material and in marketing.”

The additional income gives Hoang Thi Tuyet and her family more flexibility and opens up new possibilities.

“My family also has rice paddies, two sows and pigs we raise for meat. The chilli processing is providing me with extra income when there is less work in other things we do to make money.

I want to use the extra income to improve the living standards of my family. I have two children, 10 and 15 years old, and now I can also save more money for their education. Later I also want to invest in expanding the chilli sauce production.”





Even a Small Extra Income Is Important

Making crisp, fresh rice pancakes is another project facilitated by QTRDP for the local processing of agricultural produce. **Tran Thi Nhung** lives in Cam Thanh village in Cam Lo District. She participated in a training course arranged by the Women's Union in July of 2004. The course lasted 20 days. In addition to the course, the women were each given materials for making a small clay oven. This gave the rural women the possibility to independently earn additional income. Tran Thi Nhung told us how she makes and sells the rice pancakes:

"I make the rice pancakes every day, and earn 15 000-20 000 dong (75 eurocents to 1 euro) each day. I make the cakes in the morning and sell some of them directly in the local market, some to the restaurants. I usually sell all that I make."

Tran Thi Nhung believes that making rice pancakes is an excellent source of extra income for rural women.

Photo: Gladys Savolainen

According to Tran Thi Nhung, the additional income means a great deal to a poor family:

"My husband is a carpenter. In addition to his income, I used to earn only a little from selling the rice and groundnuts we grew. Making and selling the rice pancakes has clearly improved my family's income, and besides that I can earn my own income all year round."

Tran Thi Nhung said that the cooperation among the women went well in this project, too.

"There were 20 women from different villages in the course. I think all of them are doing well in making the cakes. We got from the Programme two electric mills to grind rice into flour which is the main ingredient in making rice pancakes. Each mill is used by 10 women. We pay 2000 dong (10 eurocents) for grinding a five kilo sack of rice. The money goes to take care of the machine and to pay for electricity."

I think this is an excellent way for rural women to make extra income. I would definitely recommend it to others. I'm also ready to teach other women how to make the rice pancakes."



A New Method of Making Fish Sauce

Fish sauce is an essential ingredient in Vietnamese cuisine. It is made almost everywhere along Vietnam's long coastline. In Hai Lang District, many families in the coastal villages make fish sauce for their own use as well as for sale. **Tran Minh Thuc** practices this traditional livelihood in the village of Thuan Daun. He participated in a project facilitated by QTRDP, which aimed at improving the quality and production of the local fish sauce. He says the project has helped him modernise and improve production:

“Fish sauce production is a traditional occupation here, and I have been making it for 20 years. I took part in the training, after that we were supported with some production equipment like big jars for storing the sauce, bottles, and small tools. The course

“Now we make a much better quality fish sauce, and it sells really well,” says Tran Minh Thuc. Photo: Gladys Savolainen

included training on how to process fish sauce using better technology, and training on marketing. We also got support to pay the business registration fee. We still need to do the trademark registration, and the Department of Science and Technology of Quang Tri Province has promised to support us on that. There were four other families besides mine who were in the training. Each family produces fish sauce separately, but we were supported by the Programme to buy a bottling machine together as a group.

Processing fish sauce has always been done in a traditional way, but during the training we were shown how to produce fish sauce that had a higher quality, and how to make our product more marketable. The water here has aluminium in it, and during the training we learned how to purify the water without chemicals by filtering and using some biological substance. That was maybe the most important thing I learned in the training, as well as the bottling method of fish sauce.”

Tran Minh Thuc says that making the sauce has now become more profitable, too: →



“With the new methods and bigger jars, the output of my production has increased by 30%. It means that my net income has also increased by 30%. The cost of production has not increased, but I get a higher price for my product because of the improved quality. I sell about 30 litres of fish sauce per day, and I also sell to my neighbours roughly processed fish which is used as raw material for making fish sauce.

My family is not poor, but nearly poor. If there is any family emergency, we know now that we are more secure, we will be able to cope with it much better than before. I have three children at home, my oldest is working in Saigon, the second is preparing for college examinations and the two youngest are still in school. With the additional income from the fish sauce, the living standard of my family has improved. We can pay our children’s education, and we have bought some household things like a television, and furniture. We are also saving to invest in expanding fish sauce production. We plan to build a bigger storage house and buy a motorbike for transportation. Everyday my wife bikes to the local market of a neighbouring commune to sell fish sauce. A motorbike would help her transport the products.”



Weaving as a New Livelihood

The mountainous areas of Dakrong, where many ethnic minorities live, are the poorest part of Quang Tri. The tiny fields are surrounded by mountains, and most of the inhabitants have received very little schooling. Additional income opportunities have been developed by arranging such things as sewing and weaving courses, as well as carpentry courses, for those whose little pieces of land barely produce enough for the family's own needs, with nothing left over to sell.

In Dakrong, weaving courses have been organised for young women in two districts, where ornamental weaving is a traditional secondary occupation. Weaving skills have been threatened with being lost in the last few decades, because weaving with traditional techniques is labour intensive, and ready-made commercial cloth is produced cheaply in Laos

Ho Thi Thu, Ho Thi Hon, and Ho Thi Nho all took part in the first weaving course organised in Dakrong by QTRDP.

Photo: Gladys Savolainen

just across the border. The Youth Union arranges courses where girls can learn a trade that they can use to earn additional income for their families. So far, a total of 26 girls have learned weaving. After only a few months of training, they were able to weave cloth for sale.

Ho Thi Thu, Ho Thi Hon, and Ho Thi Nho are young girls, 15-17 years old, from Abung. They were in the first group of girls to take part in the three-month weaving course.

Nho said: *"I liked the training very much because we have acquired a new skill. After the training course, we all have continued weaving. Our plan is to organise a weaving team. At present, there are three of us in the group. We want a bigger group to establish our own workshop and organise the marketing of our products."*

The cloth the girls have woven has proven a great success.

Thu told us: *"From the time we were trained up to now, I have woven 30 pieces; 25 of them were sold locally. The price per piece ranges from 50,000 - 60,000 dong (2.5-3 euros) depending on the complexity of the design. I used part of the money I earned to buy more materials and gave some to my mother, who bought a cow and a piglet. The rest of the pieces I wove were given as gifts to my relatives. These woven pieces make good presents especially during the Tet (New Year) holidays."* →



Photo Jussi Ojala

Nho went on: *“I’ve woven 15 pieces already, and sold 10 in the neighbouring communes. The rest I gave to my relatives as presents. Some people in our community have ordered scarves and skirts. I used part of my earnings to buy materials. The rest I gave to my mother. She used the money to start pig raising.”*

Thu has finished the upper grades of comprehensive school, a major achievement. Nho and Hon are going to evening classes; they told us that working on their weaving does not interfere with their stud-

ies. The modern weaving techniques taught in the weaving courses differ a little from traditional methods, but the girls use both methods, the old and the new. The traditional weaving in the area uses beads, and modern techniques cannot do this.

Thu said: *“I like using both looms. Using the modern loom, my weaving skills have gotten better. I can weave faster and use more complex designs with the modern loom, and I don’t get a backache like I do when I use the traditional loom.”*

Quang Tri Rural Development Programme

- Phase II: Finnish support: 4.2 million euros, 2001-2005
- Phase III: Finnish support: 9 million euros, 2005-2009

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In rapidly developing Vietnam, the first UN Millennium Development Goal has already been achieved: the number of people living in extreme poverty has been reduced by half. Prosperity is not, however, equally distributed throughout the country.

Since 1997, Finland has supported the Quang Tri Rural Development Programme (QTRDP), which operates in the poorest areas of Vietnam.

In this booklet, the rural inhabitants tell their own stories, of how with the help of the Quang Tri Rural Development Programme they have been able to improve their own lives, and how poverty has been reduced in Quang Tri.

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