

**Putting the Community in the Centre:  
Towards Effective Village-based Planning and Development in Vietnam**

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## Declaration by the Candidate

I, Andrew Catford, declare that:

- a) except where due acknowledgement has been made, this work is that of myself alone;
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## ABSTRACT

In addition to successful economic reforms, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV) is also in the process of implementing reforms in the areas of civil society, decentralisation and grassroots democracy, within what is generally considered a strong state environment. Relevant research argues that uninhibited democracy, decentralisation and civil society are important elements in achieving what has been popularly termed community 'participation' by development practitioners. The current government reforms generally promote participation, but within what is still largely a centrally controlled and comprehensive governmental framework.

International theory links the inclusion of democratic processes, particularly democratic decision-making and appropriate multi-party representative leadership systems, with the achievement of truly participatory processes. Decentralisation of responsibility from state to the community in administrative, economic and political terms is also cited as essential in enabling greater community participation at the grassroots level. Many theorists also argue that it is essential for non-government civil society groups, as key societal actors, to be actively involved in development processes if effective community involvement is to occur. It has also been noted that in Vietnam, such notions are not implemented in the same manner as these largely 'western' based theories suggest. As Vietnam transitions from strict socialism to a more pro-market approach, it is becoming clear that only certain elements within each of these areas are being applied and yet, paradoxically, Vietnam is still maintaining solid economic development and poverty reduction results.

To assist this process of reform, the government of Vietnam has developed a set of policies and programs that aim simultaneously to increase economic development and reduce poverty. This process was particularly assisted by the release of the grassroots democracy decree of 1998 and its subsequent update in 2003 that set out the details of what Vietnam required from the village and commune levels as part of the reform process. Interestingly, it is also these two levels that form the dividing line between government and community in Vietnam. Although there have been several studies investigating the strengths and weaknesses of the implementation of the grassroots democracy decree and other related policies, village-based planning and development programs, which are a development approach piloted by several non-government organisations (NGOs) and donors to address these issues, have not been comprehensively evaluated. These programs, which are generally long-term, area-based, holistic and integrated, have frequently been observed to deliver many of the relevant elements within the larger notions of democracy, decentralisation and civil society that are perhaps the most essential to advance both grassroots democracy and participation in Vietnam's current economic, social and political context.

The research explores the effectiveness of village-based planning and development approaches within the Vietnamese context using both quality and quantity criteria to assess elements of program effectiveness, focussing primarily on community level perspectives. Four projects of a selected international non-government organisation (INGO), World Vision Vietnam (WVV), were used as a detailed case study utilising a combination of qualitative focus groups and interviews, complimented by two quantitative household interviews. These community opinions were triangulated

against the opinion of other key stakeholders including government, bilateral and multilateral aid donors, as well as Vietnamese and International NGOs involved in such approaches.

The research indicates that village-based planning and development can provide many distinct benefits to development in Vietnam by implementing many of the key aspects of grassroots democracy in a culturally appropriate manner. However, the approaches are not without their challenges, in particular in terms of achieving integrated planning from village to national level, being flexible enough for the variety of ethnic minority and geographical areas, effectively involving a broad and appropriate range of individuals and organised civil society groups and, perhaps most importantly, taking the approaches beyond the current few pilot programs to a national scale that forms a more integral part of the government's overall poverty reduction strategy.

Despite these challenges it is apparent that the government of Vietnam cannot continue to be intimately involved in local affairs and it must continue to decentralise, promote democracy and involve non-government players. Village-based planning and development is one approach that can effectively be delivered in Vietnam to advance these aims and improve development assistance, as long as it is complemented by higher-level reforms in the areas of improved representative democracy, citizen participation and clearer government procedures and government capacity support. This is a conclusion strongly supported by the critical development studies conceptual framework that was applied during the research that focused on objectiveness, pluralistic perspectives and the investigation of associated power related issues at both local and national levels.

The research highlights that with careful attention, village-based planning and development approaches do have the ability to more effectively allow the community to be put back into the 'centre of development' in Vietnam, rather than being passive recipients or marginalised by the development process. A set of key elements that contribute to more effective village-based planning and development approaches in Vietnam has been outlined in this thesis. It is hoped that these key elements might be further utilised by donor, NGO and government agencies to support the appropriate replication and up-scaling of the approaches to enable development needs and poverty to be more effectively reduced in Vietnam in the future.

## ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ADB	Asian Development Bank
ADP	Area Development Program
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
ANL	Australian National Library
ANU	Australian National University
ASEAN	Association of South East Asian Nations
AusAID	Australian Agency for International Development
C&D	Center for Cooperation and Human Resource Development
CAO	Community Action Organisation
CBO	Community-Based Organisation
CBRIP	(World Bank) Community-Based Rural Infrastructure Program
CCF	Christian Children's Fund (now renamed Child Fund International)
CDO	Community Development Organisation
CDP	Commune Development Planning
CECI	Canadian Centre for International Studies and Cooperation
CEPEW	Center for Education, Promotion and Empowerment of Women
CIDSE	Cooperation Internationale pour le Developement et la Solidarite
CIVICUS	World Alliance for Citizen Participation
CPRGS	Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
DAC	Development Assistance Centres
DFID	(British) Department For International Development
DSG	Development Society Group
FU	Farmers' Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GOF	Government of Finland
GoV	Government of Vietnam
GPI	Genuine Progress Indicator
GRDD	Grassroots Democracy Decree
GSO	General Statistics Office
GTZ	German Agency for Technical Cooperation

HERP	Hunger Eradication and Reduction Program
HF	Hamlet Facilitator
HIV	Human Immune Deficiency virus
IDS	Institute of Development Studies (Sussex)
IDU	Intravenous Drug User
IFPRI	International Food Policy Research Institute
IIED	International Institute of Environment and Development
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INGO	International Non-Government Organisation
IRD	Integrated Rural Development
JICA	Japanese International Cooperation Agency
LC	Local Collaborator
LEAP	Learning through Evaluation, Accountability and Planning
LSDP	Large-Scale Development Programs
MARD	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MFI	Microfinance Institution
MIA	Missing in Action
MOET	Ministry of Education and Training
MOH	Ministry of Health
MOLISA	Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs
MOSTE	Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MPI	Ministry of Planning and Investment
NAV	Nordic Assistance to Vietnam
ND	National Decree
NDMP	Natural Disaster Management Partnership
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
ODA	Overseas Development Assistance
PACCOM	People's Aid Coordination Committee
PC	People's Committee
PDR	People's Democratic Republic
PLA	Participatory Learning and Action
PMB	Project Management Board

PO	Program Officer
PPWG	People's Participation Working Group
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
PRC	People's Republic of China
PRIA	Society for Participatory Research in Asia
RaPH	The Center for Reproductive and Family Health
RCG	Rural Cooperatives Group
RDAC	Rural Development Assistance Center
RDSC	Rural Development Support Services
RIDEF	(AusAID / UNDP / UNCDF) Rural Infrastructure Development Fund
RRA	Rapid/Relaxed Rural Appraisal
RTTCCD	Hanoi Research and Training Center for Community Development
RUDEP	(AusAID Quang Ngai) Rural Development Program
SALT	Sloping Agricultural Land Technology
SBP	Social Bank for the Poor
SBV	State Bank of Vietnam
SCF	Save the Children Fund
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SIDA	Swedish International Development Agency
SNV	Netherlands Development Organisation
SRV	Socialist Republic of Vietnam
TDI	Transformational Development Indicators
TYM	<i>Tao Yeu May</i> – Vietnamese Microfinance Institution whose name literally means 'I love you'
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USAID	United States of America Agency for International Development
USD	United States of America Dollar
UXO	Unexploded Ordinance
VAC	<i>Vuon Ao Chuong</i> - Vietnamese integrated farming system of fishponds, small livestock and home gardens
VDG	Vietnam Development Goals
VDP	Village Development Planning

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VHC	Village Health Center
VMB	Village Maintenance Board
VND	Vietnamese Dong
VNGO	Vietnamese Non-Government Organisation
VS	Village Supervision Boards
VUFO	Vietnam Union of Friendship Organisations
WTO	World Trade Organisation
WU	Women's Union
WV	World Vision
WVA	World Vision Australia
WVI	World Vision International
WVV	World Vision Vietnam
YU	Youth Union



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<sup>1</sup> The names of these agencies and the people met are listed in Appendix A.

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My sincere hope is that the findings of this thesis will provide a meaningful contribution to the development debate in Vietnam, and particularly provide some assistance to those involved with village-based planning and development approaches, to be able to more effectively address poverty across Vietnam.

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## PREFACE

### 0.1 Poverty and Development in Vietnam – An Introduction

Following the end of the American war in 1975 and the opening up of Vietnam to the West in the late 1980s, Vietnam has witnessed sustained economic growth, leading to consistent economic development and considerable success in reducing poverty. In 2005, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Vietnam grew by over 7% yet again, reaching 7.7%. Also in 2005, the level of poverty in Vietnam as defined by the international poverty line was reduced to 29% of households, compared to over 70% in the early 1990s (United Nations Development Programme 2005c). Much of this success that Vietnam has achieved in recent years has been attributed to the government's successful market economic reforms known as *doi moi* or the 'renewal' or 'renovation' reforms, as well as to supporting reforms in the areas of civil society, decentralisation and grassroots democracy (World Bank 1998). Since the late 1980s, Vietnam has become more open to western economic norms and has developed strong trade relationships with the West, a process that has included: lifting restrictions on foreign investments; developing an Enterprise Law to reduce investment risk and cost; overhauling the Foreign Investment Law to make foreign investment more attractive; developing the capital market and stock exchange; establishing real estate market systems; overhauling the finance and banking sectors to make them internationally competitive; actively pursuing free trade opportunities with key country partners including the United States (US); and perhaps most symbolically, aggressively seeking World Trade Organisation (WTO) membership (Ministry of Public Investment 2002).

The reforms have resulted in Vietnam moving away from a traditionally closed socialist economy to one which is open to market economics yet still maintaining many of the key ideals of a socialist state. These reforms and the change they have brought, mean that Vietnam today is a very different country economically, socially and politically from what it was immediately following the end of the American war (United Nations Development Programme 2002b). However, even with the above developments, it is important to acknowledge the key areas of economic, social and political policy that the nation has maintained in line with its socialist ideals. Vietnam in 2007 is a nation firmly fixed in a one-party mode of government; it still has a largely centralised and state-based system of service delivery, and has a strong focus on production, the worker and the disadvantaged. Such national directions maintain Vietnam's alignment with many of the key Marxist principles found in socialism. This context makes Vietnam one of only a handful of countries that are currently governed in this way.

Despite solid economic and social development, disparity between rich and poor in Vietnam is still a major problem, particularly for the 53 ethnic minority groups who disproportionately live in poverty. Minority groups make up nine million of Vietnam's population of 82 million people, with nearly all minority peoples falling within the group of households living in poverty (United Nations Development Programme 2005c). It is becoming clear that the continued development and poverty reduction in Vietnam has not had the desired effect on this large part of the population. Despite impressive poverty reduction in recent years, 29% of the population or 24 million people of the nation's total population of 82 million do not have access to basic food, income and other services that form the international definitions of poverty. In addition, a group of

Vietnam's population equally as large, although technically not falling beneath international poverty line standards, are still very poor. These Vietnamese have an income only just above the arbitrary 1 United States Dollar (USD) per day international poverty line, which likewise makes it difficult for them to meet their daily needs despite not technically falling into the category of the 'poor' (Vietnam Consultative Group 2003). This group are extremely vulnerable to economic shocks and can very easily fall beneath the international poverty line.

It is therefore not surprising that widespread poverty is still a major issue for the government of Vietnam despite the solid progress that has been made in recent years. Poverty reduction and development have formed a key part of the last government of Vietnam's five-year socio-economic plans. The Vietnamese government is also committed to working towards poverty reduction and development, particularly the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), an international set of targets for basic needs, which the government has translated into the country specific Vietnam Development Goals (VDGs). The government's approach to achieving these poverty reduction and development aims is set out in the Vietnam Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy (CPRGS), a document that was facilitated by the World Bank. This document clearly outlines social, economic, political and poverty reduction targets and lays out a plan of how Vietnam plans to develop as a nation, particularly in economic terms and at the same time reduce the significant poverty that exists (Socialist Republic of Vietnam 1998a).

Despite this level of detailed national-level planning, significant gaps still remain in how to translate such macro-level plans and programs into effective poverty reduction programs that benefit people at the village and commune levels. It is at these levels, the two grassroots levels of Vietnamese society, where the bulk of Vietnamese reside and where the effects of poverty are most apparent. Although the CPRGS provides a solid macro-level perspective and direction on relevant poverty issues, it does contain noticeable omissions, most notably the details of what exactly is needed to achieve each MDG target and more importantly determine exactly how this should be done. Experience of CPRGS approaches in other developing countries has been similar, with many countries frequently failing to reach the targets set, due to a lack of clarity and detail of effective country specific approaches that can assist achievement of both individual targets and plans more generally (Guijt 1998; People's Participation Working Group 2004).

One key factor that is often cited as a major contributor to the underachievement of such plans, especially in centralised state environments, is a lack of appropriate community participation in all stages of the preparation, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of such plans (Ehrhart 2004; McGee and Norton 2004; Turk 2001). The CPRGS calls for active participation of a wide range of stakeholders both in the drafting process and the implementation and monitoring of the strategy, which is large and complex. In recent years, International Non-government Organisations (INGOs) and donors have been increasingly involved in the development and design of the CPRGS and have assisted in undertaking participatory processes with target villages to feed into the strategy and encompass community perspective. Although this move towards donor, civil society and community involvement in the strategy preparation is commendable, little meaningful community involvement is still possible



in the implementation of the resulting projects and programs, which are largely delivered through a top-down centralised methodology.

The concept of participation is generally understood as 'a process through which stakeholders, by adopting social and political action, can influence decisions that direct resources to the cause of their poverty' (People's Participation Working Group 2004, p2). Considerable theory exists that supports the essential role that active community participation plays in achieving poverty reduction. It is frequently claimed that participation provides considerable benefits to development processes in terms of contributing to more appropriate development activity design and implementation, enabling more effective utilisation of grassroots capacity and indigenous knowledge, ensuring projects are more cost effective, ensuring development is sustainable, reducing conflict through improved democratic decision-making, and a host of other benefits (Chambers 1997). Participation does nevertheless have its critics and potential weaknesses, which will be discussed in more detail in *Chapter One*. Despite these areas of weakness, the potential benefits of improved community participation confirm that it is still an important concept for Vietnam at least to consider as it continues its attempts to eradicate poverty.

Relevant development research, including Haynes (2001b), Whitehead (2002), Ritzer and Smart (2001), Diamond (1994), Held (1995), Lipset (1994) and others, argues that democratic processes, decentralisation and civil society are important elements that are required to achieve effective participation at the grassroots level. Such international theory links the inclusion of democratic processes, particularly democratic decision-making and appropriate multi-party representative leadership systems with the achievement of truly participatory processes. Decentralisation of responsibility from state to the community in administrative, economic and political terms is also cited as essential in enabling greater community participation at the grassroots level. Many theorists also argue that it is essential for non-government civil society groups, as key societal actors, to be heavily involved in development processes if effective community participation is to be realised (International Institute for Environment and Development 2005). These three factors, democracy, decentralisation and civil society often combine in development theory to form an important framework for the success of participation.

Internationally, most studies on participation have focused on open and 'free' country contexts, such as those in Africa, India, the Philippines, Latin America and other areas where the concepts of civil society, democracy, decentralisation and participation are relatively uninhibited (Cook 2001). The situation in socialist countries like Vietnam is often more complex than this, with stronger state dominance in public affairs, more centralised government delivery, various laws and decrees of democracy in place that perceive democracy at times quite differently to western interpretations, and often fewer truly non-government civil society groups in existence. These countries, including Vietnam, often operate strong networks of quasi-government mass organisations that take the place of non-government civil society and facilitate many key community processes. The frequently less-developed political and legislative contexts in these countries also often provide fewer opportunities for civil society, decentralisation and western interpretations of democracy and participation to be legally mandated. Development theorists such as Gray (1999) explain that this makes the achievement of true community participation within such contexts very difficult at

best, if not impossible, given effective democratic, decentralisation and civil society conditions do not exist.

Despite the challenges experienced in such environments, donors and international and national Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) have been working to promote improved community participation through various projects and programs, including Vietnam, for some years now. In Vietnam, this was significantly assisted in 1998 when Decree No.29/1998/ND-CP concerning the implementation of grassroots democracy was developed and made effective (Socialist Republic of Vietnam 1998b). For the first time in Vietnam's history, this decree gave donors, NGOs and government a legal platform to undertake participatory processes at the village and commune level throughout all stages of development project cycles. This was a major step in enabling the establishment of village planned and implemented development programs, an approach that had been frequently used in other country contexts but had largely been not possible in Vietnam until this time, given the limited understanding and support for the approach at all governmental levels (United Nations Development Programme 2006b).

Since 1998 village-based planning and development (VBP&D) programs which facilitate communities to plan, implement, monitor and manage their own development activities have been implemented by various NGOs, donors and to a lesser extent the government of Vietnam. Despite the potential role such programs might now play in effectively contributing to poverty reduction and economic growth in Vietnam, limited research has been conducted into these programs' real effectiveness. As a result, little is still known about how effective these approaches have been in contributing to the aims of CPRGS, achieving the aims of the grassroots democracy decree (GRDD) and in achieving participation within this unique and changing environment. Individual donors and NGOs involved with such approaches often undertake final or interim project or program evaluations, however usually these studies focus only on whether the project or program has achieved the designed outputs and outcomes, and usually provide little analysis of the effectiveness of the community participation processes. Recent reports by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and World Bank, two multilateral donors involved in such approaches, have confirmed this situation (Malvicini and Sweetser 2003; World Bank 2004a). These reports confirm that the effectiveness of participation may be touched on as a principle of many such evaluations but is usually not the key focus of any evaluation. Also, despite many agencies claiming to implement 'good or best practice' participatory processes within Vietnam through village-based planning and development programs, few agencies can conclusively demonstrate how best to implement such approaches (United Nations Development Programme 2006b).

In 2004 the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) initiated a study into the effectiveness of grassroots democracy implementation in Vietnam which was released in 2006 and which endeavours to assess the successes and limitations of grassroots democracy implementation and participation by various agencies in Vietnam since 1998 (United Nations Development Programme 2006b). Like other such studies including those by Oxfam (National Centre for Social Sciences and Humanities 2003) and Mekong Economics (2006), time and budget related limitations restricted what could be discovered, especially in providing any detailed analysis of the success or otherwise of village-based planning and development programs. As a result, there has

been limited research to date in Vietnam to evaluate the success of village-based planning and development programs and to analyse the key elements that contribute to such approaches being successful within the Vietnamese context.

## 0.2 Government Policy and Responses

The government of Vietnam plans and implements its social and economic development agenda based on regular planning processes across all national level ministries. The resulting five-year and ten-year Social-Economic Development Plans highlight key targets for Vietnam in regards to economic growth and development across agriculture, health, education, social development, poverty reduction and other key areas and lists specific targets by sector, province and region. The five-year social economic plan 2001-2005 had a clear focus on building socio-economic infrastructure, privatising state owned enterprises and continuing investment in the public sector. It aimed to *'have rapid and sustainable economic growth and to stabilise and improve people's living standards'*. It also set out to *'reduce the number of poor households'* by 10%, based on the new poverty line<sup>2</sup> (Ministry of Public Investment 2002, p18). Again the strategy clearly had the dual aim of consistent economic development and consistent poverty reduction in line with the CPRGS.

The current CPRGS has three main goals: 1) high growth through a transition to market economy 2) an equitable, socially inclusive and sustainable pattern of growth and 3) adoption of modern public administration, legal and governance systems. Goal two in particular focuses on narrowing the development gap of disadvantaged and lagging areas, raise living standards of ethnic minority groups, realise gender equality and the advancement of women, make basic social services accessible and affordable to the poor, mitigate the impact of natural disasters and other shocks and enhance environmental sustainability (World Bank 2002). This is all within what the government calls an 'economic transition' or in other words, an environment of sustained economic development that is 'pro-poor' or not disadvantaging to the poor.

To achieve the targets of the CPRGS the government has developed a program to alleviate poverty with its own public funding, which is complimented by considerable external overseas development assistance (ODA). In recent years the percentage of the government's budget that has been earmarked for such social development and poverty reduction versus economic development has been quite small. In the last five years approximately 80% of the government's annual budget has been set aside for recurrent and capital economic activities in the areas of industry and construction, agriculture, forestry, fisheries, irrigation, transportation and communications. The remaining 20% of the overall budget has been left for the recurrent and capital costs for the 'social sector' which includes housing support, utilities, education, health, defence, culture and information, security and specific poverty alleviation programs (Socialist Republic of Vietnam 1998a). It is perhaps not surprising that when all non-poverty related funding is removed from the budget and for that matter the actual calculations also, only a very small percentage of government funding is actually available for poverty reduction purposes that address the immediate needs of those living in poverty. This limited funding is focused across eight specific sectors including

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<sup>2</sup> The Vietnamese poverty line was revised in 2005 from 100,000 Vietnamese Dong (VND) per person per month to 200,000 VND per person per month. Households with average monthly income under this threshold are considered poor. This figure is based on the General Statistics Office (GSO) calculation of the cost of one food basket that supplies 2,100 calories per person per day.

agriculture and rural economy, health care, education, urban development, electrification, transport, labour and social insurance and the national target programs, which means the funding for any one of these sectors is very limited.

The government's 'targeted programs', are perhaps the most deliberate attempt to direct funds for specific poverty reduction purposes. The most well known is the Hunger and Poverty Reduction Program (Program 135), which has attempted since 2001 to assist the poorest 135 districts in Vietnam through broad-based poverty reduction activities. Given government priorities and national budget limitations, funds for Program 135 are again quite limited once the other seven priority areas have received funding, especially since the program spreads funding across 135 administrative districts. Each district rarely receives adequate funding to undertake a comprehensive program, with each district commune receiving approximately USD 10,000 or less, that only allows several small needs, often infrastructure related, to be met (Do Van Hoa 1999). As well as Program 135, the government has other targeted programs in operation, which are generally aimed at a particular sector such as health, infrastructure, ethnic minorities or women, within a prescribed geographical area (Socialist Republic of Vietnam 2002). These programs also suffer from having limited funding available which means they too very often only scratch the surface of poverty (Saxena et al 2004). Conservative estimates by donor groups in Vietnam and the government, estimate that USD 5.5 billion is needed for each of the next five years to achieve the goals of the CPRGS. In the last five years the government has only raised a total of approximately USD 1 to 2 billion from all sources, well short of what is needed. In addition, over 40% of these funds have come from external donors rather than internal budgets, arguably making Vietnam's poverty alleviation program non-sustainable in the long-term (Ministry of Public Investment 2002).

Despite the limited resources, the government-targeted programs have appeared promising in some regards, at least at face value. External evaluations have revealed that the programs do generally target some of the poorest and most needy areas in Vietnam and provide some of the important services and support that these communities require. However, research has also revealed that these programs fail to deal with the multi-faceted or multi-sectoral nature of poverty and frequently focus heavily on infrastructure or on only one particular technical sector (Shanks et al 2003). Poverty as described by Chambers and Fowler is multi-faced and its reduction is not just based on the provision of physical goods, but requires the address of social services, society building, personal well-being and other aspects simultaneously (Chambers 1993; Fowler 2000). Nonetheless, most government development assistance and ODA to Vietnam, especially the government's targeted programs, frequently focus on infrastructure or 'hard-ware'. Of the USD 2 billion of ODA given in 2003 to Vietnam, only USD 278 million was directed to health and education, and this was usually to large-scale, single-sector loan projects (United Nations Development Programme 2005c). In addition, six of the largest projects in 2003 in Vietnam were infrastructure focussed, projects which rarely lend themselves towards meaningful community involvement and decision-making (Malvicini and Sweetser 2003). As a result, only a very small amount of the total aid budget has been directed towards programs that address poverty through multi-sectoral or integrated approaches. The targeting of selected and often scattered poor districts under the government's targeted programs, often means that many adjacent areas that are only marginally wealthier miss out on assistance since they do not meet the programs' criteria.

One promising element in such programs has been that they have often focused on decentralising responsibility to the grassroots level, particularly district, commune and village level. This is one step the government has taken to achieve the processes outlined in the grassroots democracy decree where lower administrative units such as the commune have a greater say in development activities. Perhaps more directly this new direction has meant the government does not need to use as many national, provincial and district resources to implement the programs and can in essence implement them over a larger geographical area. It could have been expected that this new focus on decentralisation would assist in improving the level of village and commune participation in development processes; however, unfortunately many activities within these programs have still been implemented with limited community input and with key decisions usually being made by province, district and on some occasions commune officials. Perhaps more importantly, despite at times receiving budget allocations, the commune government has been given little support to plan, design, implement, monitor and manage activities effectively in a participatory manner. Reviews of these programs have indicated that many such programs have rarely involved widespread community consultation, community involvement, nor have been effectively managed by the commune despite decentralisation appearing to have occurred (Malvicini and Sweetser 2003).

Targeted programs have generally been implemented rapidly based on government funding cycles and guidelines. This has allowed little time for training of local village and commune officials to ensure that effective community planning and implementation can occur (Joseph 1998). Also, recent government statistics indicate that only 50% of the government's budget ever makes it down to government levels below the province level. This supports the understanding that communes, districts and provinces have limited resources and opportunities to implement decentralised planning and implementation (Ministry of Public Investment 2002).

Certainly recent relevant government reforms have assisted in improving this situation, including Decree No.29/1998/ND-CP concerning the implementation of grassroots democracy as already mentioned, Decree No.52/1999/ND-CP and No.88/1993/ND-AS decentralising more key functions to the province level and Decree No.52/1999/ND-CP providing provincial government with more involvement in investment projects and infrastructure management. This has paved the way for Provincial People's Committees to make more key investment decisions rather than these decisions being made at national ministerial level. This in turn can lead to key activities being more frequently decentralised to district, commune and even village level. The ongoing development of a decree on association allowing the establishment of local Vietnamese Non-Government Organisations (VNGOs) is also expected to provide additional support to the development of civil society. All such reforms have the ability to provide an improved legal framework for community members at commune and village level to be more directly involved in the development process, rather than being passive recipients and directed centrally from above, however as this research has revealed, there is still a large gap between what is envisaged and what occurs in government programs in Vietnam, as there is in other developing countries.

### **0.3 Donor and NGO Responses**

The policy responses of the government of Vietnam have been welcomed by donors and NGOs and such developments have not surprisingly affected how such groups

now undertake community development and poverty reduction programs themselves. It has frequently been argued that donors and NGOs have been key actors in reducing poverty in Vietnam over the last ten years, given the limitation of government budgets and quality programs. ODA from donors in Vietnam rose to USD 2 billion in 2005 and NGO spending was reported at USD 100 million in 2005 (United Nations Development Programme 2005c; VUFO-NGO Resource Centre 2005). As well as representing sizable sums of money, such programs have been instrumental in reducing poverty, particularly promoting improved community participation as the government agenda has slowly evolved.

The aid budget to Vietnam (USD 2 billion in 2007) consists of multilateral funding, usually in the form of commercial loans, as well as grant funding pledged by individual governments to the government of Vietnam. As highlighted, much of the multilateral project budget is focussed on infrastructure, industry and government reform where loan repayments can be guaranteed. Such funding is often focussed on large-scale high return infrastructure projects which have minimal community input. However increasingly, following the widespread acceptance of participatory methodologies, many large donors have been experimenting with the design and implementation of programs that directly respond to community needs and involve considerable community involvement. This has supported the decentralisation of decision-making and activities to the local level to make them more community responsive. These projects, despite their benefits, have experienced difficulties due to their large scale and tight timeframes based on fixed disbursement deadlines, often at the cost of ensuring adequate capacity building and important support. Therefore, in much the same way as the government targeted programs, these too have frequently ended-up including minimal community participation.

Bilateral donors have a different approach, focusing on a variety of activities often closely linked to the agendas of their home country. Key sectors of focus of bilateral donors in Vietnam are currently governance reform, water supply, health, education and poverty reduction (United Nations Development Programme 2005c). Most bilateral projects are designed and implemented by consultants, often leading to considerable amounts of the budget being spent on consultant teams, with activities typically receiving less than 40% of the total project cost (Gasper 2003). Also, most such projects have tight funding periods of around two to five years to correspond with bilateral strategies and priority changes. However in recent years a growing number of donors have begun to experiment with longer duration projects that encourage high levels of community planning and implementation. This small group of programs has provided an interesting trial of village-based planning and development, which appears to exhibit many of the key concepts of participatory development (Saxena et al 2004).

Over 400 NGOs operate in Vietnam implementing a budget of around USD 100 million (VUFO-NGO Resource Centre 2005). Although their projects and programs are generally small in scale relative to the donors, these agencies often have staff at province and district level who have designed and implemented many examples of village-based planning and implementation programs. In Vietnam and internationally, such INGO projects are often credited with having the ability to effectively utilise community involvement and, in the case of Vietnam, potentially deliver much of what the grassroots democracy decree intended.

### 0.4 The Importance of Commune and Village Level Development

Government in Vietnam is divided into four distinct geographical units in relation to political functions, administrative functions and actual government offices, as illustrated in Figure 1 below. First there is the national or ministerial level including the National Assembly, which oversees the eighty-three provinces. These provinces are in turn divided into six to twenty geographical districts, which are divided into around eight to fifteen communes. The commune or *Xa* as it is known in Vietnamese, is the lowest official level in the Vietnamese government system and in the past, had limited power, which it was only sparingly granted as required by the levels of government above (Kerkvliet 1995; Wiegiersma 1988). With the introduction of market reforms and the high level of economic growth, a process of decentralisation of responsibilities to the provinces, and likewise to their districts has been necessary to ensure economic growth can be maintained. As the provinces and districts have taken on more and more responsibility from higher levels, there have been more responsibilities gradually placed on the commune (Kerkvliet 1995). The grassroots democracy decree potentially makes the role of commune even more important, as under the decree, the commune is highlighted as the essential administrative unit in all development planning, implementation and monitoring, given that it interfaces directly with the community. Each government level from ministry, to province, to district, to commune has its own unique political, and administrative powers and physical offices.

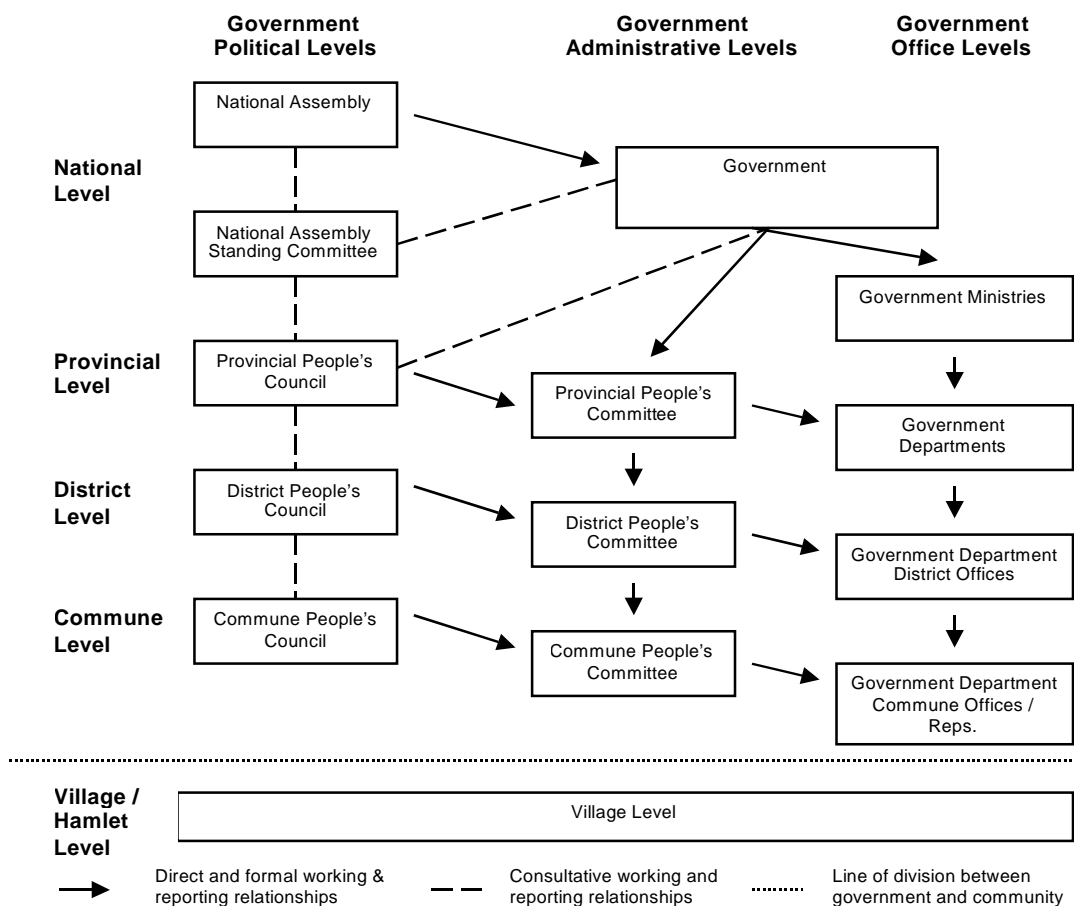
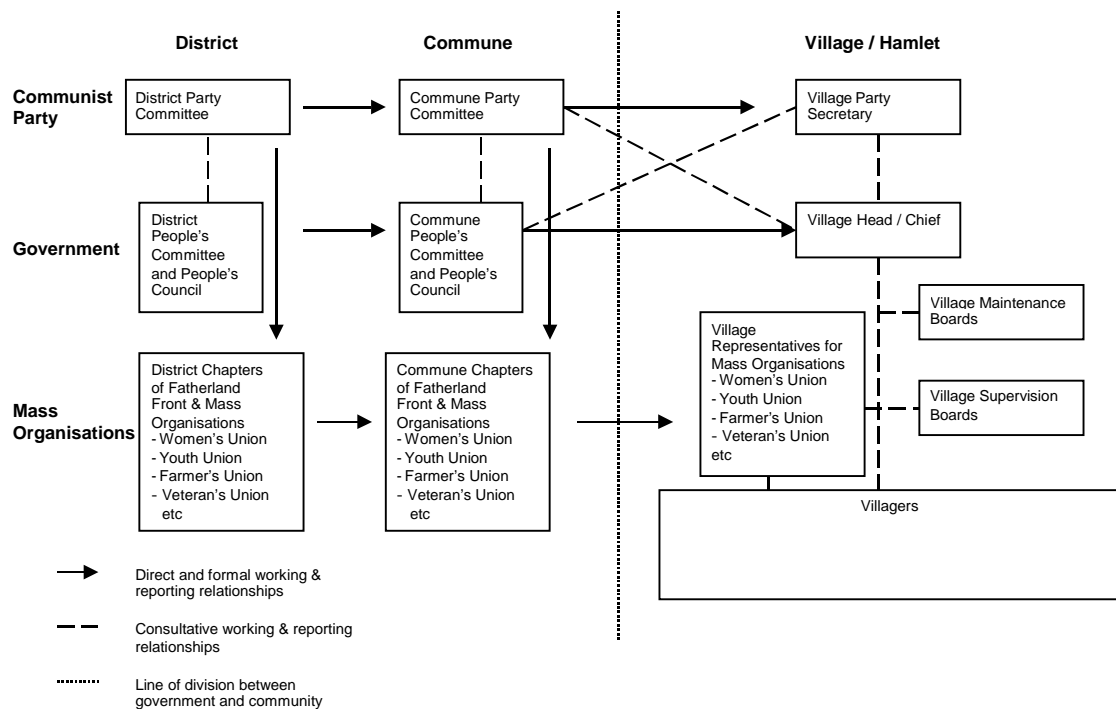


Figure 1: Government of Vietnam Political, Administrative and Office Levels from National to Commune Level.

The village or *thon* as it is frequently referred to in Vietnamese<sup>3</sup>, does not form an official part of the government structure as can be seen in Figure 1 above, yet it is at the village level where people live, where agricultural production is undertaken, where many key services such as health and education are implemented and where much potential lies. The lack of acknowledgement of the importance of the village and lack of integration of the village into the government system creates difficulties for Vietnam. In many cases, key directives travel relatively seamlessly down the various levels of the government, yet ‘fall-short’ before they reach the village and the people, due to the limited effective linkages.

As Figure 2 below illustrates, there is parallel representation of the communist party, government and the mass organisations at district, commune and village level. So although villages are not a formal part of the government system important ties exist between the commune and village. Mass organisations which exist at commune level and, in fact, at all levels up to national level, have representatives at village level, however frequently the strengths of these organisations and their individuals may vary considerably from village to village, affecting the ability of these groups to effectively link the village with the commune in any meaningful way. Each village also has a Communist Party Secretary who is usually closely connected to the larger communist party in the levels above. In addition each village has an elected Village Head or Chief who is often closely associated with the governmental levels in commune and above. Both individuals have the responsibility to integrate village development planning and implementation in the village to that at the commune level, however this is frequently reported to rarely occur. The Village Head is also often involved with any village supervision boards and maintenance boards that may exist in the village.



**Figure 2: District, Commune and Village Structures, Roles and Responsibilities**

<sup>3</sup> There are also other words in the Vietnamese language other than *thon* that describe a village.



How the village interfaces with the commune is an important area of investigation in Vietnam, especially when examining participation. It is not surprising that considerable scope exists for conflict to occur between the village and government system, commencing at the commune level, given these groups may have quite different needs and desires (Scott 1977). However it could also be expected that if these groups had clearer ways of working together, improved working relationships could lead to better development outcomes for both groups. Many scholars, including Scott (1987), Wiegiersma (1988), Porter (1993) and Kerkvliet (1995) highlight the importance of the village level to development in Vietnam since this is where the people are most active and it is where real participation can occur since it does fall outside the official government system. The village-based planning and development approaches that have been implemented by several donors and NGOs have the ability to bridge this divide between village and commune levels, to integrate socio-economic planning and implementation at these levels and those above, to link the government and community more effectively, to empower the community more fully, to enable community-based development and possibly to reduce poverty more efficiently in Vietnam based on the needs and responses of the people most affected (Saxena et al 2004; Shanks et al 2003).

## **0.5 Objectives of the Research**

This thesis explores the issue of whether effective community participation at the village level is actually possible in Vietnam through the use of village-based planning and development approaches and explores the factors that best contribute to effective village-based planning and development programs within the current Vietnamese economic, political and social context.

The research seeks to unpack many of the key understandings and interpretations of the widely accepted parts of community participation including the concepts of democracy, decentralisation and civil society, and explore what they mean in the current Vietnamese context. It explores whether effective village-based planning and development approaches are really possible in the current Vietnamese context and involves the investigation of the methods that exist, their aims, whether they have been achieved and whether community driven planning and development has actually occurred. This includes exploration of what is really meant by village-based planning and development and determining which individual aspects or elements are essential to such an approach and which ones might be unnecessary theoretical constructs, given many such elements appear not to be applicable in the Vietnamese context. This process involves careful examination of the meaning of key terms such as democracy, decentralisation, civil society and participation and their similarities and differences within Vietnamese and international understandings.

The thesis attempts to examine the important factors based on community opinion, theory and case studies that demonstrate elements of successful approaches. This involves analysis of important related issues to the Vietnamese context such as: how such programs are best facilitated; how facilitating agencies best work with government; effective use of civil society models; methodologies and relationships that best support appropriate approaches to democracy, decentralisation and participation; and other key considerations. The thesis explores how sharing power amongst

societal actors<sup>4</sup> can be achieved in Vietnam as well as more effective state-community relations at the local, national and international level. This includes not only direct recommendations for village-based development programs, but also recommendations for what additional support processes might be used to support such initiatives.

## 0.6 The Research Strategy

The research strategy is based primarily on community level perspectives. Given participation is inherently about the involvement of the people at the grassroots level, so too it is imperative to ground this thesis on what has been voiced by community people at the village level and the informal groupings below. A case study is used to ensure that the complexity of state-society relations was examined in adequate depth and to ensure the process was effectively centred in community opinion. In particular the research seeks to determine how village people feel about government, NGO and donor approaches to poverty reduction that have affected them, particularly village-based planning and development approaches. Four separate project sites of an INGO were used for this process with villagers involved in interviews, focus groups and power and trend ranking exercises.

World Vision Vietnam's, long term Area Development Programs (ADPs) were used as case studies. A process was undertaken in each program area to determine community opinions of their involvement in village development pre and post 1998, which coincided with the release of the grassroots democracy decree. This provided first hand data on what the community felt about these processes and the impact of these processes. A combination of gender, age and mixed focus groups were used to draw out key understanding and rankings of people's involvement and of local power relations. Two largely quantitative surveys were also undertaken, to verify community understanding of grassroots democracy and to validate focus group findings. Choguill's participation ladder was used as a method of evaluating the quality of the participation in each stage of the project cycle (Choguill 1995), following the standard stages described by World Vision (WV) including: i) planning and design, ii) implementation, iii) monitoring and iv) ongoing management and evaluation (World Vision Vietnam 1998a). This was triangulated against the opinion of other key stakeholders at local and national level obtained through semi-structured interviews.

The research methodology included a rigorous review of secondary literature and relevant theory particularly relating to development, poverty, participation, decentralisation, democracy and civil society. It also explored related theories of socialism, liberal economics, development theory, gender, governance, NGOs, globalisation and power. This established an international and Vietnamese understanding of the key issues and provides a framework for the research topic and its analysis. As pointed out by Bhatta (2002), it is important to ground the literature review findings and the research generally in its current context through evidence based approaches. In this case, this includes the national views of key government, NGO and donor stakeholders involved in village-based planning and development.

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<sup>4</sup> Sharing power amongst different societal actors is discussed in Chapters 5-7, including reference within the seven elements of effective village-based planning and development.

The process produces a unique, rich picture of the issues involved in putting the community at the centre of development in Vietnam, through the use of village-based development approaches. The results of this process are analysed using a discourse analysis from a post-modern, de-constructionist or critical development studies point of view. This ensures the analysis is objective and looks outside widely held notions, as well as ensuring it is pluralist and reflects the variety of different perspectives that exist in development in regards to issues of power relations (particularly of state control), historical and social contexts, eastern and western perspectives and the effects of local versus international development (Alvarez 1992; Hart 2001).

## 0.7 Overview of the Thesis

This resulting thesis is divided into seven chapters. *Chapter One* explores village development and the key theories of development, poverty, decentralisation, democratic processes, civil society and participation that are relevant to the research. This is an important inclusion, so as to explore the individual theoretical elements or elements of the key concepts and to understand their context, interpretations and appropriateness to the Vietnamese context. *Chapter Two* discusses the design of the research and the methodology that was used, outlining in detail the key research objectives, the methods used and the justification for these methods. *Chapter Three* describes the four case study research areas and the key factors behind their selection. In particular, it investigates the areas of similarity and difference between the four districts including issues of upland and lowlands, Kinh and ethnic minority peoples, rural and semi-urban, and poor and semi-poor categorisations. It also explores the Area Development Program (ADP) methodology of World Vision more generally, including its history, development and key features and how it differs and overlaps with other key donor/NGO methodologies for village-based planning and development.

*Chapter Four* begins to explore the detailed findings of the research process. It sets the scene by dividing Vietnamese history into the pre-grassroots democracy era and the post-grassroots democracy era (after 1998), highlighting differences in development and village planning and development in each period from an historical point of view. The chapter sets out some of the key donor and NGO approaches that have been used to assist village development and it explores some of the strengths and weaknesses of the different approaches.

*Chapter Five* details the key elements of village development that came from the villager consultations obtained during the case study process, as well as the consultations with the other programs. It highlights six key elements of village-based planning and development that are argued to be central to the effectiveness of such approaches. *Chapter Six* then brings these key factors together and explores the overall benefits of the approaches and the applicability of the approaches more generally within both the Vietnamese and international context. *Chapter Seven*, the final chapter, then takes a step back to look at village-based planning and development more critically again, in line with the critical development studies conceptual framework. This allows the approaches to be explored from both a positive and negative perspective, and in particular, highlights some of the key challenges the methodology faces and how these might be overcome in the future.

## 0.8 Conclusions

The Socialist Republic of Vietnam is determined to blend economic and social development with continued poverty reduction. Poverty reduction and development programs facilitated by government, donors, NGOs and communities play an important part in achieving these aims and alleviating poverty and reducing the level of disparity between rich and poor in Vietnam. The village-based planning and development programs implemented by NGOs and donors are one promising method to assist the eradication of poverty at the local level and improve community participation in development. These approaches have not however been investigated in any detail to date, especially from a community perspective. These approaches are occurring at an interesting time in Vietnam's history, where changes in government policy represent a radical shift in power between the state at national, provincial and even district level, to the village and commune level. Village-based planning and development approaches could possibly provide considerable support to this reform process.

It is not surprising that such a significant shift in government policy requires time for it to be absorbed and understood, and for attitude change to occur. However, after nine years, there are only a few examples of visible methodologies that can support the process of power transfer from central to local level. Village-based planning and development approaches are one such methodology, firmly based on the values of community level planning and decision-making, community-based implementation and management and community monitoring and evaluation. With more understanding, such methods could possibly provide a real chance of implementing much of what the grassroots democracy decree intended at the local level.

The research aims to explore these approaches that exist in Vietnam and determine how effective they are at implementing the key elements of grassroots democracy. Given the relative newness of the approaches to the Vietnamese context and the variety between the approaches that do exist, this thesis aims to establish a set of key elements that are required to ensure their effective implementation.

It should be noted that Vietnam is changing rapidly, with economic and social development occurring at a very fast pace. As a result, the research will only provide a snap-shot of the issues of village development, contextualised at the current point of time in early 2007. In years to come, the shape of civil society, the level of decentralisation, application of democracy and the role of NGOs and donors may and probably will vary from what it is currently. However it is hoped that the lessons gained from this thesis will assist in drawing a clearer picture of the issues facing village-based planning and development approaches within such country contexts where strong state controls exist. This, it is hoped, will benefit both the replication and expansion of similar programs in Vietnam and elsewhere in the world.

It also needs to be remembered that village-based planning and development and other participatory or self-help methodologies are not new internationally. Many similar program approaches have been implemented in a variety of country contexts for many years now. However it is countries like Vietnam that are transitioning from traditionally closed socialist contexts to a combined socialist-market environment where very little

is known about such approaches. It is hoped this thesis will shed some additional light on the applicability of village-based planning and development to these contexts and how to more effectively put the community in the centre in such country contexts. The following chapter, *Chapter One*, explores the important theoretical framework of village-based development and the conceptual framework of this thesis in more detail.

## CHAPTER ONE

# ISSUES SURROUNDING VILLAGE-BASED PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT AND THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE RESEARCH

### 1.1 Introduction

The preceding section of this thesis provided an outline of the overall issues that exist in relation to village-based planning and development in Vietnam. That is, despite the likely promise of village-based planning and development approaches internationally and in Vietnam, little research exists that explores the relevance and effectiveness of such methodologies in this unique environment. Over nine years have passed since the release of the grassroots democracy decree, an important step in enabling such approaches to be accepted and made possible in Vietnam. Since that time, several varied attempts have been made to implement broad based participatory approaches, so it is now timely to look more carefully at such potentially beneficial development approaches in the context of Vietnam.

In the *Preface* it was recognised that research into participatory approaches and village-based planning and development models in Vietnam is very limited with no detailed study existing that investigates in any depth whether effective community participation can be delivered in the current social, political and economic environment of Vietnam through village-based planning and development programs. Exploration of this key question would benefit many donors, NGOs, government and community groups who increasingly are using such approaches to assist in reducing poverty and to achieve development targets (VUFO-NGO Resource Centre 2006). If such approaches really are appropriate in Vietnam, there is a need to clarify the key elements that may lead to their most effective implementation.

To address such questions adequately, it is important to look at the major theories that underpin village-based planning and development approaches and to explore these areas carefully within the Vietnamese understanding of such issues. As is already becoming apparent in this thesis, many of the key concepts involved in village-based planning and development approaches have western origins and it is essential to critically analyse the origins and assumptions of these concepts before determining their relevance to the Vietnamese context. If one assumes that all such western concepts and approaches are relevant and applicable to Vietnam, one may potentially miss the complexity of the real situation. Taking a more critical stance enables more detailed exploration and questioning of even the most widely held concepts, as well as of more marginal ideas which may have some merit. As described by Lakoff (2002), in his work *Don't think of an elephant!*, this approach requires us to look at all concepts objectively and with as few preconceptions as possible. Lakoff uses the example of the political right in America to explore how terminology and what are often widely held understandings may in fact have been subtly or not so subtly moulded by government agendas. This realisation confirms the importance of looking at even the most widely held notions openly, objectively but also carefully. This is of course a difficult task for a foreign researcher who naturally has their own experience, assumptions and preconceptions. However whenever possible a critical approach is taken during this research to make objective judgements on human activities and ideas rather than



simply accepting and describing them as they are in western terms (Bessant and Watts 2001).

In Vietnam, many of the fundamental concepts associated with the research, such as democracy, civil society and decentralisation, have different interpretations as a result of local political, social and economic views. Vietnam is one of the last few socialist countries and as is being witnessed, is developing strongly, especially in economic terms. The approach to this research takes this unique situation into account and explores it for what it is. All attempts will be made to divorce thinking and assumptions from western norms and to focus on the actual situation as it exists. This means that this thesis will frequently seek to question widely held definitions and concepts against the actual situation 'on the ground' in Vietnam.

Several terms that have already been referred to in this thesis are potentially central to the debate surrounding village-based planning and development. These include the concepts of 'development', 'poverty', 'participation', 'community', 'democracy', 'decentralisation' and 'civil society'. Before exploring the findings of the fieldwork component of the research, it is important to pause to reflect on what such concepts are generally thought to mean. Despite the western origins of most, if not all, of these concepts, this chapter will reflect on the fundamental elements that might be contained within each concept, explore the context of the theory underpinning each and assess how part or all of these concepts might be interpreted and might best be applied in modern day Vietnam. The central and most relevant individual elements within each of the key concepts will be highlighted and separated so they can be explored in more detail in the context of the village-based planning and development approaches. This process of highlighting key conceptual elements will provide a conceptual and theoretical framework around which the balance of the thesis will be constructed and will assist the analysis of the village-based development programs against relevant international discourses and the individual context of Vietnam.

## **1.2 Poverty, Development and the Community**

Poverty reduction forms the backdrop to this research given it is the aim of the large majority of development programs internationally and especially in Vietnam (United Nations Development Programme 2005d). The United Nations Development Programme's *Vietnam Development Cooperation Report for 2005* details the main development activities that have been conducted in Vietnam by all agencies in 2005. It does not particularly categorise projects as to whether they are poverty focused or not, however upon inspection it does detail that the majority of bilateral, multilateral and NGO projects undertaken in Vietnam have a significant focus on the reduction of poverty and economic development generally. Although some projects may address particular sectoral areas such as agriculture, health, education and governance, many projects, especially those which work broadly and across technical sectors, usually aim to reduce or alleviate poverty (United Nations Development Programme 2005c). 'Poverty reduction', 'poverty alleviation' and 'development' are therefore terms which are important to consider in this research and which are, in practice, often used nearly interchangeably.

At first glance, poverty appears a straight-forward concept. A belief widely held by many, including many bilateral and multilateral donors, is that poverty is largely concerned with a lack of income (McGee and Norton 2004). As a result, the most

common measure of poverty is the International Poverty Line. This indicator, set at USD 1 per person per day, represents the total income of a person if all assets produced (including agricultural production) and cash are taken into account and converted into a 'cash figure' (Department for International Development and World Bank 1999). If people fall under this level of daily income they are classified as 'poor' and if they sit even slightly above this limit they are classified as 'not poor'. This style of per capita income measurement is widely used by many in-country governments, including the government of Vietnam (GoV). The government of Vietnam has modified the indicator to reflect more effectively the actual economic conditions that prevail in Vietnam and uses a monetary indicator which, up until 2003, was 100,000 Vietnamese Dong (VND) per person per month, which is equivalent to approximately USD 6.6 per person per month or US 22 cents per person per day<sup>5</sup> (Socialist Republic of Vietnam 1998a). This indicator was recently increased to VND 200,000 per person per month, which equates to approximately US 75 cents per day, placing the poverty line closer to the international standard. Such monetary indicators are still the most widely used forms of poverty measurement in Vietnam and arguably confirm the government's largely economic understanding of poverty (Center for International Economic and Management 2004).

Over time, however, poverty has been acknowledged as being a much broader concept than just income deprivation. As the writer Vandana Shiva states, there is a 'mistaken identification of the growth of commodity production as providing better sustenance. In actual fact, there is less water, less fertile soil, less genetic wealth as a result of the development process' (Shiva 1991, p12). In other words, issues of economic production and economic growth do not adequately describe what poverty actually is. In the World Bank's report *Vietnam: Voices of the Poor*, this issue was illustrated well. In villages that were consulted, many people explained that poverty is a variety of things including 'a lack of food during hungry months', a 'lack of ability to have power over our lives', 'limited opportunities for our children' and many other varied responses (Department for International Development and World Bank 1999). Such examples illustrate that poverty is a combination of social, economic and political factors. Amartya Sen (1999) in his influential work *Development as Freedom*, went on to explain in even broader terms that poverty is much more than a lack of economic or other resources. He highlighted that poverty is individual and very much based on a lack of personal freedoms that it is up to each person to define for themselves. This concept of broad freedoms is very much linked to the international understandings of human rights that attempt to articulate such freedoms into universally agreed instruments. In Sen's earlier work, *Commodities and Capabilities* (1985) he also explored poverty in terms of a lack of individual capabilities of various forms, a notion which again broadens the definition of poverty to something far more complex than a lack of economic resource.

As a result of this change in understanding in recent decades, donors like the World Bank, who have traditionally been focused on poverty as a largely economic issue, have begun to supplement economic indicators on poverty with indicators addressing social aspects such as life expectancy, infant mortality rates or other issues (Fowler 2000). This shift cannot be underestimated since such multilateral donors were set up predominantly to work on banking principles, so to deviate from a predominantly economic focus to one that is more holistic is a very significant development. The

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<sup>5</sup> 100,000 VND equates to USD 6.6 per month using an exchange rate of 0.8.



United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), as a member of the United Nations (UN) is a different type of multilateral organisation and unlike the major international banks like the World Bank and Asian Development Bank, is not as bound by the principles of economic return. The UN is, however, funded by nearly all the nations of the world, so its operating principles and policies frequently mirror the political and social policies of its strongest member countries, which not surprisingly may focus quite heavily on economic principles. That said, the UNDP has developed a set of Human Development Indicators which combine the indicators of income (based on Gross Domestic Product (GDP)) and a broad set of social indicators (United Nations Development Programme 2005d). This again illustrates a move at least to acknowledge the non-economic aspects of poverty. As Mathilde Snel (2000) clearly explains, poor people often do not have enough food, clothing, education or healthcare and they often live in areas that are prone to disease, crime and natural disasters. She also explains that very often their basic civil and human rights are nonexistent. Such a wide definition is difficult to disagree with and clearly describes poverty in much broader terms than purely economics. Such an understanding has been supported by growing numbers of academics such as Clarke and Lawn (2006) advocating for a Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI) to replace GDP, to more accurately measure important issues outside national economic performance.

When exploring poverty, the related concept of well-being often emerges, which highlights the multi-faceted nature of the situation. As the *Voices of the Poor* report states, 'well-being is much more than material poverty. It has multiple, interlocking dimensions. The dimensions combine to create and sustain powerlessness, a lack of freedom of choice and action' (Narayan et al 2000, p2). Robert Chambers (1997) describes poverty as having five clear components, material poverty, vulnerability, powerlessness, isolation and political weakness. Friedman (1962), on the other hand, described poverty directly in relation to the global economic system, a system which he argued both in the past and today, has the greatest impact on poverty. Friedman described poverty in terms of state shortcomings, effects of the expanding economy, and the role of the political community and civil society. He surmised that poverty is largely a lack of access to social power. Bryant Myers took this thinking to another level by explaining poverty as 'broken relationships' between the social and economic system, between others, between the community, with the environment and even included the aspect of broken 'spiritual relationships' (Myers 2002, p4). This style of definition describes poverty in its broadest terms encompassing all aspects of a person or a person's context or community. It is certainly a more complete and inclusive definition than that of purely economic deprivation, which has at times been the dominant understanding of many of the major development players.

What is common within most models or definitions of poverty is that they usually describe poverty in terms of a 'lack' of certain things. This might be a lack of economic assets or conditions, the widest held belief, or a combination of a lack of economic, social, political or other conditions. An asset-based approach offers an alternative point of view. This approach focuses on the assets or positives that exist in an individual, household or community that can be built upon to assist them deal with their particular areas of vulnerability, and to deal with any shocks that might occur. This does provide a strong contrast to the dominant approaches that focus on negatives such as weaknesses, deprivation or lack. Many of the most widely used development approaches and tools used today focus on issues of community

deficiency rather than focussing on what skills, knowledge and assets a community might have. (Department for International Development 1998). Development tools such as the problem analysis, problem tree analysis and logical framework all focus on the 'problems' that exist in a poverty context and work from problem identification as the starting point (Cusworth and Franks 1993). This is very different from starting from an asset position, which in simple terms begins by looking at the positives that exist, rather than looking at things from a deficit or negative point of view (Department for International Development 1998).

In Vietnam the government has largely followed the widely held international understandings of poverty. In the past and today it predominantly views poverty in terms of per capita income like many other nations do. When government officials were interviewed during the field research period, they were very quick to recite particular national, or regional poverty statistics in terms of per capita income. In 2000, with the assistance of the World Bank, the government of Vietnam's General Statistics Office (GSO) initiated the *Household Living Standards*, an approach to measuring poverty in broader terms that included social indicators relating to health, transport, communication, education and many other areas (Center for Cooperation Human Resources Development, 2004). Interestingly, when the results of the study were reviewed, the poverty ranking at household, village, commune, district and province levels closely mirrored the household income indicators with only minor variation.

This indicates that the non-economic aspects of poverty align closely with the economic aspects in Vietnam. It is perhaps therefore not surprising that despite the importance of the non-economic aspects of poverty, many Vietnamese officials still rely heavily on the household income poverty line as the key way of simply and quickly assessing the relative level of poverty of any household or area in Vietnam. Interviews and surveys with individual households also revealed that they too relied heavily on the household income indicators within the village or hamlet as a key method of determining the relative poverty of households. It could even be assumed that the strong support for the method by both government and village provides some assurance that the system must be reasonably fair and accurate.

Often closely linked to the concept of poverty, are the concepts of poverty reduction, poverty alleviation and development. Poverty reduction and alleviation have similar applications, although significant differences do exist in their academic definitions. 'Poverty reduction' refers to the process of decreasing the level of poverty in a particular area or target community, traditionally measured in dollar or other economic terms, with it rarely being defined in broader terms than just economic. The decrease in poverty anticipated is usually applied as a percentage of the particular geographical population concerned. However more importantly, the term 'poverty reduction' has imbedded within it the important principle that complete reduction in poverty is not possible. It acknowledges a theoretical supposition concerning poverty, that is that poverty cannot be completely eliminated in any particular area or target community. The UNDP World Report supports this stance with even the most developed country on their ranking, Norway, still having a poverty rate despite the significant level of development that the country has experienced (United Nations Development Programme 2005d). The term 'poverty alleviation', on the other hand, assumes that complete elimination of poverty is indeed possible. Undertaking a project or program with either a poverty reduction or alleviation aim naturally affects the approach taken.

Due to the practical difficulties experienced in obtaining even partial decreases in poverty levels in the world, 'poverty alleviation' has begun to lose its popularity as a term due to its impractical connotations (Hughes and Atampugre 2005).

The term 'development' has a much broader meaning. Most of the theory of development emerged out of the post World War II period (Mann 1989). This period was characterised by prolonged economic growth and a rapid increase in technology, communications, transport and social issues, at least in most western countries. This level of change appeared more significant than the change that had occurred in the world in the previous centuries, which resulted in a ground swell of theory in the areas of development, modernisation and progress. Early post-World War II theories included modernisation theory which was expounded by key theorists such as Rostow (1971), Pye (1966) and others who believed in lineal progression in development from 'not developed' to 'developed', or as was often described, from 'traditional to modern society'. Such development was frequently characterised in monetary terms and in many ways this theory is what has contributed to the strong focus on liberal economics today. Modernisation theorists were interested in cultural and social development, but based on a blueprint of what 'modern' life was in the west, not based on how it was understood in the less developed countries. In fact, developing countries were often seen as 'backward' and 'lazy' if they had not managed to develop like the western model envisaged. Modernisation theory did not link the activities of the developed and underdeveloped world except that development was the natural end point that any underdeveloped country would wish for. The terms 'developed', 'underdeveloped', and 'developing' all sprang from this period and understanding. Much of the modernisation drive was bolstered by a strong reliance on science and technology, which was typified by what was known as 'taylorism', which placed technology as the key ingredient that the west could provide the underdeveloped world. This assumed that simply by applying modern technology, a country could lift itself from underdevelopment (Giddens 1990).

The contrasting theories to these early models of economic development and capitalism included Marxism and socialism, however these too contained similar focuses on productive growth from a largely western perspective. It is interesting to note that even Karl Marx's thinking, which was so contrary to widely held western notions of economic development, still came from a European point of view and nearly exclusively referred to issues in terms of Europe and the north (Howard 1988). It is perhaps not surprising that when socialism and communism were adopted by many countries outside Europe, they experienced significant difficulties given it was not designed for their contexts.

It was not until the late 1950s that the first ground swell of theory began to view development from a 'southern' or 'eastern' point of view. Writers like Franz Fanon (1967), influenced by the process of nationalisation after the decline of colonialism, began discussing development from the viewpoint of the undeveloped world. Not surprisingly, such thinkers perceived development quite differently from the mostly European and US theorists of that time and emerging theorists such as Fanon began to see colonialism as an exploiting force and not a liberating force, as it had largely been seen up until this time. Many new world theorists began to envisage alternative models of development that did not involve prescribing the western view of development and the reliance on modernisation.

Ho Chi Minh was such a nationalist who began to craft a possible future for Vietnam that was not based on the European and US model which was the norm, but one more suited to Vietnam. Given the history of colonialism in Vietnam by the Japanese, French and later the Americans, it is perhaps not surprising that Ho Chi Minh and Vietnam's model of development became more aligned with communism and socialism rather than capitalism. Capitalism was a model closely associated with colonialism and Vietnam's oppressors. In the 1950s, when Vietnam's independence movement was starting to grow in momentum, socialism was the only real alternative to the dominant western models of capitalism available in the world. Even though socialism and communism have western origins, they focussed on the power of the farmers or peasants, aimed to share resources and decision-making and appeared far more egalitarian than what countries like Vietnam had experienced under colonial rule. This is why for many in Vietnam this appeared the most appropriate model. It is perhaps ironic to note that the drive for much of the change of nationalism was often driven by the intelligentsia, not the people themselves. This trend commenced as early as the 1900s when Chinese were involved in the translation of European texts and began to pick up some of the key Marxist philosophies. Even in the case of Vietnam, the move to communism was largely influenced by Ho Chi Minh's intellectual studies in France and elsewhere in Europe (Howard 1988).

Following this period of nationalism, many contemporary theorists have attempted to critique, unpack and further re-design the definitions of development. Theories have begun to take into account several important issues not previously considered when defining development. Vandana Shiva (1991) for instance was one of the first to link the issues of development with the environment and gender. Shiva noticed that development discourse up until that time had been largely based on male voices and had not included the voice of females. Certainly things had improved a great deal when writers from the 'south' such as Fanon began to speak out and express opinions from their perspectives; however females had still been left nearly completely silent in the development debate until the 1970s. This meant that in essence the debate on development was missing the input of half the world's citizens. In Shiva's opinion, females also have a particular and unique perspective they can offer and she explains that women have a natural affinity with the natural environment and their surroundings since they are actively involved in agricultural work and have a greater focus on ensuring favourable environmental conditions are continued for their children. The debate on development continues to evolve with time and more recently it has begun to embrace other areas of social exclusion in development including issues of gender, disability, human rights and many other issues.

In addition, Vietnam as a nation has evolved in its thinking on development and currently acknowledges and endeavours to address the whole sphere of issues that development contains, with the government clearly acknowledging that both poverty and development are multifaceted (Ministry of Public Investment 2003). Although still measuring and thinking of poverty largely in economic terms and embarking on development programs that are largely focussed on economic growth, the government does acknowledge cross-sectoral aspects including the issues of gender, environment, vulnerability and social exclusion. The government in its Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy (CPRGS) has clearly indicated its strong intention to address poverty, particularly the gap or disparity between rich and poor in Vietnam. Vietnam like many countries is becoming acutely aware of disparity as the

country develops on one hand, yet leaves some groups behind on the other. Although Vietnam is a diverse country with many varied ethnic groups, many would claim that the key aspects of poverty the government is trying to address nationally align generally with the basic issues that all groups of society in Vietnam face. The government of Vietnam has a strong focus on reducing disparity across the whole country, particularly amongst the ethnic minority peoples who are disproportionately the poorest in Vietnam (Turk 2001).

It is also important to consider the term 'community' and where it fits into the issues of poverty and development. Community in its broadest sense is defined as 'a group of organisms or individuals in a collective environment. These groups often share similar qualities, aims and objectives' (Oxford 1982). In earlier days in history, communities in human terms became synonymous with settlements. In Vietnam like other countries, communities were very often formed by groups of individuals, frequently joined together based on family or kinship groups, who came together for agrarian or trade purposes. This community relationship for such groups often provided protection, community benefits of living together and contributed to build local culture (Tuong Lai 1991). Very often, community was largely perceived in geographical terms but also contained elements of social overlay, since groups of similar ethnic, religious or linguistic background or people from the same families or clans often came together to form a community (O'Rourke 2004).

As societies have changed over time, the definition of community has also changed and its meaning has arguably become less clear. With economic growth, development, population growth and urbanisation, geographical groups have become bigger, differences and diversity have grown within communities and there has been a gradual move, especially in western societies, to more individual based living and a reduced reliance on community. This focus has been supported by the dominant role of liberal economics, which places more importance on individual growth and development than on community (Held 1995). In Vietnam, 75% of the population are reliant on agriculture and live in rural, not urban, areas. In such agrarian societies, community in many ways still holds its original historical meaning, being largely based on family, kinship and ethnic similarities (Nguyen Thanh Tung and Catford 2005). Communities in Vietnam are generally synonymous with the concept of village or hamlet. A hamlet is a group of households clustered together in a geographical area, usually based on strong kinship lines. Traditionally hamlets have come together to form an agrarian unit within a certain geographical area, called a village. As a result, despite 54 ethnic groups being present in Vietnam, most villages and their related hamlets are generally homogenous, comprising only one of these ethnic groups (Liljestrom 1991).

Community in many other country contexts is a much broader term. It is often used to refer to ethnic groupings, cultural groupings, social networks, political or religious affiliations and many other categories in which people can be placed, rather than simply referring to geographical divisions (United Nations Development Programme 1999). In the Vietnamese language, the word *nha* is used in three ways to describe the concepts of local area, house and wife (Do Thai Dong 1991). The three different yet related literal meanings, highlight the interconnectivity between geographical location and community, family and even partner within the Vietnamese culture. When discussing the issues of community in this research, especially when exploring

community development and community participation, this thesis will adopt the Vietnamese meaning of community, which is focused on a local geographical definition that encompasses the Vietnamese divisions of hamlet and village that sit below the official government structure that starts with the commune. The thesis will explore the effects of culture, ethnicity, politics and other elements, particularly focussing on community at this hamlet and village level.

### **1.3 The Household, Family and the Village in Vietnam**

Given the focus on the village within this research, it is important to explore some of the theoretical debates surrounding the issues of the household, family and village both historically and within the contemporary setting of Vietnam today. Any such debate must start with some analysis of the key influences that underpin life at the grassroots level in Vietnam, the most widely cited being Confucianism in Vietnam. Confucianism came to Vietnam in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries and has had a profound effect on family and community life. Confucianism contains several main doctrines that have historically underpinned how family and village life is perceived and operates. First, it includes a strong element of respect for elders and authorities, which results in people being categorised according to status. Traditionally in Vietnam society, people were categorised as mandarins (or learned ones), administrators, workers or farmers. In addition, Confucianism also places great importance on wisdom, which comes from age and the level of responsibility within the categories mentioned. In Confucianist society, those with wisdom were generally only the mandarins (or learned ones) who were the most senior in the hierarchy (Do Thai Dong 1991). The role of workers and farmers in the system was to obey and respect the mandarins and administrators who held positions higher than them in the hierarchy.

As a result, 'traditional' Vietnamese society is often characterised by a strong tendency to refer key issues to elders and learned ones rather than to have villagers and farmers undertake decision-making at the village level. Many scholars argue that this is why socialism was so readily accepted in Vietnam since the socialist doctrine placed officials in a position of power similar to that of the mandarins, administrators and intellectuals. Although the communist party sought to encompass officials who 'represented the people', in practice the villagers still maintained their position in society and their unquestioning respect for local authority. Under the Confucian system, it was also common for the farmers and workers to pay taxes to support the mandarins' lifestyles and pursuits; a system which was generally easily enforced because farmers and workers felt this was the 'right' thing to do (Tran Dinh Huou 1991). The tax system in Vietnam today can be seen as a parallel system to this ancient hierarchy where the local government can extract taxes relatively easily from the village level, even when families live in considerable poverty. Many claim this is because of the continued dominance of the Confucianist way of thinking.

Confucianism is also traditionally characterised by a tendency not to criticise, argue or correct in public. Traditionally this applied to husband and wife but also farmer and mandarin, and especially farmer and local intellectual or local administrator (Vu Manh Loi 1991). This tendency has likewise continued under socialism, with many reporting a general reluctance of villagers to speak out in public against local government if they have conflicting views. This tendency has affected how the village relates to the commune administration, with little conflict existing between these layers of administration and often only the village leader or village party secretary raising and

discussing issues with the commune government. Most villagers in Vietnam would not feel it is their place to speak out in contradiction to the government, if they felt strongly otherwise (Nguyen Tu Chi 1991). It is important to note that village heads, an important position at village level, are usually elected by the village as a whole and by representatives of all households through a democratic process. However due to the strong kinship lines of most villages, the village head is very often the most senior male member of the kinship groups of which the village is made up.

An extension to the concept of respect of wisdom and knowledge in Confucianism is the importance placed on children respecting their parents. As May Huu Bich (1991) explained, the Confucianist family is based on the notion that parents toil to give their children a good life and in return the children owe a great deal to their parents and should act accordingly. As a result, a respectful child to parent relationship is very important in any family, regardless of their ethnicity in Vietnam. Children become an important security net for parents as parents age, since children under this arrangement take on the responsibility for looking after their parents in old age, due to this strong sense of duty and with few options for care of older people being available in Vietnam outside the family. This is the case regardless of the level of poverty of the family.

Confucianist families have generally relied on patrilineal systems of lineage and as one villager said during the field work *'the most important thing is to have a son'*. A son is seen as the person to carry on the family name, maintain the worship of ancestors, take primary responsibility for looking after the parents and to maintain the bloodline (Nha Xuat Ban Giao Duc 2002). Not surprisingly, it has traditionally been seen as very important that all children, especially the oldest son, marry appropriately and maintain the bloodline. This ties in strongly with the importance of kinship, which has also been an important element of all communities in Vietnam historically. Traditionally, families in Vietnam have comprised six to eight people, a couple with children, their elderly parents and any unmarried brothers or sisters. Such extended families would usually live together under the same roof. In the Stieng minority language, this is referred to as *yau*, people living together in the same long house (Nguyen Duy Thieu 1991). Groups like this frequently grouped together to form a village and in many cases, both now and in the past, rural villages have been largely made up of such kinship groups. In particular, nearly all the ethnic minority villages in Vietnam today are based on kinship groups. The main change that has occurred in recent years is that the average family in rural areas has been reduced as a result of government family planning directions. This is part of the government's aim to curb the rapid population growth Vietnam has experienced and, as a result, most families now contain an average of four to six people. In more remote, traditional and particularly ethnic minority areas, families still tend to be larger despite the government policy.

It needs to be recognised that due to the diversity that exists between ethnic minority and the majority Kinh Vietnamese, family and village structures do differ considerably across Vietnam. As mentioned, many households and villages in Vietnam are patriarchal, yet significant numbers of villages, particularly in ethnic minority areas, are matrilineal. For example in the Erdu and Katu cultures, women are the most revered members of society and they can choose their husbands, can will assets, and also take control of household finances (Nha Xuat Ban Giao Duc 2002). Naturally, such a system has significant effects on how a village functions, which is an important

consideration when looking at village-based development. Despite the strong role of females at the household level in such villages, very rarely have women had major roles in organisations outside the household level under such cultures. So although women may have a more elevated position in such societies, this usually hits a ceiling when it comes to the official administrative system. It is important to highlight, however, that in nearly all villages across Vietnam women have traditionally played a strong role in household financial management and affairs, even in those villages that are not strongly matrilineal (Khuat Thu Hong 1991). As mentioned, the Vietnamese word *nha* means three separate things: house, wife and village; and this linguistic observation provides an interesting comment on how Vietnamese society both includes close alignment between family, kin and the village, but also highlights the central role that women play in traditional society.

Confucianism focuses on three distinct levels of community, namely *nha* (household), *nuoc* (national or state level) and *thien ha* (the world) (Tuong Lai 1991). Given Confucianism's focus on these three levels and the importance of kinship, it is not surprising that the household and village are seen to be the same level and can nearly be used interchangeably, as they are in the Vietnamese language itself. Similarly it is interesting to compare the Confucianist focus on 'national' level with the current state system in Vietnam, where the socialist government system includes representation from state level down to commune level, but not extending this down to include the village. Anything below the commune level is left out of the state system and predominately governed by kinship groups, following the same traditional divide as the Vietnamese language itself.

Vietnam has, of course, witnessed significant change in society since the influence of Confucianism began in the 7<sup>th</sup> century to modern day Vietnam in 2006. This change has, not surprisingly, affected the way the household, family unit, kin and village are understood and operate. It needs to be acknowledged that Vietnam's recent history has been dominated with struggle against foreign aggressors including attacks by China in the last two centuries, the Japanese in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the French immediately following this and more recently through the American war in the 1960s and 1970s. This has resulted in the strong Confucianist family units being frequently fractured, divided and amended. The prolonged incidence of conflict has meant that husbands have regularly been required to take part in battle and wives have been left to look after the home, children and the elderly, often requiring women to develop new skills and roles (Vu Manh Loi 1991).

The prolonged experience of war in Vietnam resulted in lower numbers of able-bodied males which, combined with policies of greater gender equality under socialism, meant Vietnamese women began to take on more equal roles to men in all aspects of Vietnamese society. Some scholars trace the start of such developments back to the war with the French, however it was during the American war that women's involvement in battle roles and other areas traditionally undertaken by men only became widespread (Dang Nghiem Van 1991). Female Viet Cong guerrillas became infamous during the American war for their ability, which has not surprisingly influenced how Vietnamese women view themselves, how men in Vietnam view women and themselves, and how women participate in village affairs.

In 1946, the first constitution of Vietnam recognised the dual role of women and men as citizens and in 1959 the Marriage and Family Law was issued stipulating a



minimum marriage age of 18 and equal marriage rights between males and females. The advent of childcare and kindergartens in the last ten years has also assisted women take up new roles in society and this has allowed women to shift some of their triple burden (as wife, mother and household manager) to be able to take on other responsibilities (Vu Manh Loi 1991). This change, like any such major societal change, has been slow and gradual and varies across different regions of Vietnam. In the cities and urban areas this change has been more rapid and more widespread, possibly as a result of higher education and improved communications. In many ethnic minority areas, lower marriage ages and an imbalance in gender relations between men and women in both matrilineal and patrilineal societies is still very apparent, despite general changes in gender nationally. Historically and in rural areas today, the kinship group still has the primary responsibility to arrange marriages. As *Article No .4 of the Gia Long Dynasty* claims 'The marriage is meaningful only if the senior member of the kinship approves' (Khuat Thu Hong 1991). Although this has become a much less common situation in large cities where 'love marriages', not marriages based on kinship selection or arrangements, prevail, it is clear that significant differences between urban and rural communities exist and traditional gender roles remain.

It should be recognised that the Confucian family model in Vietnam varies from other Confucianist models worldwide. Japan is often seen as one of the main Confucianist societies in the world, but it exhibits significant differences from Vietnam, with the family being centered on the oldest male or father who is viewed as the 'business leader' of the family. In China, on the other hand, the leader of the Confucianist family is often a largely political role, usually held by the oldest male, but with no specific role as business leader (Liljestrom 1991). In Vietnam neither of these two interpretations neatly describe the situation. In Vietnam both historically and today, villages are generally a unit of kinship groups sharing a common interest in the management of communal land and affairs. In this case, the male may be 'household head' but not necessarily the 'business leader', with many women taking on household financial matters, even if not in an overt manner (Liljestrom 1991). It is common place for a male to be the household head in Vietnam, however this involves more symbolic responsibilities and status like ancestor worship, bearing the family name and passing on the bloodline (Kerkvliet 1995). As one villager said during the research, *'if the woman is too obvious in her strong position in the households it makes the husband look bad.'*

The Confucianist culture strongly supports the role of the village, which is one of the primary reasons it is important to this research. The other key issue supporting the village as an important structure to this research is the dominance of agriculture in Vietnam. The research contained in this thesis clearly focuses on rural and semi-urban areas only, where the vast majority of people are involved in agriculture. There has been no attempt to investigate urban areas in this thesis and this decision is supported with more details in *Chapter Two*. This focus was adopted mainly because urban and rural areas exhibit quite different characteristics in Vietnam as the proceeding chapters of this thesis have begun to reveal. It is also important to remember that 75% of all Vietnamese live in rural areas and it is here where the majority of all poor live, not in the urban areas. Given the focus of this thesis is on village-based planning and development approaches that reduce poverty, the rural village is the most important unit to concentrate on, not the urban areas. Agriculture and agrarian lifestyle is obviously the dominant pursuit in Vietnam historically and in

modern day Vietnamese society today. Urban villages or 'wards' as they are known, are quite different in their make-up and function and due to the more limited levels of poverty, lack of agrarian lifestyle and different composition, have not been investigated in this thesis.

Villages, as well as being based on kinship lines, have also existed to provide a support network to agrarian or agricultural pursuits. The majority of rural villages in Vietnam work around two rice crops per year and because of the work required in each crop and the minimal overlap between crop periods, communal responsibilities in rice production has kept farmers busy for most of the year (Nguyen Thanh Tung and Catford 2005). The workload to produce rice contains peak periods, where farmers frequently assist other farmers in the village if their crop is not up to the same stage. This occurrence has driven individual farmers in a village to cooperate more closely with each other. In many cases, especially in remote areas, the village has, as a result, become the local centre for trade, exchange and frequently where the local market is located. In addition, the village has become the place where additional labour and resources can be found, not to mention where in many cases communal land is found. It is worth highlighting that the village structure does differ significantly from north to south in Vietnam. In northern Vietnam and the mountainous areas of central Vietnam, most households are generally huddled together in one location with farmland, predominantly rice paddies, located away from the village centre in small allotments where the land is arable, due to the mountainous terrain. In such areas, supply of arable land is low and land is highly valued, so village households are located in a group where the land has no agricultural benefit (Dang Nghiem Van 1991).

In lowland areas, particularly in southern Vietnam, this is generally not the case. Most villages do not group together as households but locate the home on the same piece of land that the family owns and produces from. In addition, more rapid adoption of technology and stronger production in the south has seen a greater middle class emerge which is strongly orientated towards individual commodity production and profit making, rather than collective village living and production (Dang Nghiem Van 1991). Despite such trends, many Vietnamese, including those in the south, report feeling uneasy at least to some degree with the trend towards individualism and personal economic development, since it runs against their strong Confucianist background of communal living and pre-set hierarchies. Many modern day Vietnamese increasingly have to come to terms with these changes in population demographics and eventually adapt to the effects of increasing urbanisation and its effects on traditional ways of living, particularly in urban areas and the south where this change is perhaps more dramatic than the more traditional northern, rural or mountainous areas (Dang Nghiem Van 1991).

The significant focus on agriculture production in Vietnam has also affected how families view population growth. It is accepted knowledge in many families that in order to maintain and develop agricultural production, having an adequate supply of working family members is very important. Also as mentioned, having at least one son is important to continue the bloodline and ensure support in old age. Recent government attempts have assisted to reduce population growth in urban and semi-urban areas, however many ethnic minority areas still have a tendency towards larger families particularly to allow for adequate farm labour (Mai Huy Bich 1991). This

means that many rural areas are growing in population terms, however this is at least partly offset by reasonably high levels of migration of young people from rural to urban areas to seek new opportunities. These changing migration patterns have meant that many villages have consistent levels of population growth but the most educated members are leaving and moving to city areas to pursue other employment opportunities. This has begun affecting the education level of the village as a whole, the human resource capacity of the village, the structure of village society and ultimately village leadership.

These issues highlight some of the generalisations that exist between villages in the north and the south. Frequently, villages in the north are characterised as having more centralised decision-making and production, and utilise a larger family unit to assist with production, there is a reduced reliance on technology and often more traditional cultural practices. Villages in the south tend to be seen as more individualistic, entrepreneurial and utilise smaller family units. This is again due to the different geographical conditions, more individual village structures, higher use of technology, and less traditional cultural practices. This generalisation is an important consideration when looking at exploring village-based development in Vietnam, as it highlights one key area of difference in how villages operate.

#### **1.4 Socialism and Ho Chi Minh**

The importance of socialist theory to the research cannot be underestimated given Vietnam has come from a strong socialist background and Vietnam remains as the government terms it today, a 'Socialist Republic'. Karl Marx's thinking on socialism is based on the acknowledgement that struggles naturally emerge between different classes in society (Marx 1967). Marxist theory is built on the important role that the general population or people can play in national development when supported by a strong centralised state. This is in direct contrast to the central role that the economic market plays in regulating capitalist or liberal economic societies. In those societies, the market is left to regulate between the classes with minimal state interference. Marxist theory warns the working classes of the dangers of being exploited by such capitalist-based approaches and market economics. In particular, Marx (1967) highlights that the middle class or bourgeoisie are likely to exploit the poor and gain from the market that fundamentally rewards the affluent and provides no support to the poor. In capitalist theory, the market and the growth of the middle class, is seen as the key to both economic growth and development. In fact, world economics today is arguably dominated by unbridled capitalism, a situation where the market and the accumulation of wealth is the driving force behind much of the world's activities. It is important to note that Vietnam has historically come from a different perspective of a strong Marxist approach to development. Even despite Vietnam's moves to liberalise its economic position and encompass a growing number of market economic principles since the 1980s, the government nonetheless utilises many Marxist economic principles today.

As well as Marxist economic and political thinking, Leninism has also had a significant influence on Vietnam. Lenin's thinking took Marxism to a new level with a particular focus on the importance of violent revolution by the people against their exploiters (Lenin 1964). As Lenin stated, 'the liberation of the oppressed class is impossible not only without a violent revolution, but also without the destruction of the apparatus of state power which was created by the ruling class' (Lenin 1964, p26). Vietnam has

experienced such a path to socialism, with a successful revolution against the French colonial powers that governed the country in the 1950s, which led to full independence from French colonial control in 1954 and the establishment of Vietnam as a nation. This is not the only significant fight the nation has had to undertake to maintain its national interests against the Chinese, Japanese and Americans, all of which means the Vietnamese are perhaps, not surprisingly, supporters of Lenin's notions of violent change being necessary in the process of revolution.

The role of state in Vietnam has developed certain characteristics under such Marxist and Leninist influences. As Lenin stated 'the state is a product and a manifestation of the irreconcilability of class antagonists. The state arises where, when and insofar as class antagonists objectively cannot be reconciled' (Lenin 1964, p9). According to Marx, 'the state is an organ of class rule, an organ for the oppression of one class by another, it is the creation of order which legislates and perpetuates this oppression by moderating conflict between the classes' (Marx 1967, p82). The state that emerged in Vietnam in 1954 at the point of independence, was designed along these socialist tendencies of both Marx and Lenin, to protect the classes, especially the working class, from the elite, ward off oppressors and control society life. This blurring of society-state relationships in Vietnam has meant that traditionally and even today it is at times difficult to separate the government and the people. This makes the task of defining community participation a more complex exercise compared to other country contexts where the role of state and government is more clear-cut. One good example of this level of intricacy is the expansive network of government mass organisations in Vietnam. These groups are formed under the Fatherland Front, a wing of the national communist party, yet they are predominantly made up of local membership and form the basis of what is usually termed 'civil society' in other countries. The mass organisations illustrate the high level of inter-connectiveness between the state and the people in Vietnam (Fforde and Porter 1994).

Any visitor to Vietnam will appreciate the profound effect the late President Ho Chi Minh has had on Vietnam. Wherever one turns in Vietnam there are inscriptions of 'Uncle Ho's' sayings, and portraits and statues of the leader. This is not surprising given Ho Chi Minh has been arguably the most pivotal individual in the history of Vietnam, having played a major role on the social, political and economic environments of Vietnam (Le Bach Duong 2002). Ho Chi Minh was a major force behind the development of the socialist republic, was commander in chief repelling two significant attacks on Vietnam (French and US), a key figure behind the development of much of Vietnam's policy, law and government, and generally a revered figure by much of the population, particularly in the north of Vietnam. As a result, the effect of his teachings and thinking should not be underestimated in this research, given his legacy is an integral part of Vietnamese society today. As well as supporting traditional socialist methodology, Ho Chi Minh had some very progressive teachings for his time. Even by today's standards many of his teachings are quite visionary, contributing to the importance that is placed on him. One example is the recent Decree on Grassroots Democracy based on the words of Ho Chi Minh in the 1960s, which outlines a vision for a society where the role of the people is democratic and central in all decision-making processes, a position in contrast to much of the communist doctrine of the day.

## 1.5 Decentralisation and the State

The government of Vietnam today is far different from that of 1954 given its significant journey from a strong Marxist and Leninist communist beginning, to the current 'hybrid' model of market-socialism. At the time of this research, Vietnam is well into the process of implementing its *doi moi* or 'renovation' market economy reforms, an interesting development given traditional socialist theory promotes the state as a force to reduce the impact of the market on people's lives. The traditional socialist view of market economics was that although the market may produce economic benefit, it also produces significant inequalities, particularly at the expense of the working class and the poor. The market under a socialist model is seen as the natural enemy of the working class and the poor, and a mechanism for exploitation. The state, on the other hand, plays a pivotal role in reducing the 'commodification' of people's lives, as Marx put it, through the implementation of actions that affect the macro and micro economic environment (Marx 1967) and regulate these situations. Vietnam, as a socialist state since 1954, has maintained this view, with the state government taking a strong role in economic policy, to assist all people to benefit from the economy and to prevent the poor from becoming disadvantaged. Up until the renovation reforms in the 1980s, there was a strong focus on state owned enterprises and state intervention in economics, which limited the opportunities for open markets and investment (Fforde and Porter 1994).

Since this time however, and continuing today, the market is used as an economic regulating tool, together with the power of the centralised state. This is being undertaken in a similar manner to the market reforms that have been implemented in the People's Republic of China (PRC). The introduction of reforms in the areas of grassroots democracy and civil society that have accompanied the integration of the socialist state with market principles in Vietnam, are also in line with trends in western good governance and economic development. As a result, Vietnam is currently seen by many as a mix between the different ideologies of socialism and capitalism and, as some scholars have concluded, is perhaps best described as a 'socialist democracy' (Nguyen Ngoc Truong 1994, p6). However, despite these developments, mainstream financial donors like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank do not think that countries like Vietnam and PRC have moved far enough to embrace the economic models widely accepted by the west. Where Vietnam will remain on the continuum between capitalism and socialism in the future will be an interesting issue to follow.

Within this unique political context, understanding the current role of state is crucial and to do this, it is important to determine who else exists in society other than the state. As Hall described it, there are four main actors in any society. These are: the state or government; the family and individuals; the business community; and lastly civil society. In Hall's mind it is these four groups that form a mix of influence that makes up any society in the world (Hall 1995). Within this definition, the state has several possible roles. As well described by Gray, the role of state can include: responsibility for law, providing peace and harmony, pacifying violence and aggressors, ensuring a mix of state and non-state voices are heard, and ensuring tolerance and equality under law. Many attempts have been made to describe the role of state within the Vietnamese context which places different levels of emphasis on each of these different state roles compared to western understandings (Gray 1999).

Kerkvliet (1995) describes four interesting possible interpretations of the Vietnamese state in his 1995 book *Vietnam's Rural Transformations*. The first sees the state as a central rule making, enforcing and self-contained system. This is a common interpretation often thought to exist by many who have not visited Vietnam. The second definition still views the Vietnamese state as a 'vast and coordinated party-state system' as was described by Porter, but acknowledges that the state is not purely centralised but spread across many levels and layers of society that include opportunities for real decision-making and power through the entire government system and network of mass organisations (Porter 1993, p65). This in essence describes the power in Vietnamese state-society relations as corporalist, but still not legitimate.

The third option acknowledges that the state does not have the high level of authority often attributed to it (and that was illustrated in the first two options). It highlights that the state certainly has elements of power, however it acknowledges that it is less than it appears, with a large amount resting with other elements of society. As Kerkvliet says, 'there is a contrast between what the state claims and what actually occurs' (Kerkvliet 1995, p66). The fourth level acknowledges that despite how the state in Vietnam may look on the surface, a large amount of what occurs in policy can be attributed to the government's reactions to grassroots actions and 'civil society', despite Vietnamese civil society not matching the usual western definitions. It highlights that when issues occur on a large geographical scale or affect a significant element of the population in Vietnam, they frequently translate themselves into policy. One example is the reduction in the number of agricultural cooperatives, a type of collective farm frequently promoted by the government prior to the 1960s. The move away from this style of agricultural model has also been attributed to the large number of village and civil protests that occurred in the 1960s and which has led to a much reduced focus on these by the present government. As Fforde and Porter (1994) point out, the Vietnamese authorities had to make some concessions to the grassroots pressures when confronted with a severe economic crisis. This is especially unusual because in the 1960s cooperatives were seen as a key to economic success in Vietnam. However it appears that in direct response to farmer pressure, this important element of the government's agricultural and economic policy was significantly reduced. This supports the notion that it is frequently the farmer, individual and market that are the most influential elements in Vietnamese society, despite how Vietnam may appear at face value. This is ironically very much in line with Ayn Rand's radical right-wing views that support the role of rampant individualism and reliance on natural markets rather than government controls (Rand 1964). Vietnamese society does not demonstrate this level of extreme individualism, however it is interesting to note that for a country that seems so focussed on centralisation and collective good, a great deal of individualism and individual pressure appears to exist.

The way that power is handled in relation to non-government actors, including civil society and the private sector, compared to the state, is an important consideration in any society. Any state-society relationship is a form of contract where power is handed over to the government by the other society players. Under this 'contract' the state usually has certain sanctioned responsibilities to enforce laws and defend citizen rights (Clapham 2002). However in this model, the community still holds the balance of power and is free (at least in theory) to instate or remove a government, or form its own non-government organisations. In a socialist state like Vietnam, the use of such forms of democracy and the role of non-government organisations is quite different. In

a context like Vietnam where the state has the power yet is not elected (since there is only one party), the relationship between state and the people is much more complex. The model in Vietnam is based on the underlying assumption that the socialist party is the 'People's Party', which has the people's mandate and is the most effective method to make decisions and act on a wide variety of issues right down to grassroots level.

Along with economic and other recent reforms, the state in Vietnam has also undergone a gradual process of decentralisation and it can be argued that the state is now far different from what it was when it was originally created in Vietnam, as a model of nearly exclusively centralised government control. Progressively over the years, responsibility has been shifted to the lower levels of government in Vietnam. Certainly following the 1954 establishment of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, throughout the American war and also during the immediate years following this period, the state has taken a strong national role in controlling most aspects of the country (Le Bach Duong 2002). However since the 1980s the government has implemented various changes to transfer more power and authority to the various levels of government, rather than them resting with limited senior government posts. The first stage of this process included granting far greater autonomy to provinces, which now have greater responsibility to control investment, growth and development. As described by Tim McGrath (2005), provinces are now largely independent and are influential units in their own right.

Although this is commendable on a basis of decentralisation, what it has resulted in is, at times, a lack of consistency between provincial procedures and responses. Frequently the rules and procedures in one province may be quite different from that in other provinces (McGrath 2005). The district, the governmental layer that sits between the commune and province, has received additional and more complex responsibilities from the province due to the provinces' increased workload and responsibilities and a general trend to 'push' responsibilities to the administrative level below. The decentralisation process in Vietnam has in many ways affected the lowest level of government – the commune – the most, which now receives more and more budget, is expected to undertake more project management and other key administrative functions, yet has received little or no additional support or training. Although this gradual process of passing responsibility to the levels closest to the grassroots level and the people has many positive benefits, negative effects need to be understood when exploring effective village-based planning and development.

As Eric Hobsbawm (1996) explains, the growing degree of globalisation has also changed the world economy and the role of state entities. Generally, the states of today have a far different role from what they had in earlier times when countries were less inter-connected with technology, communication and through reduced time–space relationships (Clarke 2003). The nation state of the past could afford to be closed to the outside world to a certain degree and control the nation reasonably effectively through a centralised government system, in much the same way Vietnam did immediately following the American war. With increasing globalisation, the focus of many nations has likewise moved towards ensuring regional and global relations, with less focus on national level control, and much of the internal regulation being left to market forces with minimal state intervention. As a result, many states have sought to decentralise central state authority to local government units and also shift responsibility to private enterprise and civil society (Von Braun and Grote 2002).

Hobsbawm (1996) explains some of the risks of global and regional institutions breaking-up the role of states, which has at least been partly witnessed in recent decades. A case in point would be the World Bank, which was only established in 1948 yet now has more budget and correspondingly more power than many individual state governments. Unless a state has firm plans and retains a strong state position and presence, multilateral organisations like the World Bank do have the potential to drive the agendas in weaker countries, in much the way individual states did in the past. Vietnam has opted for and maintained a different model of state in regards to these issues and has opted to relinquish some control to market forces yet maintain strong state control of market and other processes. To enable this to occur while economic growth and development continues, it has begun increasingly to decentralise key functions and decision-making, yet maintain overall control of most key activities at the national level. It has attempted to compromise on the wishes of major supporters such as the World Bank and UN through development of the CPRGS, support of the millennium development goal targets, and an incorporation of many of the World Bank's good governance policies. Whilst doing this, the Government of Vietnam has stood its ground on many country specific issues and methods of operation that are in line with socialist principles but not part of donor agendas.

Logically, the benefits of decentralisation are quite clear. By moving functions, decision-making and ultimately power from the central level to lower levels in society, it is likely to make decisions more aligned with community needs, simply because these processes are now occurring closer to the level of the people. Many scholars including Hobsbawm (1996), Waylen (1998) and Pretty et al (1995) have highlighted that government decentralisation is likely to bring benefits including increased accountability, transparency and reduced conflict due to an anticipated reduced tendency for the government's wishes to deviate from that of the people's. Decentralisation, which is often thought to have administrative, economic and political dimensions, is also attributed to reducing dramatically the likelihood of corruption since generally people are less likely to cheat people at 'their known level' (Crawford 2006). Usually the state is thought to benefit from decentralisation since it reduces its centralised administration burden which frees it up to concentrate on emerging areas of importance such as global and regional issues (Morano 2006). For example, Vietnam's shift from a centralised state mode of delivery to a more decentralised one has assisted the government to pursue Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) integration, WTO membership and as announced by the Vietnamese Ambassador to Australia, Vietnam's pending role in the UN security Council (Nguyen Huu Gia 2006).

Even with such benefits of decentralisation, states need to retain several key functions if they are to remain relevant and effective. These functions might include law making, protection, macro-economic reform, and maintaining territorial boundaries. In most current nation states including Vietnam, these functions are unlikely to change to some degree, regardless of how much reform the government goes through due to the effects of increased global interconnectivity. In some ways the functions highlighted above could be viewed as the 'core' responsibilities of state regardless of globalisation. That said, some academics, including Anthony Giddens (1990), question the ultimate role of the state in an ever globalised world.

Post-modernists and post-developmentalists argue that the role of state is becoming more complex and strategic as the world develops. For example, for a long time it has



been accepted that a nation needs healthy, educated citizens if it is to achieve solid development. This has led to state interventions in such areas, which traditional market economic governments and socialist governments believe should be delivered by the state not by the market. The increasing number of liberal democratic countries argue that the private sector or the market can deliver many such essential social services more effectively and efficiently than the state, particularly under current privatisation and contracting theory (Walsh 1995). This has led to an increase in the number of private sector health, education and other services in many countries. In the past the state had not needed to focus on how best to utilise outside assistance since the delivery of all such issues occurred internally, even if at times delivery was inefficient. The state now has a greater variety of options to choose from to achieve the responsibilities of its role, which history has shown can prove a good or bad decision socially, economically and even politically.

The particular direction a state takes in regards to empowering private enterprise and civil society is very important. For any state, including the Government of Vietnam, this choice will impact how it approaches many key activities including village-based planning and development. The research explores the particular roles of the state, private enterprise and the community in Vietnam. At times the gap between community and both civil society and private enterprise can mean that private and civil society groups do not always represent the needs of the community. It is important that the community has the capabilities, as Sen (1985) argues, to be appropriately involved in decision-making and power relationships as a societal player in their own right, rather than being beholden to the agendas of government, or for that matter, private sector or civil society groups. Civil society groups have their own values and agendas, which may not always match what a community may actually want, just as a government does. The interface between all four societal actors - state, private enterprise, civil society and community therefore needs to be balanced appropriately for development to be effective. Such balance will require each group involved to take on different levels of responsibility appropriate to their role (Gray 1999). As a result, the role of the state needs to constantly evolve to be able to effectively respond to this changing situation. This often leads to state roles outside those traditionally seen (Held 1996).

As Connell (1990) explains, state, gender and politics are linked in five distinct ways, which makes gender another important element to consider in the overall question of the state in Vietnam. First, the state is constituted with overall authority over gender as a national issue given its sovereign status and responsibility. However, importantly and conversely, gender has the potential to affect the shape and functions of the state. Second, the state is the bearer of the responsibility for gender and fundamentally has its own gender regime. Third, the state has the capacity to implement gender agendas and fourth the state has the ability to categorise and regulate gender nationally. Fifth and finally, because of its power over gender, the state is a major player in affecting gender in its own right.

Vietnam like most modern states has gender represented unequally within its own organisational structure. Based on Connell's logic, it would be expected that gender would be less likely to be equally addressed in policy issues in Vietnam, due to a gender imbalance in key government positions and major decision-making. However the move to greater decentralisation and the history of greater female involvement in politics as a result of war has helped advance the agenda for women in Vietnam. Also,

as the gradual process of decentralisation has occurred, the role of gender in policy and state debate has increased as the power of women is, perhaps not surprisingly, seen to increase towards the household level, especially in Vietnamese society where it has already been highlighted that women have considerable power at household level. Waylen confirms this issue in Vietnam stating that the 'local state', being the government at local level, is frequently more 'women friendly'. This is clearly visible in Vietnam with much higher rates of female participation in key positions at commune, district and even province level (Waylen 1998, p3).

Waylen does, however, outline several concerns relating to gender and the state in Vietnam. She highlights that state policy is very often the product of the leaders, where women are un-represented in government positions, as are gender issues in the resulting policy. Second, she explains that states tend to bury 'indifference on gender' and strive towards common agreed goals that very often side-line gender issues. She highlights the thinking of Max Weber that both 'men and women must be participants in the state for it to be effective' (Weber 1957, p412). It should be remembered that Vietnam is not alone in this journey of more effectively including gender issues on the state agenda. Most 'developed' nations likewise experience a significant gender divide and many people argue that Vietnam at commune, district and even province level has done remarkably well as a 'developing nation' to address gender in the state power system, possibly far better than many developed countries.

## 1.6 Good Governance

Since the 1990s, under the lead of the World Bank and other prominent multilateral and bilateral donors, the concept of 'good governance' has emerged in world circles as a way of 'benchmarking the state's role'. 'Governance' generally has been defined as the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development (World Bank 1992). The push for 'good' governance came from dissatisfaction with inefficient development aid programs and the belief that a strong or 'good' governance environment could better enable development programs to operate effectively. The model of good governance, which currently is accepted by most multilateral and bilateral donors and many NGOs, is built on the principles of institutional capacity building, particularly of legal, financial and regulatory systems that are needed to underpin a healthy market economy. The belief centres on a notion that a more effective and appropriate state can facilitate better development outcomes. Donor governments often include a combination of social and political related policies in their good governance agendas including promotion of human rights such as freedom of speech, democracy and participation, that assist develop areas of need such as health, education and other services. Good governance has become a key philosophy for many western donor governments and something many aid recipient nations must adhere to if they wish to receive aid funds from bilateral and multilateral sources (Drake 2003). Naturally, the political elements to the good governance platform may not always align with a particular nation's political agenda.

Good governance is made up of eight key areas according to the United Nations (United Nations Development Programme 1997). First, good governance must include participation, in that all men and women should have a voice in decision-making either directly or through legitimate intermediate institutions that represent their interests. Such broad participation is built on the universal human right of freedom of association

and speech, as well as the belief that all people have the capacities to participate constructively, as Sen highlighted (Sen 1985). Second, good governance reinforces the rule of law and that legal frameworks should be fair and enforced impartially, particularly the laws relating to basic human rights. Third, good governance promotes transparency, which should be built on the free flow of information involving the promotion of processes, institutions and information that are directly accessible to those concerned and ensure that enough information is provided to understand and monitor activities. Fourth, good governance promotes state responsiveness in regards to institutions and processes that are able to best serve all stakeholders. Fifth, the platform highlights consensus orientation, promoting the state's role in mediating differing interests to ensure broad consensus is achieved and that applicable policies and procedures are developed to support this. Sixth, good governance supports the issue of equity for all men and women and the state's role of ensuring opportunities to improve or maintain the well-being of all, regardless of gender. Seventh, like other liberal economic approaches, good governance highlights the importance of effective and efficient processes and institutions. It requires results to be produced that meet the needs that exist while making the best use of the resources available, highlighting an important principle of accountability of decision-makers within government, the private sector and civil society organisations. It requires all groups to be accountable to the public, as well as to institutional stakeholders, the accountability differing depending on the organisations and whether decisions are internal or external to the organisation. Eighth and lastly, good governance raises the issue of strategic vision of leaders and the public in the hope that both the state and the public will have a broad and long-term perspective on good governance and human development, along with a strong sense of what is needed for such development to occur (United Nations Development Programme 1997).

Before exploring where Vietnam sits in relation to good governance it is important to look deeper at the links between good governance and democracy. Interestingly, the World Bank has been careful not to make democracy a pre-condition for all good governance programs, yet it still is a key principle for the World Bank and many other international donors. This is an important issue to highlight, given the number of countries that do not subscribe to the dominant definitions of democracy as understood by the World Bank and others are quite large. Other bilateral donors have not adhered to this school of thought and frequently tie aid spending directly to recipient governments achieving certain western democratic reforms. As a result, considerable debate surrounds the issue of whether democracy is really required for good governance, and as to what both good governance and democracy fundamentally are (Lancaster 1993). Given the widespread appeal of good governance within the donor community, at least the western donor community, and also due to the number of different interpretations of governance, attempts have been made to create a standardised model for good governance. As could be expected, variations in culture, history, political systems, geography, and social and economic factors in a particular country make this a near impossible exercise to complete. Vietnam is again a good illustration of a country that is limited by such a standard model. Despite the intentions of the predominantly western group of donors, the full set of agreed good governance principles is difficult to impose in a state like Vietnam which is socialist, yet incorporates market economics and maintains solid and sustained economic growth. On many accounts, countries like Vietnam at face value

go against many of the eight key areas of good governance theory, which are seen as a complete set of principles, not a list that can be selected from.

Despite what appears to be the World Bank's relatively flexible stance on not excluding non-democratic states like Vietnam, the World Bank has nevertheless defined what it believes is 'poor governance' versus 'good' governance. According to the World Bank, poor governance includes:

- failure to distinguish between public and private sectors;
- poor or unpredictable laws;
- excessive rules and regulations which do not encourage markets;
- government initiatives that are inconsistent with development; and
- non-transparent decisions (World Bank 1997).

These criteria are of course based on what is largely a western, capitalist and democratic model of governance, even if not strictly excluding non-democratic countries. Many NGOs have been very critical of the strong push towards strongly defined good governance principles. Many claim that these are simply a way of strong developed nations supporting market friendly development that ensures their own dominant position within the global economy (Drake 2003). Based on these criteria, Vietnam can be seen to meet some of the good governance criteria, be working on others, but have clear alternative approaches to other criteria. The interesting point to note is that Vietnam is still achieving good results in regards to economic development and poverty reduction with over 7% increases in GDP in recent consecutive years. Given the increasing power of globalisation and world economics, Vietnam is likely to feel increasingly under pressure if it sits outside such widely accepted good governance norms for much longer.

It is important to note that Vietnam, despite holding a strong socialist line, has had to compromise in relation to the good governance requirements to continue to grow its position as a world player. Vietnam like many socialist states has had to 'open up' to world trade and international economic norms, partly as a result of internal decisions to follow this path, but also due to these strong outside pressures. Given the current dominance of capitalism in world terms, Vietnam as a socialist state can no longer stay removed from the world and encompassed in a socialist bubble like it did following the end of the American War in 1975 if it wishes to grow as an economic force. The increased effects of globalisation and a dominant world economic system have meant that it is becoming more difficult for a country to be what is often termed a 'rogue state' and stay out of the world economic system. In the last 50 years, states have of course done this, including Vietnam immediately after the end of the American war. Such states have had mixed success, however the level of success these countries have achieved depends largely on the definition of what 'success' is. When success is examined in national economic terms, the states that have not fully integrated into the world economic system have not been as successful in economic terms. However, many such countries have perhaps succeeded in other non-economic terms, such as Cuba, which has one of the highest rates of trained doctors per capita of any country in the world (United Nations Development Programme 2005d). It is also interesting to note that many citizens in some of the most developed countries of the world long for some of the key principles and elements of lifestyle

which such 'rough states' often have, including reduced focus on material possessions, meditation, family and community, and other elements of Confucianist societies.

Globalisation is concerned with the reduction in time and space through improvements in technology and trade. It is becoming an increasingly difficult phenomena to escape as many scholars have highlighted including Cable (1999), Grunberg (1998), Giddens (1994), Camilleri and Falk (1992), Featherstone (1995) and Gandhi (1998). As a result, a double imperative has resulted for many countries where there is a perceived need for nation states to 'think globally and act locally'. This is an important consideration for this research, because although looking at village-based planning and development within a specific defined area within Vietnam and largely at the grassroots level, care needs to be taken not to divorce the effect of the macro level environment both in Vietnam and internationally and associated economic, political and social effects this may have on village-based planning and development methodologies.

### **1.7 Democracy in Vietnam**

Democracy is an important consideration in village-based or village-driven development. It is frequently assumed that little, if no, democracy exists in Vietnam, given it is a single party socialist country with a long socialist and communist history. At face value, the socialist system is very apparent in Vietnam through propaganda posters on most street intersections, the Vietnamese flag on all government buildings and many homes and businesses and an overwhelming feeling when in Vietnam that you are in a socialist country. These observations and feelings often lead people to assume that democracy is not present in Vietnam or cannot exist under such conditions. Frequently, academics, donors and NGOs alike refer to the Vietnamese government system as 'top down'; a connotation that is aligned with un-democratic systems. Certainly, even in Vietnam today, strict hierarchies of power and control are still exhibited by the government that can affect activities right down to the village level. However other elements contradict this image.

In recent years, Vietnam has experienced significant change with the first major turning point in 1989 with the promotion of the *doi moi* process and its focus on economic liberalisation that incorporated many western economic and associated reforms. One associated reform was the Decree on Grassroots Democracy (Decree No. 29/1998/ND-CP, 11 May 1998) that assisted to institutionalise democratic principles at the village and commune level in Vietnam including the ability for local elections of key village and commune level administrative positions and to enable greater local autonomy in decision-making. Although local elections of key commune and district officials had been occurring for some time in Vietnam, the decree made village and commune election processes a national mandate. The changes that the grassroots democracy decree is continuing to bring Vietnam have the potential to considerably influence the environment in which democracy and community participation can act. It still needs to be remembered, however, that this is all occurring within a strong socialist government framework. As Le Bach Duong commented, there is still a strong sense by many key officials that the state system can identify and deliver essential services with little community policy input, despite this decree (Le Bach Duong 2002)

Therefore, to define democracy it is important to look at what democracy means, what elements it contains, and how it can be interpreted. Only then it is possible to assess how Vietnam meets or applies some or all of such definitions. There are a variety of prefixes that can be put before the word democracy to clarify the different meanings of the term. As Diamond explains, arguably the most common understanding of democracy is known as 'electoral democracy' (Diamond 1996, p21). This concerns a process where elections are held to make political decisions where the larger public is at least given the opportunity to be involved, particularly in the process of appointing key leadership positions. To be seen as democratic, such processes should obtain as many votes from the group of people affected as is possible, especially including the ability of marginalised and minority groups to be involved. In addition, under such a system, each person's vote has the same weighting, characterising this form of democracy with fairness, ensuring a voice for all and enabling all views to be represented in any decision. To many, this is the essence of democracy.

Related to this definition is what is termed 'liberal democracy'. This is used to describe the type of democracy that exists in many countries in Europe, as well as the United States and Australia. This form of democracy is characterised by a political system that usually includes transparent election processes between multiple political parties. This enables key political decisions to be made by representatives of the community, not by the whole community, including a process of electoral democracy, to ensure that leaders elected represent those who the people have chosen from a larger pool of candidates. An additional term also used to describe this type of process is 'delegated' or 'representative democracy', since a group who will make decisions that reflect the people's wishes is appointed to represent the larger group (Porter 1993, p5). Interestingly, most western definitions would not allow a single party system to fall under this definition of democracy even if the leaders were appointed through representative voting and if it used group consensus decision-making processes. This is because many see the multi-party system as central to an effective liberal democracy, even if parties have similar agendas, which can frequently occur.

The opposite of democracy is often thought to be 'authoritarianism'. This is a situation where leaders make decisions with no reference to the people and it is often characterised by key leaders being selected based on the government's selection process only, with no democratic elections by the people. Between this concept of authoritarianism and liberal democracy is also something termed 'quasi-democracy'. This is seen as a situation where a government adopts some elements of authoritarianism and some elements of liberal democracy. An example would be some of the small African or South American countries where elections are frequently held between several parties, but the process is tampered with to ensure the success of one candidate or party (Diamond 1996).

Arguably the highest or truest form of democracy is what is known as 'participatory democracy' or 'direct democracy'. This is where citizens do not vote for representatives, but instead are directly and actively involved in all major decisions themselves. Naturally such a system is hard to undertake on a large scale, which is why it is often seen to be most applicable to community level situations. It is often argued that this is the ultimate form of democracy, given power and control is handed over to the people (Potter 1997, p6). Many claim that due to aspects of human nature such as greed, thirst for power, and apathy, any form of democratic delegation will lead to significant loss of power for the people given it is so difficult for anyone to fairly represent the needs of others.

The Government of Vietnam stipulates four levels of participation in the grassroots democracy decree. These are, firstly, informing, where local administrations are obliged to inform the people about a broad set of issues ranging from new national laws to local projects. This is aimed at improving transparency of the administrative system including budgeting and financing that, as outlined by Kerkvliet (1995), has traditionally been an area of potential corruption and conflict in Vietnam. The second level mentioned in the decree is consultation, which stipulates that the exhaustive catalogue of local government initiatives must involve discussion with the people prior to their implementation. This requires village level involvement in long-term planning as well as project-by-project initiatives.

The next two levels of the decree promote two-way communication rather than just one-way through informing and consulting. For example, the third level in the decree discusses the issue of obtaining community approval. It outlines key issues that require local administration to secure majority approval by the people before the government can carry out projects or activities including public works that require contributions from the people. The final and perhaps most complex level of the decree eludes to total community control. This sets out important issues such as the management of the municipal budget and land management system, which must be undertaken by the people in conjunction with the commune government. This element of the decree seeks to achieve tighter control of finances given the vested interest of the people in such grassroots processes (Socialist Republic of Vietnam 2003). In addition, the decree outlines processes for elections of village and commune officials, who must receive a majority of votes from at least one person per village household. The important concepts outlined in the decree support the position that Vietnam is possibly more democratic than may initially be thought. In many ways the democratic principles, at least those that are outlined in the decree, provide a benchmark for democracy that many western liberal economic countries would find hard to achieve.

The notion of democracy or 'domos kratos' was originally coined by the ancient Greeks, so it is no new concept. The main theory on the subject is divided into two main discourses; one that sees democracy as the goal of political equality and participation, where human beings can express themselves, their concerns, and their interest through collective actions and the other that focuses on democracy as a form of government, with a strong emphasis on election processes, voting and the role of the people in determining leadership (Beetham 1994). Based on these definitions, many attempts have been made to categorise countries under certain definitions of democracy such as partial, limited, semi or pseudo democracy. This is often referred to as 'democracy with definitions' (Diamond 1996, p29). In a context like Vietnam with a strong state presence, a socialist government, yet some evidence of grassroots democracy emerging, it is difficult to pigeonhole Vietnam quite so easily. The *Freedom House World Report* divides countries into various categories based on political rights, including political processes such as voting. This is combined with indicators of civil liberties such as an ability to develop institutions separate from state, to form an overall democracy rating. Interestingly on both accounts, Vietnam fares poorly in regards to democracy despite its many democratic processes in place at all levels of society (Freedom House 2003). Like many such studies, these studies fail to acknowledge the complexities and the particular democratic environment that exist in Vietnam where, although not completely democratic when compared to widely used definitions and indicators, important elements of democracy are still in place.

It should also be noted that although the common type of democracy associated with multi-party systems, voting and representative decision-making has spread rapidly until the 1990s, in recent years a 'third wave' of democracy has begun, as described by Diamond (1996) and Haynes (2001a). Such writers highlight that despite several strong democracies existing in the world according to dominant definitions, many more countries are transitioning away from democracy especially in Africa and Latin America or experiencing democratic failure. This has frequently been aided by widespread discontent with democracy, abuse of democracy by individual governments, effects of authoritarian militant dictatorships or just general social backlash to many of the key elements of democracy (Diamond 1996).

Due to the mixed results of democracy, opinion is divided as to what contributes to successful democracy and even whether democracy is as fundamentally important as some states and organisations would claim. One prominent school of thought is that a strong middle class is essential to ensure the stability of true democracy. Having a large group of middle class with adequate income is seen to alleviate tensions between the rich and poor, stabilize the political landscape, and give democratic processes a real chance. Modernisation theory likewise promotes the importance of economic and social development to support successful democratisation (Lipset 1994). Interestingly, when looking at the *Freedom House World Report*, the majority of the world's most stable democracies currently, are in fact in the most developed countries that have the highest levels of per capita income. This does then question the appropriateness of different forms of democracy for different levels of developing countries.

One additional point to note, is that having a strong middle class has also been the main platform for alternative models of government to be successful including socialism, communism and even fascism. In such cases, a working class majority usually becomes dissatisfied with the 'bourgeois' or middle class, which leads to widespread dissent amongst the social masses, resulting in a regime change. This experience goes against much democratic theory, which claims a strong middle class promotes stability and democracy rather than undermining it. Vietnam having had many years of colonial and imperial rule by external countries including China, Japan and France, not surprisingly proved a fertile platform for Ho Chi Minh and other key leaders to establish a strong socialist state given there was a distinct divide growing between the 'middle class' lifestyle of the colonial rulers and Vietnamese elite, and the majority of the Vietnamese people who were still very poor. Some academics including Diamond (1992) and Lipset (1994) amongst others, support the notion that democracy can be supported by low per capita incomes, when there is a consistent reduction in poverty and increase in development. Vietnam, although being socialist, is currently supporting greater levels of democracy whilst also ensuring continued economic growth. Democracy or more importantly, particular democratic values, are therefore important to consider in this research when exploring village-based development. Care needs to be taken to ensure that a single definition of democracy is not used alone but that the key values associated with fair voting and election systems and also decision-making (direct or representative) are investigated in adequate detail.



## 1.8 Civil Society

Within this socialist context in Vietnam, it is also important to determine the relationship between government and what is characterised as 'civil society'. As a result of the strong state-society relationship, few opportunities currently exist in Vietnam for what is usually interpreted as truly non-governmental or civil society groups. The question of 'what is civil society' in Vietnam is much debated. One of the more comprehensive studies by Wischermann et al (2002) argues that civil society in Vietnam is made up of three main groups of 'societal organisations'; that is, mass organisations, professional associations and issue-oriented organisations. This study, although one of the more detailed, suffers several limitations. First, it fails to identify just how independent or 'non-government' these groups really are from the government and claims that many of the professional associations and issue-orientated groups identified operate independently from government, however little conclusive evidence of this is provided. In addition, general opinion by experienced development professionals in Vietnam is that most societal groups in Vietnam have either explicit or at least informal relationships with the government. Second, the study focussed on Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi, the two largest cities in Vietnam and cities that benefit from large populations and robust donor, government and private sectors that provide an unrepresentative environment for civil society or non-government groups to be established.

Another interesting study into the issue of civil society was initiated by CARE International and completed by Nguyen Thanh Tung (2003). This study acknowledges the historical and cultural perspective of civil society and highlights the long-standing and inescapable links between civil society and government in Vietnam. The report concurred with Wischermann, that although mass organisations are part of the Fatherland Front under the government structure, they form an important part of what usually would be termed civil society in other country contexts. The study succeeded in identifying and investigating in some detail, the majority groups in Vietnam that could be termed civil society under such a broad definition. The study did not, however, discuss in detail the validity of informal groups that are geographical derivatives of the government structure known as *xom* and *to* in the Vietnamese language. These groups often play a major role in poverty reduction projects and since they are geographically based, provide an excellent starting point for uninhibited participatory processes. In addition, although touched on in the study, the issue of small-scale issue-based community groups, for example six person credit groups and small farmer extension groups, were not discussed as part of the civil society network either. These groups, as well as the geographic groups, play a significant role in poverty reduction programs and arguably form an important part of civil society in Vietnam. Several other key studies, including Suzuki (2002), Le Bach Duong (2002), Pedersen (2001, 2002), Sidel (1996), Nguyen Ngoc Truong (1994) and Nguyen Ha Kim (2001) have also provided some insight into the shape of civil society in Vietnam, yet nonetheless, considerable difference of opinion still exists on what makes up civil society in Vietnam. This research seeks to keep an open perspective on this issue and not attempt to categorise various groups as civil society or not. This provides the optimal opportunity to explore how village-based planning and development works with no preconceptions in mind, in line with the conceptual framework of critical development studies that is used throughout this research.

Civil society is not a new concept with its history being able to be traced back to the ancient Greek philosophers who acknowledged the importance of alternate social structures to government. In the western world, democracy and the role of civil society have increased in popularity in the last two to three hundred years, particularly in Europe and the Americas. Most western countries have been built on a firm base of freedom of speech and the ability for the people to form their own organisations or civil society. Following the industrial revolution, many such western nations became catalytic in the process of developing strong civil societies. Now most European, American, as well as many Asian and African countries take for granted the ability to form and use civil society freely. Current liberal economic theory and democracy theory both strongly support the importance of an active civil society in successful development (Ritzer and Smart 2001).

As has been seen, good governance and democracy theory both highlight the importance of civil society. Civil society therefore fills an important place as one of four actors in the societal power debate. Civil society is usually defined as a set of groups that exist outside the government for a variety of reasons including: providing alternative opinion; opposition/criticism of government; ensuring accountability; providing services not delivered by the government; and many other reasons (Brown 1989). Lipset (1994) and others claim that to have a strong civil society, democracy is essential. A certain amount of state support and freedom is required to allow civil society to operate effectively, which very often an effective democracy can provide as such a precondition.

This social capital or ability for civil society to form is of particular importance in Vietnam, which is governed by a strong government system that is often seen to be relatively effective for a developing nation. At the lower levels (closer to the community) the government systems are observed to operate more democratically, although operations still fall within what is popularly described as a 'top down' system of communication from a strong state power-base at national level. Nonetheless, as Nguyen argues, Vietnam has always had a certain level of grassroots civil society and democracy, even before the grassroots democracy decree was released (Nguyen Thanh Tung 2003). He points out that the dominant agrarian village structure has always lent itself to group decision-making and democratic processes. He and other academics have also pointed out that the mass organisations can be argued to also be part of civil society in the Vietnamese context, even if having some links to government. This is because in Vietnam these groups form a complete network across all villages and provide an alternate voice to government decision-making, even though they are still effectively part of the government system. It is argued by many that mass organisations are so large and contain such broad membership that the government cannot control them closely, so frequently at the village or commune level they can act in much the same manner as independent civil society. The fact they organisationally form part of the Fatherland Front is argued as an immaterial fact. One of the encouraging studies recently completed was the World Alliance for Citizen Participation (CIVICUS) study in 1996 which sought to assess the status of civil society in Vietnam against the prescribed CIVICUS methodology used across the world (United Nations Development Programme 2006a). This study again confirmed the uniqueness of Vietnam's context and in many ways struggled to fully capture the essence of civil society in Vietnam, let alone come up with a clear definition based on the set international methodology. Like democracy, any one definition of civil society cannot be simply applied to the Vietnam context; instead the individual values or

functions of civil society need to be explored and unpacked and any overall definition redefined for the context of Vietnam.

### 1.9 The Role of INGOs and Donors

Although arguably not a specific area of theory in its own right, donors and non-government organisations (NGOs) and their role in development are an important consideration for this research. In Vietnam both groups are considerable players in the development sector together with community and the government.

NGOs are generally divided into two groups of either Community Action Organisations (CAO) or Community Development Organisations (CDO). The first group, CAOs, are generally concerned with facilitating changes in attitudes and policy, frequently through lobbying and campaign work that is often termed advocacy. The second group, CDOs, are more interested in the implementation of programs that focus on international development and the reduction of poverty (Arrossi 1994). Of course in practice, many NGOs can focus on both these objectives. In relation to the ideals of inequality, powerlessness, democracy, civil society and participation, NGOs can play a key role as change agents or facilitators of programs that influence these ideals. Being non-governmental by definition, this often means NGOs have a unique ability to promote such ideals given they usually act at the edges or outside the government's control, unlike many large-scale bilateral and multilateral programs that partner directly with government. In a socialist country like Vietnam, it can be argued that the role of NGOs is even more important given the limited civil society that exists according to common definitions (Gray 1999). The research explores the role of NGOs (and donor programs for that matter) in relation to civil society, the government and the business sector. Most NGO charters are focussed on proving tangible benefit to communities and not overlapping with other key players. Given the limited level of official non-government civil society in Vietnam or established Vietnamese NGOs, this possibly makes the international non-government organisations (INGOs) more important players in the promotion of democracy, civil society and village planning and development, if such issues cannot be effectively promoted as part of the agendas of the other societal actors.

INGOs sit in the midst of what could be defined as civil society in Vietnam. These groups are not under government control<sup>6</sup> and are generally orientated towards western political models, so either explicitly or subtly promote democracy, decentralisation, civil society and participation. Given that just under a third of the Vietnamese population are considered poor and under the international poverty line<sup>7</sup> and given the government still suffers considerable public sector capacity issues, foreign aid donors and especially INGOs play a crucial role in reducing poverty in Vietnam. Also given the limited number of truly non-governmental domestic groups that exist, INGOs often become central promoters of civil society, democracy, decentralisation and participation both through poverty reduction programs but also as an integral part of the fabric of Vietnamese civil society in their own right. Since 1989 when most international non-governmental organisations re-commenced operations in Vietnam following the Vietnam-American War, INGO development projects have

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<sup>6</sup> Some academics debate this, given a large number of INGOs are dependant on a single government donor, often meaning their programs mirror the ideology of that donor country's government.

<sup>7</sup> The International Poverty Line is individual income of USD\$1 per person per day.

continued to be implemented and in turn evolved to match the ever changing environment in Vietnam.

Bilateral and multilateral donors also find themselves in a unique position in Vietnam. Donors have the ability to fund and facilitate the implementation of projects that can promote ideals such as civil society, decentralisation, democracy and participation. For these reasons, these two groups are the key focus of the national level enquiry and case study sections of this research. These groups are the main facilitators of the examples of village-based planning and development that support the grassroots democracy agenda.

### **1.10 Community Participation**

A large volume of development literature exists on what is popularly termed 'participation', which emerged starting in the 1970s, a period when many development actors became dissatisfied with the lack of tangible results from development activities. In particular, criticism was directed towards multilateral, bilateral and government programs which were seen to operate in largely a top-down manner (Cornwall and Pratt 2003). As a result, a groundswell began to contextualise development more fully within the individual environments and in particular began to be more responsive to community needs. Soon momentum built and by the 1980s the concept of participation, empowerment and putting people in the centre of development was widely accepted. Over this period, participation as an operating principle became widely accepted by NGOs, multilateral and bilateral donors and governments alike (Guijt 1996a).

A dictionary definition of participation is 'the act of having a share or taking part in some activity or enterprise' (Oxford 1982, p746). Sammuel defines participation as 'a process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives and the decisions and resources which affect them'. In addition, by using a self-help approach in activities, the community ultimately seeks to share control of development processes (Sammuel 1987, p43). Accordingly, the term 'community participation' refers to the involvement or participation of a community of households, or individuals, in social and political action, to influence the formal decision-making process on issues that relate to them. They may use self-help or mutual-help/collective effort in the planning, implementation, monitoring and management of development projects, with or without external assistance, again with empowerment as the ultimate goal.

It needs to be noted that the above definitions are largely built on the experience of the west. Again it is important to ensure that the definition of participation used in the research is broad enough for the Vietnamese context. Considerations for adequately defining participation in Vietnam based on concepts from Choguill include:

1. The way communities are organised in Vietnam versus developed countries;
2. The interest and involvement of outsiders, such as government and other agencies and individuals in the activities of the community; and
3. The objectives and practices of the current community participation effort, considering the socio-economic and political contexts prevalent in Vietnam versus the developed countries. (Choguill 1995)

This is important because perhaps in many ways Vietnam may have forms of participation in place but these may differ from widely held western or Euro-centric

preconceptions. Again in line with the critical development studies conceptual framework, it is important to approach any such widely held notions from an enquiring perspective.

Since the 1980s, participation has been widely implemented as a discourse by communities, NGOs, government and donors in a variety of country contexts, with varying degrees of success. Although many programs and their participatory approaches have been evaluated, there has been considerably less investigation into the country contexts where participatory processes are difficult to divorce from strong government systems and government control. Most research on participation has focussed on open and 'free' country contexts, including countries in Africa and Latin America, India, the Philippines, and other country environments where civil society and participation are relatively uninhibited (Cook 2001). In socialist countries however, the situation is more complex, with often fewer truly non-governmental civil society groups in existence. Such countries often operate strong networks of quasi-government mass organisations that take the place of civil society and undertake what are usually community participatory processes. In addition, the political and legislative contexts in such countries often provide less opportunities for both civil society and participation to operate, which makes the implementation of textbook participatory processes more difficult (Gray 1999).

In addition, much of the research on participation has focussed on the tools used. Considerable research has been completed on individual participation tools in various country settings including Rapid/Relaxed Rural Appraisal (RRA), Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), ranking, matrix scoring, visualisation exercises, diagrammatic techniques, institutional and other forms of mapping, modelling, videoing etc. Participation as well as being a repertoire of tools is also 'a mindset and philosophy' (Chambers 1998, pxiv). It is the last two elements that have received less attention, especially in relation to how they are achieved in country contexts with a strong state control, such as Vietnam.

The issue of state control is logically linked with the concept of power. Participatory theory clearly links the concepts of grassroots development, empowerment, culture-knowledge and power. Participation is described by Chambers as a process of 'putting the last first' or, if you like, handing over the power to the people (Chambers 1983, p168). If a country has strong state power this can understandably inhibit this power transfer from occurring. Therefore it is important to investigate the effect of a strong state on participation.

Participation is not without its dangers and, like many areas of theory, has gone through its ups and downs. Following its widespread acceptance in the 1980s, it has come under considerable criticism. For instance, the German Technical Cooperation Agency (GTZ) pointed out that unless participatory tools are used in adherence with the wider country context and in adherence with broader principles of participation, they are often not effective (German Technical Cooperation Agency 1993). Even more recently the World Bank in their 2004 report clearly outlined the pros and particularly the cons of participation. They highlighted the critical need to balance state control and grassroots participation if effective participatory project results are to be achieved. The World Bank went on to advocate that there is a careful balance between what are often referred to as 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' processes (World Bank 2004a). This is supported by key participatory theorists such as Chambers (1999) and Guijt (1996a) who highlight the important role of effectively blending centralised responses with community driven responses if development is to be effective.

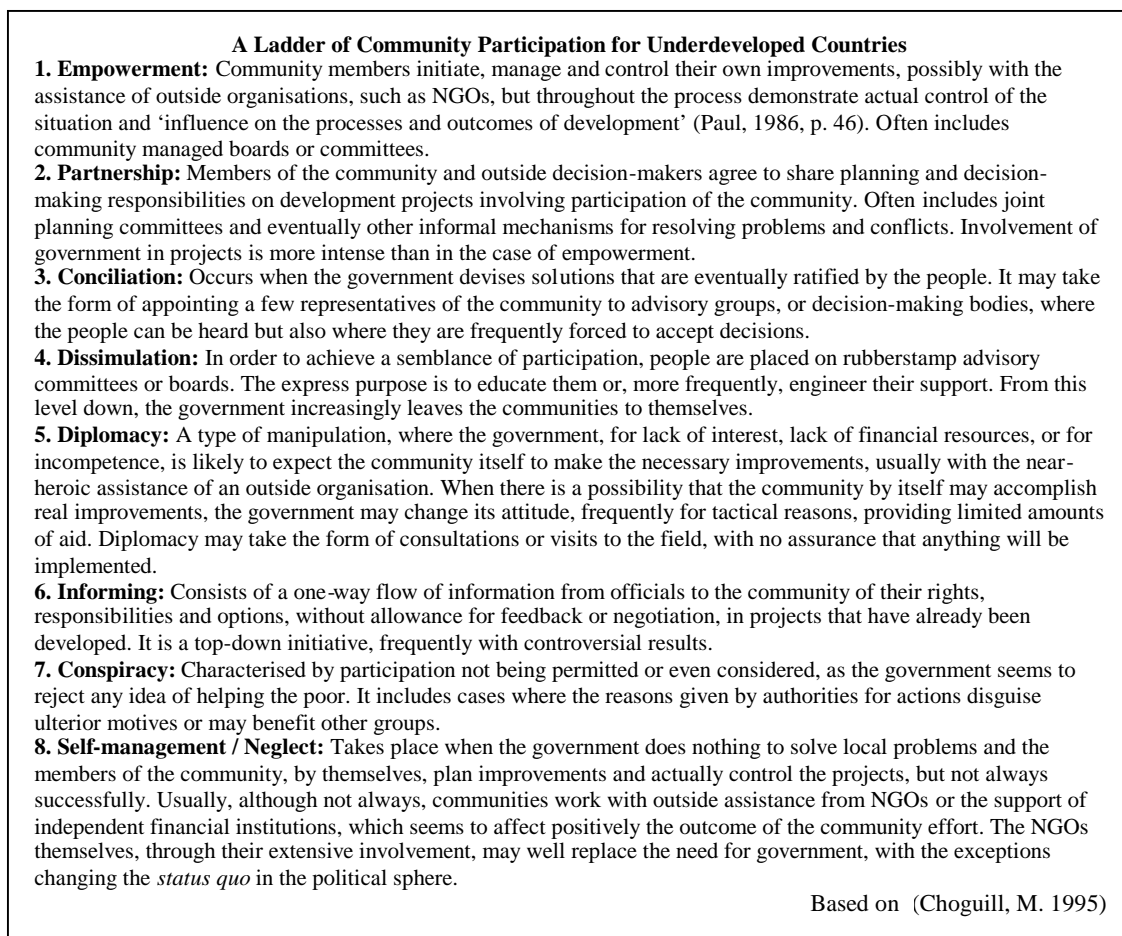
Frequently, participatory processes used across various country contexts have been naive about power relations and on many occasions resulted in negative effects. Often participatory processes have been observed to perpetuate issues of exclusion and inequality in communities, particularly of women and the poor, due to the number and way in which processes have been undertaken. Despite the apparent advantages of participation, it still has to operate in a more and more globalised environment, which it should be noted at times reduces and even reverses the effectiveness of what may at face value appear a participatory development process (Cook 2001). In addition, it is important to acknowledge that participation is often seen as part of a western approach or set of tools, not a local or indigenous approach, as highlighted by Steifel and Wolfe (1994). Therefore, one needs to be careful not to assume it is always the most appropriate methodology, and for a context like Vietnam this is an especially important question to explore.

As participatory theory also points out, for example Pretty et al (1995), there is also no blueprint response to how to handle participation. Generally there are two broad approaches: one that advocates a standardised set of methods, the other a more flexible approach based on the people's needs. Naturally the scale of poverty and development often puts pressure on agencies to come up with blueprint responses. This will become a major area of investigation in the thesis given the requirement of both donors and NGOs to be able to successfully replicate effective approaches. This creates a difficult issue, as by its nature participation should be based on local context, not preconceived methodologies (Blackburn and Holland 1998).

Participation has on many occasions proved relatively successful at community level, however what has frequently been observed is that when the principles are implemented on a larger geographical scale, it has been difficult to successfully scale-up the methodology (Malvicini and Sweetser 2003; World Bank 2004b). Participation is often seen to 'hit a ceiling', particularly when the community identified needs must be aggregated above the village or community level and interfaced with higher-level government decision-making processes. Although it is difficult to refute participation's appropriateness at a village level if undertaken correctly, when participation is used on macro scale projects and processes, its effectiveness seems to significantly diminish and it can also threaten existing structures (Paul 1998).

Two main approaches exist for evaluating the effectiveness of participatory methodologies. The first as Chambers (1992) and Pretty et al (1995) point out, is to measure the participation at different stages of a program (quantity of participation). This involves assessing the involvement that participants have had at each discrete stage of the development cycle, i.e. planning, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and ongoing management. The second method involves assessing how meaningful the community involvement is, not so much in terms of how much involvement but in terms of how significant the involvement was (quality of participation). Various attempts have been made to prioritise this involvement into a ladder of increasing levels of involvement or control including those by Arnstein (1969), Pretty (1995) and Choguill (1995). These all share a common aim to rank the levels of involvement from little or no participation to complete control or self-determination. Choguill's example is especially interesting and applicable to this research because it seeks to reflect the role and influence of other players with the community, especially the state, business, NGO and donor sectors. This provides a more relative view of community participation against other key stakeholders.





**Figure 3: Choguill’s Ladder of Participation**

Other attempts have been made to measure participation in relation to key principles and values, often strongly linked to the good governance agenda. One example completed in Vietnam recently, is the Mekong Economics Study, which aims to measure key elements of what was deemed to contribute to both effective participatory approaches and grassroots democracy. The study produced some interesting results through a strong and thorough methodology, however it did not manage to quantify on real programs, especially village-based planning and development programs, the quality and quantity of participation that occurred and to explore the reasons behind this, as described by the villagers themselves (Mekong Economics 2006). This is a major objective of this research methodology.

### **1.11 The Conceptual Framework for the Research**

The research explored the effectiveness of village-based planning and development programs within the Vietnamese context. This involved an overall assessment of the village-based development programs that exist in Vietnam, particularly highlighting the importance of civil society, democracy, decentralisation and participation as key considerations in the village-development process. This process sought to establish where the theoretical underpinnings of these different approaches have come from, if and why they are important to donor, NGO, government and communities, and how they are practically applied in Vietnam. These investigations also attempted to gain

some understanding of how well these programs have been evaluated and how effective they have been.

Welbourne explained that no matter how we investigate development theory or a particular approach, project or process, there continues to be little that actually constitutes good development and participatory work (Welbourne 1991). This line of thought, although appearing negative and extreme, is very much in line with post-modernist or critical development studies thinking that has been used as the overall conceptual framework for this research. This uses a deconstructionalist perspective to critically examine any development activity for what it is, rather than holding any preconceptions (Hart 2001). Emerging from the widespread disillusionment of development activities in the 1980s and the post-development era, the notion of critical development studies was developed so that practitioners could concern themselves with the deeper issues underlying development such as forms of power, representation, knowledge and identity, rather than just focusing on widely held and accepted definitions (Alvarez 1992). In particular, this framework values local knowledge, distrusts foreign expertise, takes a critical stance towards objectivity, and uses rational and scientific knowledge to review development processes.

Importantly, like participation itself, the framework sees people as central and separates the issue of people and local development from the larger issues of progress and development (Chambers 1983). In particular, critical development studies makes the distinction between 'big D' development (or macro development internationally) and 'little d' development (or local community development). Frequently it highlights the clear failure of the 'big D' development or development internationally and assesses the growing effect of world issues on 'little d' development or local area development (Hart 2001, p650). The framework is not, however, without its weaknesses, particularly the fact that 'rational' and 'scientific' investigation are often strongly aligned to modernisation and economic liberalisation, the types of theories the framework hopes to critically examine. In addition, although taking such an objective position may be admirable, in practice it is very difficult for any researcher to truly or completely do this. Therefore, as in any research, the level of objectiveness of the researcher does need to be acknowledged. It also needs to be realised that any shortfall in objectiveness may have negative consequences, but also may provide additional insights and benefits. Such potential limitations of critical development studies need to be monitored to ensure the methodology does provide the relevant level of investigation required in this research. It is also important to highlight that this means critical development studies is not an approach to development in its own right, but a conceptual framework that can be used to view development within.

A critical development studies conceptual framework will be used as a lens throughout this research when assessing village-based development in Vietnam. Although any researcher does have their own political, cultural and social bias, adherence to this framework where possible, importantly allows different interpretations of widely accepted notions to be more likely seen for what they actually are. For this research and the important issues of democracy, decentralisation, civil society and community participation this is especially important in the Vietnam context, as this thesis has already highlighted. Therefore, despite the potential limitations, the methodology is nonetheless very relevant.



The theoretical issues of democracy, civil society, decentralisation, socialism, and participation already mentioned all contain the central element of power. The holding of power practically, is a relative commodity between the state, community and private sector and is of particular importance to the research questions. Most theories on power, describe it as a good that can be given, shared and exchanged (Chambers and Blackburn 1996). An alternate viewpoint, as outlined by Foucault is the decentered notion of power where power is not seen as being held by the state or a class of people, but something that circulates through society and is integrally linked to discourse, which in turn produces related power-effects (Foucault 1979). In essence this definition does not restrict power as a finite resource but something that is highly dynamic. These different notions of power were explored openly and objectively in this thesis, especially taking a community perspective where possible.

## 1.12 Conclusions

A broad range of theory is relevant to the issues of village-based planning and development in Vietnam. The key theoretical underpinnings of each have been explored in this chapter and it is clear that all the theory discussed in this chapter is relevant to the debate on how best to achieve effective village-based planning and development in Vietnam. Identifying what these theories are and determining how they apply in the Vietnamese context is an important first step since all such theories have come from a western and capitalist orientated perspective, rather than an eastern and socialist orientated perspective, as is relevant in Vietnam. Therefore, care needs to be taken to contextualise all theoretical issues when applying them to Vietnam. A critical development studies conceptual framework, which questions the underpinnings of all theories was therefore used to provide direction and structure to the research. This encouraged all aspects of the research to be undertaken as impartially as possible and attempted to ensure assumptions linked with the key theories were not just accepted, but were discussed, questioned and interpreted based on the Vietnamese context. Discourses were not simply used for comparison alone, but were contextually broken down, reinterpreted and redefined.

Several key theoretical areas and discourses are particularly relevant to this research, despite their different origins and interpretations across a variety of political, geographical, social and economic divides. In particular, these include the issues of decentralisation from the state to the community, the issue of democratic processes and representative decision-making, and the importance of civil society and/or non-government entities and their role. These are the three key theoretical areas to consider when reviewing how successful village planning and development can be in achieving effective community participation. The working definitions of these three theoretical areas and their main components that were identified in this chapter will be referred to further during the remainder of this thesis. This will act as a framework to explore the issues of village-based development in Vietnam through the experience of donors and NGOs and particularly through the four case studies. The methodology of these processes will be discussed further in the next chapter, *Chapter Two*.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

#### 2.1 Introduction

The preceding chapters describe the key questions the research addresses in relation to village-based planning and development in Vietnam, and place the approach within a broad group of theories that potentially influence the approach undertaken. These chapters began to explore key elements within each area of theory, which provide a theoretical framework to use during the case study analysis. This will ensure each theory is fully understood and that different interpretations of each theory, outside the usual widely held understandings, can be explored. This critical development studies framework allows village-based development approaches to be thoroughly examined within the Vietnamese context, providing an objective analysis with minimal effects from any preconceptions.

This chapter sets out the design of the research and explores the methods used to collect the data and analyse it based on the conceptual framework. It describes the types and nature of the data collected and why the corresponding research methods were adopted. This includes the details of some of the key aspects of the research including: use of primary and secondary data sources; justification for the incorporation of mixed qualitative and quantitative data; application of participatory exercises; timing and duration of methods; use of data collection teams; issues of researcher assistance; translation and interpretation processes; matters of government, NGO and community permissions; and general ethical considerations.

#### 2.2 The Research Design

The design of the research focuses on investigating and then highlighting key success factors or elements for effective village-based planning and development models in Vietnam. In particular, it explores development responses undertaken by government, donors and NGOs that utilise an area-based approach to development, explained in more detail in the next two chapters (*Chapter Three – The Research Area and ADP Approach* and *Chapter Four – Village-Based Planning and Development*). Such approaches are usually characterised by strict geographical targeting, promotion of multi-sectoral interventions, and long-term program durations. Perhaps due to these operating principles, such programs are also frequently credited for enabling real community involvement (German Technical Cooperation Agency 1993). The research into these approaches was conducted over a three-year period from 2003 to 2005 while the researcher worked and lived in Vietnam. Literature review activities were completed in 2003 and 2004 and national level enquiry and case studies in 2004 and 2005. Submission of the thesis for examination occurred in March 2007.

As the discussion of the relevant theory has revealed, the issue of state-society relations is a central consideration to this research. To ensure this issue is explored in adequate depth, a case study approach was utilised using four separate programs of a single INGO. Four World Vision Vietnam, Area Development Programs (ADPs) were studied in detail, particularly focussing on the participatory methodology used during these village-based planning and development programs. Four separate programs of the same INGO were selected to ensure that the unique conditions that

are experienced across Vietnam could be taken into account. Vietnam is a diverse country economically, ethnically, socially, culturally, geographically and demographically. There are many ways to categorise the country, frequently in terms of binary groupings. Some of the main groupings include: north and south; mountainous and coastal; and rural and semi-rural (Socialist Republic of Vietnam 2005a; Center for Cooperation Human Resources Development, 2004). The four ADP areas selected reflect all conditions of these three binary groupings. The main type of area not included in this set is urban areas and as already mentioned, there was no attempt made to investigate urban development issues during this research due to a wide variety of reasons, including the fact that urban areas in Vietnam are structured quite differently from rural areas, so they make comparison very difficult. Perhaps most importantly, the research aims to investigate village-based development responses that address poverty reduction and in Vietnam high poverty levels are closely aligned with rural areas, which contain the majority of the Vietnamese population who are poor. Although not attempting to address urban development, this targeted approach does ensure that village-based planning and development can be explored in adequate detail across the four case study ADPs.

Community participation by definition is founded on the principle of hearing the voice of the people affected and allowing their active involvement in processes that affect their lives. This principle was mainstreamed throughout the research methodology to ensure that wherever possible, opinions were sought from people at the village level. Community level perceptions on the quantity and quality of participation in all ADP stages including planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and ongoing activity management were obtained as part of the methodology. These were then compared against the key elements in theoretical discourse, as well as Choguill's participation ladder (Choguill 1995).

To ensure the complexity of state-society issues could be uncovered, the research focussed on obtaining data from multiple sources wherever possible. This reduced the reliance on one particular data source or group of people (Ryan and Bernard 2000), (Jacobs 2000). This also optimised the opportunity for active participation since data was collected from multiple sources. This provided a broad group of program stakeholders of different ages, genders and ethnicity the opportunity to be actively involved in the research. Importantly, this also made it possible to triangulate key findings, given data was always obtained from multiple sources using a variety of methods. Triangulation or cross-checking data is a key issue for any research as Charles Choguill (1997) explained in his government housing project example in Dhakha, Bangladesh. In that example, the pitfalls of relying on one type of data were seen to have disastrous effects. To avoid this occurrence in this research, case study data was obtained from a large variety of sources including a quantitative survey, household semi-structured interviews, and focus groups that were undertaken with mixed gender and age groups, as well as age and gender disaggregated groups. Group interviews and key informant interviews were also undertaken to capture the perspective of key stakeholders including government officials, particularly at village, commune and district level. Informal field observations were also undertaken during the data collection period, which provided an unstructured opportunity to observe and discuss relevant issues with program and non-program beneficiaries for triangulation purposes. In particular, the inclusion of discussions and interviews with non-ADP beneficiaries was important to gain insights into how their level of participation had

also changed. This provided an important external reference to the programs or 'control' as it is often termed in quantitative research (Ryan and Bernard 2000).

Focus groups were relied on heavily as the basis of the data collection, despite the use of a broad range of data collection methods. Focus groups are widely known to provide particular benefits to research, especially to explore issues in depth. These benefits were particularly relevant to this research to explore issues raised in the quantitative survey processes in more detail. The focus groups allowed detailed analysis of more complex issues, especially questions of power relations, which are central questions to state-society relations at the village and commune level in Vietnam. Such issues are often difficult to discuss with villagers, however a well run focus group often has the ability to draw out and explore such issues (Weitzman 2000). Focus groups were undertaken in age and gender disaggregated groups, as well as through mixed groups, which allowed the researcher to explore the similarities and differences between different sub-groups at the village level. Care was taken to ensure focus groups in each village were made up of 'average' villagers from that village. Occupations and positions held by focus groups members were identified before the meetings started and if local government leaders were involved, their input was carefully monitored and managed. Separate interviews were held with village and commune leaders to gain their perspective on key issues.

Focus group methodology also lends itself to the use of participatory tools (Pretty et al 1995), and in particular a ten seed ranking activity was used to rank the involvement of various program stakeholders in each program stage. This involved individuals ranking their answers to questions using 10 small seeds or stones. Results were then discussed with the larger group to draw out different opinions and perspectives within the group and to reach group consensus. This often stimulated dialogue between participants and revealed important insights that would not usually be obtained from standard interview technique. The ranking also provided rich numerical ranking data on the comparative involvement of the key stakeholders in the program cycle and provided an overview of the relative 'power' of each of the program stakeholders in the program cycle. Such data is often very difficult to obtain through standard interviews, surveys or survey methods. Usually program beneficiaries would be reluctant to explore the issues of relative power of different groups, especially if this meant commenting on the role of the government in Vietnam. However, the stakeholder and power ranking undertaken in the mixed focus groups managed to obtain this information in an unobtrusive and sensitive manner. A trend analysis was also undertaken during the mixed focus groups to gain community opinion on how things had changed since the ADP began operations. This type of data also would have been very difficult to obtain without the use of participatory approaches.

The community opinions that were obtained from the 12 focus groups undertaken in villagers in each program district were then triangulated against the group interviews, key informant interviews and semi-structured interviews of other key stakeholders at the commune and district level. This produced what is often termed a 'rich picture' of the underlying issues at the commune and village level concerning state-society relations and the effect of the ADP. A rich picture is the combination of data from mixed sources, methods and triangulation and also implies that all conclusions will be drawn from multiple and varied forms of data, rather than a reliance on one or two simple sources (Scott 1990).

This mixed method qualitative approach was also combined with quantitative data collection exercises. In particular, World Vision Vietnam (WVV) was undertaking a detailed household survey in approximately 700 households in each of the four districts through a World Vision methodology known as 'Transformational Development Indicators' (TDIs). This survey, although looking at household poverty and quality of life issues, had the ability to be added to and due to time and money limitations, the researcher took the opportunity to supplement his research by adding three questions on the grassroots democracy decree to the TDI survey. This gave the research the ability to gain quantitative information of the beneficiaries' knowledge of this relevant decree. The sampling methodology for this survey is described in more detail below and involved a significant sample of 650 to 900 respondents in villages in each of the four ADP districts, providing a total of 2,800 respondents.

In addition, a smaller sample survey was also conducted in villages in each of the four districts by a small two-person team of researchers employed by the researcher. This allowed the collection of a small quantitative set of information that attempted to support the understanding on key issues that had emerged from the focus groups, particularly relating to beneficiary involvement in the program cycle. Again the sampling methodology for this random survey is explained in more detail below including the justification for the 100 surveys per program area, providing a total of 400 respondents. Issues explored in both the 2,800 sample and 400 sample survey were investigated in more detail in the village focus groups.

The information obtained from this case study process that was collected over a two to three month period in each ADP district was then compared against the results of the national level enquiry. The national enquiry included over 40 interviews with key donors, NGOs and agencies involved in village-based development. This was supported by a comprehensive literature review of international and Vietnamese literature relating to the major themes, to provide a strong basis for discussion on the relevance and applicability of the key elements of theory and discourse.

### **2.3 Case Study Investigations**

Detailed field data is usually required to provide adequate substance to theoretical analysis and national debates. As Eisenhardt (1989) points out, a case study is an appropriate tool to investigate accurately a question or line of questions, through an evidence based approach. A case study approach also provides a significant opportunity to ground the research in community opinion and perspectives, a key principle of this research process. The research methodology utilised community processes where possible to determine the quality and quantity of community involvement in the ADP program, as expressed by the community themselves. The community, through the focus groups, interviews and survey, gauged how they felt about the overall participatory processes they had been involved in and explored how effective and useful they had been. Unlike other research where the researcher draws their own conclusions, in this case conclusions were largely completed by the program beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries themselves (Faulkner 2000).

#### **Quantity Of Participation**

At first it may appear that the quantity of community participation may not be as important as the issue of quality of participation. However in a country like Vietnam where community involvement in grassroots processes has been limited by the state

in the past and, it could be argued, is still limited today, this was a basic yet important question to explore in the research. Investigations into the quantity of community participation in the four case study ADPs revealed the level of involvement of the program beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries in each of the discrete stages of the development program cycle. There are a variety of ways in which a project or program can be divided. For instance, the World Bank (2002) uses the stages of pre-feasibility, feasibility, design, implementation and evaluation. World Vision International in Vietnam has traditionally used four stages: i) planning and design, ii) implementation, iii) monitoring, and iv) management<sup>8</sup>. Given the four case studies focus on World Vision ADPs and the World Vision prescribed stages cover the key elements of any project or program, the case study methodology adopted these as the main stages to be explored with program stakeholders. As a result, focus group questions, the small sample survey and key informant and semi-structured interviews used this World Vision project cycle as a framework to ensure a detailed picture was obtained as to the level of community participation in each of these stages before and during the ADP program.

### **Quality of Participation**

Despite the benefit that determining the quantity of community participation might bring, the element of quality of community participation is also an important consideration. Programs might see community participation occurring in all relevant project stages, however perhaps the type, style or 'quality' of participation may not be high. This would mean that the project might not be as participatory as expected, despite having community involvement in all project stages. Unfortunately, measuring quality of participation is not straightforward. Whereas the quantity issues associated with the stages of participation in projects might be able to be clearly identified, measurement of participation quality requires a more sophisticated approach

Several models have been created over the last 35 years to try and attempt to address this issue of quality of community participation. Well known models that describe the quality of participation or the 'participation ladder' were developed initially by Arnstein (1969), but subsequently updated by Chambers (1983) and Pretty (1995). These three participation ladders explain a hierarchy of community involvement moving from lower levels to higher levels. They all address community participation from the basis of the community's perspective and seek to quantify the quality of community participation in the particular process, project or program by categorising it to a particular level of the vertical ladder. What such ladders fail to do is to compare the relative involvement of the various stakeholders. As this thesis has already highlighted, the relation between the community and the other stakeholders involved is an important consideration, particularly in relation to the issue of state-society relations.

A more contemporary ladder of participation or ranking of community participation was developed by Marisa Choguill (1995). The main difference in this ladder is that it describes the situation of the larger group of stakeholders involved at each level or rung, rather than just the community. This model is arguably the most comprehensive

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<sup>8</sup> World Vision International has subsequently refined these development stages as part of the LEAP initiative. The development stages now recommended by WVI are: assess, (re-)design, implement & monitor, evaluate, reflect, transition. The previous terminology was adopted for this research because all Case Study ADPs had been designed based on the earlier terminology.

and most relevant to the research since it can be used to explore the issues of state control and NGO/donor involvement, as well as community participation. The researcher took this framework into account when analysing community participation, to ensure the levels of both beneficiary and outsider participation were considered. The Choguill ladder, like other participation ladders before it, adopts a hierarchy of terms to describe participation. These represent a continuum of increasing quality of participation from a point of weakness described as 'neglect' or 'pure self-management' by the community, where the community has little or no outside influence. The level of participation moves up a sliding scale including greater involvement by others through the stages of conspiracy, informing, diplomacy, dissimulation, conciliation, partnership and empowerment (see below). This interpretation is also interesting since it does not have authoritarian control as the lowest level of control like other models. In this case, it has neglect at the bottom. This model includes increasing amounts of influence by others that increase the level of participation rather than diminishing it, and acknowledges that participation, like power, may not be a finite entity. This makes this ladder a more complex model to compare case study findings against.

1. Empowerment;
2. Partnership;
3. Conciliation;
4. Dissimulation;
5. Diplomacy;
6. Informing;
7. Conspiracy; and
8. Self-management/Neglect (Choguill 1995).

### **Villager Focus Groups**

Focus groups were a key approach in the methodology because of their ability to enable individuals to speak more freely about sensitive issues and to explore issues raised in the two surveys in more detail. A focus group usually comprises a small group of approximately eight to twelve people, which ensures that representative views can be heard from a broad enough group of people but that the group can be managed effectively (The Center for Development of Women and Children 2004). Participants are usually selected to ensure they represent as broad or as targeted a group as the research task requires. Important elements of a good focus group include ensuring every person in the group is heard and that it is conducted in a place which is familiar to participants to ensure they feel comfortable, to assist in optimising the quality of their input. Research into focus group methodology has shown that responses from such focus groups are often more detailed and gain more depth on any particular issue (Cameron 2000). It was especially important in this research to gain opinions on sensitive issues such as the relative position and power of each local party within the development process and also to determine how this situation had changed over the years, especially from the time the grassroots democracy decree (GRDD) was released and also since the case study ADPs had been in operation. The focus groups concentrated on the two processes of power and trend analysis as their



main activities<sup>9</sup>. Care was taken to ensure the focus groups were made up of average villagers where possible and any individuals with key positions identified and their input carefully monitored and managed.

The role of the focus group facilitator is crucial to the success of the focus group. This person plays a key role in mediating discussions, coaxing quiet participants, quietening overly vocal participants and ensuring that adequate information is obtained from each key theme that the group explores (Ehrhart 2004). The focus group methodology used in the research was based on the proven experience of several NGOs and donors working in Vietnam and included a single focus group coordinator for each of the four program districts (four in total). The focus group facilitators needed to be Vietnamese and speak Vietnamese, given all participants in the groups only spoke Vietnamese. The researcher participated in 12 of the 48 focus groups conducted, to ensure the Vietnamese facilitators completed the processes correctly. This ensured that high quality data was obtained. The majority of focus groups were undertaken by the facilitators themselves so as to reduce the impact of having a 'white male' involved in the process. As highlighted by Oakley, having outsiders involved can change the mood of the group, with many villagers in Vietnam equating foreigners to the issue of obtaining donor funds. Therefore, when foreigners are present in focus groups, they may considerably distort the responses obtained (Oakley 1990). As a result, it was decided that most focus groups would be undertaken by Vietnamese with enough researcher involvement to ensure quality.

The focus group facilitators were selected from university graduates from Hanoi, Danang or Ho Chi Minh City who had completed a minimum of a Bachelors Degree in Social Science or equivalent. All focus group facilitators had also participated in a number of NGO and donor surveys and focus group processes in the past in rural Vietnam. In addition, care was taken to select facilitators who knew the local geographical areas and ethnic minority cultures if applicable, and who frequently lived in a neighbouring district to the target province. The facilitators were also selected based on demonstrated research skills, local cultural sensitivity, and limited local bias. In addition to the facilitator, each focus group included a recorder to record group responses and an observer, to observe subtleties in the group dynamics and in discussions. Having such additional roles provides a thorough account of all discussions and events that take place during the focus group process (World Vision International 2004b). Also, it allows the facilitator to concentrate on the facilitation task. The observers and recorders that were used were selected based on similar criteria to the facilitator selection.

As Guijt (1996b) explains, all community consultation activities should be disaggregated by gender to ensure that gender issues are clearly identified. This argument equally applies to the issue of ethnicity or age, which are also important considerations when identifying key issues in state-society relations. Focus groups undertaken in each ADP area included two men, two women, two boy (under 16 years), two girl (under 16 years) and four mixed focus group. Two of each type of focus group was conducted in each program area to ensure data was obtained from mountainous and plain areas, a key aspect of difference in each of the four areas. The use of multiple focus groups in each program area also ensured that data was disaggregated adequately by gender and age, so that the impact on participation

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<sup>9</sup> See Appendix F for photos and samples of power and trend analysis processes conducted during the focus groups.



could be clearly identified (Okoye 1998). Facilitators were specifically trained in how best to facilitate gender and age related focus groups.

The research did not attempt to undertake focus groups with each ethnic minority group separately, although depending on the participants who were randomly selected, this did occur at times by default. Care was taken to ensure the focus groups included representative numbers of ethnic minority populations, despite the random process of participant selection. Focus groups comprised six to eight people based on general international best practice experience as outlined by Jayakaran (2003a), as well as being based on past best practice experience in Vietnam. This provided enough participants to allow a broad range of different perspectives to emerge but not too many so as to cause participant exclusion. Focus group participants were selected in the days prior to the focus group using a *random village walk-through method*, which sees the researcher or facilitator walk randomly through the village and select participants from an arbitrary group of households. (World Vision International 2003b).

The power and trend analysis exercises that formed the basis of the focus group processes involved brainstorming the major development players at levels relevant to the group and then scoring their involvement currently and before both the GRDD and ADP. All scoring responses were explored through semi-structured questions to draw out the deeper understandings of why each party was involved the way they were in the various stages of the development cycle from planning and design, through implementation, monitoring and ongoing activity management.

### **Hamlet Facilitator Focus Groups**

In all WVV ADPs, a comprehensive network of Hamlet Facilitators (HF) is in place. Hamlet Facilitators are non-government village members who have been trained in basic skills so they can facilitate the identification of community needs and prioritise these needs into a village plan for their village. This process forms the basis for each ADP's annual and five-yearly planning process. In addition, HFs are often the main trainers of new techniques in their village (particularly for agriculture); often responsible for mobilising community labour, materials and cash for ADP activity implementation; and key stakeholders in activity monitoring, implementation and maintenance. Frequently they are described as 'conduits' or 'bridges' between the community and the government or NGO (Catford 2005b). Usually there is a group of 40-50 HFs per ADP, one per village or hamlet in the program area. Given the role of this group in the ADP, they were a key group to be consulted during the research with one focus group being conducted in each program area with around ten HFs or approximately 20% of the total HFs in that program. These focus groups explored the role of the HF particularly in each of the discrete stages of the program cycle and this provided a solid method of triangulating the opinions of the beneficiary focus groups. The 20% sample was selected using a *simple random sampling technique*. This utilised the complete list of HFs present in each ADP, from which ten HFs were selected for each focus group using a random number table. This appeared to provide an appropriate sample size and selection methodology given similarities that exist between the HF role and their perspectives.

### **Small Sample Quantitative Survey**

Although focus groups often draw out more detailed responses, they do have limitations. Often a 'group think' mentality can emerge and results obtained may become flawed or not represent the actual situation (Ashe 1978). At times, sensitive

issues such as power relations, as well as possibly being more likely to be drawn out through a focus group, can equally be concealed in a focus group process if group members feel uncomfortable or feel unable to discuss such issues in a group. As a result, the research combined a small sample quantitative household survey with the focus group methodology to alleviate this possible risk. This mixed methodology aimed to blend the benefits of a largely qualitative focus group process with the benefits of a quantitative process. The survey questions were designed to gain quantitative responses on the key issues that had emerged from the focus groups' discussions and as a result, this survey was always completed after the focus group methodology had been completed in each program district.

A sample of 100 households was used in each program district. A small sample was used because it was not felt appropriate to undertake a large-scale survey in areas where people are poor and vulnerable, a frequent complaint of quantitative research and research generally (Bryman 1999). In addition, a large and more statistically verifiable survey process was planned to be conducted by World Vision in all four program areas using TDIs later during the field research period. Therefore, several key questions in relation to grassroots democracy were left for inclusion in the TDI process and verifications of key aspects of the villager focus groups were included in the small sample survey process. The process used a *two-stage cluster approach* where clusters of households were identified in each of three communes that reflected the main area types in the program district, including mountains and plains, ethnic minority and Kinh, and poor and better-off. This sampling technique ensured that a cross-section of households was consulted and that data could be compared objectively (World Vision International 2003c). The sample also resulted in nearly 50% female respondents, indicating good gender representation in the process. Survey collection was undertaken by the locally selected and trained focus group staff who had undertaken the facilitation of the focus group meetings in another district. Each local team conducted one focus group process in one ADP and one small sample survey in another. This reduced the chances of bias amongst data collectors and ensured data collectors did not get fatigued during the process, subsequently affecting the results. In addition, the researcher attended 10% of the small sample surveys to ensure data collectors undertook the exercise correctly. Care was taken to identify the occupation and position of each survey respondent for each of the two surveys. Generally most respondents were 'average' villagers however when a respondent did hold a local government position this was noted.

The data of the 400 surveys was inputted into a specially created excel database to allow for analysis across each of the four program areas and the individual villages. Results were used to support conclusions from the power and trend analysis exercises completed during the focus groups. Generally the gender disaggregation provided important insights into the different understandings of village issues based on gender, however the age disaggregation process provided few additional insights. The issues that emerged from this process are discussed further in *Chapter Four*.

### **Large Sample Household Survey**

In 2002 World Vision International embarked on an ambitious process of developing and rolling-out a set of quality of life indicators across all of its projects worldwide. The resulting set of indicators named Transformational Development Indicators (TDIs) are designed to provide an indication of the status of the quality of life of communities,

families and children where World Vision is facilitating community based, sustainable and transformational development programs, which in essence refers to locations where it is undertaking ADPs worldwide (World Vision International 2002).

The measurement process for TDIs is very detailed and robust. TDIs contain 12 indicators which refer to the main *domains of change* that World Vision hopes to influence through its ADPs and also to reflect World Vision's understanding of development as expressed in their 'Transformation Development Policy'(World Vision International 2002).

The TDI measurement process includes measurement both qualitatively and quantitatively, in particular a household survey process that is designed to be conducted in each ADP area every five years. This allows key quality of life information to be recorded to ascertain the change in target and non-target communities. Naturally, attribution of specific areas of change to World Vision programs is difficult to assess, as it is with any quantitative indicator system, however the process still provides a detailed snapshot of quality of life in ADP districts. This is used to assist World Vision's program planning, implementation and evaluation.

Well-Being of Boys, Girls and Their Families in the Community	All Girls and Boys Empowered as Agents of Transformation	Transformed Relationships	Interdependent and Empowered Communities	Transformed Systems and Structures
1. Water	<i>Child Participation (measured as part of "Community Participation")</i>	9. Caring for Others	12. Community Participation	<i>Child protection, gender relations &amp; conflict resolution (measured as part of "Caring for Others")</i>
2. Nutrition		10. Emergence of Hope	13. Social Sustainability	
3. Primary Education		11. Christian Impact		
4. Diarrhoea Management	<i>Children with Hope (measured as part of "Emergence of Hope")</i>			<i>Resource mobilisation (measured as part of "Social Sustainability")</i>
5. Immunisation				
6. HIV/AIDS Prevention (proposed)				
7. Household Resilience				
8. Poorest Households				

**Figure 4: World Vision's Five Domains of Change and 12 TDIs including proposed HIV/AIDS.**

There is a standard set of questions for the TDI household survey that is modified based on the individual country context. These questions collect data including household identification information, household characteristics including agriculture and education information, household resilience, water and sanitation, immunisation, diarrhoea management, nutrition and HIV/AIDS. These varied indicators produce an overview of household quality of life and they are collected by a measurement process involving a detailed survey process that is conducted using a *two-stage cluster* approach. This is completed by an experienced and well-trained team of up to 40 individuals per program. The household selection process enables a 95% confidence interval to be obtained by the selection method for clusters, cluster segments and individual households, usually resulting in a survey sample of around 650 to 900

households per program district (World Vision International 2003c). The researcher was responsible for the rollout of TDIs across WVV programs in Vietnam, including complete measurement in eight different districts. This involvement presented a unique opportunity for the researcher to gain additional quantitative data since the existing TDI survey questions could be complemented with limited numbers of additional questions.

The focus groups, key informant interviews and group interviews provided a significant opportunity to explore the quality and quantity of community participation experienced by a variety of stakeholders, but also highlighted that considerable variance appeared to exist in relation to people's understanding of the grassroots democracy decree. The researcher therefore decided that this would be the most relevant area to include in a set of additional TDI questions to be measured across the four programs after the balance of the case study field research was complete. This provided a robust quantitative understanding of the issue of people's understanding of the GRDD using a total sample of 2,800 program beneficiaries across the four program areas. Naturally, other questions could have been added into this process, however it needs to be remembered that any household survey must be succinct and not burdensome on participants (Nelson and Wright 1995). Therefore only a short number of well-developed questions focussing on people's understanding of the GRDD in the program were added to the TDI survey.

Like all TDI survey data collected, the results were coded, checked and inputted into a combined Epi-Info and Microsoft Access database for analysis. These results will be discussed in further detail in *Chapter Four*.

### **Interviews with Local Collaborators and the ADP Team**

Due to common staffing restrictions imposed on NGOs by the government of Vietnam, World Vision operates its ADPs through a small team. The core staff of each ADP are two WVV national staff members, an ADP Manager, and an ADP Bookkeeper. The ADP Manager is responsible for the strategic oversight of the ADP with program partners and he or she takes responsibility for the day-to-day management of the project activities, outputs and ultimately the achievement of program outcomes. WVV works on a decentralised organisational structure where project and program teams are largely autonomous and ultimately take responsibility for the project or program activities in their particular area (Ord 2004). An ADP Bookkeeper undertakes the overall program budgeting, financial management and accounting for an annual budget of approximately USD 400,000 - 500,000 over a ten to 15 year lifetime.

As a result, an ADP is a relatively large development program in Vietnam, with the current buying power of the Vietnamese Dong (VND) meaning it can ensure a large number of community priorities are met. To effectively manage the program, each ADP engages four to six additional local staff called Local Collaborators (LCs) to form part of the ADP Management Team. LCs are usually residents of the program area, with a tertiary or higher secondary qualification. They usually take responsibility for one 'sector' or component of the ADP program i.e. agriculture, education, health, sponsorship, capacity building, disaster mitigation etc. These staff, depending on the program, take responsibility for overall oversight of activities in a group of hamlets or villages. Again due to the staffing restrictions, these staff are employed directly by the local government partners in the district who form a Project Management Board (PMB). Therefore, although not officially forming part of the World Vision national staff

numbers, they work exclusively on the ADP program, a situation that ensures the government at provincial and national level endorses the model as not being in breach of staffing restrictions (Tooke 2004).

The LCs being local district people with limited education levels are often paid a wage similar to local government officials, which is frequently much lower than the wage paid to the two WVV national staff, largely due to the education level, skills and responsibilities of each party. It needs to be noted that ADP Team composition does vary across Vietnam with some larger budget ADPs engaging additional more highly paid WVV national staff members, often termed 'Program Officers' (POs), rather than purely using two WVV staff and the LCs. This enables the ADP to have a greater amount of experienced, technical skill in its team. Each ADP usually has six to eight team members but the team composition may vary.

Given their central role in the ADP and in the ADP team, the ADP Manager, Bookkeeper, POs and LCs were interviewed in each program area. The ADP Manager was interviewed separately over two to three hours, given their overall responsibility for the program. This interview explored the Manager's thoughts on the ADP model, the involvement of the community in program stages and the quality of this involvement against key theoretical areas. A semi-structured interview format was used to allow key issues to be explored but also allow enough flexibility to pursue individual issues raised by the respondents. In addition a group interview was conducted with the Bookkeeper, LCs and POs in each ADP team. The group interview followed a structured format of questions that explored the team's role in the program versus other key government and community stakeholders including Project Management Boards (PMBs), HFs, village heads, mass organisations and others. It also provided an opportunity to triangulate key community opinions gained from the focus groups with community members and HFs. The ADP group interview included all team members and usually took approximately one and a half hours. Care was taken to ensure all participants in the groups responded to each comment and provide their input on these issues.

### **District and Commune Project Management Board Interviews**

All World Vision ADPs in Vietnam partner with two levels of local management boards. The first level is at the program or district level known as the Project Management Board or PMB. The PMB comprises key government department representatives at district level who represent the key technical sectors of the program, that is, representatives of the District People's Council and Departments of Health, Education, Agriculture, and members of the main mass organisations including the Women's Union (WU), Farmers Union (FU) and Youth Union (YU). Usually the most senior representatives of each of the departments attend the PMB or they delegate their second in charge to attend. Usually the Vice Chairman of the District People's Committee chairs the group, which meets every two to four months. The role of this group will be explored further during *Chapter Four*, however generally this group is tasked with program oversight of the ADP along with the ADP team. The ADP staff members may attend the PMB meetings but are not part of the PMB (Ord 2004).

Given this group has such a major role in ADP oversight it was very important to gain their perspectives on the ADP program, the key theoretical underpinnings of the approach, and also on their role and the role of others in the program. This was achieved by a group interview, which was conducted with the six to ten members of

each of the PMBs. Individual interviews were not conducted with each member of the district PMB, except the mass organisations who are generally more hands-on in regards to project planning and implementation. Experience of the researcher has shown that the PMB members, being the most influential people in the district, are very busy and as a result have limited time availability. Therefore, one focus group interview was conducted with each of these groups that followed a fairly rigid set of questions to be addressed. This limited the time required by these individuals yet ensured their perspectives were heard. This usually took around one hour and ensured the maximum number of participants could attend the whole interview process. Also, given the particular sectoral involvement of each PMB member in the ADP, a group process was deemed most applicable to gain a full understating of the issues from the group and providing another element of triangulation.

In target communes within the district where the ADP is working, a commune PMB is also established. This group takes on the more 'hands on' role for program planning and implementation compared to the district PMB. As *Chapter Four* discusses, the composition of the commune PMBs varied significantly amongst ADP areas, however most contained six to 15 members who were tasked with oversight of ADP activities in their particular commune. Usually the group was chaired by the Commune People's Committee Chairperson and contained members of mass organisations, particularly the FU and WU. The commune PMB may also, for example, have contained HFs, village heads, the principal of the commune school, head of the commune health station and the senior Youth Union representative in the commune. The issues of commune PMB membership are discussed in more detail later in this thesis. In each ADP area, three commune PMBs were met with (12 in total), representing about 30% of the communes that the project was working with in each district. The three communes selected in each district were chosen based on set criteria to ensure they represented the main geographical and socio-economic conditions present in that district, including mountainous and non-mountainous communes, poor and not so poor communes, ethnic minority and Kinh Vietnamese communes. All PMB members were asked to attend the group meetings and generally between two and ten people attended. During the one to one and a half hour meeting, the commune PMB were asked a series of structured questions to explore their role in the program and also the role of other key stakeholders including community and government. This provided an important insight into the programs' operations at commune level.

### **Mass Organisations and other NGOs**

As has been explored, mass organisations potentially form an important part of civil society in Vietnam. Each mass organisation has representation in each province, district, commune and village in Vietnam. They therefore offer the ADP an excellent resource for planning, implementing and monitoring development activities. Although their level of involvement in an ADP can vary, they are an important organisation to consult with during the field research in each program area and as a result a forty-five minute meeting was arranged with the key mass organisation involved within the ADP districts. Generally this was the Women's Union and the Farmers Union, as typically the Youth Union had more limited roles in the program. A meeting was held with usually the director and one other senior staff member of the mass organisation, often the vice director. This interview gave the researcher the chance to explore the involvement of the mass organisation in the ADP, explore their understanding and view of the program, and also gain their insights in the involvement of other key stakeholders in the program. Given the sometimes peripheral involvement of some

mass organisations in the ADP, this at times gave the ability to gain a nearly 'outside' perspective on the program.

It had been hoped that representatives of other INGOs or VNGOs could be interviewed in each ADP area. The field research and subsequent interviews with NGOs and donors in Hanoi, Danang and HCMC revealed that other NGOs had very rarely established a field office at the district level. The majority of the NGOs based staff at national level and had them travel to program or project sites daily, weekly or less frequently. WVV was unique in basing its whole program team in the program district and given other INGOs, VNGOs and donor teams rarely do this, interviews could not be conducted with such other teams at district level. As a result, this research activity was left for the national level enquiry process, which was unfortunate as it meant it was difficult to gain a detailed alternate professional and informed opinion of the ADP effectiveness at the district level. The only one exception to this situation was the interview conducted with TYM, a Vietnamese Microfinance Institution (MFI) in Kim Dong District. The existence of this group at district level is unusual and probably largely due to the Kim Dong ADP being the most 'urban' and developed ADP included in the case study located only one hour's drive from Hanoi.

### **ADP Documentation Review**

A detailed review was undertaken of key ADP documentation both prior to the field research in the ADP areas and during the field research periods. This included obtaining copies of all relevant program documents and reviewing them including: Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) reports; needs analysis and ranking processes; assessment reports; program design documents; logframes; monthly, quarterly, six-monthly and annual reports in both financial and narrative forms; mid-term evaluation reports; designs and evaluation of complementary projects undertaken in the same area; baselines studies; TDI findings and TDI reports; organisational charts; Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with project partners; team member job descriptions; and any other relevant documents. In particular, this process included the collection of any relevant secondary data that the team knew of in the district, including information from government sources on population and demographics, income and livelihoods, agriculture, health and other key sectors. This assisted in providing a more detailed picture of the project area and the achievements of the program and also formed an important first step in triangulating or cross checking the community's perspectives.

### **Comments on the Review of Development and Participatory Tools**

The methodology of this research is heavily grounded within a critical development studies conceptual framework and the investigation of the individual elements of each theory that applies to village-based planning and development approaches, especially the ADP model. As mentioned, Chambers made the important distinction that participation is as much a 'mindset and philosophy' as it is a 'set of tools' (Chambers 1998, pxiv). Therefore, during the case study research, little time was spent reviewing the details of the particular participatory tools used in each of the program stages of the NGO. Instead of the tools being the major focus of the research as is often the case, the principles of democracy, decentralisation, civil society and participation within the overall program process was the primary focus. Discussion on the actual participatory tools used and comments on their effectiveness will be addressed in this

paper briefly, however only in relation to the main issues within the conceptual framework of the research. Perhaps the most important element relating to tools that will be explored is the issue of their selection, sequencing and use. As Narayan et al explain (2000), it is essential to use the right tool at the appropriate time in the project, based on the relationship between the process and the community.

### **Comments on Focus Group Facilitators and Survey Collection Teams**

The case study methodology outlined above could not have been completed by the researcher alone. A mixed methodology of detailed qualitative focus groups combined with two quantitative surveys and other various interviews would have been impossible for the researcher to complete given language difficulties, time requirements and numerous other barriers. As a result, appropriately equipped and trained teams were required, particularly to complete a large proportion of the focus groups and also the two surveys. The balance of the focus groups and interviews were all completed by the researcher together with experienced Vietnamese-English language interpreters, who were familiar with NGO operations, social science research and the tools employed.

Before the first case study research process was undertaken, a thorough training was conducted with all survey collectors and focus group facilitators. This included training on gender, focus group techniques, interview techniques, community analysis and participatory approaches for use in the processes. Teams were encouraged not just to undertake the data collection exercises, but also to reflect on what had been done after each process, particularly on their own influence on the process, to minimise the effect of the facilitator. As highlighted by Nelson and Wright (1995), such a reflection process facilitated by the researcher after each process can often highlight important lessons to include in future processes. The researcher was involved daily in supervision of the survey collectors and focus group facilitators and took overall responsibility to ensure all team members had adequate skills to undertake the research and to make sure sampling was random and results not biased. Although the researcher was involved daily in supervision of all field work, he took all steps possible not to create bias by being overly present during the collection process, which as Smith explains, is such an important consideration (Smith 1999). As is often the case with cross-cultural research exercises, difficulties were experienced and a small sample of data could not be used. However, generally the researcher was very pleased with the quality of the data obtained and the very limited apparent data errors. The costs for the more than 12 local staff employed during the case study research in the four areas as focus group facilitators, data collectors and interpreters were covered by the researcher and supplemented by funding received from the RMIT School of Social Science and Planning.

### **2.4 National Level Enquiry**

The case study research in the four WVV ADP districts provided detailed understanding of state-society relations at the household, village, commune and district levels and also provided insights into the perspectives of village-based approaches by key program and non-program stakeholders. However, the conceptual framework also required a detailed understanding of approaches to village-based planning and development by other INGOs, VNGOs, donors and research organisations. It needed to identify broadly what other key players were doing in



regards to village-based planning and development in Vietnam, to explore why such organisations took particular approaches and where these directions came from. As a result, interviews, investigations and document reviews were undertaken with a group of selected organisations.

This layer of research aimed to uncover first hand, current and accurate perspectives and understandings of the two central research questions. As pointed out by Bhatta (2002), it is important to ground any literature review findings and research generally in its current context through evidence based approaches. In this case the evidence based approach included obtaining the views of key stakeholders on the issues of village-based development, civil society, democracy, decentralisation and participation through semi-structured interviews.

As acknowledged earlier in this thesis, development aid plays a very important role in growth and development in Vietnam. Aid donors are an important stakeholder in poverty reduction and participation and donors have policies and even procedures in relation to good governance, civil society, democracy, decentralisation, village-based planning and development and even the role INGOs should play in participation. A group of 11 key donors were interviewed during the research period to gain an understanding of the motivation behind their programs, appreciate their political bias (if any) and gain their opinion on village-based planning and development and associated issues in Vietnam. A semi-structured interview format was used, usually with one donor representative over a one to two hour period in their office. Donors interviewed were the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), the Asian Development Bank (ADB), British Department for International Development (DFID), German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ), Government of Finland (GoF), Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the World Bank. These groups of donors represented a breadth of donors in Vietnam, including some large donors, some small donors, eastern and western donors, bilateral and multilateral donors and particularly those that had experience in village-based planning and development. The choice of donors was also affected by their availability.

There are approximately 250 INGOs in Vietnam currently undertaking a wide variety of projects, across a range of sectors (People's Aid Coordination Committee 2003). Many are quite small, engaging themselves in only one specific program area, i.e. seeking U.S. missing in action (MIA) soldier remains or working on one small disability support project. There is only a relatively small group of INGOs who are actively involved in multi-sector approaches to village-based planning and development. The researcher reviewed the Vietnam Union of Friendship Organisations (VUFO)-NGO Resource Centre<sup>10</sup> Directory and identified the key NGOs involved in area-based approaches to village-based development. In the end, 16 key agencies were selected and interviewed by the researcher. Those INGOs who have experience with village-based planning and development approaches included Actionaid Vietnam, Canadian Centre for International Studies and Cooperation (CECI), Care International, Caritas Switzerland, Christian Children's Fund (CCF) Australia, Helvetas Switzerland, Nordic

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<sup>10</sup> The VUFO-NGO Resource Centre is a centre established to support NGO operations and learning in Vietnam. The group produces an annual directory that lists all NGOs, their programs and contact details.

Assistance to Vietnam (NAV), Oxfam Great Britain, Plan International, Netherlands Development Organisation (SNV) and World Vision Vietnam. In addition, five NGOs were interviewed that did not necessarily undertake broad sector village-based planning and development programs but implemented NGO programs that included some participatory elements. These included Catholic Relief Services (CRS), Cooperation Internationale pour le Development et la Solidarite (CIDSE), East Meets West Foundation, Save the Children Fund (SCF), US and World Concern<sup>11</sup>.

With each NGO, the researcher explored the issues of their organisational or political background, particularly in regard to democracy, civil society, decentralisation and socialism within their programs. In addition, the agency's perceived role and approach to village-based planning and development, participation, and an evaluation of the key elements of their approach was conducted. This provided a crucial baseline for the analysis of the four case study ADPs.

As discussed, given the strong state control and current government policies, very few Vietnamese NGOs (VNGO's) currently exist in Vietnam. Current estimates are that there are 70 such groups in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi (Wischermann 2002). However mass organisations and some business groups need to be removed from this number to truly represent the number of actual 'non-government' organisations, at least by western definitions. The remaining group of approximately 30 organisations are mostly research groups, registered under the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment (MOSTE). These groups frequently have limited implementation ability or capacity in development but still form an important part of civil society (Lu Phuong 1994). Five of the most relevant VNGOs were interviewed to explore their structure, operations and role and particularly their opinions as civil society representatives on democracy, civil society, decentralisation, village-based development, participation and the role of NGOs in Vietnam. This was usually completed through a one hour semi-structured interview in English. VNGOs consulted were The Center for Reproductive and Family Health (RaPH), Rural Development Support Services (RDSC), Rural Development Assistance Center (RDAC) Center for Education, Promotion and Empowerment of Women (CEPEW), and Center for Cooperation and Human Resource Development (C&D). This provided an alternate Vietnamese perspective to the INGO consultations.

World Vision as the key case study NGO also needed to be investigated at national level. It was important to determine the ethics of the organisation and how this affects its concepts of democracy, civil society, decentralisation, village-based planning and development, participation and their perceived role of NGOs. As Bessant and Watts (2001) point out, it is very important to know the motivation or ethics behind any activity or organisation to determine its effectiveness and appropriateness. This process included interviews with six key WVV national staff who were not part of the four program teams, to obtain important perspectives on these issues. This was usually completed through an informal interview over approximately one hour to gain insight from these key leaders of how they perceive participation and their role and that of others in the village-based planning and development process.

Organising interviews with national level government ministries in Vietnam is a difficult task to arrange and officials are very busy and rarely afford the opportunity for organisations to research or interview their members. Usually this only occurs for

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<sup>11</sup> See Appendix A for a list of NGOs and donor personnel interviewed.

government media purposes or for high level donors studies such as those undertaken by the World Bank, United Nations agencies or the Asian Development Bank. As a result no attempt was made during the research period to interview key ministerial representatives on the research topic. Interviews with government were confined to district and commune level as described in the case study section of this chapter. One important study that did occur during the research period was a UNDP study looking at effectiveness of the implementation of the grassroots democracy decree nationally since its release in 1998. Even this UNDP research team could only gain limited access to key government officials at national level to gain insights into their views of the decree's success (United Nations Development Programme 2005a). The findings have only just been made available and will be referred to in this report to at least provide some national perspectives on the key research issues.

To supplement this formal interview process at national level, the researcher also attended relevant donor, NGO and government meetings that related to the theme of the research. This provided the opportunity to gain additional perspectives of key stakeholders and players on issues relevant to the research. In particular, the regular meetings of the People's Participation Working Group (PPWG) were attended by the researcher between 2003 and 2005; particularly relevant were the meetings on the CIVICUS Civil Society Study (United Nations Development Programme 2006a) and the Grassroots Democracy Decree Study (United Nations Development Programme 2006b), both supported by the UNDP.

## 2.5 Literature Review

### International

The case study and national level enquiry processes required a detailed literature review, which is summarised *in Chapter One*, creating a theoretical framework for the research topic and for its analysis. Within the international field of development, the literature review included thorough investigation of the concepts, interpretations and experiences relating to civil society, democracy, decentralisation, socialism, governance, NGOs, globalisation, village-based development and participation. In particular the aspects of state-society relations and the issues of power within society were investigated.

This process included review of a large volume of relevant international texts both in Australian libraries, journals and newspapers and also online resources from Australia and internationally. Presentation of a paper on *Grassroots Democracy and Participation in Vietnam* at the January 2006 Australian National University (ANU) Asia Pacific Summer School by the researcher provided the opportunity to review the extensive Vietnam collection at the Australian National University. In addition, this visit to Canberra provided the researcher the opportunity to explore the large collection of related Vietnam material at the Australian National Library (ANL).

Another key source of relevant information was literature produced by the International Development Studies (IDS) Institute in Sussex, U.K, particularly the *PLA and RRA Notes* series. The researcher visited the institute between 2 and 4 October 2006, which provided an important opportunity to review relevant academic material and participate in discussions with leading academics and researchers involved in participation.

Other research sources that were particularly applicable were materials from the International Institute of Environment and Development (IIED), the Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA) and key multilateral and bilateral publications on related topics including from the Asian Development Bank, World Bank, German Technical Cooperation Agency (GTZ), Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), Finland Development Assistance Program and the Australian Agency of Overseas Aid (AusAID) Quang Ngai Rural Development Program (RUDEP Program).

Care was taken to maintain the critical development studies conceptual framework when reviewing all materials.

### **National - Vietnam**

The researcher had significant access to relevant development literature in Vietnam while living there from 2003 to 2005. Although research available in Vietnam is limited in scope in regards to development theory, Vietnam still contains some of the most detailed information on Vietnam specific issues. Firstly, a leading International and Australian Law Firm, Phillips Fox, was used in Vietnam to obtain copies of all relevant government legislation relating to: democracy; grassroots democracy; association of local NGOs; registration and operations of INGOs; decentralisation; civil society; and governance reform generally. Phillips Fox was used for this purpose since they are the largest foreign law firm operating in Vietnam and undertake the official English translation of key government laws. This meant that high quality and accurate translations of all relevant laws could be obtained in English, which provided a solid legislative framework to support the research investigations.

The research also sought access to key GoV policy documentation, studies and reports from ministries and departments at national level. This included the Central People's Committee (PC), Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD), Ministry of Health (MOH), Ministry of Labour Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA), Ministry of Education and Training (MOET), Social Bank for the Poor (SBP), State Bank of Vietnam (SBV) national Women's Union (WU), national Farmers Union (FU), and national Youth Union (YU). Given access to key officials from these organisations was not possible, review of key GoV documentation became an important process.

The main development libraries in Hanoi related to this research include the Hanoi University, the World Bank Library, the Asian Development Bank Library and the Vietnam Union of Friendship Organisations (VUFO)-NGO Resource Centre Library. Relevant materials from these libraries were thoroughly sourced and reviewed. In addition, meetings were held with academics, academic institutions and organisations involved in related research, which provided the researcher the opportunity to explore key issues with the most knowledgeable people concerned in Vietnam. This provided a broad and informed perspective of the issues that are fundamental to the research.

## **2.6 Participatory and Critical Development Studies Analysis**

Data obtained from the case study work was analysed immediately following the data collection. In particular, the participatory methodologies used during the mixed focus groups allowed community members themselves to complete the analysis of their involvement in the development process versus other parties involved.

Following the completion of the case study process, the literature review and the national enquiry, a more detailed analysis was completed during 2006 in Australia. This involved the analysis of the mixed data obtained against key discourses and

elements of theory and the application of the critical development studies conceptual framework, to ensure the analysis of the data was objective and took into account important power relations and particularly the issues of state-society relations, historical and social context and eastern and western perspectives. This assisted to produce a strong position in response to the two main research questions.

## **2.7 Limitations of the Research and Conclusions**

The research methodology undertaken was designed to include a focus on four program case studies across different district conditions, a national level enquiry process with key stakeholders, and an international and national literature review. The case study relied on data obtained from a variety of focus groups undertaken in the program districts that utilised participatory approaches to draw out key perspectives in state-society relations within village-based development programs. This was supplemented by quantitative surveys to determine the key issues of grassroots democracy and substantiate certain focus group findings. This combined with the other interviews conducted during the case study to provide a rich picture using mixed research methods.

The researcher is confident that this provides a unique and detailed understanding of the issues of village-based planning and development in Vietnam that has not previously been seen. It does need to be remembered that Vietnam is changing rapidly, with economic and social development occurring at a very fast pace. Therefore, this research only provides a snap-shot of the issues of village-based planning and development, contextualised at this particular point of time. With rapid change in Vietnam likely to continue, village-based development and its relevant context may and probably will evolve. That said, given the limited detailed research that looks at this important subject, it is anticipated that this research will contribute a unique and important perspective to this timely debate in Vietnam.

It is also important to highlight that the research, although broadly consulting a large group of INGOs, VNGOs and donors during the national enquiry stage, relies heavily on the detailed case study analysis of only one particular INGO. This resulted in a manageable research task and adequate depth of analysis of a particular NGO's programs, but did mean that only one organisational model was investigated in significant depth. Before the research commenced, thought and consideration was given to undertaking a multi-INGO or donor case study approach, which it was soon realised would be overly ambitious given the time required to effectively complete even one detailed case study with a mixed methodology, as well as being very costly. In addition, despite the researcher having strong established relationships in Vietnam, gaining access to large group of agencies for detailed investigation would have proved very difficult. As a result, care needs to be taken when generalising the results of the research beyond the INGO and the programs' geographical areas.

It needs to be noted that the researcher was not a fluent Vietnamese speaker and had only basic Vietnamese language skills. This potential limitation was offset by the use of well trained Vietnamese–English translators who provided high quality interpretation during interviews and case study investigations and translation of key Vietnamese written texts. Given little research has been conducted on this topic to date and given the very limited appreciation of grassroots perspectives on the issues of village-based planning and development, the limitations of the researcher in local language and targeted nature of the research is justified. It is hoped that the research, by providing

the first such detailed and targeted study, delivers a practical set of principles and lessons that can be considered, modified and applied by donors, NGOs and the government, particularly in light of the current developments in Vietnam. These principles and lessons, termed key elements of village-based planning and development approaches, are presented in *Chapter Five* and further examined in *Chapter Six* and *Chapter Seven*.

The following chapter, *Chapter Three*, looks in more depth at the ADP model, which is the basis of the case study. It looks at the ADP model's history, development and key features in the first half of the chapter and then moves on to explore the particular environments in the four case study areas, uncovering the individual geographical, economic, political and social conditions that exist in each of these four districts.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE RESEARCH AREAS AND PROGRAMS STUDIED

#### 3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter described the various elements that made up the mixed research methodology that was conducted, particularly the case studies which took place in 2005 across four long-term World Vision Area Development Programs (ADPs). The case studies provided the opportunity to explore the issues of state-society relations in detail and determine how area or village-based planning and development programs can possibly assist in promoting effective community participation. The four case study districts were especially chosen to represent a variety of geographical, demographic, socio-economic, political and ethnic divisions. This chapter further explores the selection of these four program areas and details the key aspects of the four districts and their associated provinces to provide a contextual understanding of each particular area before looking at the case study findings in detail.

This chapter also explores the history, development and main features of World Vision's ADP methodology, the focus program in each case study. Although other donor, government and NGO programs were reviewed in each of the case study areas as well as nationally, it is the ADP that forms the basis of each case study. The background, history and key aspects of World Vision International and World Vision Vietnam are described as well as the important elements of the ADP approach both internationally and in Vietnam.

#### 3.2 Description of the Program Areas

##### Province and District Selection Process

##### *Geography of Vietnam*

Vietnam is a diverse country that covers 329,841 sq. km and stretches 3,260 km along the South China Sea from borders with China and Laos in the north, to the Gulf of Thailand and the Cambodian border in the south. Approximately 75% of Vietnam's land area is mountainous, with only 22% considered arable. The most productive land is located in the two major river delta areas, the Mekong Delta in the south and the Red River Delta in the north. The country is often divided into three main geographical regions: north, central and south (United Nations Development Programme 2005c).

The northern region is centered on the Red River Delta which is densely populated and heavily farmed with four distinct seasons allowing up to two rice harvests a year. (Poverty Task Force 2005). There are two major urban areas in the north of Vietnam: Hanoi, the nation's capital, and Haiphong, the major port city. Apart from the Red River Delta, the balance of the north and northwest of Vietnam is mountainous, containing significant numbers of ethnic minority groups who traditionally live in nearly exclusively minority villagers. Most rely on only one rice crop per year. Such areas are also often characterised by limited transport and infrastructure contributing to high poverty rates (United Nations Development Programme 2005c).



The central region is both coastal and mountainous and moving from west to east, contains three distinct types of topography, mountainous, plain and coastal belt. The typhoons and floods that affect the low-lying coastal region annually often have significant effects on agriculture and fishing, the main production activities. The soil is mainly saline and generally less suited to agriculture, however most of the poor are nonetheless reliant on agriculture. Fishing, shrimp farming and salt production are primary occupations for the inhabitants of the coastal area. The central highlands and high plateau region is inhabited by scattered ethnic minority communities who mainly live through agriculture, some engaging in traditional shifting cultivation. A large amount of the American war was fought in this area which still produces impact on the local area in terms of defoliation, soil contamination and unexploded ordinance (UXO) (Asian Development Bank 2005a).

The south of Vietnam is dominated by the Mekong River Delta and as a result, the land is fertile and supports a wide variety of agriculture. Most of the rice exported from Vietnam (3.4 million tons in 1998) is grown in the Mekong Delta and, unlike the rest of Vietnam, this area can support three high yield rice crops per year (General Statistics Office 2005). The Mekong Delta like the Red River Delta also contains high population densities, especially in Ho Chi Minh City, which is the largest city in Vietnam, the economic and financial centre of Vietnam and the nation's major port. There are fewer ethnic minorities in south Vietnam, concentrated mainly on the Vietnam-Cambodia border, as well as in some small scattered mountainous pockets. Case studies districts were selected to include two in the north and two in the central / south to ensure the differences between north and south were taken into account in the research. The four case study districts also included 3 mountainous districts and 1 lowland district.

### **Poverty In Vietnam**

Vietnam is still one of the poorest countries in the world with a Gross National Product (GNP) per capita of approximately USD 300 (United Nations Development Programme 2005c). Poverty is largely associated with the rural population which makes up 80% of its 82 million people, with the 2,000 Household Survey Statistics revealing that 30% of the population of Vietnam are still considered poor (General Statistics Office 2002). Two thirds of the population still depend on agriculture for their livelihood, which is why poverty reduction is still an important part of the government agenda.

Poverty, which still remains a persistent and significant problem in Vietnam despite the positive steps to reduce it, is characterised slightly differently in each of the different geographical areas (United Nations Development Programme 2005c). Given the focus of this thesis is on community-based responses to reduce poverty, it was important to investigate and understand these geographical characteristics of poverty in Vietnam, as this informed the selection of the most appropriate areas to conduct the four case studies. Careful area selection ensured that a broad understanding of community-based development across the diversity of Vietnam could be obtained.

Various studies have been conducted in Vietnam to determine the characteristics of poverty, in particular these include the GSO Living Standards Survey (General Statistics Office 2002), the MOLISA Poverty Data (General Statistics Office 2005), the various Asian Development Bank (ADB) Regional Poverty Assessments (Poverty



Task Force 2005) and the Poverty and Inequality in Vietnam Spatial mapping exercise (International Food Policy Research Institute 2003). The World Bank lists four key factors that it feels best characterises the incidence of poverty in Vietnam. These are:

- Isolation (geographic, linguistic and social);
- Excessive risk (from typhoons, flooding, pests, illness, unplanned births);
- Lack of access to available resources (particularly land and credit);
- Lack of sustainability (financial, environmental); and
- Inadequate participation in planning and implementing of Government programs (World Bank 2002).

The International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and Institute of Development Studies (IDS) spatial study confirmed the important effect of geography on poverty incidence in Vietnam. Using a Geographical Information System (GIS) methodology that mapped poverty down to province, district and commune level, this study revealed that areas with 'exogenous variables' such as elevation, slope, poor soil, or limited land cover tended to be the poorest in terms of per capita income. In addition, these areas were frequently associated with limited means of transport, which was reported to impact market and socio-economic opportunities. Areas that particularly meet such criteria are the mountainous districts of the north, north west, north-central and south-central coasts (International Food Policy Research Institute 2003, pvii).

Such areas also happen to contain the highest proportion of Vietnam's fifty four ethnic minority groups that are located in areas that border China, Laos and to a lesser extent Cambodia. Districts that sit on these borders contain the highest concentration of ethnic minorities and are nearly exclusively represented in the groups of poorest districts (Nha Xuat Ban Giao Duc 2002). Therefore a key consideration when selecting case study districts, was inclusion of districts on national borders, with high minority populations and in mountainous areas, since they represent the bulk of the poorest people in Vietnam.

Another important geographical issue to consider is that despite the high numbers and acute nature of poverty in these mountainous areas, population densities in these areas are quite low. Areas such as the Mekong Delta and the Red River Delta, although not having the acute poverty or poverty 'depth', as it is often known, often have the largest numbers of poor people or 'incidence' of poverty (International Food Policy Research Institute 2003, p22). This is simply a result of the large populations in such areas, which means that greater numbers of people are poor in these areas, even if the percentage of the population who is poor and the severity of poverty in the areas are not as great. Case study districts were selected to ensure severe poverty was investigated adequately, but also to enable the issue of high incidence poverty to be investigated across one district also.

Urban areas in Vietnam, unlike many other countries, contain only low levels of poverty (Vietnam Consultative Group 2003). Migration of the poor from urban to city areas does occur in Vietnam, however this is minimised by government controls (Statistical Publishing House 2004). In addition, major urban centres, especially Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City and Haiphong have developed rapidly in recent years, actually creating a larger poverty gap or level of economic disparity between urban

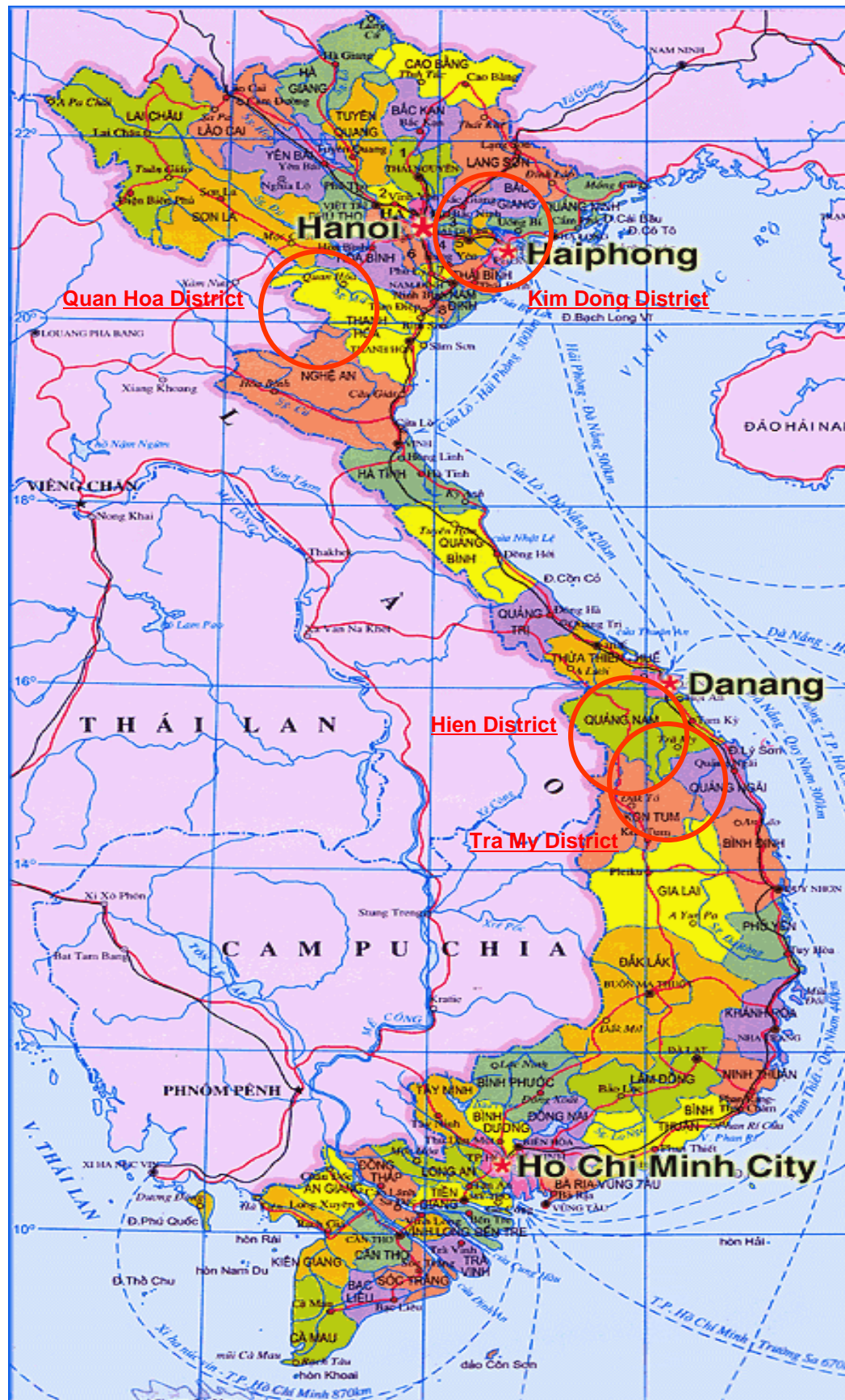
and rural poor (Department for International Development and World Bank 1999). As a result, given the issues of poverty are not nearly as severe in urban areas as they are in rural and semi-rural areas, exploration of the issues of urban poverty was not a consideration in this research. Consequently the main focus of the case study was rural mountainous areas and one high-density delta area. The inclusion of one delta case study area allowed the issues linked to urbanisation to be touched upon given the proximity of the delta case study area to a major urban centre. However, apart from this district, urban areas were not studied in any detail, a decision also influenced by time and resource limitations.

Another factor frequently linked to poverty in Vietnam is vulnerability to disasters. In Vietnam the north and south central coast areas are particularly vulnerable to typhoons and flooding during the July to November wet season (Socialist Republic of Vietnam 2004). Although the north of the country also experiences typhoons and floods in May to July, as does the south between September and December, it has traditionally been the central region which has been the most affected in terms of loss of life and loss of production (Socialist Republic of Vietnam 2005a). Also disaster events in this region are becoming more irregular and severe with the effects of industrialisation and global warming (Cooperation Internationale Pour le Development et la Solidarite 2004). The different level and type of disaster vulnerability was also used as a factor to select case study districts.

Due to these significant differences in geography, ethnicity, economic prosperity and demographics, Vietnam is far from a homogenous country. As a result of the location of World Vision Vietnam's 22 ADPs and government permission issues, the researcher selected four districts for the research. The location of these is illustrated in Figure 5 below. These are Kim Dong District in Hung Yen Province, Quan Hoa District in Thanh Hoa Province, Tra My District in Quang Nam Province and Hien District in Quang Nam Province. This selection includes three districts that represent the 'poorest' upland districts in Vietnam and one lowland delta district that is not as poor and experiences some semi-urban characteristics. Two of the four districts are located in the north of Vietnam and two in the south. One district experiences a significant risk of flooding and the others only minor disaster vulnerability. Three districts contain considerable numbers of ethnic minority populations and one district has nearly no ethnic minority people. Lastly, three districts have lower population densities and one has a very high population density.

Naturally, due to research limitations, not all ADP districts or large quantities of each specific district type could be investigated. However the set of four districts selected provided a broad representation of the different district characteristics that are associated with the main dimensions of poverty in Vietnam. This provides a broad set of areas to begin to explore the breath of the issues associated with poverty and village-based development in a country as diverse as Vietnam.

Figure 5: Map of Vietnam – Including the four case study districts (Quan Hoa, Kim Dong, Hien & Tra My)



## **Hung Yen Province, Kim Dong District**

### ***Hung Yen Province***

Hung Yen Province is one of the 11 provinces in the Red River Delta region. The province is located less than 50 km from Hanoi, nestled in the middle of the Red River Delta provinces in terms of geography, economic productivity levels and population size. The Red River Delta is the most densely populated region in Vietnam, comprising only 1.5 million ha or 4.5 percent of the land area for Vietnam (Vu Manh Loi 1991). The area has an estimated population of 16.6 million or 22 percent of the total Vietnamese population and this high density is largely attributed to the fertility of this alluvial delta area. This natural environment contributes to the Red River Delta being the second biggest rice producing area in Vietnam after the Mekong Delta. Despite the high density, 80% of the Delta residents live in small rural areas rather than cities (Poverty Task Force 2005).

Despite the clear economic benefits of the delta environment, over three million people live in poverty, representing a large number of poor people, but the region is still positioned as one of the wealthiest of the seven regions in Vietnam<sup>12</sup> (United Nations 1996). The poverty in Hung Yen is almost exclusively located in the rural areas where farmers are nearly completely reliant on agriculture. It needs to be noted that solid results in poverty reduction have been achieved in this region, with the overall poverty rate being reduced from 18% to less than 10% between 1998 and 2005, which has been attributed to improvements in food production, housing and purchasing power (Ly Ha Hoa 2005). Non-farm employment has also developed as an important economic activity, with 25% of the nation's activities being located in the region and non-agricultural jobs currently making up 17% of the jobs in the region, particularly including jobs in construction and manufacturing (Poverty Task Force 2005). In addition, having the national's capital of Hanoi and major port city of Haiphong in the region provides additional opportunities for employment that are not present in other regions. These factors combine to make the Red River Delta one of the richest regions in the country after the Mekong Delta (United Nations Development Programme 2005c).

The Red River Delta contains a relatively high number of 'unregistered migrants' unlike other regions of Vietnam. This group of people who have relocated to the area voluntarily are officially not permitted to reside there. Due to this situation, they frequently finds themselves amongst the group of the poorest within the Red River Delta urban areas (Statistical Publishing House 2004). There are very few ethnic minority people, only 2%, which makes this the region with the lowest percentage of ethnic minority people in Vietnam (Poverty Task Force 2005).

### ***Kim Dong District***

Kim Dong is one of the ten districts in Hung Yen Province and is located 60 km east of Hanoi. It borders Chau Giang District in the north, An Thi District in the east, Ha Nam Province in the south and Ha Tay Province in the west (Ban Do Cartographic

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<sup>12</sup> The 7 regions of Vietnam are a more detailed division of the 3 major areas of Vietnam (north, central and south). The seven regions comprise the North-West, Red River Delta, North-Central Coast, South-Central Coast, Central Highlands, South Coast and Mekong Delta.

Publishing House 2003). In 1996 the district of Kim Dong was separated from An Thi District to form the new district of Kim Dong. This separation was completed in line with government trends to make district units more manageable and allow for greater government decentralisation. The district has a natural area of approximately 11,800 ha, with approximately 8,279 ha of the land under cultivation. The population of Kim Dong is 126,999 people, of which 37,453 are children and 69,891 are female. With a total of 29,896 households, this means the average cultivated land per head is only 370 m<sup>2</sup> (World Vision Vietnam 1997a). Kim Dong is typical of Red River Delta districts where there is high population density and small fertile plots per family. Its proximity to Hanoi allows for additional income generation opportunities through the greater accessibility to markets, ability to be involved with construction work, or work in one of the manufacturing businesses in the economic development zone that includes Kim Dong and several neighbouring districts. Interestingly, in the communes selected for inclusion in the ADP, very few people work in the economic zone or outside their commune (Ly Ha Hoa 2005). The villages selected for the ADP include two of the poorest communes in Hung Yen Province (World Vision Vietnam 1997a), so even though the province is not as poor compared to other districts, within the province and particularly the district with its high population, significant 'pockets' of poverty exist.

Given the district sits in the Red River Delta, water is a major issue in the area. Water is on one hand an asset to the local economy, bringing much needed water supply to ensure adequate irrigation for the two wet rice crops per year. On the other hand, water is a major hazard, due to the precarious position of the district within an alluvial delta that is prone to significant annual flooding. Drainage systems are frequently inadequate and cannot deal with the flooding as part of the 1,500 mm of average rainfall per year. The ADP works with nine communes in total including the communes of Phu Cuong and Hung Cuong that are particularly vulnerable, being located on an island in the middle of the Red River. The other communes in the ADP area are Duc Hop, Hung An, Mai Dong, Ngoc Thanh, and Phu Thinh that are adjacent the red river, and Vu Xa and Song Mai communes which are not. Several communes are protected from the flooding of the Red River by a dyke system, however this is often inadequate when a large flood event occurs, frequently causing large-scale damage. In flood prone communes even rice production is difficult and in many such cases farmers are limited to growing jute, maize and sugarcane, which, although more flood resistant than rice, are still at risk of flood damage during the rainy season (World Vision Vietnam 1997a). The effects of flooding on Kim Dong are one of its major defining factors as a district and a significant characteristic of poverty in the area.

### ***Target Villages and Communes for the Research***

The Kim Dong district comprises 20 communes, two of which are islands on the Red River, seven of which lie along the Red River containing land that is inside and outside the dyke system. The remaining communes lie in plain areas not adjacent to the Red River (Ban Do Cartographic Publishing House 2003). The communes that the ADP works in represent the two most vulnerable communes (islands) and those next most vulnerable areas (next to the Red River inside and outside the dyke). Only two communes within the program area are in plain areas however these were reported to be included in the overall ADP design since they contained high poverty levels, are still prone to flooding or had limited agricultural production.

The case study in each of the four districts focussed on villages in three communes only, due to time and resource limitations. These were selected to represent major geographical areas in the program district and as a result, the case study in Kim Dong focussed on Phu Cuong, Song Mai and Hung An communes to address communities within the island areas, flood areas adjacent to the river, and plain areas.

### ***ADP History***

World Vision began working in Kim Dong through the ADP in October 1997 and it is the only NGO working in Kim Dong district. WVV has an office of six staff, with a program of approximately USD 500,000 per year. The program evaluation in 2005 approved for it to continue for another four years, at which time the program will be phased out due to good results in poverty reduction over the program lifetime. The program's goal is to contribute to increasing the quality of life of people in the target communes, with activities focussing on a variety of community needs, particularly food security and disaster mitigation, micro-enterprise development, education, health care, the environment and capacity building (Ly Ha Hoa 2005).

### **Thanh Hoa Province, Quan Hoa District**

#### ***Thanh Hoa Province***

Thanh Hoa Province lies in the north of Vietnam in an area often referred to as the north central coast, positioned between the Red River delta, northern region and the region of central Vietnam (Ban Do Cartographic Publishing House 2003). The north central coast region includes Thanh Hoa, Nghe An, Ha Tinh, Quang Binh and Thua Thien Hue provinces and has the highest poverty share in Vietnam, accounting for 21.45% of the poverty in Vietnam in 2004 (Asian Development Bank 2005a). This is frequently attributed to the relatively high population density and the lower speed of poverty reduction constrained by factors such as limited land area, few natural resources and out-migration, amongst others (General Statistics Office 2002). Overall the area has a poverty rate of 12.5% using the MOLISA poverty rate, which makes it much more severe than the average region of 8.3% (Asian Development Bank 2005a)

The province of Thanh Hoa is approximately 140 km south of Hanoi and consists of diverse geographical areas including coastal areas, plains and mountainous areas, and is typical of provinces in the central region of Vietnam. The province has a population of 3.5 million and is rated 23rd lowest of 61 provinces in terms of poverty and social service indicators, a situation largely due to the large proportion of mountainous districts that lie in the west of the province where approximately 20% of the province's population lives (International Food Policy Research Institute 2003). These mountainous areas are characterised by low-density living and high poverty rates, with large numbers of ethnic minority peoples. These areas also have less arable land available and poor soil, contributing to low crop yields, particularly rice, which is usually only a single rice crop annually, particularly in the mountainous areas. The coastal areas of the province are, however, characterised with high-density living and lower poverty. The majority of the most acute poverty is nearly exclusively located in the mountainous, rural areas where there are large numbers of ethnic minority people and where most people are farmers practicing upland agriculture, which generally yields far less than lowland agriculture. Main crops include upland rice (dry



rice), corn, and sticky rice. Slash and burn agriculture is frequently used in these areas (Nha Xuat Ban Giao Duc 2002).

The poverty level in Thanh Hoa Province, like most, has been reduced in recent years from over 40% to 17%, with the bulk of this change occurring in urban and semi-urban areas (General Statistics Office 2005). The level of reduction in the mountainous districts, namely Quan Hoa, Muong Lat, Quan Son, Lang Chanh and Ba Thuoc has been far less than this, a situation frequently linked to a lack of arable land, limited access and low education levels (World Vision Vietnam 1997b). This has resulted in an increase in off-farm migration, with one member from each upland household frequently leaving the village to seek work in urban centres in construction or manufacturing, particularly in Thanh Hoa City or Hanoi. Any income generated from this off-farm work will generally be sent back to family members to ease the burden of their poverty with some studies claiming that much of the reduction of poverty that has resulted in provinces like Thanh Hoa can be attributed to expatriated funds from off-farm migrant labour in cities (Statistical Publishing House 2004). It is also interesting to note that the five poorest districts in Thanh Hoa Province represent only 6% of the total province population (of 27 Districts) yet contain a large percentage of the poverty (General Statistics Office 2002).

### **Quan Hoa District**

Quan Hoa is one of 27 districts in Thanh Hoa Province and is located 220 km south of Hanoi. It borders Mai Cha and Moc Chau Districts in the north (Son La Province), An Ba Thuoc District in the east, Quan Sen District in the south and Muong Lan District and Lao P.D.R in the west. The district has a natural area of approximately 104,000 ha, making it a large district in area terms, however a large proportion of the area is mountainous and unusable for farming (Ban Do Cartographic Publishing House 2003). The population of Quan Hoa is low with 40,905 people, of which 7,013 are women aged 15-49 and 6,395 are children under five years age. With a total of 7,352 households this makes the population density only 46 people per square kilometre (World Vision Vietnam 1997b).

The three ethnic minority<sup>13</sup> groups that live in the district are Thai (74%), Muong (17.6%) and Hoa (1.4%). In addition there are 7% Kinh<sup>14</sup> or Vietnamese (Nha Xuat Ban Giao Duc 2002). Thai and Muong ethnic groups generally live in elevated houses made of bamboo and palm leaf, with families usually living in one room that ranges in area from 30 – 100 m<sup>2</sup>. This one room is used for cooking (it includes a fire), sleeping, storing food and other activities and most families also keep livestock under their stilt houses (World Vision Vietnam 1997b).

The main activity of households is agriculture or forestry, with approximately 70% of the people being involved in bamboo and other wood forestry, accounting for about 8,000 of the 104,000 ha in the district (Ban Do Cartographic Publishing House 2003). Over-logging and deforestation is a growing problem in Quan Hoa, as in most of

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<sup>13</sup> The term 'ethnic minority' is widely used in Vietnam to describe those ethnic groups that are not Kinh Vietnamese who are the vast majority of Vietnamese people. The numbers of any of the 53 minority groups nationally can range from very small to over one million. Therefore the term 'ethnic minority' does not refer to the density of the group on a local level but on a national level.

<sup>14</sup> Kinh Vietnamese are the majority population group in Vietnam often referred to simply as 'Vietnamese'.

Vietnam, with recent studies showing that around 2,000,000 ha of forest land is lost annually (Vietnam Consultative Group 2003). In particular, many people log or burn land to create more land for agriculture, despite this activity being prohibited by the government in recent years.

The remaining 30% of the population are involved in agriculture, which includes farming rice, cassava and maize on sloping land in small upland plots in the valleys. Rice is only grown on 581 ha, which produces a low level of yield of around 4.5 tonne per ha per annum, a situation aggravated by poor soil quality and difficulties in obtaining irrigation (Nha Xuat Ban Giao Duc 2002). Many families have been involved in slash and burn agriculture where land is periodically burnt to promote regeneration. Studies have revealed this has had more negative effects as population increased, with the land being put under more pressure and there frequently being less time left for the land to regenerate than the model initially intended. As a result there has been a continued reduction in the quality of soil leading to ever lower yield levels (Cooperation Internationale Pour le Development et la Solidarite 2002).

Quan Hoa also suffers regular disasters, with drought in particular becoming an increasing phenomenon given poor irrigation systems, already low yields and the increasing average annual temperatures<sup>15</sup>. Flash floods and effects of typhoons are also common in Quan Hoa, a situation that often causes rivers to swell and mud slides to be frequent events. River flooding and mudslides claim numerous ethnic minority houses adjacent to the rice growing areas and also the lives of many children who are caught in rapid flooding as they travel to or from school (Save the Children Fund 2003). Despite some significant development improvements in the district in recent years, the average income of the local people is still very low, ranging from USD 13 to USD 70 per month. Around 27% of the households are classified as 'poor' under government standards and have an average income of less than 13 kilograms of food per head per month (Ord 2004). Many households still suffer food shortages due to low production levels and poverty for up to three months per year.

The villages selected for the ADP are included in 11 communes that were identified as being the poorest in the district including Phu Thanh, Phu Le, Phu Xuan, Nam Xuan, Nam Tien, Thien Phu, Hien Trung, Hoi Xuan, Thanh Xuan, Phu Nghiem and Xuan Phu. These areas represent the typical and most vulnerable people in the district who are largely ethnic minority people living in mountainous areas (World Vision Vietnam 1997b). These communes are situated various distances from the Quan Hoa town centre with some of the closer communes being located on the main road to Mai Chau and others across the Luong or Ma rivers or only accessible by unmade rough and rocky roads.

### ***Target Villages and Communes for the Research***

The Quan Hoa district comprises a total of 12 communes all of which are relatively poor, with various degrees of access difficulties. All are partly or completely mountainous in nature, and include high proportions of ethnic minorities (Ban Do Cartographic Publishing House 2003; Nha Xuat Ban Giao Duc 2002). The main factor differentiating the communes and the villages they contain is their level of poverty

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<sup>15</sup> A study completed in 2004 revealed that average temperatures in Vietnam have risen 0.1 % each decade for the last 50 years (Cooperation Internationale Pour le Development et la Solidarite 2004)



relative to each other, which is at a minimum indirectly related to their distance from the Quan Hoa town, as well as major infrastructure and transport, particularly road access and to a lesser extent water access.

Based on these criteria, villages in three communes were selected for the case study research to represent the main differences in economic conditions and access within the district. The communes were Hoi Xuan (the closest to the district centre and least poor) Phu Thanh (a remote and poor commune only accessible by foot) and Nam Thien (a commune accessible by road and river but not close to the district centre).

### **ADP History**

World Vision began operating the Quan Hoa ADP in October 1997 and since that time and currently, it is the only NGO working in Quan Hoa district. However, due to the high poverty levels, the area has received some government and donor program funding to assist alleviate poverty including the government's hunger and poverty alleviation program (No.135), of which Quan Hoa is a target district. This program has focused on the provision of infrastructure, particularly roads, electricity, schools, health care stations and agro-forestry extension. In addition, the government's Program No.167 of forestry has been implemented in the area and involves the planting of forest areas to assist offset the level of deforestation that has already occurred. As well, the World Bank's Community-Based Rural Infrastructure Project (CBRIP) provides community level infrastructure (roads and bridges) and is also active in the district. It should be noted that despite these programs and the WVV program being active in the one district, the needs that exist are still significant and a long way off being met given the level of assistance being provided.

WVV has an office of six staff in the district and a program of approximately USD 300,000 per year. The 2004 evaluation approved the program it to continue for another five years (Ord 2004), after which time the program will be reviewed and either continued for an additional five years or phased out over three to five years. In addition WVV operated an AusAID funded Community Health Program in the district from 1998 to 2001 that worked to reduce the mortality and disease rates of women and children in regards to preventable diseases. The project worked in the poorest eight communes in Quan Hoa, working with local commune health station and district health officials to improve skills, knowledge and facilities. The final evaluation of this project commented that the project had been reasonably successful in improving the overall quality of the health service provision, especially through the village health worker network established (World Vision Vietnam 2001).

In addition, an AusAID agricultural program was operated in Quan Hoa between 2000 and 2003 as part of a three province project that looked to expand the government's VAC model (a combination of fish ponds, fruit trees and livestock farming) and to promote the use of Sloping Agricultural Land Technology (SALT), a method from the Philippines of farming upland land without the use of slash and burn agriculture. The final evaluation completed in 2004 confirmed that the project was successful in promoting these methods in Quan Hoa District; in fact few opportunities exist to expand the SALT program due to its high coverage rate (Swete-Kelly 2003).

The ADP's goal is to contribute to increasing the quality of life of people in the target communes in Quan Hoa. This program had the added difference that it partnered very

closely with the district Women's Union who took on a greater role of coordination of the program. Typical activities of the program focus on a variety of community needs, including improving agriculture through VAC, SALT, village vet services and new crops; assistance to improve transportation; support to primary health and nutrition; micro enterprise development; and micro-credit; support to kindergarten, primary, and secondary education; and capacity building of local government and community (Ord 2004).

## **Quang Nam Province, Hien District**

### ***Quang Nam Province***

Quang Nam Province lies in the central region of Vietnam in an area often referred to as the South Central Coast. The South Central Coast area includes the provinces of Quang Nam, Quang, Ngai, Binh Dinh, Phu Yen, Khanh Hoa, Ninh Thuan and Binh Thuan, Danang City and it sits below the city and Province of Hue and the 17<sup>th</sup> parallel, so is situated firmly in the south of Vietnam (Ban Do Cartographic Publishing House 2003). Generally speaking, much of the area has the advantage of good infrastructure such as road and water routes and it has become a hub for economic development both within the country and with other countries. Given its location half way down the length of Vietnam, it occupies a strategic economic position and in the past the area has generally performed well in terms of contribution to GDP growth above the national average (Asian Development Bank 2005a). Despite this success, its poverty rate stills sees it sit behind the Red River Delta, Mekong Delta, South East and urban centres (Asian Development Bank 2005a). A major concern in the area has been the increasing number and size of disasters that affect the area, particularly floods and typhoon. The South Central Coast provinces are the most vulnerable to natural disasters in Vietnam in terms of economic loss and loss of life, a situation that has been aggravated by deforestation in the mountainous areas in the region (Center for Cooperation Human Resources Development, 2004). Interestingly, however, the areas most affected by disasters in the region are also the wealthiest and also have the highest population densities due to their proximity to the sea, which provides economic opportunities and greater possibility for higher density living (Socialist Republic of Vietnam 2004).

Despite the positive economic development in some parts of the region, other areas have remained relatively unchanged. Like most of the central section of Vietnam, the South Central Coast can be divided into three distinct bands from east to west, being mountainous, plain and coastal areas. It is the coastal and plain areas that are by far the best performers economically and therefore have the lowest level of poverty with the mountainous provinces and districts being the worst performing, particularly those districts bordering Laos (Vietnam Consultative Group 2003). As can be seen in the North Central Coast, border mountainous districts and communes are often the poorest and also contain high proportions of ethnic minority peoples (General Statistics Office 2002).

The province of Quang Nam sits adjacent to Danang City, approximately 600 km south of Hanoi and consists of diverse geographical areas. The province has a population of 1.4 million which is quite low in terms of population density, largely due to fact that seven of the 12 rural districts are considerably mountainous which also rates it one of the weakest provinces in Vietnam in terms of poverty and social service

indicators (General Statistics Office 2005). These mountainous areas are characterised by low-density living and high poverty rates, with large numbers of ethnic minority peoples and generally have less arable land available and poor soil, contributing to low crop yields, particularly rice. Again, there is usually only one rice crop per year in many of the mountainous areas in the province compared to two or three crops in other areas of the country. In such areas the farmers practice upland agriculture that yields much less than lowland agriculture. The main crops in the area include upland rice (dry rice), stick rice and others (Asian Development Bank 2005a).

The poverty level in Quang Nam Province, like most, has been reduced in recent years from over 40% to 17%, the bulk of this change occurring in urban and semi-urban areas (International Food Policy Research Institute 2003). The reduction in the mountainous districts, namely Hien, Nam Giang, Phuoc Son, Tra My, Hiep Duc and Tien Phuoc has been far less than this. This has frequently been explained to be due to a lack of arable land access, effects of the American war (defoliants, unexploded ordinance) on agricultural productivity, low education levels and the difficult mountainous terrain. Due to the distance of some villages to major centres, this has not led to the level of migration to cities for work opportunities that has been experienced in other parts of the country, although migration does still occur but on a relatively small scale, also as a result of traditional and close knit ethnic minority family structures (Statistical Publishing House 2004). Many ethnic minority groups who, despite being located in the 'south' were aligned with the Northern Government during the American war, have received significant subsidies and pensions to reward their service and the hardship they have faced. Many donors and NGOs have explained that at times these subsidies have made sustainable development difficult in such areas, given the people are used to waiting for things to be given to them rather than addressing things themselves (VUFO-NGO Resource Centre 2005).

### ***Hien District***

Hien District, or Dong Giang as it was recently renamed, is one of 14 districts in Quang Nam Province and is located 85 km west of Danang City. It borders Thua Thien Hue Province in the north, Danang City and Dai Loc District in the east, Nam Giang District in the south and Lao P.D.R. in the west (Ban Do Cartographic Publishing House 2003). Hien district was divided into two in 1999 and the current World Vision ADP area is the east district now named Dong Giang (Swete-Kelly 2005). It sits at an elevation of 500m above sea level, and has a natural area of approximately 170,000 ha, making it a large district in terms of natural area. However, a large proportion of the area is mountainous and unusable for farming leaving only approximately 24,000 ha suitable for farming (World Vision Vietnam 1998b). The population of Quan Hoa is 32,000 people, which makes the population density comparatively low at only 32 people per square kilometre.

The Katu ethnic minority group make up 81% of the population of the district, living nearly exclusively in the most mountainous parts. (World Vision Vietnam 1998b). Katu families live in simple, one room timber and thatched roofed stilt houses that range in area from 30 – 100 m<sup>2</sup>. Houses are grouped together to form kinship groups and villages, with local village culture still being very strong as a result. Many Katu had to flee deep into the forests during the fighting that took place during the Vietnam-American war and as a result, many suffered severe malnutrition and health issues. The effects of these are still being felt in the communities today. The education in Hien

is very low with the Katu people being known to be one of the lowest educated peoples in Vietnam (Dang Nghiem Van 1991). In particular, there is a tendency for Katu girls not to have the opportunity to go to school due to their responsibilities in the home and their often early marriage age. Boys also drop out of school early due to the pressure to be active in the family farm. In addition, a large number of adults, particularly Katu women, are illiterate in reading, writing and spoken Vietnamese language (World Vision Vietnam 1998b). The remainder of the population are Kinh (Vietnamese) who usually live in the more fertile lowland areas.

The main activity of households is agriculture with wet rice being the best yielding variety but rare given the elevation and difficulty obtaining water. Many farmers are involved in dry rice, cassava and maize farming on sloping land on small upland plots in the valleys which are characterised by poor soil quality since the soils frequently lack nitrogen and phosphorous and are also affected by the large quantity of defoliants used during the American war. Water is scarce in the area with difficulties existing obtaining clean drinking water and also irrigation water. (World Vision Vietnam 1998b).

Many families have been involved in slash and burn agriculture causing continued reduction in the quality of soil, further exacerbating yield problems. Farmers have little access to quality seeds, tools, technology and support and few are involved in any form of post-harvest technology or have adequate capital to expand their agricultural activities. Due to people's poverty and cultural bias against cash savings, few Katu have access to cash savings or investment funds (Swete-Kelly 2005).

Transport is an issue, with the district being split in to three sections by rivers, streams and mountains that often make the district un-trafficable during the wet season. Many communes do not have year round road access, which is a major constraint to economic development in the area. Flash floods and the effects of typhoons often cause rivers to swell and mudslides to occur, claiming many of the ethnic minority houses adjacent to the rivers. The effects of typhoons and floods are not as severe as in the plain and coastal areas of the province in terms of loss of life or income, but because the people live more simply, they are more susceptible to the effects of disasters on their simple homes and agricultural activities. Drought has also become an increasing phenomenon and has begun to put additional strain on the already struggling farmers (Socialist Republic of Vietnam 2005a). The average income of the local people in Hien is very low, with around 24% of the households being classified as poor and having an average income of less than 100,000 VND. Over 5% of the households still suffer food shortages for up to three months per year due to poverty levels and low production (Swete-Kelly 2005).

### ***Target Villages and Communes for the Research***

The communes selected for the ADP were the eleven communes that were identified as being the poorest in the district. They comprise Tri Tran Prao, Zahung, Arooih, Macoih, Xa Ba, Ta Lu, Song Kon, Zo Ngay, Ating and Xa Tu communes and the district town. These areas represent a spread of areas across the district and due to the widespread poverty and high proportion of ethnic minority peoples, most villages in the district are very poor and easily meet the WVV selection criteria. The rural communes are situated various distances from the Dong Giang town centre.

The Hien district comprises seventeen communes in total, all of which are very poor, with various degrees of access difficulties (Ban Do Cartographic Publishing House 2003). All communes are partly or completely mountainous in nature and are either completely or mostly made up of Katu minority people. The main factor differentiating the communes is that the ADP is divided into three bands, the east (four communes), central (four communes) and west (nine communes). The west is the least developed followed by the east then the central (World Vision Vietnam 1998b).

As a result of difference between the bands, villagers we selected in one commune from each of the three bands for the research to reflect the possible differences in economic conditions and access in the district. This resulted in the selection of Ba, Zo Ngay and Arooil communes.

### ***ADP History***

World Vision began working in Hien through the ADP in October 1998 and since that time and currently, it is the only NGO based Hien district. Several NGOs have worked in Hien on short-term projects but none on long-term development initiatives. Due to the high poverty level, the area has received government and donor program funding to assist alleviate poverty in the past. This has include the government's hunger and poverty alleviation program (No.135), the 167 forestry program, the World Bank CBRIP program and some small Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) agricultural projects (Swete-Kelly 2005). However, it should be again noted that despite these and WVV programs, the needs in the district are still significant and by no means met.

WVV has an office of nine staff in the district with a budget of approximately USD 500,000 per year and the 2005 evaluation approved the program to continue for another five years due to the considerable needs remaining, after which time the program will be reviewed and the program either continued for another five years or phased out over four to five years. WVV has not operated any additional donor projects in this district, which gives this project another element of uniqueness (Swete-Kelly 2005).

As for Quan Hoa District, Hien ADP's goal is to contribute to increasing the quality of life of people in the target communes in the district, typically through community identified activities such as improving agriculture through VAC, SALT, village vet services and new crops: support to primary health and nutrition; revolving loan schemes; water supply and sanitation; support to kindergarten, primary, secondary and vocational education; access improvement; and capacity building of government and community (Swete-Kelly 2005).

## **Quang Nam Province, Tra My District**

### ***Tra My District***

Tra My District is one of the fourteen districts in Quang Nam Province and is located 120 km west of Danang City at an altitude of more than 200m above sea level. Tra My District borders Thien Phuoc and Hiep Duc Districts in the north, Kon Tum Province in the South West and Quang Ngai Province in the South East and it has a natural area of approximately 171,000 ha, making it large district in area terms (Ban

Do Cartographic Publishing House 2003). However, most of the land area is mountainous and covered with forest, which leaves only 24,000 ha suitable for farming.

Tra My has a population of 55,000 people divided into 10,170 households, with ethnic minority groups making up 57% of the population. The ethnic minority people present in the area are mostly Monong, Cadong and K'Or (Munnell et al 1996). The relatively low population and large land area makes it an area of very low population density at only 3.1 people per square kilometre. The ethnic minority groups live almost exclusively in the mountainous areas and all three groups are also known to have quite high illiteracy rates, especially amongst women. The ethnic minority groups usually live in simple timber and thatched homes in village or kin clusters in the mountains and the remaining Kinh people live in the towns and more lowland areas. Traditional culture is still strong in all three groups due to their isolation and all three groups had to flee deep into the forests during the fighting that took place during the America-Vietnam war. This has had long term effects on malnutrition and health issues, the consequences of which are still being felt in the communities today (Dang Nghiem Van 1991).

The main activity of households is agriculture, however wet rice, the best yielding variety, is only cultivated by a small percentage of farmers due to limitations in adequate water supply for irrigation. Dry rice is the most popular crop, as well as corn, beans, cassava and peanuts. In recent years, cinnamon and other high value crops have begun to be grown, however due to poor soil quality, poor seed quality and the elevation, yields are still quite low (Munnell et al 1996). In addition, farmers often only have access to the most basic hand-made farming tools, making their work relatively inefficient. Like many upland areas in Vietnam, families have traditionally been involved in slash and burn practices causing continued reduction in the quality of soil, further exacerbating yield problems (Woods 2003). Few farmers are involved in any form of post-harvest technology or have access to capital to expand their agricultural activities.

The district also contains small gold deposits. The yield from this industry is quite small, but it does bring in additional workers to the area and does provide a small amount of labour to the local people. It also has contributed to an increase in social problems associated with migrant work forces including sexual diseases and alcohol addiction. The mining activities have also been linked to high arsenic levels in the area that has contributed to an increase in major health issues (Munnell et al 1996).

Access and transport infrastructure is one of the major problems in the area because the district is extremely mountainous with few well-made roads, except those from the district centre to neighbouring district centres. The area is broken up by numerous rivers, streams and mountainous areas which again often become un-trafficable during the wet season, resulting in many communes not having year round road access, which is a major constraint to economic development (World Vision Vietnam 1998a). Tra My, like Hien, also experiences flash floods and mud slides which damage houses. The district also experiences a high number of whirlwinds, an unusual phenomenon that results from the district's location between adjacent valleys. These whirlwinds can prove quite destructive, frequently damaging houses, infrastructure and crops (World Vision Vietnam 2004b). In recent years, the effects of drought have begun to be felt in the district also (World Vision Vietnam 2004a).

The average income of the local people in Tra My is very low with around 50% of the households being classified as poor and having individual average income below the old poverty line of 100,000 VND per person per month. Many areas still suffer food shortages for up to six months per year due to low production levels and general poverty (World Vision Vietnam 1998a). Tra My district includes 20 communes which are spread over its extensive geographical area (Ban Do Cartographic Publishing House 2003). The ADP currently works with 11 communes that were identified as being the poorest in the district, initially beginning work in the six communes of Tra Tan, Tra Giang, Tra Bui, Tra Giac, Tra Kot, and Tra Nu (World Vision Vietnam 1998a). All communes in the ADP are mountainous, contain large numbers of ethnic minority peoples and experience widespread poverty.

The effects of the Vietnam-America war are also still being felt. This has affected agricultural yields and led to long term nutritional issues, with over 40% of all children aged between zero and five still considered malnourished, despite attempts to address this issue (Socialist Republic of Vietnam 2004). Although household food shortages have been significantly reduced in the last seven to eight years, the limited diversity in agriculture means that even though the quantity of food has increased, the quality, diversity and nutritional value is still a problem (Crawford 2005).

### ***Target Villages and Communes for the Research***

Tra My district comprises 20 communes all of which are very poor, with various degrees of access difficulties. These communes are partly or completely mountainous and are nearly entirely made up Monong, Cadong or C'or minority people (World Vision Vietnam 1998a).

Villages for the case study were selected in three communes, from the initial set of six communes the ADP worked in to ensure that the history of the development intervention since the beginning of the ADP could be investigated in detail. The three communes selected (Tra Giac, Tra Giang and Tra Kot) represent various levels of remoteness and distance from the district centre, as well as representing high poverty and ethnic minority levels.

### ***ADP History***

World Vision began the Tra My ADP in October 1997 and since that time and currently, it is the only NGO based Tra My district. Several NGOs have worked in the district on short-term projects but none on long-term development initiatives. Due to the high poverty levels the area has received government and donor program funding to assist alleviate poverty. This has included the government's hunger and poverty alleviation program (No.135) the forestry program 167 and its preceding program 327. In addition, the UNCDF / AusAID / UNDP Rural Infrastructure Development Fund (RIDEF) project worked in Tra My in the late 1990s and early 2000s providing local commune and district infrastructure, particularly roads, bridges, commune health stations and schools. Following this period, the World Bank CBRIP program began working in Tra My, continuing the provision of infrastructure. Despite the number of programs active in the area, particularly infrastructure, significant needs still remain in all areas (Crawford 2005).

WVV has an office of seven staff in the district with a program of approximately USD 250,000 per year and the 2005 evaluation approved the program to continue for another five years due to the considerable needs remaining, after which time the program will be reviewed and the program either continued for another five years or phased out over three to five years (Crawford 2005). Other WVV operated donor projects have also been undertaken in the district to compliment the ADP's activities including the AusAID SALT Project, an AusAID Food Security project, and an Adult Literacy Program.

The ADP's goal is similar to Quan Hoa and Hien and is to contribute to increasing the quality of life of people in the target communes in Tra My district. Typical activities developed by the community include improving agriculture through VAC, SALT, village vet services, animal husbandry and new crops; support to primary health and nutrition; support to kindergarten, primary, secondary, and adult education; access improvement; capacity building of government and community; and relief response (World Vision Vietnam 1998a).

### **3.3 World Vision and the ADP Model**

#### **World Vision International**

World Vision was established in 1950 by Rev. Bob Pierce, an American evangelist and medical doctor who witnessed first hand the terrible effects of the Korean War on the Korean people and began the establishment of a relief and development agency. Since that time, World Vision International (WVI) has grown considerably to include 100 offices, employ over 20,000 staff, have an annual budget of over USD 1 billion and assist over 300 million people per year (World Vision International 2007).

As a Christian aid and development organisation it has always had a strong focus on poor children and the community. Child sponsorship has been a key activity and funding source for the organisation since it first commenced sponsorship in Asia in the 1950s. Since this time, the child sponsorship program has evolved considerably to be less focussed on providing tangible benefits to individual children, to a focus of providing a child's community with long-term development assistance that benefits the individual children that are sponsored, their families and their community as a whole. The children, in essence, become an indicator for the overall program's success (Michael 1996).

In 2007 WVI operates a broad range of projects and programs, including child sponsorship, through the Area Based Development (ADP) approach but also bilateral and multilateral grants, emergency assistance programs, food commodity programs and advocacy campaigns. In 2007 WVI operates over 10,000 projects around the world, making it one of the largest development and relief organisations globally (World Vision International 2007). WVI's stated mission is to work towards 'life in all its fullness' for communities, families and particularly children, a mission which is further explained in WVI's *Transformational Development Policy* which sets out WVI's aim to transform communities at all levels including the economic, social, community, political and spiritual dimensions of poverty (Myers 2002). This provides an overall approach to development that affects the entirety of an individual or their community and enables poverty to be attacked from any angle with a holistic and multi-sectoral approach (Eshete and O'Reilly-Calthrop 2000; World Vision International 2002)



## **World Vision Vietnam**

World Vision Vietnam (WVV) is a largely autonomous national office of WVI that operates in Vietnam. In Vietnam WVV has a similar focus to WVI of *'improving the quality of life of the poor and marginalised people, especially children through transformational development and relief'* (World Vision Vietnam 2000, p1). The strategic directions for the organisation for 2005 - 2010 are heavily focussed on WVV's continued commitment to its child-focussed area development initiatives. As stated in the strategy, *'the ADP will continue to be the major vehicle for transformational development'* (World Vision Vietnam 2000, p3). In addition the organisation also has a major focus on empowering communities, families and children, and building their capacity so transformation can occur (World Vision Vietnam 2003).

The aspects of decentralisation, civil society, democracy and participation are referred to as important elements in the organisation's key documents. For instance, the WVV 2000-2005 strategic plan states *'we continue to dialogue with Government at all levels encouraging them to partner with us on a journey toward true participation with their people. Our aim and approach is one of openness and dialogue to foster better understanding between all parties'* (World Vision Vietnam 2000, p5).

As highlighted in the strategic plan, the ADP model is anticipated to continue to be the major vehicle for transformational development and the office's programming approach for the future. In line with the WVI Learning through Evaluation, Accountability and Planning (LEAP) initiative, WVV is seeking to integrate development grants and emergency projects from bilateral, multilateral, corporate and WVV funding sources into ADP programs to optimise the level of development impact in any particular area (World Vision Vietnam 2000). In 2006, WVV had a total budget of USD 13 million, 45 project and programs and 200 staff, making it one of the largest NGOs in Vietnam in terms of project size and diversity of program (World Vision Vietnam 2004c).

## **Area Development Programs**

### ***ADPs Internationally***

In the late 1990s WVI began researching and developing a new standard model of program internationally called the Area Development Program (ADP). This was a significant decision for WVI since it signalled a definite and unified way forward based on lessons learned from other responses (Cookingham 2002). Since World Vision's beginning in the 1950s, its programs had grown and expanded significantly. In the 1970s and 1980s, like many donors, government and NGOs, World Vision was beginning to learn the pitfalls of development. World Vision began to see that not all development activities necessarily produced the level of success that may have been expected. In particular, World Vision had focussed heavily on a child sponsorship approach that had both strengths and limitations. Initially, funds for child sponsorship were funnelled into various welfare projects that enabled individual sponsored children to obtain benefit from their sponsorship funds directly. Often quite separately, small amounts of funding were obtained from bilateral and multilateral donors for other development activities (Swincer 1994).

In the 1980s, WVI began to group children more deliberately into what it termed 'Community Development Projects'<sup>16</sup>. This saw WVI promoting small and scattered development projects that aimed to meet children's needs in the areas of basic education, the provision of clothing, access to medical assistance, and a small amount of income generation for families of sponsored children. As this model continued to develop, several lessons emerged, particularly that the approach was very 'welfare' or handout focussed with little opportunity for empowerment to occur at the community level. The model also did not include the ability for the community to be involved in program planning, design, implementation or monitoring. In addition, the approach experienced difficulties achieving long-term impacts given the scattered and small-scale level of intervention. World Vision, like other sponsorship agencies at that time, began to see that this approach was beginning to create inequalities between sponsored and non-sponsored children and their families. It also appeared to have very little community level involvement, with such programs frequently being operated remotely from the community with only minimal WV staff input, through irregular WV staff visits from nearby urban centres (Michael 1996).

Despite the weaknesses, the CDP model had a major strength in that it reduced a reliance on donor or government funds, which frequently constrained development activities to only one or two particular sectors, types of projects or activities, or else only made funds available for one to three years. The sponsorship funding model provided the ability to focus a project or activity on whatever needs were the most important to that particular area and address them over a longer time period. The CDP approach ensured that funds were more effectively funnelled down towards the community level but not just to individual sponsored children, with minimal expenditure occurring on the way down. This optimised the amount of funding available to the community (Swincer 1994).

During this same period, WVI experimented with several other program approaches that, as well as government grants projects, often in single sectors, included Large-Scale Development Programs (LSDPs). These programs were particularly popular in Africa to address the issues severe famine that the continent experienced during the 1970s and 1980s. The LSDPs sought to address short-term famine relief activities and some longer-term development activities over a large geographical area and population base. Frequently, such programs spent more than USD one million each per year and covered over 100,000 beneficiaries, often being managed by expatriates and focussing on individual sectors and detailed activities. The programs rarely had a cross-sector or unified program goal and the life span of such programs of usually only five years, constrained their potential impact and ability to adequately address the needs present. They did, however, appear to provide some distinct advantages over earlier programs by working over a large geographical area, to more widely address the development issues present, through a variety of technical activities that could focus on a variety of beneficiaries' needs. In addition, the existence of an overall program framework over a particular geographical area meant additional funding sources could be attracted to the same area to address the same needs of the LSDP, an attractive proposition for donors who had the security of an overarching program to support any additional targeted project interventions. This large scale approach also required WVI to improve its planning, design, implementation, monitoring and

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<sup>16</sup> See Appendix B for a glossary of terms that describes the different World Vision International program types and other key terms outlined in this thesis.

reporting systems to international 'best practice' levels to allow adequate accountability, transparency and effectiveness (Michael 1996).

Another model trialed by WVI during this period was the Development Assistance Centres (DACs). These centres proved particularly successful in Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand and India. This approach involved the establishment of a set of training activities for a group of villages. This was designed to build the geographical area's capacity, frequently through a group of democratically elected village development workers. The model often failed to address the overall development issues, even though being successful in setting up a solid community capacity building framework (Swincer 1994). It was also noted that it frequently focussed on particular community members only, while leaving the bulk of the community out of the development process.

The learning obtained from all these WVV approaches, as well as international experience of other agencies, especially through the Integrated Rural Development (IRD) and the Program Approach models, were used by WVI in the late 1980s to develop the Area Development Program approach for WVI. This approach had the capacity to utilise the sponsorship funding, but also included the ability to complement this funding with other donor, government and community sources. Sponsorship worked quite differently under this model, unlike the past, with sponsorship funds not going directly to the child or their family, but instead being pooled at the village or other applicable geographical level. This funding would then be used for a village-wide development program which would include 2,000 to 5,000 sponsored children out of a population of anywhere from 20,000 to 100,000 people (Michael 1996). The theory was that if the program was effective and efficient, the children would benefit directly and indirectly through the ADP activities in their local area, reducing any issues of inequality of sponsored children and others in the village.

The program area was frequently designed to overlap with a discrete governmental or geographical area division. Depending on country contexts, this was a district, governate, township or other division, assisting to provide a tangible 'area' in which to operate. The question of the 'area' used for each ADP is an important one, with the area needing to be large enough to contain an adequate number of sponsored children and community members, but not too large so as to make the achievement of project impact overly difficult (Michael 1996). Areas chosen also need the ability to allow for adequate market opportunities, usually requiring one small town within the program boundaries. Successful program areas were noted to often contain similar development issues throughout, so as to enable the program design to be kept simple. Suitable program areas also need the ability to be able to absorb the likely program growth that may occur as well as to be effectively phased out in the ten to fifteen year period (World Vision International 2002).

The ADP approach is long-term and experience of donor grant projects, CDPs, LSDP and DACs and other organisations' programs clearly indicates that good development does take time. Therefore, the ADP was conceived to be a ten to 15 year program minimum that would require distinct stages of one to two years to establish the program (seed-phase), one to two periods of five years each for implementation (implementation phases) and then two to three years to close the program (phase-out) (World Vision International 2004a). This program structure provides a long-term approach to ideally get to the bottom of complex development issues and ensure

sustainability. The model also allows optimal community involvement, with the one to two year 'seed phase' allowing time to establish community priorities and structures to ensure continued community involvement in the program. The longer period also allows time for the community to be involved through a decentralised structure of project management that encourages community involvement in all project activities. As explained by Langford, time constraints are frequently the major factor limiting community involvement (Langford and Catford 2004). This long timeframe includes the ability to evaluate the program at the end of each discrete period and for the program to change over time as the needs of the communities in the area change.

The model was established to allow a holistic approach to development in line with WVI's Transformational Development Program, which meant that any particular ADP had the ability to address whatever needs or sectors were applicable to reduce poverty in that particular area. With the introduction of good systems of community needs assessment and ranking, the model had the ability to truly allow the community to prioritise their development needs. This often involved the training and establishment of community committees or teams of 'village development workers' from the program area to undertake the bulk of project work (Tooke 2004). This built on the DAC experience of focusing on local capacity building to deliver the project activities and to assist in ensuring sustainability. This was a significant departure from the CDP and LSDP approaches where activities were mostly completed by WV staff. In the ADPs this now required the strengthening of local civil society or community-based organisations (CBOs) to become important program players and in some cases ultimate owners of the ADP. With a budget of up to USD 500,000 per year for ten to fifteen years, the program had a good chance of addressing poverty over that period.

The first WVI countries began to pilot the ADP in 1990 and in the next seven to eight years the model was refined and rolled out across all WVI national offices. In 2007, nearly all field offices employ an ADP model and it has become the main model of program implementation for WVI worldwide, with the majority of WVI funding now being used for ADPs (World Vision International 2007). Since its establishment in the 1990s, the ADP model has evolved a great deal, in particular, when WVI introduced the Transformational Development Indicators (TDI) in 2003, which provided the ADP with additional standard systems to assess the key overall areas of change and provide clear guidance on how to measure quality of life in each program phase (World Vision International 2002). Similarly, the Learning through Evaluation Accountability and Planning (LEAP) framework for project cycle management, released in 2004 which included standards for evaluation, monitoring and design, is making a large impact on the quality and understanding in each ADP worldwide (World Vision International 2004a). WVI's organisational structure and the relative autonomy of each national office does mean that the standards of ADPs do vary depending on the particular national office involved (Eshete and O'Reilly-Calthrop 2000). However, the development of international WVI standards has assisted in ensuring the quality of each individual program.

### **ADPs in Vietnam**

The ADP model came to WVV in 1997. Up until this time, WVV, like other countries, was implementing CDPs and other grant projects. The timing for introduction of the ADP approach in Vietnam was opportune as it was in 1998 that the government released its historic grassroots democracy decree allowing greater commune and

village involvement in planning, design, implementation, monitoring and management of development activities (Socialist Republic of Vietnam 1998b). During the first year of ADP implementation in 1997, it was clear that both the government and the community were not used to such approaches which encouraged community decision-making and involvement in activities (United Nations Development Programme 2005c). The implementation of the ADP approach at that time, as *Chapter Four* explores, proved a timely way of assisting the implementation of the agenda of grassroots democracy through the ADP approach (Catford 2005a).

In Vietnam, all WVV ADPs were and are established within one administrative district. This was an important decision because it made government approval and liaisons more achievable and also ensured the population size of each district overlapped with the ADP parameters. Each district in Vietnam has between 20,000 and 100,000 people, very much in line with what the ADP model intended. In selecting districts, WVV gave priority to districts which were the poorest, yet still accessible, so that finance and Sponsor Relations (SR) systems required by WV could be maintained (World Vision Vietnam 2005). In addition, the ADP in Vietnam had a clear two-year establishment, research and design period to develop the program and establish important community structures. The program was also built on the concept of having the ADP located in the program district, based on the lessons learned from CDP that the program team needed to work and live in the same area as the project, not implement it remotely. The program, although focussing on involving and benefiting the community, also had to partner with government given the government directions. In Vietnam in 1997, as today, all development programs must partner with a key government agency (VUFO-NGO Resource Centre 2005). As a result, the model of a Project Management Board (PMB) was devised to give broad-based government involvement to ensure the holistic nature of the program could be maintained rather than having to focus on one particular sector. The PMB structure used in the model linked in members of the People's Committee (PC) and key ministries and mass organisations at the district level.

Each ADP in Vietnam also has a five-year design and logframe matrix, which outlines the key outputs, outcomes and issues of the program. These documents are prepared based on the community consultation process in the seed phase, which involved meetings with all villagers. Such village meetings involved representatives from all households ensuring the model met the concepts of democracy set out in the original transformational development charter. Systems were established to include the Hamlet Facilitators network, which included one HF per village in the ADP. These were non-government village representatives designated to act as a conduit for the project. HFs are also voted in by their peers. Care was taken to ensure the village head was not used for this purpose given their frequently close alignment to commune government and the communist party (Catford 2005b).

The ADP approach, as outlined in the first group of ADP design documents in 1997 was often described as being '*greater than the sum of its component parts and focused on problems of development as a whole*' (World Vision Vietnam 1997b, p14). This referred to the fact that it aimed to not just focus on sector issues or projects, but have an overall aim related to quality of life and poverty reduction. In addition, each ADP sought to work equitably in the project area in terms of ethnic minorities, gender and age to ensure all marginalised groups were included. The new sponsorship model

also allowed this to occur, however care had to be taken to ensure that children still benefited from the project in a tangible manner since they were still the major driver for the individual private donor funding system.

The ADP typically addresses several sectors or components based on the community's particular needs (Swincer 1994). These sectors include agricultural production, micro-finance, health, education, disaster mitigation, capacity building and child sponsorship support activities. Due to the holistic and multi-sectoral nature of the program, this often requires partnering with a variety of key government partners. The structure of the PMB allows easy access to staff and resources for these activities at district level, given these groups are part of the PMB. Outside resources for sector activities are also procured through the government or by WVV (World Vision Vietnam 2005).

### **3.4 Conclusions**

This chapter provided an overview of the particular features of the four case study districts and corresponding provinces and therefore the villages within. This included discussion on the distinguishing features of each area in terms of economic issues, geographical conditions, demography, ethnic minority make up and other factors that highlight the diversity within Vietnam that affects the research. In addition, the context of World Vision International and World Vision Vietnam was explored to gain an overview of their development as an organisation and their philosophy. This provides an important organisational understanding before the Area Development Program (ADP) approach is explored in each case study area. The ADP is seen to be the key program for WVI to bring sustainable transformational development to the communities, families and children in the places the organisation serves worldwide.

This chapter has also provided some initial insights into area-based or village-based planning and development approaches. The next chapter, *Chapter Four* explores these approaches in more detail based on the literature review, national level enquiry and case study results. It explores the history and development of village-development planning and other similar approaches both internationally and in Vietnam, particularly in relation to the Grassroots Democracy Decree introduced in 1998. This will provide the first set of findings in relation to the development of such approaches in Vietnam and assist contextualise the issues that emerged from the case study.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### VILLAGE-BASED PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT IN VIETNAM

#### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the evolution of village-based planning and development in Vietnam and looks at the ways in which planning and development was undertaken at the village level in the period before the implementation of the grassroots democracy decree (GRDD), including the effects of traditional village structures, colonialism and socialism. It also explores how government, donor and NGO programs have attempted to support village-based planning and development approaches in the period between the end of the American war in 1975 and when the GRDD was released in 1998.

The chapter investigates the advent of the GRDD, why it was created, what its intention was and examines its effect on village-based planning and development from the time it was released until the present day. It explores the positive effects the decree has had and also some of its major shortcomings. The chapter analyses the results of the research survey collected in 2,800 households across the four case study areas, as well as the power and trend analysis findings from the focus groups and information obtained through the small sample survey of 400 households across the four case study areas. This information provides a unique perspective of local people's knowledge and understanding of the grassroots decree and its impact in four different districts. Using the findings from the 40 donor and NGO interviews conducted during the research period, the chapter also explores the main developmental responses of the government, multilateral and bilateral donors and NGOs to help implement the decree and improve community participation in development activities generally, particularly highlighting approaches which take an area or village-based planning and development approach.

#### 4.2 Village Development Prior to 1998

Development in Vietnam has had many varied and complex influences. The effect of Confucianist systems and the largely agrarian way of life in rural Vietnam have shaped how villages have been organised, operated and have developed (Mai Huy Bich 1991). In addition, across each area of Vietnam, the significant geographical differences and local cultures, especially those of the various ethnic minority groups, have also affected how individual villages or communities have been managed and have grown (Dang Nghiem Van 1991). As well as these geographical and cultural effects, it is important to understand the significant political changes that have occurred in Vietnam and have contributed to the need for the grassroots democracy decree. As many historians have explained, including Marr (1995), Karnow (1991), and Nguyen Khac Vien (2004), colonialism, war and socialism are three of the major factors that have shaped modern day Vietnam.

Traditionally, that is before even French rule started in Vietnam in the late 1800s, development in Vietnam was based primarily on agrarian systems. Villagers worked together as collective units due to the necessity of the agriculture tasks required of each individual village. The village itself was a very important societal unit with

extensive social ties within a communal framework. Villages maintained sharp boundaries and a strong sense of 'insiders' and 'outsiders' (O'Rourke 2004). A natural hierarchy existed in each village based on a Confucianist structure. This saw intellectuals having the highest position within village society followed by peasants, handicraftsman and lastly traders. (Tran Dinh Huou 1991). Under this system, peasants had involvement in village decision making together with the intellectuals. This occurred because peasants were seen as being representative of the agrarian way of life that was central to village life. Significant issues involving groups of households, changes to local governance, or village wide issues were frequently decided by local leaders and intellectuals because of their superior level of education and standing but frequently with input from the peasants or average villagers.

With the expansion of French colonialism to Indochina in the 1800s, subordination of the average villager increased under a new western form of rule. Vietnam was a country rich in resources, particularly in terms of cheap labour, which the French used as a source for additional young men suitable for battle duties in World Wars I and II. In addition, Vietnam (or Indochina as it was then known) had significant naturally occurring resources including gold and silver, rice, rubber, tea, coffee, silk and cement (Nguyen Khac Vien 2004). The French, like many colonial powers in the world at the time, saw Indochina as an area ripe for exploitation of resources and labour to aid colonial progress. The French saw themselves as being superior to all Vietnamese in terms of trade, technology, governance and moral behaviour (The Gioi 2002). When the French initially began to exert their control on Indochina there was naturally some resistance from the intellectuals and mandarins, local leaders and some pockets of the rural population. However, fairly quickly the French administration established a system where they put themselves in place as masters of the colony with the local Vietnamese leaders acting as a puppet administration under their control. This kept the peace with the officials and mandarins who still had power over the masses of villagers who remained a cooperative source of labour, that covered the high costs of maintaining a colonial outpost. Some elderly villagers who participated in the focus group interviews recalled the situation under French and Japanese occupation.

With the outbreak of World War II, Vietnam received a new group of colonial masters: the Japanese. The Japanese quickly swept into Vietnam after taking China and promptly replaced the colonial French rulers with an Asian equivalent (Karnow 1991). Despite significant differences in the style of their colonial rule, for many at the village level considerable similarities existed between the French and Japanese occupations. Both groups largely used the significant rural population to supply their needs through cheap goods and labour and, like the French, any production gains were absorbed by the Japanese colonial masters and particularly used to supply the intensive war effort. As one elderly male villager in Kim Dong explained, *'They (the French and Japanese) got many things from our country and the Vietnamese people did not get the benefit. Vietnam is a strong country now and our government manages the country better so that all Vietnamese can benefit.'* This was sentiment was frequently voiced by village participants in the focus groups.

Despite alignment by some Vietnamese political groups with the Japanese in resistance to the French, many Vietnamese were not content with the automatic position of authority and superiority assumed by the Japanese over all Vietnamese society. Protest and resistance to both the French and Japanese rules occurred during



this period, however many Vietnamese submitted to the stronger colonial masters in much the same way as they had under the Confucianist system. It should be noted, however, that during the period from the 1920s onwards, more significant opposition began to form in resistance to both French and Japanese rule. As one elderly male villager in Kim Dong explained, *'we were not happy to have both the Japanese and French here. It was good the (communist) party started and Ho Chi Minh got rid of them.'* This resistance initially started with underground movements and then reached the levels of public mainstream opposition. In particular this included the Viet Minh, an association of organisations who formed in 1941 and included the Vietnamese Communist Party who had formed in 1930. These organisations began to build up resistance and began working to establish an alternative governance model that was based on a rejection of colonial rule and putting the rights of the local Vietnamese people first.

In 1945 the Japanese were defeated in World War II and separate governments in the north and the south of Vietnam were established, but neither was strong enough to suppress the French, who again returned to Vietnam to rebuild their presence in the region and to resume their overall rule of Vietnam (Nguyen Dy Nien 2004). The communist and nationalist movements also began to build momentum over this period and the important national leader, Nguyen Ai Quoc, later known as Ho Chi Minh, came to the forefront with his strong Marxist-Leninist policies that promoted a nationalist economy based on the rights of the masses (Karnow 1991). In the late 1940s and early 1950s a growing number of rural protests and resistance against French rule occurred with the people at the village level becoming more vocal and active in their opposition to colonial rule and subordination more generally. Resistance existed across the whole of Vietnam, but was generally less in the south, which was more closely aligned with the French through long-standing economic arrangements.

The battle of Dien Bien Phu in 1954 saw the defeat and removal of a colonial government from Vietnam for the last time. This battle not only signalled the formal removal of French rule but a strengthening of the position of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in the north. As one female district government official explained in Tra My during the PMB interview *'Dien Bien Phu was a very important battle, so the Vietnamese people could rule our country'*. Although the Democratic Republic of Vietnam had existed since 1945, it had not been until 1955 that the Geneva Accord had essentially divided Vietnam into two distinct nations and governments, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in the north and Republic of Vietnam in the South. Like many nations of the time, both parts of Vietnam were struggling to find an identity after colonial rule. The Communist Party had been instrumental in the defeat of the superior French military and it was not entirely surprising that communism became the political model of choice for the north. The north clearly saw communism as the main alternative to the capitalist ideology contained in both the French and Japanese colonial agendas. The south of Vietnam at this time, however, sought to maintain a more capitalist model in line with the direction of the French, but remain a separate nation. This left Vietnam split into two very politically different nations (Nguyen Khac Vien 2004).

The spread of communism in the north of Vietnam, particularly after 1954, had a significant effect on village development. The Communist Party installed People's Committees and Revolution Committees at all levels, a compartmentalised yet

centralised governance system that began to be spread across the whole of northern Vietnam (Marr 1994). The design of this governance system envisaged that committees would represent the people and, through a hierarchical series of government levels, ultimately link grassroots governance to a centralised governance system at the national level. The term 'People's Committees' was deliberately chosen to represent this situation of the government being conduits for all people's rights and to represent a new form of government far different from that under colonial rule. As one male villager in Quan Hoa explained during a focus group, *'when the people's committees were set up it was good. It made it clear to the village who they needed to speak to at the commune and district'*.

From the beginning, however, such committees frequently became intermediaries for centralised decision-making rather than being able to truly represent the wishes of the masses (Hy Van Luong and Unger 1999). As one villager in Hien explained during the focus group meeting, *'we wait to hear what the government in Hanoi tells us. The commune leaders tell us this.'* During the periods of war and also through the process of nationalisation, the government focussed on ensuring a united voice at all levels in Vietnam to ensure fragile stability. The system that resulted was contrary to what had been initially intended and it evolved so that people were not in charge of the decisions that faced them including development activities, rather, the government was. In many ways, the communist governance model of the time simply replaced two masters – the French and Japanese, with another – the communist system. It is important to note, however, that what the rise of communist rule did do is achieve self-governance of Vietnam and the complete removal of colonial rule for the very first time. This coincided with similar nationalist movements around the world that also sought to instate local governance models based on local traditions. The exact political make-up of each such post-colonial government varied, but like Vietnam, many were based on non-western development models (Fanon 1967). The alternative rule in the south of Vietnam at this time was largely supported by US Government based on strong western economic principles rather than Marxist/Leninist principles (Karnow 1991). The difference between the northern Vietnamese political ideology of the time and the south, combined with international tension towards the growing number of communist governments resulted in the American war. McNamara, the US Secretary of Defence of the time, has since conceded that the Vietnam-America war was actually a war centrally concerned with nationalism, not communism, the main enemy of the US at the time and the main reason behind much of the US war effort (McNamara 2004).

Following the success of the communist army and the retreat of the American allied forces in 1975, not surprisingly the doors of Vietnam closed to the outside. Vietnam had suffered significant civil war, losses and hardship, on top of the effects of the Japanese and French colonial rule and earlier frequent and bloody conflicts with the Chinese. The economy was in ruin, a large percentage of the male population was dead and the nation needed to be rebuilt, however the country did have one unified government for the first time, through the communist party. *'After the American war, it (life) was very difficult in our village. We had little food and there were no development activities (or NGOs) to help'*, said one male villager during a focus group in Tra My. Due to significant dissent towards the government that still existed in some parts of the country, particularly in the south, the communist party strictly controlled all elements of governance, especially village development (Marr 1994). Government

resources were finite at this time, so the government favoured geographical areas and ethnic groups who had supported their cause during the war or were areas that had been significantly affected by war, which particularly included central Vietnam where a large proportion of fighting had occurred. The issue of post-war compensation and its effects on development was raised numerous times during the case study research in Tra My and Hien ADPs, which lie in the heart of the central Vietnam battle area. As one male villager from Tra My explained during a focus group *'the government helped our village after the war because of what had happened but the money they had was very small'*. Very slowly in the years following 1975, a long process of development began to occur across all parts Vietnam as the nation began to rebuild itself.

It was not until the late 1980s that outside donors and organisations were invited to return to Vietnam to assist with the development process (VUFO-NGO Resource Centre 2005). Development had been slow with Vietnam closed to the rest of the world and the rural population had suffered significant hardships in the post-war years, including significant and widespread famine. Village development up until this time was completely controlled by the district and province People's Committees, with commune committees in particular having very few resources and capacity and, as a result, being involved in planning and development in only the most superficial ways. *'For many years there were no money, food and programs, we just had to try and survive as a village'*, said one male villager in a focus group in Tra My. Instead, all major decision-making was handled by the higher levels of government, particularly the national, provincial and district levels, who unfortunately had few resources and mechanisms to respond to development needs. Once Vietnam began to open up and the *doi moi* market reforms began to take hold, a slow and steady injection of external development assistance began to enter Vietnam and began to impact development at the village and commune level.

Between 1975 and 1998 all development assistance, particularly that to the village and commune level, was tightly controlled by the relevant People's Committee and all NGO and donor projects had to partner closely with provincial and district People's Committees. Development organisations were closely monitored and all projects were jointly implemented with government to ensure maximum governmental control of the processes. As a result, little opportunity existed to allow the villages and communes to participate actively in the project cycle (Nguyen Ha Kim 2001). As one female INGO worker explained during an interview, *'only a few agencies were working in Vietnam during and immediately after the war (American war), everything was done completely through the government then. You couldn't just do your own programs with villages.'* The power and trend analysis exercises completed with focus groups in the case study districts generally supported this notion that nearly all major development decisions and projects up until 1998 were made by district and provincial officials. Villagers explained that they had little or no say in the choice of development activities, their location and the means of implementation. As one male villager in Tra My explained during a focus group *'the government used to always just tell us what things we needed in the village and then do them for us. This was different to how things work now'*. Many focus group participants explained that this frequently resulted in activities that were not successful and were not maintained by the villagers. As one female villager in Quan Hoa explained during the focus groups, *'many of the activities the government decided without asking the village elders were not good. Many are broken now. Some of the new crops didn't work'*

World Vision began experimenting with the ADP model in Vietnam in 1997. The majority of World Vision staff interviewed explained how difficult it was to encourage community involvement before 1998 in such programs. *'It was really difficult until more recent years to do participatory work in the villages. The government didn't support it and many communities didn't understand the benefit'*, said one male programme manager during a World Vision interview. He went on to say *'we knew about participation and tried to do participatory programs but it was very hard'*. Many reported that local officials found such approaches foreign and threatening and were only comfortable with centralised decision-making, with ADP teams experiencing great opposition to the use of participatory approaches that actively involved commune and village people in development planning and implementation. As one female World Vision programme manager said during an interview, *'I think the government was worried that by trying to involve the community in participatory approaches, we were going against the government, which was of course not what we were trying to do. We always made sure we worked closely with the government but still let the community be involved'*.

Other NGOs and donors who worked in Vietnam prior to 1998 reported similar experiences, as at this time the idea of active community participation was widely acknowledged by most donors and NGOs internationally, but had not been effectively applied in Vietnam due to the context. *'We knew participation was important then, we were using it in most of the other countries we worked in, it was just hard to apply in Vietnam then,'* said one NGO representative during an interview. In particular, the failure of many development activities in the 1970s and 1980s had made many agencies question the approaches of many NGOs and donors, particularly the structural adjustment programs of multilateral donors that were firmly built on modernisation theory. As a result, a ground-swell began to build which advocated for greater involvement of villagers in development activities, including women, ethnic minorities and other often marginalised groups to ensure greater project success (Pretty et al 1995). Given the growing support for such participatory approaches worldwide, it was not surprising that many agencies wanted to apply such ideas in Vietnam. However, at this time no agencies were able to attempt village wide planning and development approaches given the provincial, district, commune and village officials did not support such approaches. To enable such broad-based participatory approaches to be possible, the government at the highest level would need to support such an initiative.

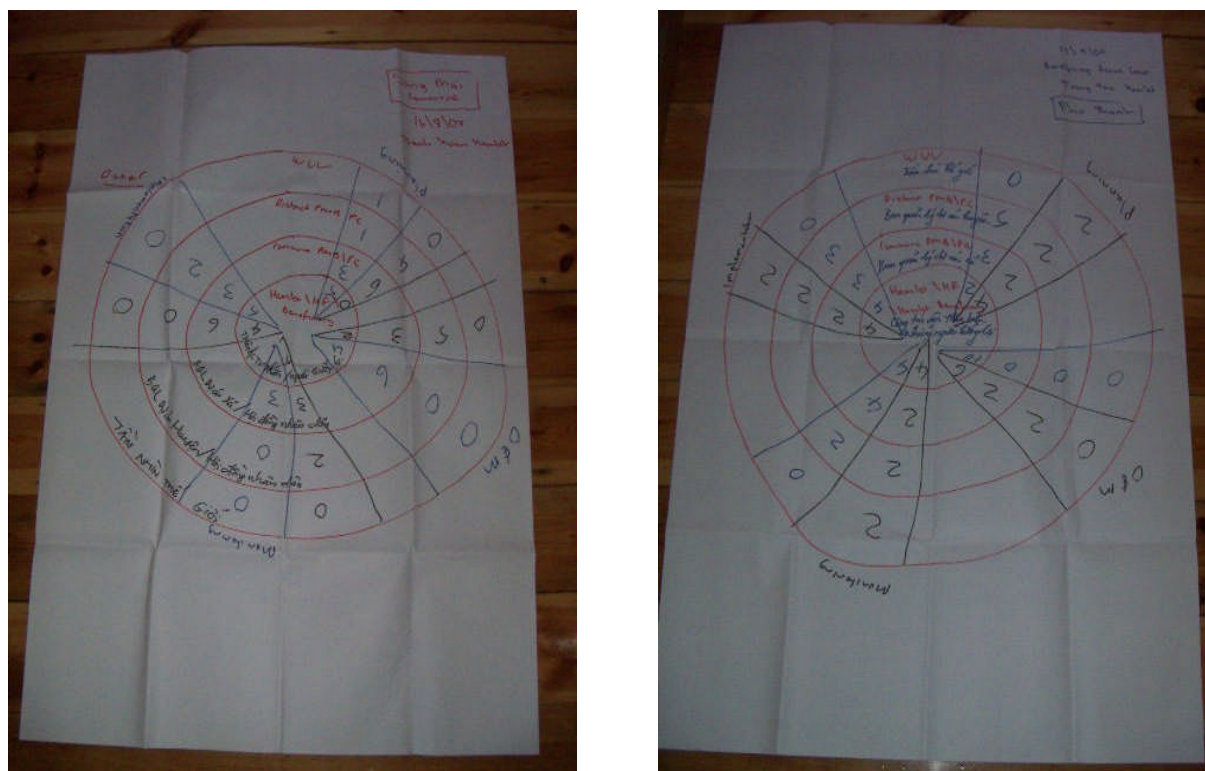
It should be noted that the above account is a very generalised account of the situation that existed in Vietnam pre-1998, especially given Vietnam is a large and varied country with many exceptions to any particular rule. As a result, although generally commune and village decision-making and village-based planning and development were limited over this period, the level of centralisation in decision-making and development assistance did vary from area to area. For instance, in Tra My, Hien and Kim Dong districts the trend analysis exercises undertaken with village groups clearly indicated significant differences in people's level of participation in the development cycle after the GRDD was released: 10 of the 12 mixed focus groups conducted indicated significant positive changes in how average villagers felt they were informed of programs, involved in key decision-making, and involved in implementation, supervision and management.

However, interestingly, the Thai and to a lesser extent the Muong ethnic minority villages in Quan Hoa district case study noted very little change in their level of involvement after the GRDD and the ADP began. In particular in 2 of the 12 mixed focus groups in Quan Hoa, it was discovered that the Thai culture had a long history of village-based decision-making and development planning and implementation, with most major plans being put to the village for discussion and consensus for many, many years. As a result in Quan Hoa, the focus group confirmed that all major village decisions must have approval from one representative from each household in the village, providing a strong example of direct democracy. This system was reported to have been undertaken in these villages throughout the Japanese, French and communist periods. *'We have always decided the development activities as a village. The households and leaders have always decided this way'*, said one focus group member who was a member of a mass organisation. On occasions it was reported in Quan Hoa that decisions were made by senior government officials and did not receive community input; however it was reported that most local decisions were made by the Thai community themselves. In addition, the community was actively involved in all other stages of the development cycle including implementation and monitoring and it was revealed that generally the senior local government officials were so used to this system in Thai villages, that they routinely treated these villages differently, thus allowing the traditional village processes to continue. *'The government let us do things this way. They knew it worked best this way'* said one villager during the focus groups in Quan Hoa.

In contrast, the Katu ethnic minority group in the Hien district case study operated quite differently. They explained that prior to pre-1998 nearly all decisions were made by the district and province officials and only sometimes by the commune and they felt the village made no major decisions themselves during this period. They reported a marked difference in how they were involved in development once the GRDD and ADP processes began and they explained a dramatic shift, with much more information being available, the ability for them to be involved in important village decisions, and to be involved in implementation, monitoring and management. *'The government has always made the decisions for us because we have low education. Now the programs (program staff) have us involved in deciding activities and doing them'* said one villager during a mixed focus group in Hien.

Figure 6 below illustrates two separate power / trend analysis outputs from mixed focus groups in Kim Dong and Quan Hoa. The figure illustrates results of a 10 seed ranking process of village / hamlet, commune, district and NGOs staff involvement in the development process, represented by concentric circles starting with village / hamlet in the middle. Village participants ranked the involvement of each stakeholder group in the development cycles stages – planning, implementation, monitoring and maintenance, having only 10 seeds in total to distribute to each of the stakeholder groups, across each of the four project stages. Focus group members completed this exercise as a group, focusing on how things are now. Following this process, they completed the same exercise again, this time focussing on the pre-1998 situation. The ranking results illustrated below, indicate a stark improvement in how much the village was involved in planning, implementation, monitoring and ongoing management after the 1998. Generally participants ranked the village involvement as double (ranking of 6/10 versus 3/10) for all project stages. Similar results were found in Tra My and Kim Dong districts. Interestingly in Quan Hoa district, the results were very different.

Results for the involvement of the villages in the development process varied from being the same (for monitoring) to being lower since 1998 for planning, implementation and maintenance. This was explained by the group to be due to the existing strong village system for development planning and implementation and also the fact the ADP program actually promote greater involvement of district, commune and NGO staff in the process. Villagers in the focus groups explained that the level of community participation has still increased at the village level since 1998 but so has the involvement by the other stakeholders. As one female focus group member explained in Quan Hoa *'there are now many more people involved in the activities than before. The villagers are involved more now as well.*



**Figure 6: Sample Power Ranking and Trend Analysis results from focus groups in Kim Dong and Quan Hoa**

### 4.3 Village Development After 1998

As Vietnam began to slowly re-establish itself in the late 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, some dissent began to grow towards the centralised form of governance that was in place across Vietnam that provided limited ability for the average Vietnamese citizen to be involved in processes that affect them. In 1996 and 1997, significant grassroots protests were undertaken, especially those in Thai Binh province but also elsewhere across Vietnam (Mekong Economics 2006). This saw mass protests by villagers in response to local government decisions and development activities that they perceived as not being appropriate and not transparently handled. Villagers complained about poor decisions that were made by party officials that resulted in little or no benefit to them as end users. They also complained about the lack of understanding of rural issues, a growing level of mistrust of government officials, poor transparency in all elements of major development decision-making and generally poor financial accountability (National Centre for Social Sciences and Humanities

2003). Even though these protests were aimed at local officials, they still represented a level of dissent towards the centralised government system that controlled key decisions down to the grassroots level. It is interesting to note that these protests occurred mainly in the north of Vietnam, an area usually more easily controlled by the communist party system.

Village protests, although commonplace in the process of nationalisation, had not been a major occurrence in the post-American war Vietnam. Protests in the period immediately before 1998 were widespread and presented a significant threat to the government. The government could see that if it did not appropriately respond, it could risk losing the stable nation that it had fought so hard for (National Centre for Social Sciences and Humanities 2003). As a result, the government developed the first decree on grassroots democracy: Decree No. 29/ND-CP dated 15 May 1998, a decree that was arguably produced in direct response to the protests and lack of perceived involvement of village and commune people in grassroots development processes. As the literature review for this thesis confirmed, significant differences of opinion exist on how centralised or how responsive to the people the Vietnamese Government is, however the process that led to the development of the GRDD reinforces that the level of centralisation in Vietnam cannot be easily pigeonholed (United Nations Development Programme 2006a). This example illustrates how the will of the people of Vietnam can directly lead to a radical shift in government policy, despite the other examples of a centralised State that are present.

The decree was drafted to follow the important words of the late President Ho Chi Minh explaining how grassroots democracy could be envisaged: 'the people know, the people discuss, the people do and the people monitor' (*dan biet, dan ban, dan lam, dan kiem tra*) (Socialist Republic of Vietnam 2003, p1). The decree marked a significant departure from how power was shared by the government, because in the past, as the case studies confirmed, most decisions and activities were controlled by the national, province and district level government. As a result, most power over development processes was located with senior government leaders and committees, with the village and commune level frequently being passive recipients only. This decree marked a significant change, enabling the active involvement of the commune (the lowest level of the government system) and the village or hamlet (the first non-governmental level in Vietnamese society) in the development process. For a highly centralised and government controlled government, it cannot be overestimated what a significant effect this potentially could have on development processes.

In simple terms, the decree was intended to reduce red tape, inefficiencies and unjust systems in development at the grassroots level, which would allow village people to be informed and involved with land and budget issues, public management, and activity monitoring. It also supported the implementation of more fair and democratic elections for village officials, therefore building capacity in representative democracy and also providing the opportunity to enable local people to be involved in direct democratic processes throughout the whole development cycle (National Centre for Social Sciences and Humanities 2003). The decree also had the potential to allow all people to have fair and equal say in all aspects of village affairs including women, the handicapped, ethnic minorities and any other disadvantaged groups, therefore opening up the way for much greater equality in Vietnamese society. This was another important benefit of the decree, as by 1998 the rate of economic growth in rural

Vietnam was already noticeably lagging behind that of the urban areas and beginning to create significant disparity in Vietnamese society. Ensuring equality for all, especially the poor and marginalised, was an important focus of government.

The decree was widely rolled-out to all provinces, districts, communes and villages. Like most decrees, senior ministry and province staff were briefed and trained on the key elements of the decree and these officials were then given the responsibility to transfer the principles and application of the decree to the departments and areas for which they were responsible. The decree was also widely publicised on television, radio, the village loudspeaker system, through village meetings and many other forms of communication. On many occasions it was translated into local ethnic minority languages and even presented in dance and other creative mediums (National Centre for Social Sciences and Humanities 2003).

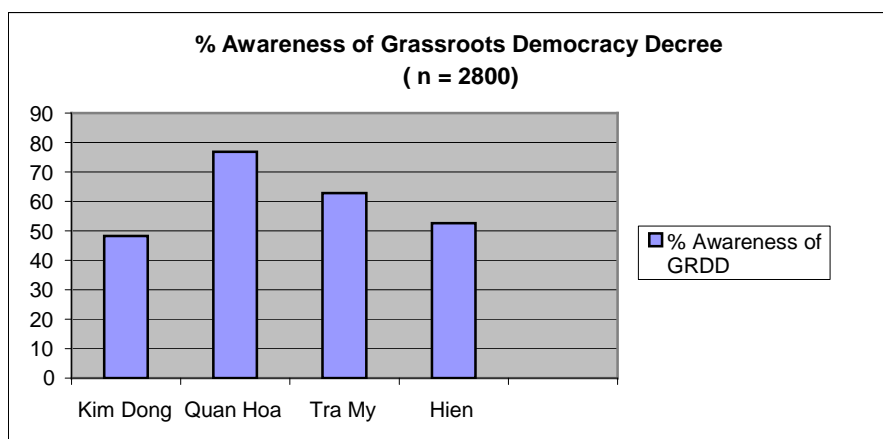
However, despite the widespread attempt to disseminate the decree, by 2002 there was a feeling that the decree was not fully understood, not fully implemented and certainly not meeting expectations. As a result, a follow up decree on grassroots democracy was released: Decree 29/ND/CP dated 7 July 2003, which sought to clarify and reinforce the key elements of grassroots democracy and assist with its more effective implementation. This decree also followed the words of Ho Chi Minh, divided into four new responsibilities of the people, including being informed; discussing and decision-making; public debate; and inspecting and monitoring. This reinforced the villagers' rights to access commune budgets, commune socio-economic development plans and tax and fee schedules; to be involved in developing socio-economic plans; to attend community meetings and discuss important village affairs; to be involved in the management of development activities, including the provision of local contributions; and to have the ability to inspect and monitor activities through proposed maintenance and inspection boards (Socialist Republic of Vietnam 2003).

It should also be noted that the two grassroots democracy decrees do not sit alone. As only two elements of the general process of reform in Vietnam, these two decrees sit together with other policies and reforms that have been introduced to complement this general direction in open, market-focussed economic development. This process has included the formation of decrees that allow citizen complaints; the decentralisation of budget and financial management functions to the province, district and commune levels; decrees and decisions reducing corruption; and the newest law on associations, allowing the formation of non-government civil society organisations (United Nations Development Programme 2002a). Despite this wider context, it is the two grassroots democracy decrees that most relate to the key elements of decentralisation, civil society and democracy that form the basis for village-based planning and development approaches. For this reason, investigations into the implementation of the grassroots democracy decree are especially important to this research.



## Case Study Findings on the Grassroots Democracy Decree

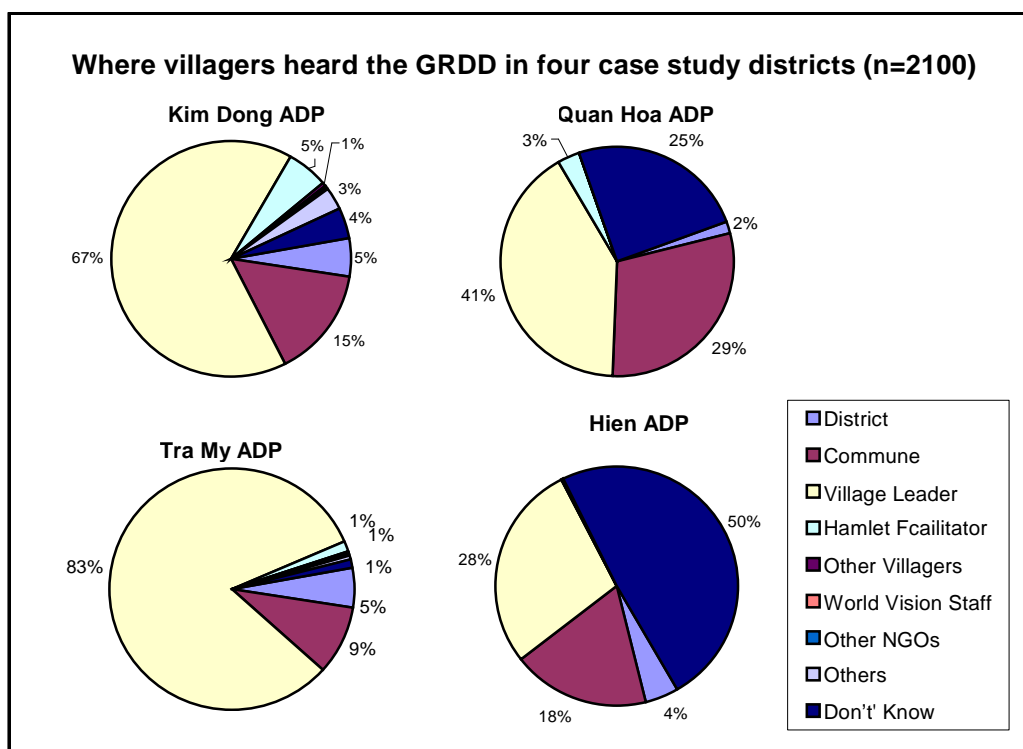
The case study research involved a variety of methods to determine the effect of the GRDD at the village level and to explore any shortcomings. The household survey of 2,800 households across the four case study areas revealed good knowledge of the decree in even the most remote areas. In Kim Dong, Quan Hoa, Tra My and Hien 48.3%, 76.8%, 62.8% and 52.6% of respondents respectively reported knowing of the decree, as illustrated in Figure 7 below. Given the time since the decree was released, the limited modes of effective communication in the case study sites and the language limitations of the participants, this is remarkably high even though not all respondents knew the decree. These results align well with results obtained from the Mekong Economics, UNDP and Oxfam studies that also have investigated the implementation of the GRDD since 1998 (Mekong Economics 2006; National Centre for Social Sciences and Humanities 2003; United Nations Development Programme 2006b). What is interesting to note from these results, however, is that the knowledge of the decree is higher in the poorer areas, with Tra My, Hien and Quan Hoa all reporting higher levels of awareness of the decree than Kim Dong, the wealthiest of the four districts. Follow up focus group exercises examined this issue further with many participants in the poorer districts explaining that the decree had a more significant effect in their area since it represented a larger change to how things were done. As one female focus group respondent explained in Tra My, *'before the decree the government used to do most things for us without us having to be involved. Things work different now the decree has come'*.



**Figure 7: Percentage awareness of the GRDD across the four case study districts**

The survey also revealed that of those who had heard of the decree, 66.0% in Kim Dong, 41.1% in Quan Hoa, 81.8% in Tra My, and 28.1% in Hien had heard of the decree from the village head as illustrated in Figure 8 below. The next most popular response was that they had heard through the commune, with responses of 14.8% in Kim Dong, 29.4% in Quan Hoa, 9.2% in Tra My, and 18.4% in Hien. Although significant variance existed in the results between districts, these results still confirm that it was village and commune people who took responsibility to disseminate the decree. In Hien district and to a lesser extent Quan Hoa district, a large percentage of the respondents who had heard of the decree were not sure exactly where they had

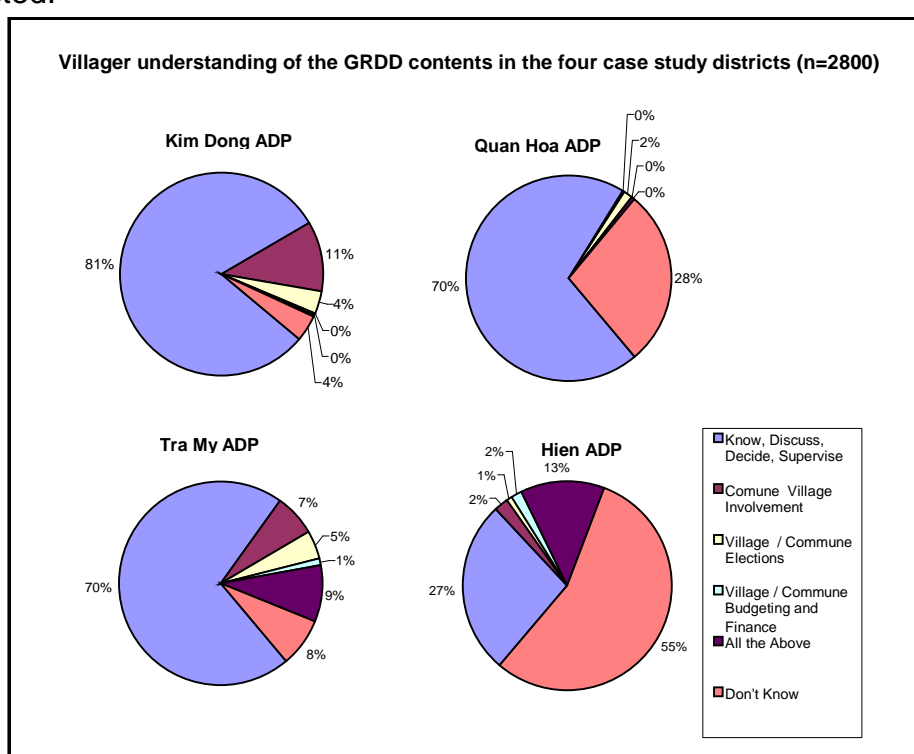
heard of the decree (48.8% in Hien and 24.8% in Quan Hoa), significantly affecting the results obtained. This issue was investigated during the focus groups in each area and it seems most likely that the response of 'not remembering' where they had heard about the decree, was frequently due to the fact participants had heard about the decree from a variety of sources and that the main messaging was delivered some years ago. As one Hien focus group member explained *'I cannot remember where I heard the decree because we heard it from many places and it is so long ago. That is why I said I didn't remember on the survey'*. Nonetheless, it was still encouraging that the village took a lead in the dissemination process. It was also encouraging that WVV was not a major source of information on the decree; instead villagers heard through a variety of local government and non-government channels.



**Figure 8: Where villagers heard the GRDD across the four case study districts (n = 2100)**

The survey also revealed that most people associated the decree with the words of Ho Chi Minh ('the people know, the people discuss, the people do, and the people inspect') as illustrated in Figure 9 below. Overall, 80.5% in Kim Dong, 69.9% in Quan Hoa, 71.0% in Tra My and 26.9% in Hien felt the decree was primarily concerned with the words of Ho Chi Minh. Again responses in Hien and to a lesser extent Quan Hoa, were noted to be lower than the other districts with 55.3% and 27.5% of respondents respectively, reporting to 'not knowing' the contents of decree at all. This seems to be due to the remoteness and low education in these areas. As one Hien focus group member said *'Our village is far away from the commune and we are not educated. We do not know the answers to such questions'*. This was a frequent response in Hien to such issues. The next most popular response by around 10% of respondents in each area, was that the decree was generally about greater involvement of the village and commune in development processes. Focus groups discussions in each district contributed to this debate, revealing that many knew the words of Ho Chi Minh but not necessarily the real meaning or implications of the decree and particularly how the words of Ho Chi Minh supported the decree contents. The focus groups revealed that

a small group of people from each area (around 10-20% in each district) appeared to have a more complete understanding of the importance of the principles of decentralisation and community planning and implementation than is outlined in the words of Ho Chi Minh. The focus groups confirmed that this understanding was mostly found in the leaders from the village level such as the village head, party secretary or hamlet leaders who are more intimately involved in the implementation of the GRDDs compared to the average villager. As one male village head in Tra My explained *'many of the people know the words that Ho Chi Minh said. It is easy to remember. But only the leaders really know what it means for how the village and commune should work together in development'*. This highlights an important weakness of the government's dissemination system for laws, decisions and decrees where often such catchy phrases, like that of President Ho Chi Minh, ensure the dissemination of a simple message to a wide audience but not necessarily a real understanding by the people most affected.



**Figure 9: Villagers' understanding of the GRDD across the four case study districts (n = 2100)**

Some respondents explained that follow up meetings were conducted in some villages to discuss the decree further, however frequently only local leaders and men attended. *'I went to meetings to discuss the decree'* said one women villager during focus groups in Kim Dong, *'but I was one of the only ones. Usually only the leaders came.'* It was frequently reported that limited opportunities existed to allow broad based, representative discussion of the decree, so people's understanding of it was limited. Survey respondents frequently complained that the decree was not translated into minority languages therefore the poorest people, the ethnic minority people, could not understand what was being said. The results in Figure 9 above, were also disaggregated by gender which indicate relatively equal understanding of the decree across genders. In addition some respondents of the survey complained that the importance of this decree was lost because of the large number of laws that are frequently presented to the people on the village loudspeaker system, or the complex legal language used. As one male villager survey respondent in Hien said *'I hear*

*many things on the loudspeaker, I did not listen to that one (the GRDD)'. Therefore, although on one level the government did well to inform a large population of the decree, on many levels this was completely superficial.*

As already mentioned, several studies have been undertaken to assess the effectiveness of the GRDD. The study by the UNDP released in 2006 highlighted the lack of support for implementation of the decree not just at local level but also at a national and policy level. It highlighted the need to engage citizens not only in direct democracy through village and commune processes, but also through improved representative process at all levels of government (United Nations Development Programme 2006a). The study by Mekong Economics also released in 2006 highlighted that the implementation of the decree has varied across Vietnam when rated by a quantitative assessment methodology which investigated the perceived key aspects of grassroots democracy, including issues of transparency, capacity, participation, accountability and awareness of the decree at the commune level. The study highlights the difficulties of a 'one size fits all model' for grassroots democracy and reinforces the need to support commune and village levels to ensure the decree is effectively implemented. This study also highlights the tendency of the decree to be constrained to infrastructure activities, rather than used more holistically for community planning and development as was intended (Mekong Economics 2006).

The Oxfam study of 2003 also provides a significant qualitative, village-based understanding of the effectiveness of the decree's implementation. Although the study is several years old, it still highlights many of the key issues that were reinforced in the UNDP and Mekong Economics Study and the case study investigations. In particular, it highlights the weakness of the decree's implementation, given low commune and village capacity to implement it effectively. As a result, the study recommends the need for: training of local stakeholders in how to facilitate village meetings; improvements to key information sharing processes with the community; improvements to commune skills in budgeting and management; and development of better mechanisms for village monitoring and supervision. It should be noted that none of the three studies looked at the same provinces or districts as this research, yet all highlight the varied ways in which the decree was implemented in different parts of Vietnam (National Centre for Social Sciences and Humanities 2003).

All studies point towards, but do not directly propose, the necessity for a program framework to be in place to ensure such a radical change in village power structures, as is envisaged in the GRDD, can be realised. Donor and NGO village-based planning and development models, including the ADP approach, appear to have the ability to provide such a framework. This is one of the main reasons why this research is so important and timely to development in Vietnam. It should also be highlighted that all the key studies mentioned also raise the issue of the level of capital and political support required to successfully enable the effective implementation of such grassroots attitude change. These important issues will be investigated in detail as this thesis continues to explore village-based planning and development frameworks.

#### **4.4 Approaches to Assist the Implementation of Grassroots Democracy and Enable Greater Community Participation**

As already mentioned, various attempts have been made, particularly by NGOs and donors, to help implement the principles of grassroots democracy and community

participation since Vietnam started its path of reform. The lack of legal framework and lack of acceptance of participatory principles made it difficult, if not impossible, to implement widespread grassroots democracy before the decree was implemented in 1998. As a result, up until 1998 more donor and NGO approaches focused on small-scale community development initiatives that tried to maximise the involvement of village and commune people in individual sector project processes in individual villages. Some success was achieved through such approaches, however this was reported by many of the donors and NGOs that were interviewed to be limited and ad hoc. As one Vietnamese NGO staff commented during the case study interviews, *'you couldn't do any real community participation in development programs until after 1998. Before then the officials just wouldn't go along with it and neither would the community'*.

Given such approaches were not part of the government agenda before this time, no significant attempts were made by government to implement the principles of either grassroots democracy or participation during this period. For this reason, the release of the GRDD is important as it gave a legal mandate to implement important democratic, decentralisation and community participation principles, with the potential to include civil society involvement. Once the decree had been widely circulated by the government system by the end of 1998, most NGOs and donors were in a much better position to implement the key elements of community participation, even though the dissemination was not entirely successful as discussed. Since that time, donors, NGOs and government have attempted to implement elements of grassroots democracy in Vietnam with varied levels of success. Determining the level of success can at times be a very subjective exercise. Interviews with 40 of the main NGOs and donors involved in such approaches highlighted common strengths and weaknesses of particular approaches. Approaches to implementing grassroots democracy in the post-1998 environment appear to vary depending on the agency mandate, geographical scale, budget and numerous other factors. These different approaches of agencies are roughly grouped and explained below. Key elements within these approaches will also be discussed further in *Chapter Five*, which explores the approaches undertaken in the case study areas in detail and compares this with other models that exist in Vietnam.

The largest level of implementation of grassroots democracy principles has arguably been undertaken by the multilateral donors. In Vietnam, these are mainly the World Bank and Asian Development Bank (ADB) as the two largest donors in Vietnam in terms of program size in Vietnam (United Nations Development Programme 2005a). In recent years, these donors have become increasingly interested in the principles of grassroots democracy in line with international trends in good governance. Many groups have completed studies and written reports internationally that affirm the importance of community involvement in loan projects, including the banking institutions themselves (Malvicini and Sweetser 2003; World Bank 2004a). Since the failure of the largely technically driven structural adjustment programs of the 1980s, the banks have come increasingly under pressure to include effective community participation as an integral part of each loan. This is often in stark contrast to the usual loan procedures, where only the minimal level of community consultation has traditionally been included to get the job done. Major project decisions are usually made between the government and the donor at the highest levels with teams of consultant advisors determining the more detailed issues at the project or program

level (Asian Development Bank 2005b). This has arguably continued to lead to programs that do not fully respond to the needs of the communities.

However, many of the current programs of these donors are increasingly including improved methods of community consultation and participation. The first iterations of such approaches included community consultation on a limited scale through rapid Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) processes with small samples of project beneficiaries. This provided some community input into the project design but was far from what was anticipated under the GRDD, where community members would be able to be actively involved in the whole project cycle. Despite the apparent shortcomings, it should be highlighted that such approaches are far more difficult to implement on large-scale multilateral projects, which usually operate over a sizeable geographic area, covering multiple districts and provinces. Not surprisingly, representative consultation and direct democratic decision-making is not so easy to achieve on such a scale compared to that undertaken in one or two villages. As a result, the main planning and design elements of such projects are frequently agreed upon between donors and government with little opportunity or flexibility to include meaningful community involvement. To undertake a representative consultation process on such a large-scale project and then follow it up with active community involvement in implementation, monitoring and community management would require a complex and time consuming system to be in place. Due to the financial terms of such loan transactions, this level of time and budget investment is usually not permitted (Asian Development Bank 2005b).

Despite these challenges, several attempts have been made by major donors to address these shortcomings and develop a model which involves the community, yet maintains the key elements of the loan process. The World Bank has been making certain elements of community involvement mandatory on its projects in Vietnam, for example the CBRIP project, which required set amounts of community contribution (in labour and finances) and prescribed community involvement in the planning and design processes. This requires one village member from each target village to compulsorily attend certain project design meetings (Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation 2002). As one donor representative commented during interview, *'for an agency like ourselves, we need to have such quota based approaches to make sure we have something to aim for in terms of (community) participation'*. Although a positive step, such quota-based systems do not fully respond to the principles of GRDD or the principles of community participation, which envisage direct democratic involvement of all households in project design and then meaningful community involvement in implementation and monitoring processes. Therefore they frequently end up being more tokenistic, than promoting appropriate community involvement (Cornwall and Pratt 2003).

The ADB has increasingly been engaging with NGOs in Vietnam to develop and pilot improved community participation methodologies on its large irrigation program to address such issues. Currently, several NGOs are piloting approaches to blend village-based planning and development with the delivery of large-scale irrigation loan projects. Again, difficulties frequently arise because community mobilisation and active involvement is frequently time consuming, can easily prolong the loan periods, incur additional resources, and possibly affect the financial terms of the loan agreement. To compensate for this situation, funds required for community participation issues are

often separately raised and then granted to NGOs rather than being lent to partner government agencies (Asian Development Bank 2005b). Such models appear to be a positive step in including broad-based village planning and development processes in large-scale projects. However, one criticism of such approaches is that the village planning and development processes that are conducted are usually specifically targeted to support a pre-agreed loan activity, i.e. construction of a dam. Therefore, they often become less focussed on establishing sustainable systems for ensuring communities can identify, plan and implement their own development activities, as much as securing necessary additional support for loan activities to be effective (Asian Development Bank 2005b). As one donor representative commented during interview, *'the overall focus of the project is decided bilaterally between the donor and government; community participation can only come later, during design and implementation'*.

Some other approaches very relevant to this research have been piloted by a group of bilateral donors including the German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ), the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), the Government of Finland (GoF) and the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID). These organisations have set up district and province-wide approaches to support the implementation of improved village and commune development planning. These projects engage with communities in a province for between three and ten years to help improve bottom-up planning systems utilising the key principles of grassroots democracy. The programs have typically involved paid facilitators working with most or all villages in a target area to identify annual and longer term needs, rank these needs, and form these needs into an overall village development plan. Care is taken to include broad-based involvement of all stakeholders (women, men, ethnic minorities, different income groups) and to gain consensus for the plans on a village level through direct democratic processes. Assistance has then been provided to aggregate village plans into commune plans and then to integrate these with the commune's formal commune planning cycle. This results in an overall commune socio-economic development plan that addresses the community's actual needs, a process quite different from that undertaken by multilateral donors. The resulting plans can be integrated into district and ultimately provincial plans, which enables village priorities to permeate through all planning levels to the highest level (Australian Agency for International Development 2005; Finland Development Agency 2005; German Technical Cooperation Agency 1993; Swedish International Development Agency 2006).

Such projects have included various levels of donor funding to support the processes. In some cases, the donor only funds the planning process and does not provide funds to support the activities that result from the community plans. This often leaves the commune reliant on funds available from existing sources in the local area especially government and donor schemes, such as CBRIP, Program 135 etc. As one male technical specialist of such a program said during interview *'we have to rely on the funding available from other programs including the government's, to actually pay for the field activities. It is not possible for us to have supply the funding for all the activities like the NGOs do'*. In other cases, the donors have supplemented existing commune funds for activities with some funds of their own, providing more support and often more activities to be completed. It should be noted that despite the various funding sources from government and the presence of donor and NGOs in nearly



every province in Vietnam, the actual funding available for each commune, even those receiving funds from multiple agencies, is often very limited compared to the level of need that is identified in the community plans. For example, Program 135 funding may only provide USD 10,000 per commune, which will only be enough to address one or two of a commune's most pressing needs from a much longer list. Such funding is far from adequate, especially in larger communes. As one male villager commented in Quan Hoa during the survey, *'the money from all the government programs here is not enough. We need much more to help our village from being poor.'* The Oxfam study reiterated that to implement such a comprehensive system of village planned and implemented development, there must be adequate resources to ensure the activities decided upon can be put into place (National Centre for Social Sciences and Humanities 2003). There is a risk of undermining the achievements of the community planning processes if no funds are available to ensure the implementation of a reasonable proportion of identified activities. In many cases the improved community planning systems have made a significant difference to community involvement, however there is tendency for these approaches to end up as a framework only, given local stakeholders have limited ability to experience and live the key elements of grassroots democracy throughout all the important development cycle stages. As one INGO representative explained during interview *'it is a real problem if we make these people (the villagers) attend meetings, identify priorities and come up with a village plan but then don't help them implement them. If not enough activities end up happening because of a lack of funding, the whole thing is for nothing'*.

These bilateral donor projects have generally focussed quite carefully on strengthening the commune government to be actively involved in program budgeting and financial management, together with the district and provincial levels. The general weakness of commune government as the main implementers of grassroots democracy as set out in the GRDD has frequently been highlighted as a key blockage in its effective implementation (United Nations Development Programme 2002b). The case study investigations highlighted commune capacity as a key weakness in both the effectiveness of grassroots democracy implementation and also development more generally, given the strong linkages between these two notions. The process of capacity building and decentralisation which is often seen as key to any participatory approach, is supported by significant theory that promotes the importance of bringing development funding and management closer to the community, to allow greater transparency, efficiency and accountability (Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development 1995). The bilateral projects mentioned have placed considerable effort into building the skills of commune officials in project and financial management in particular, to enable this level of government to be effective overseers of community consultation processes and effective budget, financial and project managers. *'Building up the commune's financial and project administration skills has to be a key part of any village-based approach if you want sustainability'* said one donor project representative during interview.

One weakness of such bilateral approaches is that despite the program framework appearing quite open, many such projects still focus activities on one or two particular sectors only, for example agriculture, irrigation or infrastructure, rather than being able to truly respond to any needs the community raises. Although the approaches succeed in building a program framework that allows community needs to be identified and addressed, only those activities that are within the relevant program parameters



can usually be implemented. This restricts the level of responsiveness to the community's needs and ultimately their level of involvement in the program. As one donor project specialist said during interview *'we just can't work on all the types of activities the community wants. We have to focus on just a few so we can do them well technically'*.

Such approaches have also been criticised for having the ability to become a 'shopping list' approach to development rather than being an approach to development that brings long-term change in all aspects of grassroots democracy (United Nations Development Programme 2005a, p6). The duration of such approaches and the depth of their implementation can vary considerably across Vietnam. Although these approaches on the surface appear to assist in implementing the principles of grassroots democracy, some such programs only do so over a one to three year funding window in each particular area. This means the complex attitude and behaviour change processes associated with moving both government and community towards improved grassroots democracy is completed rapidly with little allowance for follow up. Frequently, the donor completes training and implementation of the program in one to two years and then moves on to the next geographical area to repeat the process, in the interests of expanding the approach as much as possible for greatest impact. As this thesis has already highlighted, the key elements of the grassroots democracy decree require radical attitude change by communities and government officials alike and this arguably requires long-term engagement to ensure such change does occur and occurs properly. If such change is not fully accepted, there is a real chance that the area may resort back to traditional systems of largely centralised decision-making. As the case studies confirm, the approach may require at least ten years engagement to ensure grassroots democracy is firmly in place to limit the likelihood of this occurring. As one male donor project representative commented, *'you must have at least 10 years to do this properly (village-based development approaches) if you are really going to see a sustainable change.'*

Despite some positive outcomes of such bilateral projects in terms of grassroots democracy and improved participation, few post evaluations have been conducted of these projects to determine the real effectiveness of the approaches used. Through the investigations undertaken as part of this research, it was clear that this research may be the first attempt to evaluate many of these bilateral projects individually and as a group from an external perspective. In addition, many of the multilateral and NGO's programs that seek to promote improved community participation have also not been evaluated in these terms. Anecdotal evidence seems to confirm that these programs are appearing to contribute to the implementation of grassroots democracy and donors involved are likewise gaining confident in this methodology and therefore promoting it more widely in Vietnam. However despite this, village development planning (VDP) and commune development planning (CDP) methodologies as they are commonly known as, have still not been carefully evaluated and their actual effect on the implementation of grassroots democracy investigated in any detail.

Several NGOs have also explored village and commune development planning approaches. NGOs including World Vision Vietnam (WVV), Oxfam Great Britain (Oxfam GB), Plan International, Christian Children's Fund (CCF), Netherlands Development Organisation (SNV), Nordic Assistance to Vietnam (NAV) and Helvetas have implemented various forms of village-based planning and development since

1998. Most NGO funds are more limited than those of donors, so typically these responses have focussed on assisting villages and/or communes to determine their development needs, rank and prioritise these needs and help develop an annual and/or five-yearly action plan in much the same way as the bilateral programs. Village level needs are obtained and decided on either through village mass meetings or through village or commune level focus groups or a combination of both these processes. Then, with the help of the NGO and government staff, these plans are implemented with considerable, if not total, control by the commune and village.

Due to NGO funding limitations, such approaches do at times work on a very small scale of one or two villages of a particular commune only. Some agencies therefore find it difficult to aggregate needs from the village to commune level and develop comprehensive commune plans in the same manner the bilateral projects can. Also, most NGOs lack the strong higher-level relations with province and district to be able to gain access to the official province and district development plans. As one male INGO representative explained *'we (NGOs) just don't have the relationships with government or the funding to facilitate the planning and implementation of even a commune plan comprehensively'*. This frequently prevents the full integration of village and commune needs identification processes with the official government development planning processes that the bilateral programs can achieve. As a result, many NGOs end up with a parallel village and/or commune development plan. This at times does not prove problematic, as government officials involved in the two processes ensure that activities in the NGO and government plans do not overlap and where possible are complementary, however significant scope exists to blend such approaches as the bilateral donors have managed to do with some success.

It is often observed that NGOs are more successful at implementing effective community needs analysis and ranking processes (Siddharth 1995). Given this is what the village development plan stems from, how well this is done is directly linked to the success of the overall development program. Most NGOs take considerable time to get to know their target community, understand the issues and work through needs and their ranking, as NGOs are less beholden to the tight timeframes and targets of bilateral and multilateral donors. In addition, NGOs in Vietnam often train local people to undertake these community consultation tasks at little or no cost, rather than using highly paid external facilitators like most bilateral VDP and CDP approaches. This approach often results in low cost sustainable systems that can ideally continue ongoing planning and development cycles in the future.

Another key difference between bilateral and NGO approaches to VDP highlighted in the consultations, is that NGO engagement usually continues through the implementation and monitoring phases, as well as occurring during the planning and design phase. Many donor approaches to VDP, donors on the planning and design program stages only, due to budget restrictions and a focus on large-scale area coverage and replication. The NGO generally takes a longer-term approach to the issue and assists facilitate the implementation and monitoring processes as well. *'We would never just do the planning and then leave the community'* said one male INGO representative, *'we always need to stay to ensure the plan is actually implemented effectively'*. This approach provides another opportunity to influence the level of community involvement in the important implementation, monitoring and supervision stages of the development cycle. Given the level of attitude change the process

requires, such an approach also assists in ensuring that the principles of grassroots democracy are applied in all stages of the development cycle.

Of the 500 NGOs currently operating in Vietnam it is interesting to note that most, if not all, of these groups claim to employ participatory processes or support the implementation of grassroots democracy (VUFO-NGO Resource Centre 2005). Many agencies have produced materials to inform communities of the GRDD, trained local partners and communities on the GRDD and participatory approaches, or implemented participatory planning, implementation and monitoring on small-scale sector-based projects. However, only a few NGOs (less than ten<sup>17</sup>) have implemented broad based village and commune development planning similar to the VDP and CDP models. This is largely because of the cost involved in undertaking such programs effectively, even at a commune level, which many small NGOs cannot afford to do comprehensively. In addition, such approaches usually require broad technical and sector skills to ensure all activities that are community planned can be supported, which likewise is difficult for NGOs to be able to do. As one female Vietnamese NGO staff member explained, *'both international and Vietnamese NGOs can't afford to support all the sectoral activities a community may want to do. We just don't have the funds or the skills'*. Therefore, most NGOs focus on sector programs and implement elements of community participation in these single sector initiatives only. Groups which undertake participatory approaches in projects that focussed on single technical sectors such as agriculture, health, HIV/AIDS and education were reviewed as part of this research. However, generally this thesis will not focus on these small-scale sector-based approaches, but only on the programs that promote wide-scale or area-based village and commune planning and development since, as is becoming clear, the VDP approach has some unique elements to most effectively implement all aspects of the GRDD at the grassroots level.

The Government of Vietnam has also been attempting to implement the elements of grassroots democracy. The Government's Hunger Eradication and Reduction Program (HERP) or Program 135 as it is known, is perhaps the clearest example of such an approach. Like more and more of the government's programs, it is seeking to build up village and commune local capacity to more effectively and directly assist the poorest households and subsequently reduce poverty. In recent years, Program 135 in particular, has decentralised funding to the commune level to encourage commune and village people to be more involved in all aspects of the development cycle. It has also placed village and commune officials in charge of selecting the poor who will receive assistance, rather than relying on district and provincial level lists. Recent evaluations indicated that this move has assisted more targeted selection of needy beneficiaries and also enable a higher level of financial accountability (Poverty Task Force 2005).

Despite the potential benefits of the process of financial and administrative decentralisation, the approach has not been complemented with adequate commune and village capacity building. Therefore, despite many communes receiving funds directly, few have had the ability to spend them effectively or in the true spirit of the GRDD. Also as mentioned, funding under such programs is often very limited and has frequently not been enough to cover the needs that exist. The funding a commune

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<sup>17</sup> This number is based on a review of the NGO Resource Center 2006 Directory, discussions with NGO Resource Center staff, and interviews with 40 NGOs and donors in Vietnam.

receives, even if through multiple government programs, has not been sufficient to develop an holistic framework to implement the key aspects of the GRDD and allow participation to occur meaningfully throughout the project cycle. It is also important to note that all government programs, including Program 135, focus on one individual sector, for example, the government's program on forestry and the government's program on infrastructure, which has again meant that, like many bilateral approaches, these programs have not had the ability to cover the broad range of community development needs and deal with them in an holistic manner. As one male donor project member explained '*they (the government) have the right idea - they just haven't got enough funds and put enough effort into really building up the commune to be able to effectively run these programs*'.

#### **4.5 Village-Based Planning and Development and National Development**

It is important to note that despite the focus of this chapter and, for that matter, this research, being on village and commune development, ultimately what is required to achieve grassroots democracy and effective community participation requires more than just grassroots level intervention at the village and commune level. The VDP and CDP systems are not nearly as effective unless they are linked into the planning systems of the higher levels at district and province level and complemented by additional support at these and the levels above (Australian Agency for International Development 2005). As this thesis has highlighted, this is one area where the bilateral relationship with government of many donors can achieve some success, whereas NGOs often find this more difficult to achieve. This highlights the important balance between what many term 'bottom-up' forms of community planning and 'top-down' processes of state direction (Chambers and Blackburn 1996). The level of centralised planning that existed in Vietnam before 1998 did not allow effective bottom-up community involvement, however it is important to note that VDP cannot achieve this aim alone either. There is subsequently a middle ground required where direct democratic processes are implemented where appropriate, yet tied into other centralised or representative processes and national level initiatives that support the important village level processes.

The recent UNDP study explains clearly the need for grassroots democracy to include support for direct democracy and representative democracy (United Nations Development Programme 2006b). This is supported by many academics who advocate the importance of national and macro level changes, together with grassroots initiatives, if participatory development is to be successful (Cornwall and Guijt 2004; Gaventa and Valderrama 1999; Hague et al 1992; Hines 2004; Pimbert 2003). This thesis has confirmed that it is often very labour and time consuming and difficult to achieve direct democracy on a large geographical scale, however, it is in many ways the 'purest' form of democracy as it allows for the people to be involved ultimately in all elements of the development process from planning to monitoring the results (Potter 1997). This is why such direct democratic processes, despite being difficult, are still an important element of VDP and CDP approaches, since they allow communities to participate actively in the whole development process rather than being outside observers or observers to representatives, just like they were prior to 1998.

However, no country can rely purely on a system of direct democracy, especially as it continues to develop and grow in complexity (Diamond 1994). If grassroots

development and any level of grassroots-national integration are to be possible, perhaps most importantly, full state support across all areas will be required. In essence, a set of high-level conditions are required that may involve, for instance: the improvement to high level understanding and the 'mainstreaming' of community focussed processes across all ministries; improved elective processes for key ministerial and departmental positions; support for effective district and province planning and budgeting systems; and work to ensure key citizenship rights nationally.

Such complementary initiatives will be essential if grassroots initiatives and processes are to be fully supported and to be as effective as possible. Such additional initiatives may often fall into the realm of what donors and governments themselves usually complete in development, rather than what NGOs may classically undertake. NGOs are often noted to be most effective at building capacity at the local level and grassroots level interventions, which experience in Vietnam generally supports. NGO strengths in Vietnam often lie in establishing networks of local facilitators and development workers to undertake community consulting, needs analysis, activity ranking, planning, implementation and monitoring systems most effectively. All of these are processes that are integral to implementing improved grassroots democracy at the local level. However, it is equally important to note that complementary higher level initiatives are also required if grassroots level processes are to have the desired impact.

#### 4.6 Conclusions

This chapter has provided an overview of the key aspects of village-based planning and development before 1998 and since the advent of the grassroots democracy decree. It explores the key effects of traditional culture, colonialism and socialism on how activities were planned and implemented at the village level in Vietnam. It highlights again the fact that Vietnam is a diverse country with a large range of different cultural conditions and although some generalisations can be made, it is important to acknowledge the significant variance that exists even today in Vietnam in relation to local village culture and how it affects village and commune development.

It is clear from the survey, focus group results and individual interviews that when the GRDD was released and its contents informed to the villages across Vietnam, that it marked a key change in government direction. It has been impressive to note how well people were at least informed of the decree. It is also clear that providing a legal framework (developing the decree) and informing the people is not enough to ensure grassroots democracy is achieved. What has become apparent from this research is that an organisational framework is required to support the change process needed, if direct democracy is to occur. The village development planning and commune development planning models used by donors, NGOs and some government projects and programs seems to provide the ability to translate many of the key aspects of the GRDD into reality. These approaches, which this thesis has broadly termed *village-based planning and development*, can provide such a framework if they support both the planning and implementation stages and have adequate geographical coverage.

It needs to be noted, however, that despite the promise of village-based planning and development approaches that rely heavily on direct democracy, an important place still remains for representative democracy, given few, if any, communities can rely on a system of direct democracy alone. As many have noted, as development increases

there is an increasing need for representative democracy. However, village-based planning and development approaches still play an important role in building the grassroots understanding of democracy and allowing direct democracy to occur if they are complemented and linked with higher level processes. The following chapter, *Chapter Five*, will explore the set of seven key principles that contribute to effective village-based development planning and the ideals of grassroots democracy in more detail.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### KEY ELEMENTS THAT ENABLE EFFECTIVE VILLAGE-BASED PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

#### 5.1 Introduction

Based on the issues that have emerged from the case study investigations in the four districts, and the interviews and document review, this chapter seeks to confirm a set of seven key elements that are most likely to contribute towards effective village-based planning and development within the current Vietnamese context. The chapter groups these elements into thematic areas that have emerged from the research and which reference the theoretical pre-requisites that are frequently expected of participatory program approaches. This includes issues of democracy, civil society, decentralisation, integrated area-based planning, local contribution, multi-sectoral development, and long-term development approaches for effective capacity building for attitude change. The themes are articulated widely, to ensure that the breadth of possible interpretations that are applicable in Vietnam are explored, in line with the critical development studies framework. Within in each thematic area, the individual elements that are most essential in achieving effective village-based planning and development within the Vietnamese context are highlighted, explored and refined.

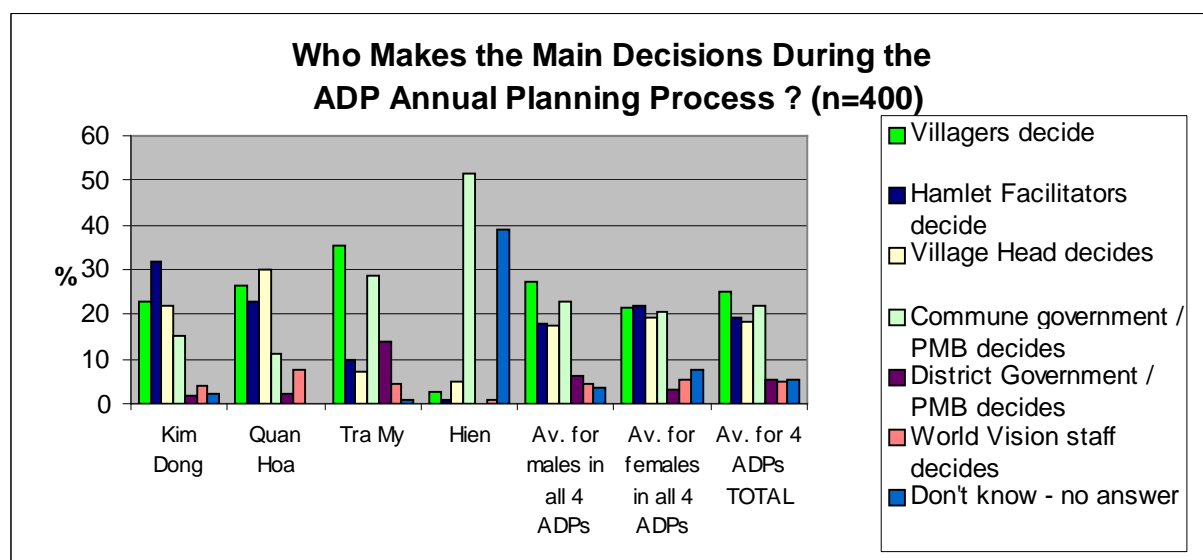
It is hoped that the resulting set of seven key elements that are derived from each of the relevant areas of theory will provide a guiding framework for existing and future village planned and implemented development programs in Vietnam. The full implications that such approaches are likely to have on poverty reduction and development in Vietnam (and elsewhere for that matter) will be touched upon in this chapter, but discussed more fully in *Chapter Six*. Despite the many positive benefits that such approaches can bring, it is important also to acknowledge the challenges that village-based planning and development approaches face. Amongst such challenges is the important aspect of up-scaling and institutionalising such approaches, issues which will be elaborated on in *Chapter Seven*.

#### 5.2 The Need for both Direct and Representative Democratic Processes

The research has strongly supported the notion that the release of the grassroots democracy decree was a key step in the process to enable meaningful and widespread community involvement in village and commune decision-making and development activities. Before the decree's release in 1998, there was a long history of the village and the commune being marginalised from important planning due to the centralised decision-making and implementation systems that were undertaken by the French and Japanese colonial powers, the early national communist government and as part of the long standing Confucianist tradition. The case study results have highlighted that generally there has been great change in the level of local decision-making at the village and commune level but that it does considerably vary from province to province, district to district and even village to village as Figure 10 below illustrates. Results of the 400 person survey across the four districts confirmed that 22.8% of respondents in Kim Dong, 26.2% in Quan Hoa, 35.3% in Tra My and 2.9% in Hien felt activities agreed to be completed in the ADP annually were decided by the villagers themselves democratically. An additional 32% of respondents in Kim Dong



and 22.7% in Quan Hoa felt it was the hamlet facilitators who decided the activities, with 22.1% and 30.1% respectively in each of these same two districts feeling the hamlet heads largely decided the activities. The focus group trend analysis confirmed that this was generally a significant change to how such processes had occurred before the GRDD and the ADP model, when most such important decisions were made by the district or province. The only real exception to this was in Quan Hoa as discussed. It was interesting that in Hien, 51.4% of respondents felt the commune government / PMB made the decisions on what activities would be completed and in Tra My 28.7%. Discussion during the focus groups revealed that these two areas had a strong history of the government making decisions for the villagers as a result of the government's opinion on the ethnic minority people's level of education and tendency for the government to '*just do things for the villagers*', as one male government official in Hien explained it. Although the trend analysis activities indicated this situation had significantly improved since the GRDD and ADP were introduced, the amount of village level decision-making on the development activities undertaken each year was still significantly lower in Hien and Tra My. It was noted that Hien had a very high response level of 'not knowing' (38.9%). Focus groups in Hien, suggested that this was largely due to a reluctance of people in Hien to discuss such issues of power between stakeholders, rather than them actually not knowing. However, on the whole, results from all four areas confirmed that the majority of people believed people at the village and commune level were most involved in the annual activity planning on each ADP.



**Figure 10: Decision-making processes in the planning stage across the four case study ADPs**

Investigations in Quan Hoa in particular, illustrated that effective traditional forms of representative decision-making existed in villages before both the GRDD and ADP model. The Thai ethnic minority groups in Quan Hoa reported having had a long-standing system of making decisions as a village with representative input from all households. This was particularly evident in the trend analysis exercises in Quan Hoa, which showed limited change in decision making processes after both the GRDD and ADP were introduced. Therefore, for them the GRDD and the village-based planning and development model of the ADP has had only limited influence on their village governance structures. As one male Thai villager in Quan Hoa explained '*We have*



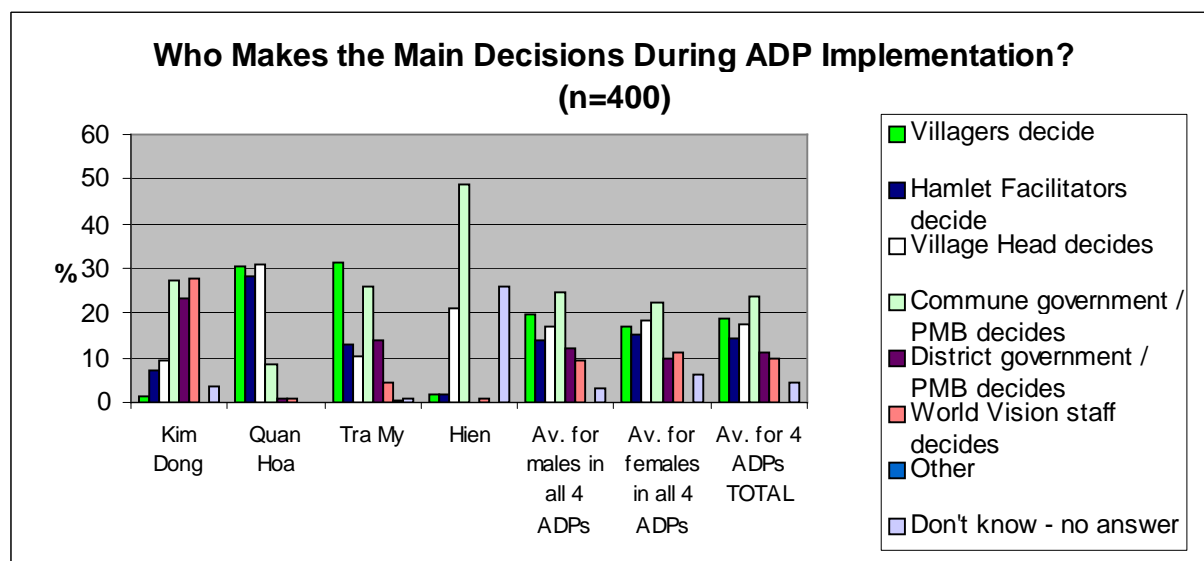
*always decided things as a village no matter what the government says*'. This was in stark comparison to the Katu ethnic minority groups in Hien District in Quang Nam Province where few opportunities had existed before the GRDD for villagers to be involved in any significant form of village planning, generally due to the government's view of the minority people in those areas.

However, despite the variance that exists between different cultural groups in the four different districts of Vietnam, the overwhelming view of respondents, as well as focus group members and interviewees, was that the decree had still provided an important legal mechanism that had more tangibly enabled villagers to be actively involved in local planning and implementation. In essence, it appears that the decree has provided a legitimate platform for such processes to occur across the whole of Vietnam, rather than it only occurring in particular cultural groups who have a particular disposition towards this style of governance. The widespread support for the decree by village people across the different cultural and geographic areas of Vietnam that were researched affirms that the Vietnamese want to be involved in 'popular' decision-making, particularly for development activity planning. This style of majority decision-making is often directly equated with 'democratic' decision-making (United Nations Development Programme 2002a).

In areas where the village had not been involved in community level decisions as part of developing planning in the past, it was clear that such a system had frequently led to inappropriate development responses that often did not address the real needs of the people. Equally as important is the observation in all four case study areas that if village beneficiaries were just told the development activities that would occur each year, there was a much reduced incidence of them being involved in the implementation, monitoring and ongoing management of the activity. As one female villager in Kim Dong explained, *'of course if the village decides the activities we will be involved'*. This is supported by participatory and empowerment theory which highlights the need for beneficiaries to have a stake, particularly in activity planning, if they are to remain involved in all stages of a development activity (Guijt 1996a). This element of popular democracy that ensures a majority of households are involved in key village decision-making is the first key element that is essential to effective village-based planning and development in the current Vietnamese context. If this element is not included in the process, the development process starts from a position where the people's opinions are often not included and therefore some parts of the community are marginalised.

Decision-making is also an important issue during activity implementation, as Figure 11 below illustrates. After activities are decided upon and development work is underway, decisions relating to implementation will often need to be made that may have a major effect on the development outcome and therefore the village beneficiaries. Survey results revealed that in the Kim Dong ADP respondents felt that the district government / PMB (23.5%) and World Vision staff (27.9%) made such key decisions during implementation. This was quite a different result to Quan Hoa, Tra My and Hien, where respondents felt that 98.2%, 80.4% and 73.3% retrospectively of implementation decisions were made by the village and commune level stakeholders. This issue was explored further during the focus groups in each area which revealed that this appeared to be linked to the difficulty gaining community participation in more wealthy areas, where people lost interest in being involved in activities after they were

planned since they had other economic development opportunities to keep them busy. As one female focus group member in Kim Dong explained, *'many of the people go to Hanoi or other areas for work, so they can't always be involved in the (ADP) activity implementation'*.



**Figure 11: Decision-making processes during the implementation stage across the four case study ADPs**

The case study and interviews with NGOs and donors revealed several practical tips for ensuring greater effectiveness in popular decision-making. As a minimum, nearly all programs investigated included at least one village planning meeting each year, where as many village members would attend as the facilitating agency could arrange. Most agencies reported to aiming for at least one person to attend the meeting from each of the households in that particular village. Although statistically the majority of household heads in Vietnam are male, due to other commitments of these men, women, the elderly, ethnic minority people or other marginalised groups were reported to often attend these meetings in reasonable numbers, at times providing representation of the community which was close to being representative. Ensuring effective input of key marginalised groups, especially ethnic minorities, women, the elderly, disabled or economically disadvantaged groups, is often cited as being an essential element of any truly democratic process (Okoye 1998; Wong 2005).

All agencies reported to in some way monitor the level of attendance of such groups to ensure that those who attended the key community meetings fairly represented the diversity of the village. In the cases where the attendance was not equitable and a particular gender, ethnic or other marginalised group was under-represented, programs frequently reported to employ deliberate measures to ensure adequate attendance of these particular groups (Nguyen Thi Thanh Huong et al 2004). As one female INGO project member explained, *'if we have trouble getting particular societal groups to attend the mass meetings, we put attendance targets in place for each group'*. This is an important consideration, given the effect of both community structures and individual household dynamics. It is widely known that in many cultures, particularly in Vietnam, the role of the household as the basic building block of a particular village or community is crucial and within the household, like the village community, significant diversity and disparity can exist (Nguyen Tu Chi 1991).

Therefore, it is important to ensure any village meeting includes representatives from all relevant parts of the household units including men, women, the elderly and even children. Ensuring such community and household level diversity in representative processes was noted as a key aspect in ensuring equality in overall village decision-making.

The case study also clearly revealed that in mountainous areas where the community is located close together, many villagers were used to regular community mass meetings and since it is frequently difficult for them to leave the immediate area, in nearly all cases it was relatively easy to have representatives from all households attend such mass village meetings. As one village women in Tra My explained during the survey, *'I like going to the community meetings, I get to meet all the people in the village'*. In Kim Dong, however, a low-lying area closer to Hanoi with a high population density, it was a much more difficult task to ensure that one person from each household attended major village planning meetings. This was logistically difficult to achieve since many villages had up to several thousand members, so that even if all village households could attend such a meeting, this produced a difficult environment in which to facilitate an effective meeting, especially where all people could be fairly heard. Given the logistical issues associated with such a process, it does raise the question: how important is it to have representation from all households? Could a process with lower representation produce the same results if members did not represent all households, but only major groups within the village? This is in essence what naturally occurred in Kim Dong, with all groups in the village being represented by one member of that group, and few beneficiaries complaining that the system was unfair or biased, even those who did not directly benefit from the resulting activities. Therefore, although a system where all households attending mass village meetings is perhaps the most ideal situation based on direct democratic principles, if care is taken to ensure that all groups are fairly represented at such meetings, a successful representative planning process may also be able to be achieved.

Facilitation of effective community meetings, especially those with large numbers of attendees with varied agendas, was noted to frequently and not surprisingly prove quite difficult. *'It is a real art running a good community meeting with all the different interest groups in the village'* said one male VNGO staff member. Skilled facilitation was reported to be required to ensure that such meetings allowed all views to be heard and for a decision to be made that truly represented the views of the people as a whole. Most NGO and donor models were noted to utilise an outside facilitator who is trained in such techniques to undertake this task together with the Village Head and often the Village Party Secretary. Not surprisingly, tension was noted to arise between these different players who at times have quite different motives. Beneficiaries explained, however, that this method was a reasonably effective way of chairing such meetings and to reach consensus on an annual development plan. *'Having the hamlet head at the meeting means there is someone from the hamlet who can make sure our needs are met, not just those of the government'*, said one villager in Tra My during the survey. This model seems both popular and effective because it utilises the existing systems of village governance (Village Head and Village Party Secretary) but complements it with a non-government, non-political position to ensure the process was not driven by political agendas. Naturally the dynamic of the processes studied varied, however generally it appeared a fairly effective method to ensure a reasonable set of activities was obtained that responded to the main needs of the various parts of

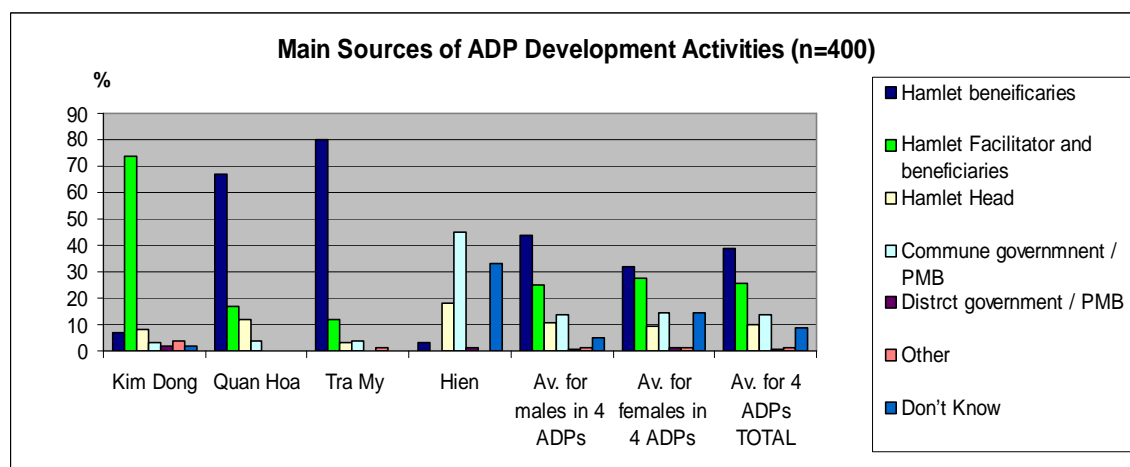
the village community. It needs to be remembered that given the political context in Vietnam, to remove the Village Head and Village Party Secretary from key decision-making processes would be very difficult and possibly mean the process could not be undertaken at all. Several NGOs explained that when they did not include the Village Head and Village Party Secretary in their processes the village had refused to participate in the overall process. *'We looked at just using non-government players in the community meetings but it never worked well. You just have to involve them (the government and village / commune leaders) in the process'*, said one INGO staff member during an interview.

The World Vision model of having local Hamlet Facilitators involved in the planning process was noted to provide some additional benefits. Hamlet Facilitators, as non-government representatives from each hamlet, have the benefit of knowing the hamlet intimately. This can, perhaps not surprisingly, prove advantageous given it enables them to understand the local dynamics, power structures and decision-making norms. However, it can likewise prove a disadvantage when the Hamlet Facilitator, as a local villager, may be unable to assert him or herself against the often dominant positions of Village Head and Village Party Secretary. Focus groups and the 400 sample survey revealed that generally the use of the Hamlet Facilitators had enabled more effective decision-making to occur, with many villagers explaining that at times this person had *'as much power'* as the Village Head or Village Party Secretary, given the activities that resulted were often great in number, often successful and therefore appreciated by the community.

The Hamlet Facilitator as a local hamlet member themselves is often able to reveal the development activities that the community really wants. This issue was explored through the 400 person survey which revealed some interesting results. Figure 12 illustrates that in Quan Hoa and Tra My ADPs, beneficiaries strongly felt that the program of activities that eventuated in their district through the ADP was strongly based on their development ideas with 67% of respondents in Quan Hoa and 80% in Tra My feeling strongly that it was the beneficiaries alone who decided the development activities. In Kim Dong, 74% of respondents felt it was a dual decision-making process between the hamlet facilitators and beneficiaries, possibly due to the different demographic and economic factors in Kim Dong resulting in less time availability from community members. Once more, Hien had the most different response with 33% of people responding to 'not knowing' the answer to the question again. In addition, 18% in Hien responded that the hamlet head made such decisions and 45% responded that the commune government / PMB made these decisions. The focus groups in Hien were used to explore this issue further given the significant difference in response to the other 3 districts. Focus group discussions indicated a reluctance of the Ka Tu ethnic minority people to make their own decisions and to frequently leave such decisions to leaders, despite obvious work by hamlet facilitators to build up their confidence in this area. In addition the focus groups revealed that many participants were just not interested in being involved in such decisions. As one Ka Tu minority villager responded *'we are asked (by the hamlet facilitators) to think about activities for the ADP however we are poor and not educated. It is better for the government leaders to decide for us'*.

It was also interesting to note there was a slight difference in responses across genders. Overall across all 4 districts, 43.8% of men compared to 31.8% of women felt

beneficiaries decided the development activities. It is interesting to note this level of difference within the same villages. This could either represent a difference in understanding of this process between genders or a different perception of who actually does make these decisions at the village level.



**Figure 12: Main sources of development activity ideas across the four case study ADPs**

Despite some difficult dynamics resulting at times between the three-way facilitation structure between the hamlet facilitator, hamlet head and beneficiaries, generally the model appeared to allow more representative decision-making at the village level. In addition, the results confirm that the majority of villagers across the four districts felt that having a local hamlet person involved was far better than having the process conducted by an outside facilitator, especially a local government official from the commune, or anywhere else for that matter. This is very much in line with Robert Chambers's stance in his series of publications which advocate for a greater voice from the community affected in all aspects of development, rather than it being driven by outside assistance (Chambers 1983). The use of Hamlet Facilitators is therefore an important step in having a local village resident facilitating the planning process for their village, rather than relying on externally driven processes and people. In addition, the Hamlet Facilitator model, by utilising local village members, provides several distinct advantages for development sustainability. The three-way facilitation structure provides an adequate way of ensuring planning is undertaken effectively within the existing political structure. Alternatively, village committees could be created to ensure a representative group undertakes this task. Experience in Vietnam and other countries, however, has often indicated that this model has a tendency to reduce the level of direct democracy and number of important village mass meetings, and leading to the establishment of new and parallel structures which are difficult to sustain. Sustainability of local organisations is an important issue that we will return to in the section on civil society in this chapter.

The other key issue often raised in the literature surrounding village-based planning is how such meetings actually decide priorities. A wealth of literature exists that discusses various tools and approaches to ensuring equitable decision-making across a variety of country contexts (Okoye 1998). In the field research, all donor and NGO programs varied in their approach to this important issue. Some undertook one main meeting per year where activities were raised, discussed and agreed upon as a whole

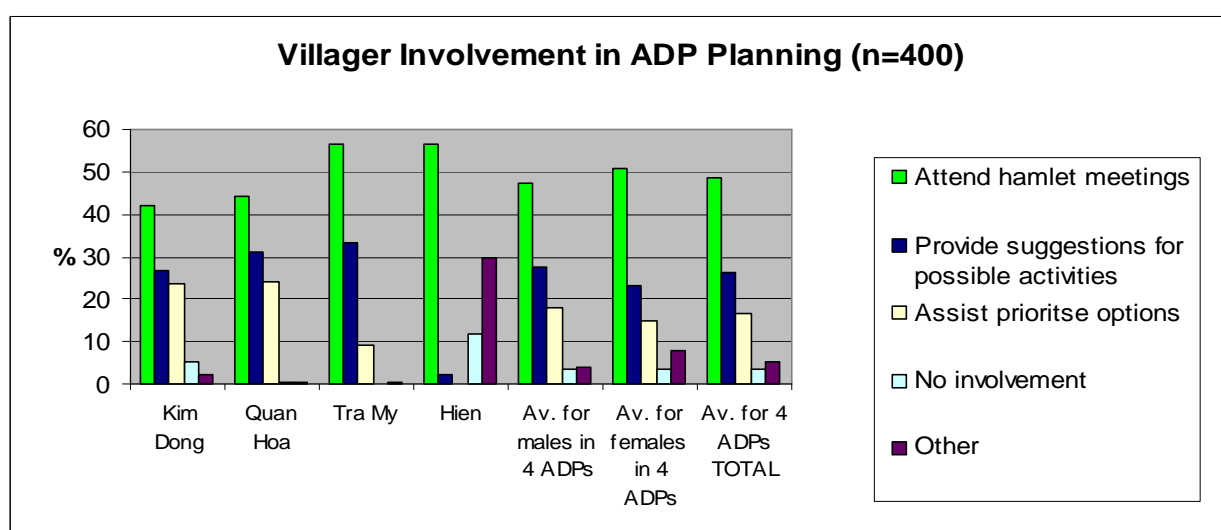
village. Other methods involved several meetings to ensure people could go away and discuss potential activities and, if needed, lobby behind the scenes to ensure issues that perhaps could not be raised in the public forum were carefully considered. Others combined mass meeting processes with focus groups and other participatory methods to ensure the plan effectively included input from all people through small groups. Ideas were then combined and agreed in a subsequent village meeting. The research revealed that all such processes had advantages and potential disadvantages. At times focus groups, particularly with marginalised groups, provided additional understanding of particular community needs that would not have been drawn out from a single mass village meeting. However, in some circumstances, a one-meeting planning process was deemed adequate in gaining an overall consensus on the vision of the village and a discrete set of yearly activities that generally all people seemed happy with.

Academics who are conscious of the reality of poverty and the significant amount of work most villagers who live in poverty complete each day, frequently argue that development activities should minimise the involvement of the poor in any particular process given the opportunity cost such processes might have on their daily lives. For example, women are often highlighted to be particularly busy due to the triple role they play in society in terms of reproduction and family, production and income generation, and community decisions (Moser 1993). If the time that is required to come up with effective decisions can be reduced, this reduces the stress and other negative impacts that being involved in such processes can have on program beneficiaries. As a result, despite the benefits that multiple planning meeting processes can have on ensuring all people are heard, the research results from the beneficiaries strongly supported undertaking the minimum processes that are necessary, even if it may mean some needs are not addressed. As one female villager said in Quan Hoa during the focus groups, *'we are very busy. We only want to come to the meetings if they are needed and something good comes from it'*.

This is in contrast with some participatory theory that clearly warns of the dangers of relying on mass meeting processes only (Cornwall and Pratt 2003). The minimum that appeared to be required in Vietnam, based on focus group findings in the four districts, is that at least one democratic village planning meeting is required yearly, where care is taken to ensure representation of all major groups and the chance for all groups to be heard during the planning process. Additional processes, such as focus groups, can be completed based on an assessment of the need for additional community opinion, but should not be based on what a donor or NGO feels they need or usually does. It is recommended that the advice of the community be followed and that all attempts be made to minimise the impact of the processes, to make the requirements as simple as possible and to minimise the time required by the community.

The 400-person survey revealed that in all four ADPs, there was strong attendance of people surveyed at the ADP planning meetings. Figure 13 illustrates that in Kim Dong 42.0%, Quan Hoa 44.1%, Tra My 56.7% and in Hien 56.4% of respondents attended the ADP planning meetings. This is remarkably high given survey participants were chosen randomly, attendance at such meetings is voluntary, and usually only one representative from each household is requested to attend. It is interesting to note that attendance at such meetings was higher in the poorer, more remote areas. Focus group discussions revealed that this may have simply been a result of less competing

activities in these areas. As one female focus group member said in Tra My. “We look forward to the village planning meetings, they are one of the most interesting things to do in the village.” It is interesting to note that in Kim Dong, Quan Hoa and Tra My, people felt their next biggest level of involvement in the ADP was in suggesting activities and prioritising them, with these activities often occurring at mass village meetings. In Hien the respondents gave different quite answers, explaining they were not as involved in the suggestion and prioritisation process. In addition, 29.7% of respondents in Hien gave the answer ‘other’ to this question. Upon further exploration during the focus groups it was revealed that for many such respondents, financial contribution was a significant factor of involvement for them, even if the amount given was small, as a result of their level of poverty. Also again in Hien, a reasonable number of respondents (11.9%) responded as ‘not knowing’, most likely due to the reasons outlined earlier.



**Figure 13: Overall villager perception of their involvement in the ADP planning process across case study four ADPs**

One of the most important ways in which democracy was seen to be included in the village-based development programs by the beneficiaries was how the activity beneficiaries were selected. The large sample survey and follow-up discussions in the focus groups, revealed that for the majority of respondents, the way the ADP chose people was one of the most positive elements of the program and was what set it apart from many of government, bilateral and multilateral programs. Beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries within the ADP program alike frequently explained that involving the whole village in a democratic and open process for beneficiary selection led to much fairer results. Many complained that the government often used set lists and criteria that did not assess people’s level of poverty accurately. Instead most such government programs used inflexible national level criteria that frequently did not reflect the local poverty conditions present in that particular village. *‘It is much better how the program (ADP) selects people together with the village. The government lists are often old and wrong’*, said one man in Quan Hoa during the survey. The active involvement of the village in selecting beneficiaries, especially the local Hamlet Facilitator, meant the people most affected could use their detailed local knowledge to come up with a truly fair selection criteria and list of beneficiaries that all could agree with. It was reported that such a system significantly reduced the number of complaints and conflict later in the development process. This process was frequently

completed as part of a mass village meeting, to ensure the list of beneficiaries was fair and presented transparently.

The other democratic value that was revealed through the case studies and donor NGO interviews was the importance of blending both direct democratic processes with representative democracy. The mass meeting discussed above largely refers to direct democracy, where representatives from all affected households (or close to it) directly agree upon major village issues and an annual village development plan through a popular vote. This thesis has highlighted that it is easier to do this effectively in a smaller community such as Tra My, Hien or Quan Hoa compared to a high-density area such as Kim Dong. In higher density and more affluent areas, it often becomes difficult to obtain high percentage attendance at meetings, thereby increasing the risk that the plan agreed upon will not meet all of the communities' needs. When looking at international experience, the trend is clear that it is often easier to achieve direct democracy in small, close and even less-developed communities than it is in urban, individualistic and more developed ones (Hines 2004).

The aim of village-based planning and development is that villages develop or change not only economically, but also socially and even politically. It is therefore not surprising that as progress occurs in communities, the level or type of democracy may not always stay the same. Many have noted that in much of the world there is a shift towards representative systems and away from direct systems (Whitehead 2002). This seems to reflect the increasing ability of the state and society to operate accountable, transparent and representative functions that reduce the need for the people to be involved intimately in all decisions like in direct democratic models. In many ways, it could be claimed that this is a move away from the 'real' or 'pure' forms of democracy that can be seen in direct democratic models; however, the situation in Kim Dong illustrates that such a direction is perhaps inevitable as conditions change and only a small percentage of representative households can effectively stay involved in direct democratic processes.

It is interesting to note that in many western and 'democratic' countries, direct democracy is now rarely used (Freedom House 2003). Most countries utilise representatives, people who are elected as candidates to represent the views of the members of their constituency (Gaventa 2002). The GRDD is particularly interesting in this regard, as on one level it clearly promotes direct democracy through community meetings and high levels of community involvement in the whole development process, yet on the other hand it clearly supports representative democracy through the promotion of open and transparent voting systems for Village Heads, Commune People's Committees, Commune People's Councils and Village Maintenance and Management Boards (Socialist Republic of Vietnam 2003).

In all cases these systems encourage all people to vote for these representatives in a 'democratic way'. This promotion of representative democracy in Vietnam is important, as the Kim Dong case study illustrates, as it cannot be expected that all people will want to, or necessarily should, be involved in direct democratic processes only, especially as a country develops and in high density areas where this may be unfeasible. Blending open processes for voting based on majority systems with direct democracy aids the implementation of effective village-based planning and development. For example, representative voting is an essential element in deciding the appointment of Hamlet Facilitators for the World Vision ADPs. This process allows



delegated responsibility to be given to these people so that instead of large meetings needing to be called regularly, representative responsibility can be given to these individuals. This provides the village with the opportunity to be involved in the appointment of delegated individuals, but then allows them to be free to go about their daily duties, as these delegated people complete what is expected of them. Certainly this system always has potential faults, as whenever there is a move away from direct democracy to delegated democracy there is invariably some reduction in the effectiveness of decisions and greater chance of 'elite capture' where delegated representatives can manipulate their position for self-interest, another reason why direct democracy is often idealised even though, as this research has demonstrated, it is generally unworkable in practical terms across a modern nation state which does not lend itself to such intensive processes (Beetham 1994).

However, that said, we have also clearly seen that direct democracy does diminish over time, especially as population, income and arguably development increases. We have also noted that Vietnam has come from a situation that was not conducive to direct democracy, but was not strongly representative either. Instead, Vietnam has experienced a centralised system with little opportunity for democracy of either form to thrive. The inclusion of direct democratic processes through the GRDD is therefore a very important step in instilling the true meaning of democracy in all levels of the government and community. It then may be anticipated that as development continues and governance in Vietnam develops, there will be a gradual move towards more representative forms of democracy, as has been witnessed in other country contexts. Therefore, although ultimately the form of direct democracy envisaged in the GRDD may only be temporary, it is arguably a more pure form of democracy and, combined with associated representative democracy reforms, is a very important step in a gradual move towards more participatory governance systems.

The use of both direct and representative or delegated democracy are therefore essential elements in ensuring annual and possibly longer-term planning processes enable a representative and, where possible, a majority of the local households to be meaningfully involved in discussions and decisions on the main development activities. Popular democratic processes that encourage representatives from all households to be involved in decision-making should be encouraged in village-based approaches, but need to be undertaken flexibly to reflect the different socio-economic conditions that exist in the villages, as well as to align with existing power structures that are represented particularly through the Village Head and Village Party Secretary. A mix of both forms of democracy is important as Vietnam transitions from a centralised system.

### **5.3 The Importance of Involvement by 'Non- State' Community Organisations**

The definition of civil society has long been a point of contention in Vietnam. Several academics and subsequent studies have been undertaken to attempt to develop a working definition of the concept for the Vietnamese context. The most standard definition of civil society generally is that it is the area of 'society as opposed to state or, more precisely, as an intermediate sphere of social organisation or association between the basic units of society – families and firms and the state' (White 1994, p4). This definition often defaults to a notion of 'non-government entities' (Eberly 2000, p3). This proves problematic in Vietnam where only in mid-2006 was a government decree on non-government associations finally issued by the 12<sup>th</sup> Congress, which openly

permitted the establishment of non-government entities. Even this decree contains numerous restrictions, as have earlier laws that have related to the establishment and operation of non-government entities in Vietnam. It is perhaps not surprising that, based on western definitions, Vietnam does not have a vibrant set of civil society actors as can be witnessed in many other countries, especially those that are non-socialist in their political orientation. As an example, the Philippines is a country where there are many non-government civil society groups in place which play a key role in implementing development assistance. Such groups reduce the need for implementing NGOs and donors, who instead can partner with local civil society groups, NGOs or community-based organisations (CBOs) who, as a result, undertake the bulk of project implementation (Sidel 1996). If the operation of these organisations can be sustained it can provide ongoing long-term support to project activities, which many such countries and academics claim is important for developmental sustainability (Hughes and Atampugre 2005). The situation in Vietnam is in direct contrast to such circumstances, with a much more restricted environment for standard civil society to exist and to act.

Despite this overall context, there are, however, Vietnamese NGOs (VNGOs) working in Vietnam. The Wisherman (2002) study estimated these to be around 90 in 2003, so there are likely to be many more now, especially given the new associations decree that has been released in 2006. Many of these VNGOs are registered under the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment and have largely research oriented agendas under arguably a high level of government control. Other VNGOs are registered under individual provincial People's Committees, particularly in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi and due to their provincial registration have limited scope of operations geographically. Interviews with VNGOs confirmed that nearly all VNGOs have limited technical capacity, working in one or only a handful of technical development sectors. VNGO representatives confirmed that few, if any, VNGOs have the breadth of technical skills and experience to work across rural development in an holistic manner, nor over a diverse set of geographical areas. Although many agencies did not want to openly discuss the issue, many explained that VNGOs are still a new societal group in Vietnam and as a result the understanding of them by government and their scope of operation is still growing, but from a very low base.

At the time of writing of this thesis, VNGOs are still a very important part of civil society in Vietnam because of the unique position they play in Vietnamese society and because of their ability to better understand the development needs of Vietnam and provide sustainable assistance. However, that said, it is also noted by the researcher that VNGOs are quite a long way off having the ability to be key facilitators of village-wide planning and development processes like similar groups do in other country contexts. As one VNGO staff commented during an interview *'there are really no Vietnamese NGOs who can run a comprehensive village-based development program. We just don't have the staff, resources and experience yet. Hopefully in time that will change.'* Nonetheless, given the potential role of these groups in Vietnamese development in the future, VNGOs need to be encouraged to grow, build capacity and take on additional development roles, particularly those undertaken by INGOs who frequently have more resources, skills and capacity. Although VNGOs do not form an important part of village planned and implemented development approaches in Vietnam at the present time, VNGOs could be expected to be major facilitators of these approaches in the future as the political environment evolves and the number

and quality of such groups increases with time. This issue and more detailed recommendations on how to best enable such a development is further explored in *Chapter Seven*.

The research undertaken as part of this thesis does not attempt to come up with a rigid definition of civil society, nor does it attempt to establish a definition based on a particular set or group of organisations or individuals that could be considered civil society. More importantly, using a critical development studies conceptual framework, it seeks to define the characteristics or elements relating to civil society that are relevant to village-based development approaches within the Vietnamese context. Despite the numerous definitions of civil society that exist internationally and, to a lesser extent, in Vietnam, the most important civil society value that emerged from the research for the Vietnamese context is that of impartiality from government and elite groups and the ability for civil society to reflect the needs of the community, especially those needs that may differ from those of government.

Given the government of Vietnam is currently held by the international community, including multilateral and bilateral donors, NGOs and other organisations, to have a generally clear and well thought through agenda for development and poverty reduction, it could be assumed that the intervention of non-government actors in Vietnam is not important. It is a widely held belief, however, that civil society acts as a community conscience for government (Hall 1995). The process that led to the creation of the GRDD clearly indicates that in Vietnam it is important for alternative voices other than the government to exist and be vocal and active, especially in questioning the dominant direction the state may be taking. If this voice did not exist in Vietnam, the elements of representative and direct democracy outlined in the GRDD would probably not exist today nor would people have the ability to be practically involved in all aspects of the development cycle.

It can be strongly argued that for any country, but especially for Vietnam, there is therefore a need for non-government groups to be able to be formed and to be active. A centralised state cannot expect to always be able to represent or fully understand the wishes of society, even if, like in Vietnam, the state system was designed with the clear intention of truly representing the needs of the masses. Few, if any, states can honestly claim to represent the general public yet not permit non-government voices to be heard. It is widely understood that there is an important link between an active non-government civil society and ensuring freedom of speech (Hammersley 1995). The development of the law on associations in Vietnam illustrates that the government has at least partly recognised this issue and is moving towards policy that supports this notion. Although to western minds this may seem an obvious area to develop, in a communist government structure that is based on the belief that the socialist government is the most appropriate mechanism to effectively represent the best interests of the people and act on their behalf, this development should not be underestimated (Le Bach Duong 2002). History has shown in Vietnam and the current direction of the government illustrates that there is a need to create space for non-government actors to be active if a country is to develop effectively.

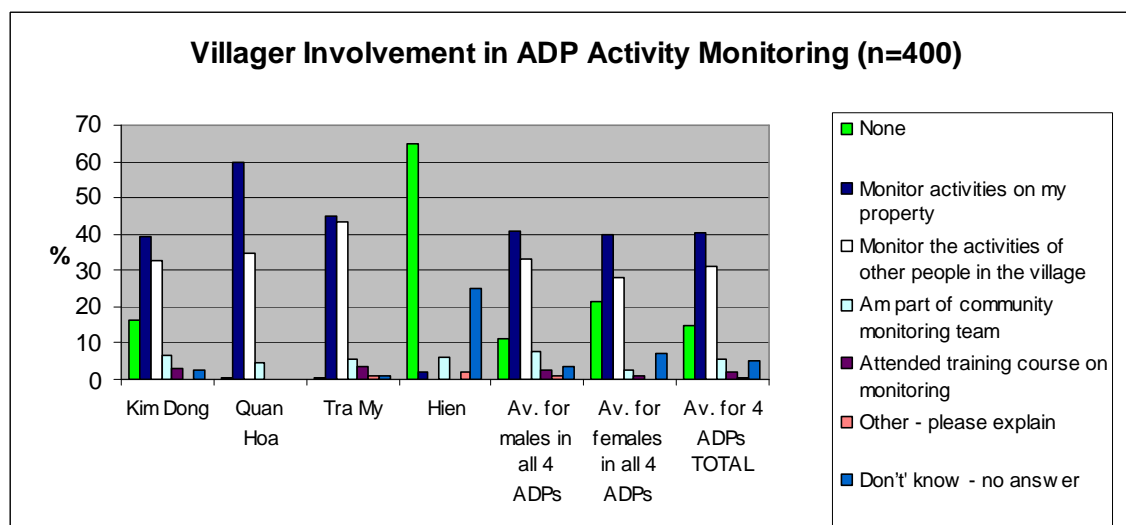
A recurring theme in all aspects of the research is that change in attitude, particularly within government policy, takes considerable time. The GRDD was released in 1998 and its implementation, perhaps not surprisingly, has varied considerably across Vietnam, especially in areas where village-based planning and development programs

have not been in place. Civil society, by definition of being non-governmental, has the ability to promote concepts or ideas that are alternate, new or challenge the dominant view of government (Elshtain 2000). In many cases internationally this has been a major role of such groups, with many focussing on attitude change as their primary purpose (Sidel 1996). The active involvement of non-government actors of civil society in village-based planning and development in Vietnam provides an important opportunity to influence both the community and the government and to effectively support important attitude change that is needed to maintain the key elements within democracy, decentralisation, and participation. Despite the traps of trying rigidly to define who makes up civil society in Vietnam and therefore who can best influence this process of change, it is important to explore the main groups that played an important civil society role in the case studies and other programs, to assess how relevant these groups are at supporting the attitude change required to enable effective village-based development outcomes to occur.

Village Supervision Boards (VSBs) and Village Maintenance Boards (VMBs) are specifically encouraged under the grassroots democracy decree (Socialist Republic of Vietnam 2003). By including these groups in this decree, it is one of the rare times that the government has actively encouraged non-government entities to be formed. In practice, however, beneficiaries explained that these groups very often included the Village Head, a person who is technically non-government given they are voted in as a representative for the village through a majority election, as a key member. However, very often this person is closely aligned with the communist party, with a Village Head position frequently being a stepping-stone to official government positions, usually at the commune level. Therefore, the Village Heads' dominance on such boards can at times make these groups political and have a tendency to follow government directives rather than being a conduit for non-government voice in development. As one INGO staff commented during an interview, *'you have to be very careful with the village head being on the maintenance board. It can so easily make it just an extension of government rather than a potentially civil society group.'* However, that said, both the VSBs and VMBs do still provide a chance for a type of civil society organisation to be created and to act and, if the Village Head is not overly dominant on these boards, they do have the ability to enable a civil society voice to be active in the village.

The 400 person survey revealed that a large proportion of respondents were involved in some form of activity monitoring in Kim Dong, Quan Hoa and Tra My as Figure 14 below illustrates. Respondents for this question could give multiple responses to indicate their involvement in different types of monitoring. In these three districts, 39.3%, 59.9%, and 44.9% of respondents respectively, reported to be involved in monitoring activities on their property, with 32.7%, 34.7% and 43.4% respectively being involved with monitoring with another villager. Interestingly across all four districts, a very similar number of people reported to being part of a formal village monitoring or supervision board (between 4.8% and 6.5%). Hien had the highest response of 'no involvement' in monitoring with 65% responding to no involvement and 25% to 'not knowing'. On closer investigation of this issue through the Hien focus groups, it appeared that actually many villagers were involved in monitoring development activities on their property or within their village however with a strong reliance on outside assistance. One woman in the focus group in Hien explained 'We

have to make sure the activities on our property work or it will make us poorer. We need the government to check what we are doing and help us make sure things work'.



**Figure 14: Villager involvement in the monitoring stage across the four case study ADPs.**

It is interesting to note that in Quan Hoa and Tra My it was a very small percentage of villagers who reported to not being involved in monitoring at all, 0.6% and 0.5% respectively. In Kim Dong it was slightly higher at 16%, which focus group findings attributed to the high population in the district and competing interests from nearby economic development opportunities. It was also interesting to note that generally more men reported to being involved in monitoring across all 4 districts with 21.44% of women and 11.4% of men overall, reporting to not being involved in activity monitoring at all. This is perhaps not surprising given the triple role women play in Vietnamese society. This is of course an important consideration for village-based planning and development programs to take into account.

The case study investigations revealed that VSBs were frequently formed in villages, particularly in Hien and Tra My districts, to look after all village projects that were in operation within the particular villages. The boards in these cases included the Village Head, Hamlet Facilitator and one or two elders from the village. Focus group discussions generally revealed that these groups made good decisions that represented the wishes of the people in most cases. Again, investigation revealed that care had to be taken to manage the involvement of the village head if they were a member of such groups. Given such organisations were neither encouraged nor permitted in the past, they do appear to provide a unique opportunity to form a community based organisation (CBO) and provide a space for civil society to operate at the village level. As one male villager in Hien explained during the survey, *'the village supervision board works well. They manage all the projects for the village on behalf of the village'*.

The VMBs that had been created in the case study areas were reported to be formed to oversee the ongoing management and maintenance of primarily large-scale infrastructure, such as branch schools, bridges, roads etc. Specific infrastructure in Vietnam is usually the responsibility of the associated department, for example the village health centre is usually under the care of the Ministry of Health (MOH), main

schools under the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET), and large irrigation schemes under the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD). Unfortunately, line ministries often have limited financial and human resources to effectively maintain village and even commune infrastructure and therefore their focus for maintenance is very often at national, province, district and to a lesser extent commune level. As a result, VMBs can play a pivotal role in monitoring the maintenance issues in the village, obtaining and managing funds for essential works and coordinating works that are required. Groups of three to eight villagers usually formed a VMB in the case study areas and, unlike the VSBs, in many cases were reported not to involve the Village Head, but at least in the case of World Vision ADPs, did include the Hamlet Facilitator. These groups were reported by villagers generally to work effectively, fairly and transparently and provide another opportunity sanctioned by government to utilise non-government action. *'The village management board is good. It makes sure things are maintained given the government does not do this in the village'*, said one male villager during the survey in Tra My.

Some villages have expanded the charter of these supervision and/or maintenance boards to act as quasi village committees with additional responsibilities. Under the GRDD, the government clearly encourages VSBs and VMBs to be formed, for a Village Head to be elected and for democratic decision-making. It does not, however, actively encourage the formation and use of overall village committees, a model which is common in other countries and cultures (Truelove 1998). Some minority cultures in Vietnam have a long-standing system of electing a village committee or board, usually comprising the key elders of the village. These groups meet regularly and have various degrees of delegated responsibility for decision-making on behalf of the village community. Focus groups revealed that in the four case study districts, these groups often rely heavily on the opinions of a select group of elders, usually the key families or kinship groups, who may often not represent the full level of diversity within the village. As a result, decisions that these groups make and their general direction may not always reflect the best wishes of the whole community, a problem common in any form of representative democracy. In addition, such village committees rarely contain women, disabled, lower class members, other marginalised groups or members of all parts of a village society. In other international contexts, the promotion of village committees is commonplace, with existing village committees being modified with outside assistance to include fairer representation of relevant gender, ethnicity, age, class and other important groups. Such membership criteria combined with careful capacity building can assist in transforming such groups into effective instruments of delegated responsibility (Development Association for Self-reliance 2000).

The example of such expanded supervision and/or maintenance committees acting as defacto overall village committees can be seen to have both positive and negative effects (Swiss Red Cross 2003). If it contains broad membership and the group has the required skills, it does appear that such a model can ensure effective management of village affairs, freeing up the involvement of villagers in time-consuming mass village meeting processes. It is also important to note, however, that the use of such a group could potentially undermine the key principles and elements of direct democracy that are so important in Vietnam at this stage of its development and also clearly promoted under the GRDD and through the mass village meetings it prescribes. It is important to note that although village committees have many advantages, they do technically fall outside what is expected of a village under the

GRDD. As well as potentially undermining the important process of promoting direct democratic processes, international experience also reveals that such groups are very difficult to sustain if they fall outside existing structures (Blair 1994).

An alternative to the village committee model is that of the Hamlet Facilitator network present in the four World Vision ADPs. In this model, it is these non-governmental development workers who form the basis of both the village planning and implementation processes. Unlike the village committee model, the Hamlet Facilitators do not take on delegated decision-making responsibilities, but instead serve as facilitators only, tasked with working with local officials and the community (including the Village Head and Village Party Secretary) to facilitate the discussion, development and consensus on the village plan and then the facilitation of the activities and related monitoring through VSBs and VMBs and any other required village structures. This model does have several distinct advantages, but also several disadvantages over the village committee models. One particular advantage is that often the Hamlet Facilitator model is more time effective, since the main facilitation input is focussed on one person, therefore reducing the load on a variety of village members.

Research investigations also revealed that this situation works well as long as the community could pay the Hamlet Facilitator for his or her time and that the payment to this person could be sustained. Often such payment to the Hamlet Facilitator by the village was not in cash but in the form of rice or bamboo, items that can be easily provided by the community but are likewise easily converted into cash or other items. Given many Hamlet Facilitators spend up to fifteen days per month on the ADP program, they have a significant opportunity cost that does need to be compensated if the model is to be sustained. The model was seen to often provide the required level of village facilitation input but without putting a substantial burden on villagers who are often busy with limited spare time. Also as mentioned, the non-government and non-political nature of the Hamlet Facilitator's appointment means that these individuals, if correctly chosen, can remain more impartial than committees that frequently get influenced by political agendas and common group think mentalities (Jayakaran 2003).

The success of this model is perhaps most evident in several World Vision ADPs in Vietnam that have closed down or 'phased out' of particular villages, yet the Hamlet Facilitator network continues to be operated and funded in the villages by the community itself (Ly Ha Hoa 2005). A disadvantage of the model already mentioned in this thesis are that the three-way facilitation process can at times be manipulated by the village head and village chief therefore compromising the village-based decision-making processes. However the research generally revealed that if hamlet facilitators were carefully trained, this could be largely avoided. In addition it was noted that many village committee models likewise suffered from the same issues of local leader control.

A wide variety of other informal groups that also could fall into a loose definition of civil society, exist or are frequently formed at the village level. Many development programs encourage farmers to form groups, such as the development society groups (DSG) as seen in the World Vision ADPs, water user groups, small groups of women involved in credit activities or village banks, disaster mitigation teams and many others from an extensive list of such informal village groups. What is important to note is that many village-based planning and development programs rely heavily on such informal

groups to undertake the bulk of planning, implementation, monitoring and ongoing activity management responsibility that is required. Given the common financial and labour constraints experienced on many development programs, use of such community groups often referred to as community based organisations (CBOs) in the Vietnam context, is not only a deliberate program strategy of many NGOs and donors in the interests of civil society promotion but also an essential and practical requirement if they are simply going to be able to complete project activities and programs with the resources they have. As a result, informal groups are very often a lot more than simply a group of villages coming together to get the job done as part of the project. They form both an essential element of donor and NGO program management, as well as arguably the largest element of civil society currently involved in development activities in Vietnam. As one INGO staff commented during interview *'water user groups and other such project groups are perhaps the biggest form of civil society that exists in Vietnam'*.

These informal CBOs are also very often the main area where local community development capacity is built, since it is these groups who learn through the experience of being actively involved in development activities what concepts like grassroots democracy and participation are all about. Yet CBOs are paradoxically the least recognised under the government's legal system. In very few cases are any of these wide varieties of local village level groups officially acknowledged, contributing to their label as 'informal'. The only exception would perhaps be the examples of informal cooperatives<sup>18</sup>, water user groups and credit groups who, under new decrees, are gaining more recognition as 'official' rather than 'informal' groupings (Bach Tan Sinh 2001). As the effects of the GRDD, village-based planning and development models and development more generally increases in Vietnam, it could be expected that such groups may continue not only to be essential to development, but also to gain more and more formal recognition.

Figure 15 below illustrates that of the 400 people surveyed, 3.1% in Kim Dong, 12.6% in Quan Hoa, 0.7% in Tra My and 2.8% in Hien are part of an ongoing activity user or management group. For this question, respondents were able to give multiple responses to how they were involved in ongoing activity management. Focus group discussions in Quan Hoa revealed that the main reason for the higher membership of such groups in that district was largely because of the significant number of people who were part of microfinance organisations, water user groups and agricultural support groups particularly for Sloping Agricultural Land Technology (SALT) and VAC. Again Hien at 13.4% and Kim Dong at 25.5% had the highest rates of people not being part of any such ongoing activity management groups. Focus groups in each of the two districts confirmed that in Kim Dong this was largely due to the fact that not all people were involved in ADP activities due to the large population size and competing economic activities and in Hien because of the dominant culture of relying on external assistance. Hien again had a high rate of respondents 'not knowing' at 16.0%.

In Kim Dong and Tra My a large number of people had at least participated in the activities conducted by such management groups, particular training sessions, with 21.4% in Kim Dong and 21.8% in Kim Dong confirming such attendance at training. In all 4 areas, respondents reported to funding maintenance activities even if not being

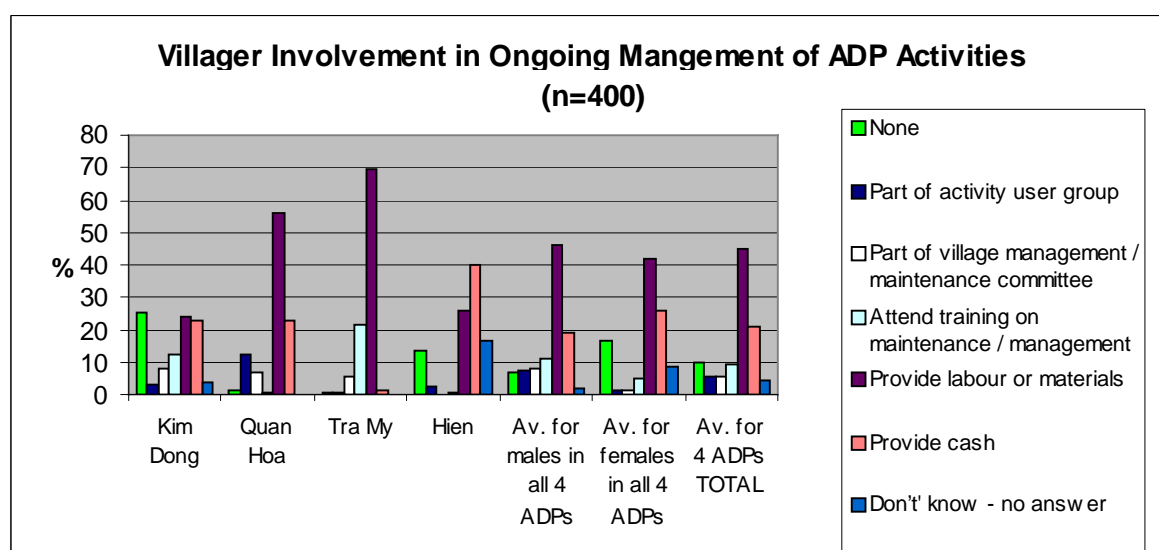
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<sup>18</sup>Modern cooperatives differ from the collective farms actively promoted by the government prior to the 1960s that were also referred to as cooperatives.



personally involved in the group's management activities. 24.2%, 56%, 69.7% and 25.9% of participants in Kim Dong, Quan Hoa, Tra My and Hien respectively reported to contributing labour to the activities of such groups and 23%, 22.8%, 1.5% and 40.2% of participants in the four areas retrospectively, confirmed to contributing cash to ongoing management activities. One interesting observation within these findings is that in Tra My and Quan Hoa, more villagers reported to contributing labour versus cash. It was generally noted that for the poorer areas there was a preference to provide labour as a contribution rather than cash, so scarce cash income could be preserved. Again, Hien was an anomaly, with the survey results indicating that 25.9% of respondents provided labour contributions to ongoing management activities and a high 40.2% cash. The focus groups in Hien revealed that this was probably because Hien villagers saw their cash contributions as being large and significant, even though in real terms their contributions only covered a very small proportion of activity costs.

The focus groups in Hien also explained that in government programs they were nearly never asked for such financial contributions, instead the government paid for all ongoing costs. As one villager elder in Hien explained during the survey, *'the government has always paid for such maintenance and not asked anything from us. We are poor and do not have money for these things'*. A woman in the same focus group in Hien explained later, *'many of the water supply systems and buildings are not fixed by the government, so they often stay broken and cannot be used'*. This illustrates the important importance of the community taking ownership of such issues.



**Figure 15: Villager involvement in ongoing management activities in the four case study ADPs.**

It is perhaps also important to note at this stage, that in the past the village was involved in a much higher level of local organisation and control under government systems, particularly through the system of cooperatives. Following the end of the American war, these government controlled agricultural groups were aggressively promoted as a key element to a successful socialist economy. Since the introduction of the *doi moi* reform process, the focus on such government controlled units and therefore the overall number of such groups in existence, has reduced as the country has moved towards greater private ownership (Kerkvliet 1995). However, with the

recent promotion of grassroots democracy and village-based planning and development, cooperatives, now being operated through private formal and informal management structures, are beginning to prove effective and therefore are beginning to increase in popularity. Although falling largely in the 'business sector', which is usually not included as part of civil society, such cooperatives do frequently form a strong, organised and frequently united non-government entity at the local level and have the ability to influence local government decision-making and fulfil some of the expectations of civil society. Despite such benefits, with a gradual and continual move towards greater individualism in Vietnam, many farmers are becoming less inclined to trust such group structures controlling their interests individually. As a result, it is perhaps unlikely that such groups will grow dramatically in the future.

The mass organisations are perhaps the major type of group present at the village level that is frequently argued to be included as part of civil society in Vietnam. These groups, who are part of the Fatherland Front and Communist Party, can be defined at a minimum as being 'quasi-government' by nature. This group of mass organisations includes the Farmer's Union (FU), Women's Union (WU), Youth Union (YU) and the Vietnamese Red Cross, as well as other mass organisations for war veterans and other issues, which are less related to this research. This thesis has highlighted that these groups, although technically part of the Communist Party, become increasingly autonomous closer to the grassroots level (Le Bach Duong 2002). For instance, the Women's Union is highly centralised on a national level, however at district level in more remote districts and certainly at commune and village level, is largely outside any direct centralised government control. This is perhaps not surprising in a country as large as Vietnam with finite government capacity and resources. As a result, many NGOs frequently partner with the Women's Union because, at times, it represents the closest thing to effective civil society at the district, commune and village level due to its expansive network that reaches down to every village in Vietnam (Nguyen Thanh Tung 2003). This makes such an organisation an important group not to be dismissed in civil society terms.

The membership of the Women's Union and Farmers' Union in particular is impressive. Technically every farmer is part of their local Farmers' Union and similarly every woman is part of their local Women's Union. In practice, as the case studies revealed, many local people are not interested in considerable involvement, particularly in the Farmers' Union, which many reported as becoming weaker at the grassroots level as more farmers become interested in business organisations or individual representation to meet their needs. The Women's Union on the other hand, appears to have maintained much of its relevance at national and local levels. In the Quan Hoa ADP the WU is the main partner for the ADP, undertaking a large proportion of the overall program facilitation including planning, implementation, monitoring and management, in much the same way a CBO would perhaps undertake this role in other country contexts. Interviews with beneficiaries, WU members and other stakeholders revealed that the WU politics appear to have few negative effects on the overall program in Quan Hoa. The research indicated generally that the involvement of the WU made communication and participation, particularly of women, more efficient. In many ways the WU was seen to act in nearly an identical manner to that of non-government agencies in other country contexts. One ADP staff in Quan Hoa explained, *'if we did not have the Women's Union involved in the program, it*

*would be very difficult, if not impossible, to run the program as effectively, given their network in the villages’.*

The use of mass organisations is therefore an important decision for any village-based planning and development program to consider, when looking at civil society involvement broadly. As the Quan Hoa example outlines, groups like the WU can be effectively used as non-government CBO partners if the group is relatively independent from government, has enough capacity and has the basis of a network at the village level. If the organisation does not have these conditions, as was reported of the Farmers’ Union in all four case study areas, the partnership may not provide any distinct benefits. Despite the risks of political agendas permeating through such program partnerships, it is important for partnership opportunities with such groups to be explored. Mass organisations, due to their long-term presence at all administrative levels in Vietnam, at least under current government policy, provide an important opportunity to support development sustainability. Also, given the lack of strong alternatives in Vietnam, they often represent one of the strongest ‘civil society’ partners at local level as long as they operate relatively independently.

The last group that is not often considered civil society in Vietnam under traditional definitions is the geographical sub-unit of the village. In urban areas these are often referred to as ‘blocks’ and ‘groups’. In rural areas they are referred to as ‘groups’ and are generally strongly linked to family and kinships groupings, unlike urban areas where such groups typically represent a cross-section of society. Traditionally under the socialist system, such groups have been required to perform particular functions for the state, including facilitating local organisation, meetings, discussion and decision-making. Some such groups have ended up growing in capacity and scope from these requirements and formed a pseudo ‘sub-village’ management committee structure. Like the village, such groups are not under direct governmental control, yet may, depending on who forms part of the particular group, be more or less controlled by government agenda. If, for instance, the Village Head in a rural village or a retired government official in an urban area is part of such a group, such a group may experience more alignment with the government’s agenda. However, often at times this does not occur and such groups, particularly in rural areas where there are fewer government officials, have little such control from government sources. On such occasions, these groups can form an important place for non-government collective thought to be expressed and for action to take place. Therefore, despite the potential limitations such groups may frequently experience, there is the potential for them to fulfil some civil society functions.

The context of Vietnam therefore makes it very difficult to define civil society based on western notions. Even the use of the non-government category is problematic where mass organisations, groups which are ultimately controlled by government, can at times operate independently from state control or, on the other hand, be highly controlled. What is clear is that such non-government groups, whether they be mass organisations, sub-village groups, informal village groups such as water user groups, government promoted groups like Village Supervision Boards and Village Maintenance Boards, or private cooperatives provide important opportunities for non-government voices to be heard and for the community to be both organised and heard.

The history of Vietnam has clearly shown that individual and community action can make a difference to development in Vietnam. What is more, given the development needs that still exist in Vietnam, such community organisation is essential to further continue the current level of development and to reduce poverty more effectively. Most development programs in Vietnam utilise a raft of community groups who come together during the development program to help identify needs, democratically develop plans, facilitate activity with community input and assist the community to be involved in the monitoring and ultimately the management of all completed development activities. This input is both advantageous as it promotes a greater civil society voice, and necessary given the finite nature of development resources. Appropriate use of non-government entities is another important value in effective village-based development to utilise important civil society involvement, even if such groups do not operate in the same manner as in other contexts.

#### **5.4 Decentralisation and Required Capacity Building**

Decentralisation is frequently linked to the concepts of participation, empowerment, grassroots democracy and democracy more generally (Gueye 2005). Decentralisation is defined as the process of moving responsibilities for policy or activities from the state at a national or central level to a level that is closer to the people or grassroots level. This may mean moving specific functions of government that may usually be completed at one level, to a level which is closer to the people. In the case of Vietnam, practically this often means giving more responsibility to the commune and village level. Decentralisation can include decentralisation of different types of responsibility, frequently grouped in to the terms financial (or fiscal or budget), administrative and political decentralisation (Goldman and Abbot 2004).

Significant theory surrounds the way various states have gone about processes of decentralisation, as well as what has motivated them to undertake this type of state response. Given many, if not all, states are built on a strong economic platform, usually economic benefits are a key driver to pursue processes of financial, administrative, and political decentralisation. Hobsbawn (1996) argues that on many occasions the state cannot deliver all services and undertake all duties effectively at a national or centralised level, especially as it develops. Therefore, it becomes cost effective to delegate responsibility to various levels of government, non-government groups or private enterprise. This leaves the state in a position where it can concentrate on its core functions, including the rule of law, policy development and defence, rather than on direct implementation and control (Waylen 1998). Often a boat analogy is used to describe this process where in a centralised state system, the boat (or national development) is both steered (controlled) and rowed (implemented) by the government as the government undertakes policy development and service delivery. In a more decentralised state scenario, the government concentrates more on the steering or policy function and less on the rowing or implementation, a situation which is often achieved by decentralising responsibility to lower government levels, non-government or embracing processes of privatisation (Von Braun 2002).

The history of Vietnam has been dominated by government controls to centrally manage all development planning and implementation, with the GRDD marking one significant point of departure from this centralised approach. History has shown, particularly in socialist Eastern Europe and also modern day China, that centralised planned and implemented economies do struggle to be efficient, with many reaching a

point where they need to heavily decentralise responsibility or rely on a greater level of local government autonomy and privatisation (Tong 1997). The introduction of the *doi moi* market reform process was the first action the Government of Vietnam took to effectively invite more players from outside government, in this case private enterprise, to undertake some of the government's functions. Other government reforms that have promoted financial, administrative and political decentralisation have likewise invited more involvement by local government and other stakeholders. The GRDD was such a key milestone because it signalled that the government realised that it needed to promote greater involvement of a variety of layers of society to ensure continued development, especially at the village and commune levels.

As a result, a raft of decrees, laws and government decisions have been released that promote decentralisation in various forms. Scott Fritzen (2002), describes in detail many of the key steps the government has undertaken to encourage financial, administrative and political decentralisation. In particular many laws have been released that give the provinces far greater autonomy, with key socio-economic planning and development now largely managed on a provincial basis, rather than a national level. This has resulted in over 40% of the national budget being financially decentralised to provincial level, a situation which makes Vietnam one of the best examples of budget decentralisation (White and Smoke 2005). This level of financial decentralisation has naturally needed to be accompanied with administrative decentralisation to ensure associated responsibilities are also undertaken at province level to mirror the budget decentralisation reforms. Given the significance of this process of decentralisation from the national to province levels, this process cannot be easily handled by the province alone without either significant up-scaling provincial level services or the undertaking of corresponding processes of decentralisation to the district and commune level.

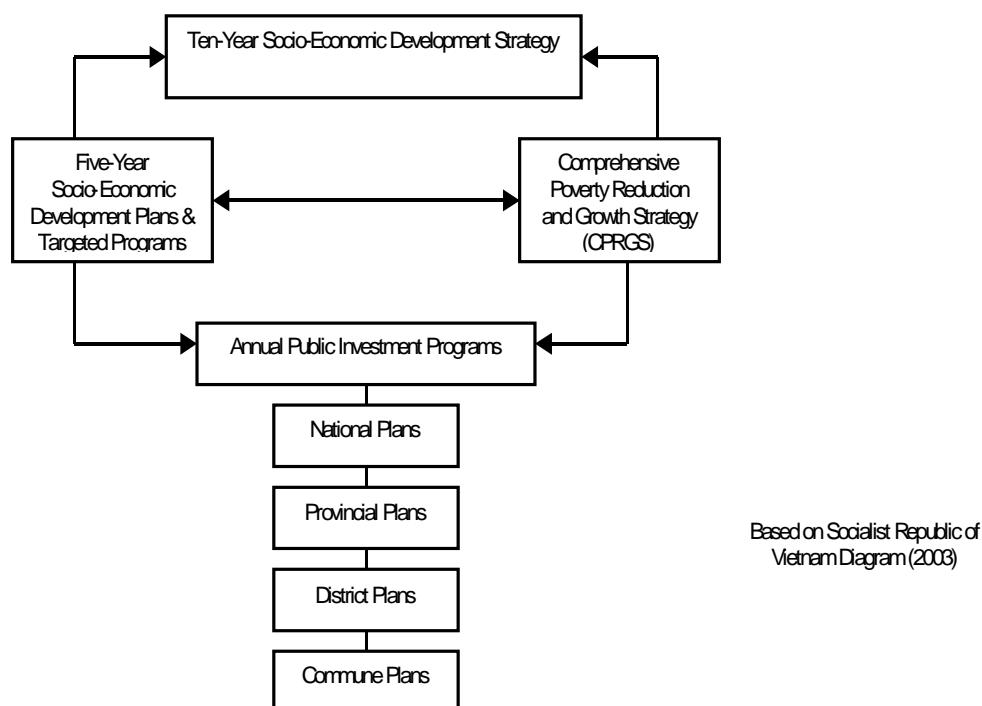
It is perhaps not surprising that the province has in turn opted to increasingly rely more on the district level. As a result, it is the district that now takes the main responsibility for socio-economic planning annually. As one district PMB explained in the Tra My PMB interview, *'the district planning process is very important, we coordinate the plans of all the communes in the district and ensure they match with the province'*. Therefore, although there is decentralisation to province level, it is the district that arguably undertakes much of the 'leg work' during this process, with the province consolidating and approving the overall plans and oversight. It is also perhaps not surprising that all district officials interviewed complained about the large workload and level of responsibility they now face as a result of the decentralisation process that has occurred in Vietnam. *'We are too busy to work on the ADP as we would like because of all the work that must be done by the district government'* said one PMB member in Quan Hoa during the PMB interview there.

The GRDD, however, proposed a further level of decentralisation to the commune and also to the village level. The decree clearly places the commune in charge of socio-economic development planning, implementing, supervision and monitoring as the last official line of government. The decree also clearly states that this process will be completed in close cooperation with the village through democratic processes (Socialist Republic of Vietnam 2003). This move to further decentralise main responsibilities for socio-economic planning and development to commune and village level has been supported by several other laws and decrees, in particular the Prime

Minister's Budget and Finance Decentralisation Decision No.225/QT-TTg that clearly states that the commune should take the main role in local budgeting and financial management (Socialist Republic of Vietnam 2005b).

In essence, what this shift in government policy does is fully decentralise key responsibility for socio-economic planning, budgeting, implementation, financial management, monitoring and in many cases on-going management of development activities to the commune with important dialogue and processes being jointly undertaken with the village. Figure 16 below illustrated the current planning process from national to village level. It illustrates the strong vertical planning process that is design to occur in Vietnam. Starting with the National 10-year socio-economic plans, the corresponding provincial, district and commune plans form an integral part of this process, with village level planning being the least important element of planning not even indicated on this official Socialist Republic of Vietnam representation of the process.

It cannot be underestimated what a significant change this process is for Vietnam where prior to 1998, nearly all such planning functions were centrally controlled or at least controlled by district and the levels above. It is not surprising that significant difficulties have been experienced practically when attempting to effectively implement this process of change in Vietnam. What the GRDD and supporting decrees are requiring is a radical change in attitude and practice of both community and government in how all socio, economic and development activities are planned. *'The GRDD has made a big change to what we do (commune government). Now we must do many things for planning, implementation, financial management and many other things. We are a very important part of the government system but it is difficult given we have few resources and because we are not use to this role'*, said one commune PMB member in Hien.



**Figure 16: Government of Vietnam's Socio-Economic Planning Processes**

Given the level of decentralisation that has already officially occurred from national to province and province to district in Vietnam, it could possibly be assumed that the decentralisation process from district to commune would either have occurred or not be a difficult process to complete. It could also be assumed that because each level of government has finite resources and relies heavily on the level below them, that it would be best for each level to decentralise what it feasibly can to the level below. However, despite administrative decentralisation from province to district level having occurred relatively successfully, the level of financial decentralisation from district to commune has generally not matched this, with many communes frequently complaining of a lack of funds and support (McGrath 2005).

The case study investigations confirmed that decentralisation from district to commune had occurred in the four case study districts on only a very limited and ad hoc scale and, in many ways, this appeared the weakest level of the overall decentralisation process of the government. Interviews and focus groups supported the notion that much of this weakness might be due to the fact commune government, unlike the other levels of government above it, is made up of people who are not educated townspeople or trained officials, but often local farmers. As one male commune official explained during a PMB interview in Hien, *'I was not trained in the city for this (government) position and I still farm my land in my village which is in this commune'*. It is important to highlight that the commune forms an important interface between the government at district level and the community at village or hamlet level, given it is often individual villagers from that commune who form part of the commune government team, the Commune People's Committee and are the Commune government department representatives. The key six to ten officials at this level either live, farm or both in the commune's villages and hamlets. As a result, the capacity of this group of individuals to perform government administrative functions is far more limited than district and above since few, if any, of these people are natural or well-trained bureaucrats. It was specifically noted in the focus group discussions with PMBs that the capacity of ethnic minority commune officials is especially low due to the generally low education levels of the community pool they come from. As one male Kinh Vietnamese district PMB member explained in Quan Hoa, *'It is very difficult to find strong commune officials in the ethnic minority communes'*. As a result, it is common for the Kinh Vietnamese with higher education levels to take positions of responsibility in the government in such communes, which often raises concern, since these leaders may not be able to truly represent the local ethnic minority populations they serve.

As a result of this capacity issue at commune level and also due to the finite resources available within the government system, even at district level, district officials have been reluctant to decentralise responsibility to the commune level despite the directive through the GRDD and other key reforms. Many district officials revealed during focus groups that in their opinion, commune and village levels are not ready for this level of responsibility. *'It is difficult to get the commune to do all that the grassroots democracy decree says'* said one district PMB official in Tra My. It appeared that at times these seemed to be valid fears, given genuine capacity concerns, however on other occasions these issues appeared unfounded and possibly linked to prejudices against rural and particular ethnic minority groups. The focus groups undertaken with commune officials revealed a raft of skills and training that they felt they lacked yet which were important to them completing their roles effectively. In particular, many remote

communes particularly in Quan Hoa, Tra My and Hien explained that they had no real financial or management systems in place, nor adequate skills to manage activities effectively. If significant financial, administrative and political tasks were decentralised to this level as the GRDD outlines, many communes would lack the transparency and accountability required to undertake these tasks effectively. This was not reported to be a major problem in Kim Dong, where generally all commune officials were reported to be generally more competent, even if a gap did still exist between what their current duties were and what the GRDD proposed.

Internationally, a large amount of theory exists that supports the importance of decentralisation in all terms and it is often claimed that financial, administrative and political decentralisation are all needed if real grassroots participation is to occur (Goldman and Abbot 2004). However, Gueye (2005) especially highlights the importance of financial management, stating that unless people have control of funding, clear input into what money is being spent on and how it is being spent and are regularly updated on the progress of these issues, there is real risk that funds will be directed to inappropriate purposes. Experience in the business sector internationally has highlighted this same issue, with many financial disasters confirming that centralised systems of financial management often tend to lead to greater levels of 'leakage'. On the other hand, more decentralised systems of financial management are often seen to potentially reduce the levels of leakage since funds are closer to the people and more under the watch of the people who the money affects the most (Goldman and Abbot 2004). As the communes are largely villagers themselves, it could be expected that they would be more accountable and less likely to take the funds, because the funds directly affect them.

Due to this argument and in support of decentralisation under the GRDD, some bilateral donors and a very small group of NGOs have begun attempting to decentralise financially to the commune. It should be remembered that until recently there was little, if any, ability to decentralise funds below the district level, with all projects and programs being required to undertake all financial management jointly with the district, a situation that was very tightly monitored and controlled and was one of the main ways the government could control independent NGOs' operations (VUFO-NGO Resource Centre 2005). The budget decentralisation decree now means this is not the case and, as a result, this small group of agencies has begun piloting commune-centred financial management approaches.

It is important to highlight from the outset that this process is a more difficult exercise than it may initially appear. Many agencies have found that the skills required for effective financial decentralisation are very low at the commune level, with many communes lacking adequate bookkeeping and accounting systems that are required for even the most flexible of donors. Some communes, especially in the most mountainous areas in Quan Hoa, Tra My and Hien, even reported to having no qualified accounting staff, a situation which required a significant capacity building and training approach to be put in place before any funds could be transferred to ensure competent staff and procedures are in place to allow the decentralisation process to occur properly. To offset these difficulties, some development agencies have started the process in less remote districts and communes where commune level skills are generally higher and allow agencies to work from a stronger existing skills base. Several agencies have successfully piloted this approach and have enabled



communes to budget and manage all aspects of the annual financial management cycle effectively with only outside auditing. The process is not without its costs, with agencies involved reporting that even in areas with higher existing skills, this process would take at least two years.

The clear advantage of this investment, however, is that if this process is undertaken successfully, the commune – the bridge between the people and the government – is actively involved in these important financial processes, which complements associated decentralised administrative tasks, particularly those involved with development planning and implementation. Beneficiaries who had experienced these processes explained that this reduced their level of mistrust and opened up a greater level of transparency and accountability. *'Now the commune is in charge of the finances it means we know where the money is spent and there is more for the commune'*, said one PMB member in Tra My district. This very much links in with the GRDD principles, which place similar responsibilities for project and financial management on the commune for the very same reasons. The act of decentralising both financial and project management functions to this level provides an integrated approach to decentralisation and, in essence, assists with the third element of political decentralisation. Political decentralisation, or the process of granting more political power to other parties and government levels, is still ongoing in Vietnam, which still has a single party system under a centralised political model. However, moves to allow local elections of village and commune officials are a step in this direction, which was initiated to complement the financial and administrative decentralisation that was proposed. Once a commune has the skills associated with financial and administrative decentralisation this will most likely allow them the opportunity to pursue even more political autonomy in time.

Of the three elements of decentralisation, it is perhaps the effect of allowing local financial management that is of greatest significance. In many ways, this act is the ultimate symbol of participation and real power transfer, with decentralisation of financial management to the commune, and ideally the village, being most likely to provide real power transfer and 'empowerment' to occur. Being in control of funds is often the great motivator for community action and responsibility, so it is recommended that this be a key value in the village-based planning and development process. Even though this process is not easy, will require long term capacity building, will cost program funds and may prolong the development process, it is arguably the central form of decentralisation that can enable administrative decentralisation reforms to be made possible and increase the likelihood of decentralisation of associated political powers. The process is not without danger, potentially placing project funds at risk. However, at the end of the day, it is a clear value that can help build greater community trust, accountability and ultimately participation.

## **5.5 Integration of Community and Government Area-Based Planning Systems**

Since the end of the American war, Vietnam has operated under a centralised planning and administrative system with relatively few opportunities for outside organisations, including businesses, donors and NGOs to be involved in the formation of socio-economic plans, especially at the commune, district and province level. Certainly, key donors, especially the World Bank, ADB, UN agencies and many NGOs have had some influence on policy development in Vietnam and how it relates to socio-economic planning at the national and province level; however few agencies

have actively been involved in holistic planning at the sub-province level. In many ways, it is not surprising that the government is often not open to undertaking socio-economic plans together with outside agencies given the history of Vietnam leading up to the American war and then the conscious decision of the government following the war to remain closed to outside influences until the *doi moi* reform process began. Given this reform process only began in the 1980s, it is not surprising that it is still difficult for outside agencies to be intimately involved in these processes at the province and sub-province level (McGrath 2005).

It is also important to note that the government's socio-economic plans that are created at commune and district level often include areas of government sensitivity, including budgets and details of military activities, policing and border security issues. For any government these would be the kind of details that may not be made public. This is certainly the case in Vietnam, where gaining access to the full details of the five-year socio-economic plans of communes, districts and provinces is a difficult task. Many INGOs and even donors explained the difficulty they experienced gaining access to these documents. Some reported not being able to get any access or only access to particular details of a sector in which they were involved. As one NGO staff member explained in an interview *"There are often sensitive details in the local 5-year plans, things about policing and security which they don't want us to see. It makes it hard to do good development though when you can't see the whole picture."*

Despite the difficulties gaining access to these plans, several bilateral donors in Vietnam in recent years have attempted to become more involved with socio-economic planning and to gain access to the full details of plans at provincial, district and commune levels. In particular, these donors have encouraged this process to enable more effective integration of all funding sources available at commune, district and province levels, a process that does appear to have several important benefits for both the government and community. The case study interviews revealed that many beneficiaries felt that the government did not always integrate its development activities in any particular area effectively. As one female commune government official in Tra My explained, *'often what the (district) budget says for health is not taking into account what education is doing. They could be much better aligned. Often the NGO and government activities aren't well aligned either'*. This was a common response, highlighting that the different donor, government, and NGO programs and budgets often worked in parallel leading to overlap and funds not being fully optimised. Given the level of poverty still present in much of Vietnam, as well as the limited funding available at the local level, many beneficiaries were not happy with this situation.

Integrated development planning is not a new concept internationally, however naturally the challenges of including all development planning in one overall socio-economic plan when this has not been the usual practice, does pose distinct challenges within the Vietnamese context. As Eshete and O'Reilly Calthrop (2000) argue, integrating all development funding into one local plan can provide many improved benefits such as lack of overlap of activities, greater development outcome, financial efficiency and a reduced incidence of conflict. Interestingly, none of the NGOs interviewed who were involved with village-based development programs in Vietnam had managed to integrate the annual planning processes of the government with the development planning processes they were undertaking within their

programs. Many, including the four case study programs, end up creating an NGO plan annually that complements the government's plan. It could be expected that this situation may lead to duplication and overlap, however at least in the case study areas, the village level consultation processes initiated by the NGOs were used to feed into the government plan. Therefore, although one plan was not created to represent the planning objectives of the NGO and the government together, the information that was used for each plan was the same, very often involving the same district officials in the plan development process. It was reported that care was taken to ensure both plans were complementary despite the NGO not having access to the overall government plan. In the case study, the four district PMBs, which include representatives of all line departments, facilitated this planning process, a situation that case study interviews reported to not lead to major issues as far as overlap. As one government official explained in Quang Ngai, *'It is good that we are starting to integrate the plans of the NGOs and the government. This leads to less overlap and more benefit to the people. The NGOs are good at finding out what the community wants. They can help us with this.'*

The difference between the approach of the NGOs and the donors to socio-economic planning highlights a key distinction between the two types of organisations. Interviews with both groups appeared to confirm that the high level bilateral relationship between the two country governments made it more possible for bilateral groups to integrate project and government planning. Both groups explained that possibly the non-government nature of NGOs meant they are less trusted by the government and less able to gain access to high level government planning details. One bilateral project team member explained, *'the fact NGOs are non-government worries them (the government). They don't know if they can trust NGOs because they are not under a bilateral relationship.'*

The bilateral project model utilises close partnering relationships between governments, including shared staff working arrangements, a situation that when successful, often lends itself to a greater likelihood of trusting project partners with sensitive socio-economic planning data (Nguyen Thi Thanh Huong et al 2004). Interestingly, despite the benefits of the bilateral relationship, many bilateral donors still saw several distinct advantages of the NGO facilitated planning processes. Frequently in donor interviews there was open acknowledgment that the close working relationships between the village and the NGO, the use of local non-paid facilitators and long-term engagement often made the NGO ranking, analysis and planning processes more effective than their processes, despite the fact the bilateral programs seemed to make fully integrated planning more possible.

Given the distinct advantages of both bilateral and NGO approaches to socio-economic planning and planning integration, it appears that perhaps the ideal way to ensure quality socio-economic planning could be a joint donor/NGO approach. This could possibly involve the NGO doing what they do best, which is long-term engagement to more effectively identify needs, rank needs and have these agreed into a village and commune plan. This could then be combined with bilateral donor engagement to integrate the needs of this plan with the official government socio-economic plans at commune and district levels, including developing a plan which takes all funding from all available sources into account. Such an approach would arguably ensure the fullest form of integration of government and village planning at

commune, district and up to province level, however it would require a close and flexible working arrangement between NGO and bilateral projects, a situation that has not always been easy to achieve due to different working styles, organisational values and terms of project engagement. This approach is currently being piloted by several NGOs, bilateral and multilateral donors in Vietnam. At the time of this research, the trial had only just begun, however it will be interesting to see the long-term potential for this model.

Interviews with many NGOs confirmed that NGOs often struggle to integrate village plans into commune level plans, let alone commune into effective district level plans. This was often reported to be due to the limited budgets and program scope of many NGOs. One NGO Director explained *'we often only have the funds to work with a few villages or at best a few communes within a district; we don't have the funding to comprehensively work with a whole district like the bilaterals and multilaterals do'*. Often working with only a handful of villages or communes, makes it difficult for NGOs to effectively undertake socio-economic planning with all villages in a commune and all communes in a district, as the bilateral approach often envisages. Experience of bilateral programs has confirmed that it is important that planning processes are undertaken with all corresponding villages and communes, even if the following implementation processes are not supported with outside assistance in all villages and communes. If this is not completed, it will mean the needs from certain villages or communes will not be reflected in the overall plan. This will result in a plan that is not encompassing of all its relevant parts. Again, collaboration between donors and NGOs could help fund, support and alleviate this occurrence. Donors could enlist NGOs to undertake the planning processes to provide full coverage in all villages and communes to ensure holistic district level plans resulted. Donor funds would supplement NGO funding which is often limited for such processes, and ensure high quality village level processes, but more importantly, ensure integrated area development planning.

## 5.6 Appropriate Community Contribution

Vietnam has mixed experience in successfully obtaining community contribution on development projects. Particularly in the period immediately after the Vietnam-American war, the government was very reluctant to request any form of community contributions for development projects and programs given the major famine that gripped the country in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the significant level of poverty the country was feeling, the terrible experiences the people had had during the war years and because of the still fragile hold the government had on the whole nation at this time (Nguyen Khac Vien 2004). Despite these well-founded reasons, development theory is quite clear on the importance of community contribution in development. Providing long-term welfare assistance, that is, assistance which is simply handed out with little or no repayment, is often seen to lead to a situation of long-term reliance (Riddell 1990). The case studies confirmed this, with many people, particularly those communities who were most affected by the war and famine, in particular Hien and to a lesser extent Tra My, explaining that they were used to a welfare approach where development assistance was simply given to them with no requirements placed on them as beneficiaries. Many beneficiaries commented that prior to NGO and donor projects coming to their local area, they usually would 'just wait' for the government to help them and certainly nothing would be expected of them in return, especially in

terms of financial or any other form of contribution for that matter. In some areas, particularly the Katu minority area in Hien District, the survey results have demonstrated this way of thinking and its dominance today. These results have highlighted the difficulty getting beneficiaries to be actively involved in activities as a result of this strong history of government welfare.

The government has, however, dramatically amended its approach to community contribution for development activities since this period. The government has noted the importance of both community participation and particularly contribution if it is to maintain economic development and to continue to reduce the level of poverty in Vietnam (Saxena et al 2004). With poverty persistent in many areas and finite resources available to the nation, it is perhaps not surprising that the government is encouraging community contribution as a key aspect of national poverty reduction programs. For instance, the government's Program 135 prescribes set amounts of financial contribution from beneficiaries in all program activities. The level of contribution, which frequently ranges from 25% to 50%, must be raised by communes and villages for the corresponding government grant to be made available. Given the limited funds available at these levels, the burden of this contribution ultimately becomes an issue of household or individual financial contribution. This practice was frequently raised during beneficiary interviews with beneficiaries often complaining that the system was unfair since it often treated all people the same, despite their relative incomes. Villagers often reported in the survey and focus groups that these programs were taking 'too much money off the poor and not enough from the rich' and very often the comment was passed that some people suffered and others found the contribution no burden at all. In particular, people complained that the set levels of cash contribution put significant additional burden on the poor who frequently had little or no cash income. For many, this meant selling important assets or not paying for other important items like health care or education for children. As one female villager in Tra My explained *'we are very poor and have no money, we cannot provide the cash to the activities. We need it for many other things in our household. We would much rather provide labour but the government wont allow this now'*.

Despite these comments, it is important to note that contribution in its various forms has been a common element of the government's approach to development for the last 20 to 30 years. Contribution systems have generally been applied uniformly over the country, except in the odd area like Hien where it believed people were just too poor for the system to be effective. In particular, people in Vietnam were required to undertake a prescribed number of days of labour on community programs, particularly dyke repair, being an important activity in areas prone to flooding. This practice was common, for instance, in the Kim Dong case study area where people reported needing to provide labour as opposed to cash contributions. During interviews, many people commented that as their income has risen many had opted to 'pay in cash' the fine for not providing the labour contribution, rather than providing the required 'volunteer' labour themselves. It was explained that this was done because for many in the more urban areas, the 'opportunity cost' for missing a day of work was greater than the cost of paying the dyke labour fee. This was particularly evident in Kim Dong, the wealthiest of the four case study districts. As one young male villager explained *'I would rather pay the government and not have to provide labour. I can earn more in Hanoi'*. Some Vietnamese academics have claimed that the growing incidence of this type of occurrence and move away from volunteerism towards economic development

is eroding the amount of community participation, in much the same way it has reportedly done in western countries (Nguyen Khac Vien 2004).

In addition to labour contribution, but on a more limited scale, the government has also at times requested that the community provide local materials as part of their contribution to development activities. This has frequently constituted the provision of sand, rocks or bamboo when these materials are locally available in the village at little or no cost. Often this contribution largely involves community labour to transport materials to the project site with rarely any cash component being required. As Vietnam's population and level of development puts more pressure on the environment, such local materials are becoming more and more difficult for the community to provide. Interviews and focus groups with beneficiaries confirmed that both labour and local materials are usually the preferred forms of community contribution, especially in poor areas, due to the limited access to cash resources by households in poverty.

Issues of economics infiltrate all aspects of development theory, however interestingly how to practically handle the issue of financial, labour and materials forms of community contribution is rarely explored in detail and certainly conflicting approaches to this issue are frequently apparent. On one hand, ensuring some such contribution by the people on any project is seen as very important (United Nations Development Programme 2003). As Michael (1996) says, it can improve the likelihood of the community being involved in the future project stages particularly project implementation, management and maintenance. Another supporting view is that of the Asian Development Bank who advocates for optimal community contribution for both implementation and maintenance as a key incentive of communities to activity participate and to ensure sustainability. (Asian Development Bank 2005b). This thinking is dominant in development, however in areas that are very poor, this approach does not always prove feasible and a welfare or 'hand-out' approach becomes the only feasible approach. On a more practical note, as the government's experience has shown, ensuring some community contribution in cash, labour or material terms ultimately allows for more project activities to be completed, because if the people contribute even a small percentage of the overall development budget, overall funds go further and more households can be both involved in the program and benefit from it. This links in with the argument of economics of scale, where increasing the overall level of funding may take the program over a certain threshold where additional financial benefits and program impact will result from this increase in scope and scale (Bourguignon 2005).

A more sophisticated argument for promoting contribution is to enable greater levels of empowerment, as an important step towards effective poverty reduction. Academics including Remenyi argue that as you become less poor, it is important to increase the level of contribution to keep building the economic potential of people and their subsequent level of empowerment up the 'poverty pyramid' (Remenyi 1991, p8). Micro-finance programs are a key example of this style of economic self-sufficiency approach, where facilitating agencies often take on clients who are very poor based on welfare approaches initially and then slowly graduate them up the economic ladder to require more and more individual contribution. For example, a very poor farmer may enter a micro-finance program and be granted, with no financial repayment necessary, some livestock. Then, as they raise some income from the livestock, they can perhaps

be involved in a revolving cow scheme where they are given a cow with no cash repayment being required, however once the cow has a calf, they must give the initial female cow back to the program. If the farmer is successful at this approach, they will be invited to be part of a micro-credit program where they take out a small loan at commercial interest rates, given they now have some savings from the first two activities. Then, if this process is successful, the person can take on larger loans, eventually with mainstream banking institutions. The important principle in this process is that the clients need to be matched with the approaches that are appropriate for their economic position and then, as they become more able, they are 'graduated' up a scale of financial contribution enabling them to be more and more self-sufficient. This moves them from a welfare position to eventually a position of economic self-sufficiency, with care being taken not to overstretch their involvement, but build their empowerment as is appropriate (Remenyi 1991).

In opposition to economically centered scales of contribution are approaches that strongly advocate for no form of contribution. Vandana Shiva explains that the poor are already disadvantaged economically by world inequality, so by encouraging them to become more economically integrated into local economic markets they may, in fact, become further exploited. By simply being involved in systems where cash contributions or loans are used, Shiva (1991) explains that vulnerability of the beneficiaries most likely increases. In contrast, if beneficiaries do not enter such cash systems and focus on local production, bartering and other such activities, it can be argued that the potential risk for them is reduced.

Gender experts also often criticise approaches that promote cash and labour contributions. Gender and development advocates including Boserup (1970) and Moser (1993) have highlighted the importance of the triple role in society that women play compared to men in terms of having a major role in the household, in reproduction and in the local community. This role, also referred to as a 'triple burden', often makes it difficult for women to take on any additional duties, including those requiring financial or labour commitments. However, years of experience of many donor and NGO projects has highlighted that women are often superior at saving and managing finances in nearly all contexts, so subsequently significant pressure is often placed upon them by projects to be involved in financial contributions and financially based schemes regardless of the individual circumstances (World Bank 2002). Proposing labour and financial contributions from women often exacerbates existing gender inequalities and inequality generally, with contributions often being taken from important household areas.

Similarly, the provision of local materials has often been criticised as a form of contribution since, from an environmental perspective, such contributions frequently require villagers to provide large quantities of local materials from riverbeds, bamboo from community bamboo plantations or rocks from fragile ecosystems. This has often led to higher occurrences of erosion, deforestation and other negative environmental effects (Mann 1986). The notion of contribution therefore becomes a complex area that is often requested by donors and NGOs without adequate analysis of the local situation.

It is clear that there are both advantages and disadvantages to the notion of financial, material and labour contributions for development activities. When looking at the issue of empowerment, power transfer and sustainability it does seem that the benefits of

people providing cash, materials and labour contributions can outweigh the potential risks. Such forms of contribution provide tangible beneficiary involvement in development processes and, through the act of contributing, moves them from being subjects rather than objects in the development process. It also provides a greater likelihood that they will be active in the later stages of the project cycle, a key consideration when looking at ultimate sustainability of the activity. Contribution also potentially leads to greater development efficiency and more targeted assistance, given few beneficiaries will contribute to activities unless the activity has their full support.

For contribution to be successful it does need to be handled very carefully. It is important that the relative poverty of the area is fully understood or else there is a real risk that contribution will cause additional burden on the poor, rather than contributing to greater development efficiency. Involving the poor in discussion and the determination of the level of contribution is essential to this process. It is difficult, if not impossible, for outsiders to determine the level of contribution, even though this is a regular occurrence in development projects. The case studies revealed that the most effective systems of contribution occurred when the village discussed the issue and came up with a system that responded to the individual situation in that village. As one female villager in Kim Dong explained, *'they (the government or development agency) can't decide what we must provide without involving us. Only we can tell them what is fair'*.

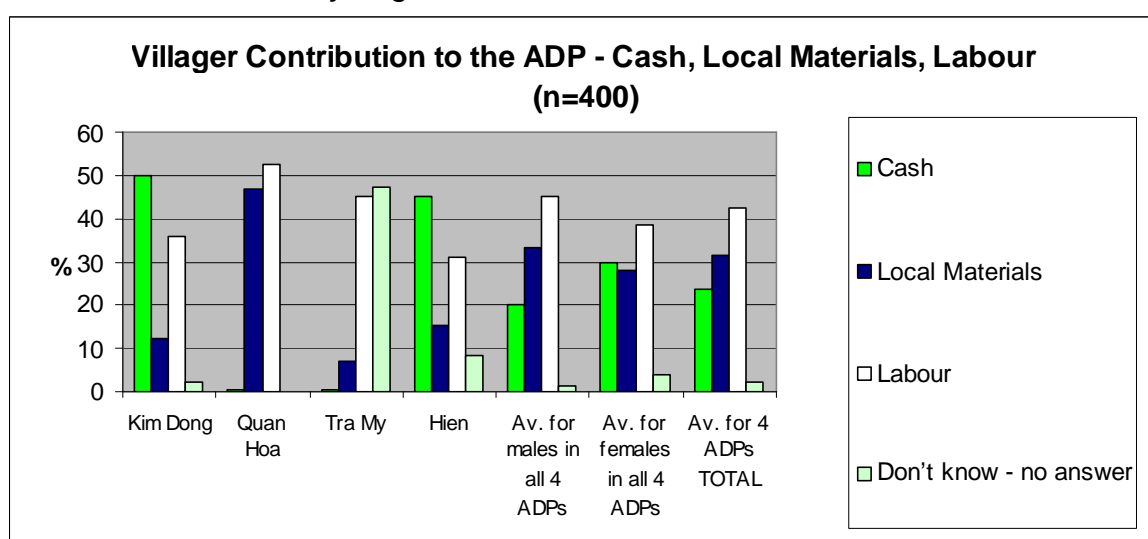
It is important to also understand any historical or cultural dimension to contribution. The case study in Katu areas in Hien District, revealed that sometimes there are long-standing and existing systems that create a barrier to different forms of contributions. These need to be understood and a slow and appropriate process of education and attitude change initiated to counter such issues appropriately. It is important to ensure contribution is handled sensitively and flexibly to ensure its positive development impacts are realised. This requires the issue to be considered from the outset of a project with deliberate thinking and processes developed to realise this important aim.

The level and form of contribution needs to be regularly discussed at least yearly in each village and as necessary amended to provide additional resources to the community to ideally provide additional development impact. In Kim Dong, the least poor of the case study areas, the level of contribution frequently reported in focus groups was up to 40% of the overall cost of a particular activity, with little labour or material contribution being available in the district. Figure 17 below confirms the views on contribution in the four case study districts. Participants for this survey question could provide more than one response. More than 50% of respondents in Kim Dong reported to providing cash contribution to activities, 12.1% local materials and 35.8% labour. This was not dissimilar to Hien where 45% reported to providing cash, 15.3% local materials and 31.3% labour. It is interesting to note that despite the similar results in each of the two districts, the level of cash provided in Hien was considerably less than in Kim Dong, as a result of the difference in poverty between the two areas. In Hien and also Tra My, focus groups revealed that it was very difficult to gain contributions of over 10% cash for any activity due to the higher incidence of extreme poverty and history of direct development assistance. Interestingly, the survey results explored earlier confirm that despite these two districts proving little real cash



contribution to activities, residents in both Tra My and Hien highlighted cash contribution as a major form of contribution given what this meant to them proportionately to their overall income.

Tra My perhaps surprisingly had a high rate of 'not knowing' to this question at 47.1%. This is a surprising result given strong responses had been received in Tra My to all other survey questions. The focus group exercises followed up on this result and revealed a reluctance to discuss the issue of contribution with the survey team, especially the issue of cash contribution. This appeared to be due to a concern that providing information on this issue may reduce how much assistance the district is getting and lead to higher cash contributions in the future. Quan Hoa had a high level of both material contribution at 46.8% and labour at 52.6% with very low cash contribution. As a village chief in Quan Hoa explained *'We have much bamboo in Quan Hoa so it is a good way for us to give to the project. Also our people can work. But we do not have money to give'*



**Figure 17: Reported villager contribution in terms of cash, local materials and labour across the four case study ADPs.**

It is recommended that village-based planning and development programs should look at the issues of contribution carefully and not dismiss them, despite the potential complexity. Firstly, any program needs to build awareness of the importance of contribution within communities and government to ensure all concerned appreciate the reasons why it is important and also to begin identifying options of how the level of contribution can be optimised. Therefore situations like were witnessed in Tra My where contribution was not discussed openly, make it very difficult for a program to respond appropriately to this issue. The community then needs to decide what is appropriate and develop an appropriate set of criteria for contribution in its different forms, based on the poverty level of the households and individuals in that particular area. A 'sliding-scale system' that increases or amends contributions based on community derived poverty levels should be developed to create a vision of how the issue may be amended. This again needs to be flexible so it can be adjusted based on the situation in the village and how it develops.

It is important to remember that considerable work still exists in Vietnam to reduce poverty and that this will require donor, NGO and government funds far greater than what is available now to tackle this level of poverty. As a result, development

approaches need to consider appropriate community contribution to assist in funding the development and maximise the funding available through appropriate cash, labour or in local materials. This will also ensure the community is fully involved and contributes towards increased likelihood of sustained development outcomes.

### **5.7 Multi-Sector Development Responses**

Development history has been dominated by decisions being made by people other than the direct development beneficiaries themselves. Modernisation theory and the works of Rostow clearly support the notion that the western understanding of development is superior due to its focus on economic, growth, technology and pursuit of a way of life similar to that of the west. This thinking not surprisingly also strongly supports the notion that western development experts knew what was best for developing countries (Rostow 1971). Slowly, since 1945 when modernisation came to the forefront as a major form of development thinking, it can be argued that in some ways there has been a move away from such lineal thinking. In many areas of theory and practice there has been an acknowledgment of the Eurocentric nature of development and a slow and gradual move away from paternalistic forms of development. Subsequent movements promoting nationalism and local state governments have assisted in reducing the reliance on outside notions of development. However, these too have at times fallen prey to the same notions of lineal economic development, this time being frequently championed by educated local elites. The move towards acknowledging the importance of local voice and local participation in the 1980s was an important step in acknowledging that reliance on outside assistance would not necessarily produce the development results that may have been anticipated. Participation and allowing the opinion of the beneficiaries to direct development has been hailed as an important step in ensuring more appropriate and successful development (Nelson and Wright 1995). Participation as has been already explored is a process of handing over power to the development beneficiaries as much as is possible, rather than maintaining outside control as modernisation assumed.

Despite this important realisation occurring in the 1980s, development approaches that are based on modernisation are still evident and many would claim are growing under 'neo-liberalism', a term often synonymous with the key aspects of modernisation theory. Given this alignment between notions, current neo-liberal economic approaches often constrain what level of participation can occur in the interests of conservative, economic aims. Bilateral donor agendas and to a lesser extent multilateral and NGO agendas are often linked to political, economic and sometimes social agendas. Very often, especially in larger projects and programs, the development goal is heavily grounded in technical solutions linked to the technical skills of the country concerned. This allows for a considerable amount of the development dollar to be returned to organisations in the donor's country and also results in many projects and programs being decided at national level based on pre-decided sectors of engagement based on both bilateral partners' interests, with beneficiary opinions not being taken into account fully.

Donor and NGO funding sources are also limited as a result of the overall aims and objectives of the bilateral partners. Agency funding cycles and agendas frequently constrain interventions to one-year to five-year periods, in turn constricting what can be possible in development terms, especially in regards to longer term approaches. In

response to this situation, the first series of integrated rural development programs began being implemented in the late 1970s and 1980s and it was hoped that these programs would be an answer to some of the problems that development had faced in working in pre-determined specific sectors over short time periods. Although perhaps the most high profile of such programs were those linked to structural adjustment programs of the development banks, others were undertaken by a variety of bilateral agencies and NGOs with a more open mandate (Chambers 1997). This later group of programs adopted a broad-based program framework and many attempted to address diverse needs, very often working across multiple sectors and activities to ensure development outcomes were met (Singh and Titi 1993).

Programs that follow the general concept of integrated rural development that began in the 1970s are still implemented today in a variety of countries using a range of different approaches. Given the huge task of taking on such a broad approach, many agencies opt to restrict programs to one or two sectors such as agriculture, health or economic development, to make them more manageable but still workable on a broad geographical scale across a selection of different sectors. Other agencies have kept the program mandate open, attempting to work on any activities that are deemed necessary to assist in reducing poverty, especially those which are interconnected (Kleymeyer 1994). The programs that have been focused narrowly have frequently run into problems, with many beneficiaries complaining, especially during program evaluations, that all needs are not being met or are being met too slowly. This problem was reiterated by the NGOs and donors interviewed, who are involved in similar approaches today. *'If we don't try and address multiple sectors the community is often unhappy,'* said one INGO representative. Another frequent observation of such approaches is that, although attempting to work over a group of sectors is admirable, theoretically such programs also often struggle to address all sectors well technically. Due to the diversity of activities being tackled, it is often difficult for the implementing agency to undertake projects in all sectors effectively as compared to focusing on one discrete sector.

In defence of such multi-sector approaches, they do frequently have the ability to address the root causes of development or poverty related problems. Very often a development problem will straddle two or more development sectors, for example, a problem in a particular village may include both health and agricultural dimensions. A single sector approach would not address the root cause of this issue effectively, however an integrated rural development program, which works across multiple sectors, effectively deals with this issue (Ministry of Public Investment 2003). This issue cannot be underestimated since most development issues are a combination of different sectoral issues. Although this approach struggles at times to include the technical rigour of single sector projects, the integrated approach is important to village-based development to give the people the ability to identify their needs and subsequently the sectors the program will work in. This is an important element of participation and could be argued to be the most important, given it is when the main parameters of the overall project design are decided.

During the 1990s donors continued with their experiment of this style of flexible multi-sector development approach and a model called the 'program approach' emerged as a refined version of integrated rural development that took a broad approach to being able to respond to a diverse set of development needs flexibly and over a longer-term

period. At times this approach differed from the integrated rural development approaches because it often encouraged rural communities to develop proposals for individual projects that they had to identify and plan themselves. Such approaches have been regularly evaluated with mixed results, with it generally being found that in areas where education levels were high and civil society was active, proposal processes were relatively effective if they involved only simple procedures. The inclusion of the community proposal development process provided the added benefit that it built capacity of local communities and CBOs in planning, design and proposal development, providing an invaluable skill for future for such groups to secure their own projects and funding. The situation, however, was frequently different in poorer areas with limited civil society and education where local communities and CBOs often lacked the skills to prepare winning proposals. For many such groups, the act of proposal preparation was not something they were concerned with, given their significant poverty and, as a result, communities became disgruntled and the whole system was viewed to be too bureaucratic and subsequently broke down (Australian Agency for International Development 2003).

The lessons of the program approach went through further evolution in the late 1990s leading to the 'facility approach' program. This type of program, which often takes a national approach rather than sub-national or sector-based approach is again designed to allow broad needs to be met by a series of sub-projects. In this case sub-projects are frequently policy related and are usually implemented by various groups or sub-contractors based on the specific skills required. The overall set of sub-projects are combined together towards the achievement of one overall national or provincial program goal, for example, improved governance. These programs have become increasingly popular in recent years as a way of ensuring long term development needs can be met, that flexibility can be maintained and that the technical skill required for these often 'high-level' activities can be adequately sourced (Australian Agency for International Development 2006).

Despite the possible benefits and lessons of national level facility style programs that look at policy development and national capacity building, this research is ultimately aimed at rural development in Vietnam, arguably the largest and most significant area of need in the country. In this context, the lessons to take away from the above approaches are largely concerned with ensuring flexibility and the ability to work multi-sectorally. For a village-based planning and development approach to be effective, it must be able to address any needs the community raises and prioritises, otherwise participation is lost and only the voice of the donor is addressed. This is discussed in detail by Robert Chambers (1997) in the important work *Whose Reality Counts? Putting the First Last*, that describes the importance of following community rather than donor and implementing agency agendas.

Programs must have the ability to work across all sectors that are required if they are to address the root causes of poverty. Many staff on programs of only one or two sectors could see that at times this went against the principles of empowerment and participation the program was trying to emulate. This type of long term and flexible approach therefore does have many distinct and important benefits, however it is also important to acknowledge its negatives, not the least of which is cost both in terms of the sectors covered, the expertise required and the geographical scale. This issue of budget implications will be discussed more in *Chapter Seven*, nonetheless the

advantage of being truly open to community input and for the voice of the beneficiaries to be heard cannot be underestimated. Of the 2,800 beneficiary surveys, most explained in some way that the ADP model had the ability to deal with a larger number and diversity of needs over the life of the program than government programs that usually focussed in one sector like infrastructure and forestry only. This makes multi-sectoral development a key element for village-based planning and development programs, despite being challenging to achieve in practice.

### **5.8 Long-Term Development for Attitude Change**

The key theoretical issues in the literature that are thought to underpin village-based development approaches are developing civil society, developing democracy systems and assisting state decentralisation. As this thesis has highlighted, elements of civil society have existed in Vietnam for a long time, however legal recognition of such groups, especially through the association decree and other decrees, has been slow. As a result it could be expected that the full potential of civil society in Vietnam will not be realised for some time given its development is still ongoing. Democratic principles have likewise been in existence in many villages for quite a long time in Vietnam, yet it is only more recently that their widespread applicability is now possible thanks to the GRDD and other relevant decrees and laws, so their effective implementation is still spreading. The process of decentralisation from a centralised nation to lower levels of administration, the private sector and the community in Vietnam has also only just begun in more recent years. This situation highlights that change in these three underpinning areas of village-based development is still relatively new and ongoing in Vietnam.

The theory of attitude and behaviour change tells us that the level of change expected in any of the these three theoretical areas, let alone all three, is likely to take a long time, given the issues of attitude and behaviour change are linked (Pasteur 2006). Change in power structures is embedded in individual behaviour, which only occurs if corresponding individual attitude change has occurred. To change a person's attitude, especially if it has been held for a long time, is naturally a difficult thing to achieve (Chambers 2005). It is therefore important to highlight that no matter how efficient or technical a project or program may be, it is naive to think that community and government attitude change is likely to happen rapidly (Spybey 1992). The trend analysis conducted in the case study areas confirmed this situation, with change in levels of participation occurring gradually over an eight year period, not more rapidly. Even with this considerable time period, gaps were still seen to exist in the attitude change experienced by certain individuals or groups of individuals in each of the four areas.

In addition, we have seen that village-based planning and development approaches need to be backed up with activities in all sectors that demonstrate the changes in practice that are to be anticipated with attitude change. Therefore, a focus on village-based planning approaches only does not guarantee that either attitude change or change in practice has occurred. Also, if a multi-sector program approach is taken, including activities in health, agriculture or education, it can take considerable time before dramatic change in such multiple areas can be seen. It seems clear that any serious approach to village-based planning and development must take a long-term

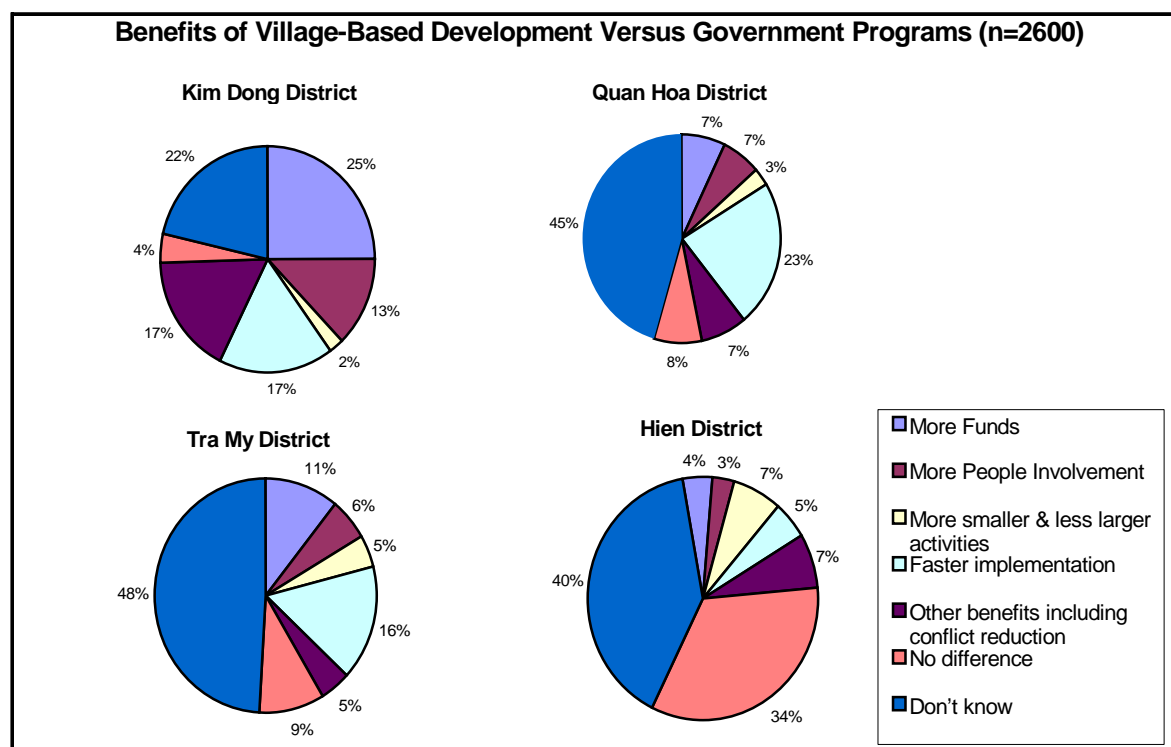
approach if it is to ensure attitude change occurs, especially in something as difficult as increasing community participation within a traditionally centrally controlled society.

Some donors have set up effective village-based planning systems at village, commune and district levels in one to two year periods in Vietnam. Usually this has been done with a view to later move the program on to the next area and to replicate the process. The risk of this approach is that the donor does not have the chance to see the results of the planning process during the implementation period and to determine the effectiveness of the planning process. An alternative approach is to facilitate both the planning and implementation components of the village-based development programs, a commitment which usually requires a minimum of ten years engagement.

This longer-term engagement has been noted to provide many important benefits which the case study, particularly the 2,800 people survey sought to explore. Of the four main survey questions put to the 2,800 sample group, the question of the benefit of the ADP model or alternatives such as the government's, was the most difficult to obtain clear responses for. As indicated in Figure 18 below, a high proportion of participants choose 'don't know', with 21.5% in Kim Dong, 45.5% in Quan Hoa, 49.1% in Tra My and 40.0% in Hien responding this way. This was unlike any of the responses obtained for the other survey questions from either the 400 or 2,800 person processes. As a result, the focus groups undertaken in each district were utilised to investigate this issue in more detail but again difficulties were experienced in all four areas. Generally the survey team were confronted with an overwhelming feeling that the respondents did not want to openly compare the effectiveness of the government program approach and that of a non-government approach such as an ADP. As one villager explained in Kim Dong *'we don't want to talk about that here, we do not know the difference.'* Such responses seemed to confirm this may not be the real reason but simply that there was a reluctance to be critical of government.

Interestingly, however, some good indications on the differences between the long term and integrated focus of the ADP and government approaches could still be gleaned from the responses, specially by the number of respondents confirming the benefits of 'more funds', 'more people involvement', and 'faster implementation' and 12.7% of respondents in Kim Dong responding that the ADP promoted greater villager involvement in development compared to other programs. In addition, 17.2% in Kim Dong, 22.7% in Quan Hoa and 15.8% of respondents in Tra My felt the ADP delivered development benefit more quickly than other models. Again Hien revealed some different results with 33.6% responding 'no difference'. Again the focus group process was utilised in Hien to explore this further and indicated that this response was probably linked to the issue of government reliance and again a reluctance to be at all critical of government. Also in Hien, villagers seemed less able to really identify differences between program types and to compare them objectively.

Having more funds to comprehensively deal with poverty was also highlighted as a strength of the ADP model over alternative models in each district. 25.0%, 7.1%, 10.7% and 4.3% in Kim Dong, Quan Hoa, Tra My and Hien respectively reported this benefit. Therefore despite the reluctance of many survey respondents to provide clear differences between the government and ADP model, the responses that were obtained, still indicated a strong set of benefits of the long-term and integrated approach of the ADP.



**Figure 18 – Villager perceived advantages of ADP over Government Programs across the four case study ADPs**

Specific advantages of the long-term approach include that it allows the facilitating organisation to assist in tailoring the principles of grassroots democracy, democratic processes, civil society formation and decentralisation to the local environment over a longer time period. The benefit of this cannot be underestimated since it possibly allows such important principles to be more thoroughly realised, rather than simply training people rapidly on a set approach and then moving on to another area. Also, by providing funding and support for implementation, unlike planning only approaches, these programs ensure the planned activities actually occur, an important aspect in ensuring long term change of both government and the community. Most importantly however, the ongoing involvement of the facilitating agency through both planning and implementation enables the agency to monitor and make sure key elements of the program are understood and hopefully the attitude and behaviour change required actually occurs.

Many of the survey respondents commented that the large number and the appropriate size and nature of activities of the ADP made them more likely to stay actively involved in the ADP program compared to other programs. As one male villager in Tra My explained, *'because the ADP has so many activities happening there is always something happening that helps my family and that I want to be involved in. This is why I stay involved.'* The impact of such benefits cannot be underestimated.

Given the difficulties that are likely to be experienced in any program that attempts to undertake such a large and profound shift in attitude of community and government, it



seems wise to ensure adequate time is allocated to optimise the chances of success. To achieve this may, in fact, mean less rapid replication and up-scaling compared to planning only approaches which can be rapidly rolled-out over one to two years.

However, in an environment like Vietnam, the change associated with moving to village-based planning and development can not be overestimated, given it requires a profound attitude change on behalf of the community, the government and also often the donor and implementing agency. Such attitude change will probably be difficult at times and significant resistance may be experienced, confirming that it cannot be undertaken quickly. Therefore, a long-term perspective is advisable to ensure important attitude and behaviour change, arguably the core process needed for effective village-based development and grassroots democracy in Vietnam.

## 5.9 Conclusions

This chapter identifies seven key elements that need to be considered if village-based planning and development is to be successful within the Vietnamese context. In particular, these include a strong, direct and representative democracy framework to ensure that all annual and possibly longer-term planning processes effectively enable the majority of the local households to be meaningfully involved in discussions and decisions on the key development activities. This importantly includes the selection of beneficiaries by the beneficiaries themselves, based on agreed poverty related criteria.

Direct democratic processes, although very important, need to be complemented by effective delegated democracy that includes the ability to vote in fairly, through majority election systems, Village Heads, Hamlet Facilitators, Village Maintenance and Supervision Committees, Commune People's Committees and Commune People's Councils. Although the direct democratic processes are important given Vietnam's limited history of such approaches, the implementation of effective representative systems are also important as villages and communes grow and develop and decisions based on direct democracy become less possible.

Use of non-government or civil society entities is another important element of enabling effective community participation. The context of Vietnam makes it very difficult to define civil society or non-government agencies based on the restricted nature of western notions of this category that find it difficult to accommodate groups like mass organisations, groups which are ultimately controlled by government, yet can at times operate independently from state control or be very strongly controlled. What this thematic area reveals is that, at the village level, there needs to be some form of effective community organisation which is relatively independent of government, but can work alongside government to provide an alternate voice. Whether this is a mass organisation such as the WU, CBOs, DSGs, informal groups or even the Hamlet Facilitators network does not matter. What is important is that there is a need for a variety of active community groups at the village level who can help identify needs, democratically develop plans, facilitate activities with community input and assist the community to be involved in the monitoring and ultimately the management of all development activities to ensure villagers are actively involved in the whole development cycle in a variety of ways.



The link between decentralisation, community participation and grassroots democracy is strong in most country contexts, but especially in Vietnam. Any effective village-development program must strongly support decentralisation from national level downwards, through all layers of government to reduce the gap between the state and community. Any process of decentralisation needs to be complemented with adequate capacity building and support to ensure that those parties who have power decentralised to them have the required skills. Of the three types of decentralisation, budget or financial decentralisation is very important, given the effect that shifting financial management can have on the complimentary areas of both administrative and political decentralisation. It is important for communes and hamlets to be supported in financial and project management not only to support decentralisation generally, but also to bring appropriate decision-making and control closer to the people.

Integration of community and government planning systems is especially important in the Vietnamese context. Although many NGOs have had success in assisting hamlets and communes prepare annual development plans that run parallel to the government, the advantages of integrating the two planning processes of the community and government cannot be overlooked given such integration provides less chance of programmatic overlap, builds trust and understanding between the two societal groups and provides more effective use of resources to more effectively reduce poverty. In addition, such open integration may encourage the village level to be more active in providing their own contribution. Considerable work still exists to reduce poverty in Vietnam and although Vietnam is a popular country for donors, the gap between what is available and what is still needed is high. The promotion of appropriate community contribution in terms of cash, labour and materials can help fund the development effort and make limited funding go further to provide greater developmental impact. It also provides an important element of community involvement and buy-in, which ultimately may lead to greater continued community involvement and sustainability of development activities.

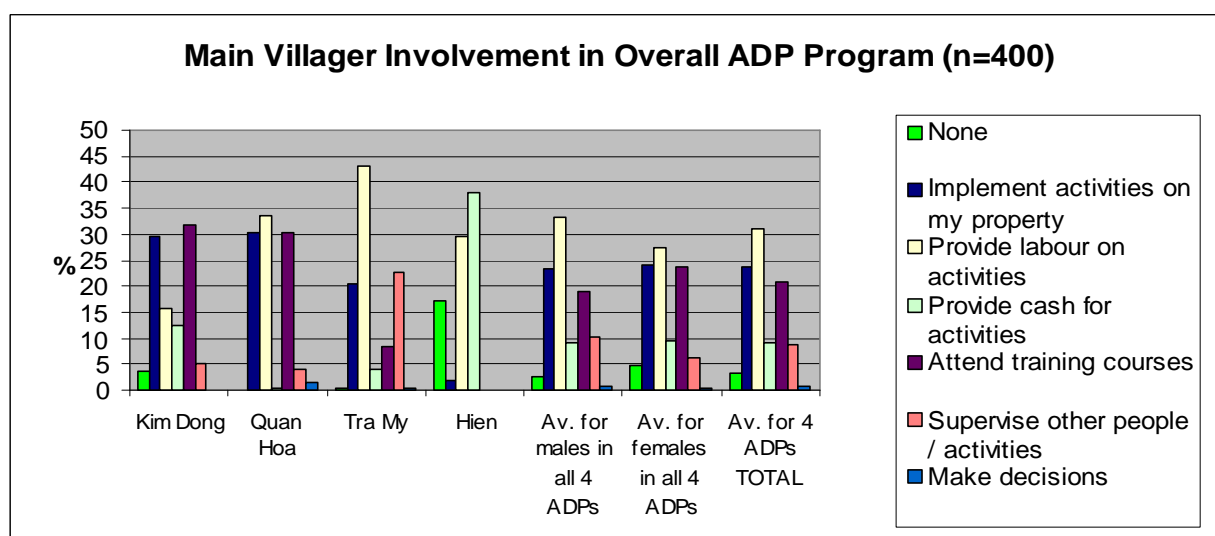
Participatory development is ultimately about the community deciding, an aim that cannot be achieved unless the community has the opportunity to decide the initial needs that will be addressed, particularly the overall sectors the program will work on. The program must start from a position where the sectors are not set by bilateral or technical directives, but are able to be identified and then addressed through a flexible program approach. Such approaches, especially in Vietnam, require a considerable amount of attitude change of government and community, a process that requires adequate time and support. As a result, village-based planning and development approaches cannot be undertaken quickly and may need ten to 15 years of planning and implementation support to really ensure they lead to the attitude and behaviour change required to achieve the key elements of grassroots democracy.

As the four case studies have demonstrated, the village-based planning and development model at the heart of World Vision's ADP methodology, is a strong example of a long-term, multi-sector, and needs based approach. If implemented in adherence with the above seven key principles, such approaches do provide a strong program approach to addressing development objectives within the Vietnamese context, including the reduction of poverty. Also importantly such approaches also have the ability to put the community in the centre of the development process through

the important elements of community participation that such models promote, even within the very unique context of Vietnam.

Figure 19 below illustrates community level perspectives of the main way respondents felt they participated in the overall ADP program within the four case study districts. Respondents were asked to list the key single way they participated. Kim Dong respondents indicated a strong focus on implementing activities themselves (29.5%), providing labour (15.7%), providing local materials (12.4%) and participating in developmental training (31.8%). In Quan Hoa respondent reported to implementing activities themselves (30.2%), providing labour (33.7%), and participating in developmental training (30.2%). In Tra My respondents reported to being involved in implementing activities themselves (20.6%), providing labour (43%) and supervising others (22.8%). In Hien respondents reported to reported to providing labour (19.7%) and providing cash contribution (37.8%). Again with most responses in Hien, a good percentage of those surveyed did not comment (13.6%) or claimed no involvement (17.1%). Again these results were verified with the Hien focus groups that confirmed that in fact most people had been involved in various ways in the ADP program however for various reasons the involvement was downplayed to highlight the role of government.

Generally these results confirm that village beneficiaries were actively involved in the program planning and implementation in the ADP. Although the type of involvement varied from area to area depending on the level of poverty, population density, urban rural status, ethnic mix and many other factors, the programs still managed to involve the people actively in the various elements of the program. As earlier trend analysis indicated, this was generally in more and varied ways than prior to such programs and the GRDD coming to being. It is important to note that respondents were asked to list one major way they were involved in the ADP program, which is what generated the results that are illustrated in Figure 19. It should be noted that many beneficiaries found this very difficult to do, given they explained they were involved in many different ways in the different stages and processes within the programs. As one male beneficiary in Quan Hoa explained, *“we are involved so much in the program, it is hard to choose just the one thing that described how we were involved the most”*.



**Figure 19: Main involvement of villagers in ADP activities across the four case study districts**

The resulting seven elements that are derived from each of the theoretical themes outlined in this chapter provide a framework of reference for future village planned and implemented development approaches that are undertaken within the Vietnamese context. The implications of the approaches on poverty reduction and development in Vietnam and elsewhere will be explored further in *Chapter Six*.

## CHAPTER SIX

### BENEFITS OF THE APPROACH AND APPLICABILITY

#### 6.1 Introduction

The preceding two chapters have highlighted many of the advantages of village-based planning and development approaches in the Vietnamese context and the seven key elements that contribute towards the successful application of this style of approach. Given the significant time and resources required to undertake effective village-based planning and development, it is important to be clear about the benefits that such approaches bring before embarking on such a high level of engagement with communities, government and donors. It is not just important to identify ways in which the approaches generally benefit Vietnam or are 'good' or even 'best practice'; it is also important to be able to identify how they link into the government of Vietnam's development and poverty reduction agenda.

In particular, within the Vietnamese context, it is important to see how these approaches tie in with the government's national five-year and ten-year socio-economic development plans, as well as other key government strategies that are devised to put these plans into action, particularly those relating to hunger eradication and poverty reduction. Based on the diverse set of research methods undertaken, this chapter will identify the key benefits of village-based planning and development approaches and explore how these benefits complement current government directions and agendas. In line with the critical development studies conceptual framework used during the research, any gaps or areas of conflict with government agendas will also be highlighted and investigated, as the change required for village-based development may not always be easy and may require significant alteration in government politics. With such considerations in mind, attempts will also be made to identify ways of mitigating such issues.

The village-based planning and development approaches explored in this thesis also have potentially wider applicability outside Vietnam. Although all country contexts differ, many countries experience at least some conditions that are similar to Vietnam. Exploring principles or, in this case, elements that promote a greater role for village-based development may be highly relevant in other country contexts. Developing country contexts can be roughly divided into two groups based on their level of relevance to this research. The first grouping contains countries that are either socialist or have a highly centralised method of government service delivery. Such contexts might include China, Laos, Cuba and Myanmar (Burma), for example. The second grouping of countries can be categorised as not having highly centralised government models of service delivery, but as still lacking important aspects of grassroots involvement in development processes. Such countries may often be termed 'democracies', but perhaps fall short in achieving the full set of elements that democratic systems usually include, especially allowing local people to be meaningfully involved in the development issues that affect them. Such countries could include a wide group of democratic countries in Asia, Latin America or Africa.

It is hoped that this chapter will provide some initial insight into the positive and negative issues associated with replicating such approaches in a variety of country contexts. Following this chapter, *Chapter Seven* will explore in more detail some of the

overall challenges that village-based planning and development approaches face in Vietnam, as well as in other country contexts.

## **6.2 Benefits of Village-Based Planning and Development Approaches on Development and Poverty Reduction**

Earlier chapters have highlighted some of the ways in which village-based planning and development approaches in Vietnam can lead to improved planning and implementation that more fully utilises community participation. In particular, elements that better enable effective grassroots democracy, decentralisation and civil society involvement have been highlighted. The advantages of these approaches over government and other development models was a central question in the survey of 2,800 households, as well as the focus groups, small sample survey and key informant interviews. These results were compared to observations and discussions with other NGO and donor programs to gain a more complete understanding on what village-based planning and development actually offered the community and the government and, to a lesser extent, it also revealed what these approaches offered the donor or implementing agency. This yielded a list of key benefits of such approaches. Even though this list of benefits has been created, it is by no means an exclusive list. In fact, few if any of the fifteen programs studied in Vietnam displayed all eight benefits mentioned below. This was largely due to the different ways in which programs have been operated in Vietnam and also as a result of the large variance between program areas geographically, economically and culturally. In many ways, the list of benefits that is referred to below is an ideal, that takes into account all lessons learned from existing programs rather than those seen in any one individual program. Despite these limitations, it is still important to identify and understand these potential benefits before looking at how they might tie into the official policies and current direction of the government of Vietnam.

### **Reduced Power Differential (State and Community)**

The power analysis undertaken in the focus groups and the 2,800 sample survey, revealed that some power was transferred from district and province level to commune and village level through the village-based approach of the four ADPs. This was particularly evident through the power ranking exercises that ranked the power of hamlet, commune, and district officials before and after the ADP program. Fourteen of the 16 mixed focus groups scored this change as highly significant using the ten seed scoring technique, with many villagers explaining that the GRDD and the ADP model enabled them to be far more active in development compared to the situation that existed beforehand. When prompted, one male focus group member in Tra My commented, *'people are less likely to protest against the government now, like many had in the past'*. Common comments in all four districts were like the following from a woman in Kim Dong District during the focus group, *'I think the government has a better understanding of the issues the villagers face now that we work together this way (in the ADP and under the GRDD).'* Such comments seemed to indicate a reduction in the perceived gap between the understanding of the priorities of the government and the community. This seemed to be a result of the planning and activity development processes being undertaken by the villagers themselves.

All 48 focus groups confirmed a greater role of the villagers and commune in activity implementation and management as a result of the ADP program. Certainly variance

existed between districts, especially in Quan Hoa where effects were more limited. However generally the ADP approach was seen to provide opportunity for far greater villager involvement in implementation, in a variety of ways. Power analysis exercises highlighted that on such occasions, this gave the average villager a greater level of village power than in the past. As one villager said *'Now we (the villagers) have a lot more responsibility than the government (commune) used to have. They still make some important decisions but we make important decisions also'*. It cannot be underestimated what a significant change this represents. This type of testimony reinforced the effect village-based development processes can have in improving the level of community involvement in a context where this was not possible previously. Also, as the government continues to attempt to decentralise more and more responsibility to the lower levels of the administrative system and to the community, the importance of village-based planning and development approaches being able to assist the delivery of such reforms should be considered. Similar observations that confirmed significant power transfer between state and community were also observed in the other 14 donor and NGO village-based development programs.

### **Supporting Democratic Elections**

The GRDD clearly promoted democratic elections for Commune People's Committees, People's Councils and Village Heads. In addition, the majority of the villagers visited during the case study reported electing Village Maintenance Committees and Village Supervision Committees in line with the recommendations of the second GRDD released in 1993. Villager feedback obtained through the small sample survey process indicated that these groups were not, however, always functioning fully or sustainably. However election processes for such groups and positions were reported to occur regardless of the implementation of a donor or NGO village-based development program in most areas (United Nations Development Programme 2006b). One male villager in Hien explained, *'yes, we have elections for the important commune and village positions. We (all villages and communes) must do this'*. The case study investigations suggested that the implementation of electoral processes was one element of the decree that seemed to have most consistently occurred in all four districts since the decree was initiated. This was unlike other elements of the decree, for example involving the people in all development stages, which often did not occur unless an outside an agency assisted to facilitate it.

Despite election processes being implemented regardless of village-based planning and development processes, it was noted during the research that village-based planning and development programs did often lead to some improvements in the electoral processes that may not have occurred otherwise. The electoral processes undertaken as part of village-based development programs for community positions such as Hamlet Facilitators, Village Maintenance Committees and Village Supervision Committees appeared to assist build village understanding and skills of practicing open and representative democratic election processes. In many cases, this learning was routinely applied to the election processes for Village Heads, Commune People's Committees and Commune People's Councils, usually resulting in larger number of voters, more open and fair election processes and more consensus amongst the community. As one female villager in Kim Dong explained, *'the way we elect the hamlet facilitator is very good. Anyone in the village can be involved in choosing. This is a good example of how this can be done'*. The system of Hamlet Facilitators set up

under the ADP was reported by villagers to be a very positive initiative, since villages were now able to democratically elect important non-government or civil society roles themselves and learn what an election process could be. All case study communes commented that this was an important improvement on how things used to work in the past. In addition, the processes of democratic decision-making that are incorporated in the planning and implementation stages of the village-based planning and development approaches were also reported to support and reinforce the principles included within the local election processes. Consistently villagers in all districts reported that they could see clear synergies in the democratic and equality based principles of elections and the planning and implementation processes included in the village-based development model. In fact, frequently during interviews, focus groups and survey processes, villages explained that they in fact saw the government and the NGO or donor doing 'the same thing', as a result of the complementarity of the approaches. This response often surprised NGO and donor representatives who often dwelt on the difference in their approach versus that of the government, rather than such important complementarity.

In many ways it is not surprising that the election process of local leaders was the main element that was most consistently supported from the decree and required less facilitation to enable it to occur. The process, after all, is about delegating key responsibility and power, something that is keenly contested in nearly any community. (Borrini-Feyerabend et al 2004). In many communities whether in Vietnam or elsewhere, elections are a key event because they represent the transfer of significant power to individuals or a group of individuals, often from within that society (Kaufman 1997). Also, given the high level of poverty still evident in many parts of Vietnam, it is perhaps not surprising that elections, which cost very little to undertake, are completed regardless, unlike other more costly and time-consuming aspects of grassroots democracy, for instance the implementation of improved participatory planning or participatory implementation (United Nations Development Programme, a. I. 2002). Election processes for village and commune officials were not investigated in detail in this research given the sensitivities of such issues, however informal discussions during the research period revealed that, according to many beneficiary reports across all four districts, these appeared to be reasonably fairly conducted. Naturally, on occasion, reports of un-transparent processes or corruption were alluded to, however these seemed relatively rare. Encouragingly it was reported by most villagers who were happy to discuss this issue, that in their opinion, a majority of households voted in such elections, especially in more remote areas in Quan Hoa, Hien and Tra My. This is an impressive result for any country, especially one going through a relatively recent reform in democratic processes (Beetham 1994).

It is important to note that the roles and duties for village and commune officials defined under the grassroots democracy decree of 1998 and especially 2003 provide a much greater mandate for decentralised responsibility (National Centre for Social Sciences and Humanities 2003). This has resulted in a system of local governance which is far different from the one that existed under French, Japanese and early communist rule. A frequent comment by villagers in all four districts was that, for the first time, they can now elect local people to have overall responsibility for village affairs, rather than relying on outside supervision and control, especially from the district and provincial level. This seemed to lead to a much higher level of contentment at the village level. As male villager in Kim Dong explained during a survey interview,

*'it is good we have these processes (local elections in village and commune). It means everyone can be involved and see what happens. It means less problems in the village.'* It is reasonable to assume that this change in electoral democracy occurred mainly under the guidance of the GRDD, however it is also important to note that village-based planning and development approaches have significantly supported such approaches through promotion of parallel process under their overall methodology. The research in all four districts supported the notion that such approaches had provided important support to existing democratic elections processes occurring under the GRDD.

### **Improved Financial Transparency and Accountability**

It can probably be assumed that the GRDD did not explicitly foresee that the commune would be the major party involved in local budget creation and subsequent financial management. After all, this is a significant departure from how financial management, possibly the most guarded area of any government, is handled. What the decree did outline is that the commune, the lowest level of government, would be much more involved in local development program management, a process that is hard to achieve if all budget and financial management functions are handled by the levels of government above. Despite this logical link between decentralisation of administration, development cycle management and financial decentralisation, in many cases financial decentralisation to the commune has very rarely occurred, as interviews with commune and district PMBs confirmed. This however is a situation that makes it difficult for the intention of the GRDD to be fully realised at commune level, unless the commune can complete this role.

One of the main factors contributing to this situation is a lack of legal framework that clearly sets out what is expected of the commune in terms of budgeting and financial management, how this relates to their administrative and developmental cycle management responsibilities and how to ensure this integration occurs. As one donor project representative working on such issues explained, *'the government really needs to support the commune much more. Unless they have the capacity to manage their own finances and programs and have a clear mandate on what they need to do, this will always be a problem.'* As a result, any such legal reform to reinforce the role in financial management of the commune would need to be heavily supported by capacity building of relevant commune staff to ensure these people have the required skills and resources to complete the important functions that would be expected of them. The government's Program 135 was recently amended to include decentralisation of funds to the commune government level, a process followed in a similar manner by the World Bank CBRIP program and several other programs. Due to funding and other organisational constraints, many of these programs have delegated funds to the commune level with little or no additional capacity building (Oxfam Hong Kong 2000). Villagers reported during the survey processes that this often meant that considerable funds were inappropriately used, potentially damaging the goal of both decentralisation and grassroots democracy. Given the frequent capacity gap in commune officials in terms of financial management, ensuring they have adequate skills is an essential pre-requisite.

Some village-based development programs have not just encouraged the commune government to take a greater role in budgeting and financial management, but have also set about implementing comprehensive capacity building programs to ensure



these new tasks are able to be completed effectively. This has included training that equips commune officials with the skills to have all budgets, socio-economic plans, fees and taxes and other financial issues communicated to the people and the opportunity for these to be openly discussed. This often results in such matters being advertised publicly on commune and village notice boards and discussed in public meetings as was, interestingly, intended in the GRDD. In addition, such processes have involved detailed training and coaching to ensure adequate numbers of commune staff are equipped with key financial competencies that effectively link them into both village and district processes.

To complete this process effectively, the facilitating agency typically takes on a capacity building role rather than an implementing role and as the skills of the commune increase, the agencies amend their role towards an audit or checking role only. In the small number of villages where this occurred, the villagers consistently commented that this had allowed them to have much greater confidence in local commune leaders and the level of financial accountability they provide. In the past, villagers reported to not trusting the district and provincial officials because they were never told what money was being spent on and did not have confidence in the commune's financial management skills. As male one villager in Quang Ngai explained, *'now the commune can manage the funds, we are more happy'*. When such open processes are put in place, it is naturally more likely that villagers feel more confident in local government and that protests against local leadership, like those of 1996-1997 complaining of misuse of funds, would be much less likely under the improved open, transparent and financially accountable systems. The few mostly bilateral agencies that have had success with this process reported that it was one of the most important benefits of their program. *'In successfully supporting administrative processes, the commune is given lasting capacity that will assist not just with the current program, but also with all grassroots democracy and development processes in the future,'* said one male bilateral project representative.

### **More Equitable Distribution of Resources**

The use of democratic village decision-making processes through both the GRDD but particularly village-based typically development approaches has meant that resource allocation at a commune and village level is generally more equitable. Consistently in all villagers, the issue of resource distribution was raised as a key area of disagreement at the village level in the past. For example, many Kinh villagers in Tra My explained that they felt the ethnic minority people were getting disproportionately too many resources and assistance in the past and they did not understand why this occurred. Alternatively, some ethnic minority people in Quan Hoa explained that the people closest to the commune towns (usually Kinh Vietnamese) seemed to get all the assistance in the past with little allocated to their villages. The focus group discussions held in all four districts confirmed that when the process of mass, commune-wide meetings was instigated, all people had more opportunity to hear, discuss and understand how resources were being distributed and have the ability to be involved in such decisions. This was reported to build much greater trust between different community groups and reduce possible misunderstandings and tension. *'Now we have the village meetings to decide such things (resource allocation), we understand much better why decisions are made'*, said one village woman in Hien. Interviews and focus groups confirmed that in many cases such meetings occurred directly because

of the GRDD. However it was also reported that such meetings were not always effectively conducted and did not always prove conducive to participation by all. This often meant that the opinions of the Village Head, Village Party Secretary or elders dominated, with decisions as a result reflecting government agendas. It was felt that meetings and decision-making processes conducted in this manner resulted in personal and commune interests being met rather than village priorities.

The village-based planning and development models of the bilateral donors and NGOs were seen to help mitigate such issues when community facilitators were introduced into such processes. These paid or non-paid people who were usually trained in basic community consultation and how to effectively run successful village meetings, assisted in supporting the meeting processes, very much in line with what the GRDD intended. If their intervention was undertaken sensitively and justly, these facilitators often succeeded in involving and fairly representing the interests of all village groups in the final development plan. Although needing to work with the Village Head and Village Party Secretary during this process, the inclusion of an outside facilitator provided a non-government and community centred approach to such processes to more fully enable representative discussion and democratic decision-making to occur on all activities and plans.

### **Greater Ability to Create Attitude Change and Transformation**

A comment frequently raised by people involved in village-development approaches is that they appreciated the long-term engagement of the approaches, frequently from five to 15 years. The benefit of this is not just to maintain development funding and impact over a longer period. Villagers themselves acknowledged in interviews in all four case study areas that development and the changes they hoped for usually involved considerable time, especially given the level of underdevelopment and poverty that many areas experienced. As one male villager said in Hien, *'we are very poor and it takes a long time to change our situation. It is a process of going step-by-step'*. This type of comment was commonly heard in all case study areas with, respondents frequently criticising short-term programs because they often failed to really change how things occur. Again, one male villager in Hien said, *'some projects are only one or two years and expect to fix many things. Usually some things are fixed but others take much longer, long after the project is gone'*.

We have seen that some programs subsequently do take a long term approach to development like the World Vision ADPs that work with individual communes for five to 15 years (World Vision International 2007). The length of engagement of these types of programs is generally not based on donor timeframes and agency standards, but on the needs of the particular area. The funding obtained from private donors in a variety of countries through child sponsorship allows such a flexible approach to be taken on World Vision programs, unlike many donor projects which are often beholden to set timeframes and political agendas. Under the flexible village-based development funding, some villagers may complete their development priorities in five years, whereas others may require the full 15 years to address the main poverty needs and instigate the change required (Cookingham 2002). Under the ADP model, each five-year program period is externally evaluated at the end of the period to help determine whether the program needs to continue for another five-year cycle (World Vision International 2004a). The potential of multiple five-year periods provides a long-term approach that gives an adequate timeframe to influence both government and

community processes and allow change to occur, especially the type of attitude and behavioural change expected under the GRDD. It is important to remember that development and poverty reduction is not just about obtaining economic outcomes nor assisting with the provision of social outcomes like education and health. It is fundamentally about changing power relationships, attitudes and achieving transformation across multiple levels (World Vision International 2003a).

Given the long-history of existing power structures and deep-seated attitudes in Vietnam, it is not surprising that such attitude change can take considerable time. A number of academics, including Lederach (2001), have commented how attitude change cannot be completed quickly, but requires time to build up trust and understanding. This is why, in many ways, the large geographical roll-out of village-based planning processes by some bilateral donors in Vietnam can appear to achieve some results in improved planning processes over a large geographical area, however it can not be expected that these programs will have the same effect on long-term attitude change, given they only operate for a one to two year period. Approaches with a focus on higher level goals of power transfer and attitude change naturally take a longer time period, involving support of the whole development cycle through planning, implementation, monitoring and ongoing management.

### **Ability to Address All Development Needs**

An important element of the ADP approach is that, unlike many other village-based planning and development approaches, it has the ability to respond to all types of needs that may be raised by a community. As discussed, many donor programs, even those claiming to be village-based planning and development approaches, often only focus on one or two sectors due to many practical and valid considerations, including financial and technical limitations or, frequently, the political interests of the donor or government. This often means that the program cannot consider all needs that underpin poverty and that might be articulated by the community. Frequently during interviews and surveys, project beneficiaries told of situations where other projects had come and only worked in a single technical sector. As one male villager explained in Tra My, *'when the project came they told us they would help us with health. We agreed to work with them because our village is poor. What we want as farmers is more help with agriculture not health'*. When a program is not restricted to particular sectors or types of activities in this way, it means that there is a far greater ability to address all community needs, even if they fall under different agency prescribed categories. It is important to remember that community is primarily interested in assistance, not confining it to certain categories that an agency may have in mind or particular skills in. Such an open-minded response is also perhaps the only way of addressing the multi-dimensional root causes of poverty, which naturally are not confined to just one sector. Villagers and local government officials during the case studies interviews in all four districts frequently commented that the ADP approach was the only program they knew of in Vietnam that attempted to work in this way and address any needs that were raised and agreed upon. Several cases were reported where for financial or other reasons, a community suggested activity was not permitted by the ADP however generally these instances were rare.

Such an approach often includes activities in several diverse sectors, such as health, agriculture and education, all of which may require detailed technical expertise, creating a potential burden for the implementing agency compared to a single sector

approach. Frequently, programs that attempt to address such broad issues find they may be able to address the diverse needs that present themselves on one level, but in practice struggle to implement the broad set of activities with a high level of quality. It is often perceived that such program systems can spread such approaches 'too thinly' in a technical sense, compared to more targeted and detailed single sector programs. Therefore, a trade-off often presents itself between, on one hand obtaining true participation, where people have complete control over decisions and on the other being able to effectively undertake a diverse cross-sectoral development program. In many ways, this is the key challenge of any village-based development approach. It is also a difficult element to compromise on because it is one of the factors, if not the most important factor, that differentiates this approach from any other participatory style approach. It is this difference that ultimately gives the community the greatest level of say in the development process and is arguably the greatest benefit of the approach, despite being difficult to achieve in practical terms.

### **Achievement of Economic and Social Results**

The last important benefit to highlight in a successful village-based planning and development approach is the ability to provide clear outcomes. At the end of a program it is often this issue of 'impact' that is at the heart of many program evaluations (Estrella and Gaventa 1998). *Chapter One* revealed that the government of Vietnam, like many governments, sees and subsequently measures poverty in economic terms and is often judged on the level of tangible economic benefit it provides, despite the importance of the other dimensions of poverty. In the context of Vietnam and, for that matter, many other countries, how a project may fare against something like Choguill's ladder of participation may be interesting and prompt discussion, however ultimately tangible increases in income and subsequent decrease in poverty in financial terms may be the most pressing consideration. If a village-based planning and development program cannot demonstrate some meaningful contribution towards such aims they will often struggle in the Vietnamese context. To address this issue, many scholars have attempted to quantify the economic benefit that improved community participation can bring an area in economic terms. Repeatedly these exercises discover that measuring any development change is difficult, especially attributing the change to a particular program or style of approach in development terms (Taylor 1991). This produces a complex, if not impossible, measurement task, given macro factors that can easily influence the achievement of any development outcomes. Several academics and studies have attempted to demonstrate that improved participation does provide tangible economic benefits as result of unique factors within such methodologies including improved activity selection, accountability and transparency, community contribution and community management (Chambers 1998; Malvicini and Sweetser 2003). Although providing some indicative support, generally such studies cannot prove this conclusively due to the difficulties associated with attribution. The four five-year independent evaluations undertaken in each of the case study ADPs prior to and during the research period confirmed that these programs had definitely contributed to some level of economic growth, despite this not being easily quantified (Crawford 2005; Ly Ha Hoa 2005; Ord 2004; Swete-Kelly 2005). As for example, the Hien Evaluation report states, '*Economic Development: Agricultural Enterprises: World Vision through its ADP Program has provided a major support role in this process and its contribution is acknowledged by district officials*' (Swete-Kelly 2005). Despite the lack of hard evidence and detailed studies to

conclusively support the economic benefits of participation in Vietnam, it appears that such approaches do most definitely provide some economic benefit.

It is also important to remember that many development practitioners argue that economic success is not an adequate measure of poverty reduction (German Technical Cooperation Agency 1996; Levy 2003; Roche 1999; Woodhill 1998). As explored in *Chapter Two*, poverty is a multi-faceted phenomenon with economic, social, political, personal and even spiritual dimensions. Therefore, any more comprehensive assessment of poverty reduction usually includes multiple indicators including economic indicators as only one type amongst many others. Again, independent evaluations of the four case studies revealed that when taking such a broad set of social, personal, political and other such indicators into account, the village-based planning and development programs appeared to have had tangible levels of success despite the difficulty in attributing such high level impact achievement conclusively to the programs (Crawford, P. 2005; Ly Ha Hoa 2005; Ord 2004; Swete-Kelly 2005). As the Quan Hoa Evaluation report states, '*that the ADP has been a participant in achieving these improvements to the quality of life for people living in Quan Hoa district is undeniable*' (Ord 2004). Quantitatively, such impact indicators were usually measured in each technical sector of the four ADPs, often against a baseline, to provide as accurate a picture of outcome and attribution as was possible.

Perhaps more importantly, the evaluations included qualitative processes to obtain comments and stories from program beneficiaries on the impact of the program in their lives, based on their own opinions and indicators. Due to the limitations of quantitative measurement systems and the difficulty in determining the level of attribution, increasingly villager opinion is used to measure 'project success' as an alternative (Davies 1995). Generally, this type of method aligns with the principles of measuring 'most significant change'. Frequently beneficiaries in interviews and focus groups noted the most significant change they had experienced was directly a result of the ADP or other village-based planning and development programs. As one female villager in Tra My explained, '*it is this program (the ADP) that has helped us get out of poverty the most*'. As already noted, significant difficulty was experienced when asking villagers to explore the difference between government and other program types, due to a reluctance to be critical of government assistance.

It needs to be highlighted that that it is always very important to consider this style of monitoring and evaluation, since it is often a more effective way of gaining beneficiaries opinion and involvement in evaluation processes. In line with the principles of participation, such types of evaluation are important since they continue to involve the community in the development cycle, as they ideally have been in the proceeding cycle stages including planning, implementation and ongoing management. If the community is not involved in monitoring and evaluation, it again removes them from an important part of the process, reduces their level of involvement and moves the process to be more donor or NGO driven (Estrella and Gaventa 1997).

This again links in with the work of Sen who strongly advocated for alternative ways of looking at poverty. He saw poverty as not just an economic phenomenon, but as something integrally linked to individual and community capabilities and the freedoms of each individual, as defined by those individuals themselves (Sen 1985). This

thinking also supports the notion of open forms of evaluation that promote the end users or beneficiaries to be able to articulate what they feel the result of the development process is, rather than comparing sets of complex quantitative indicators, often developed from a western and technologically-focussed perspective.

When looking at the issue of overall development impact, it is important to note that any change in the standard of development can lead to additional or unintended outcomes that can be both positive and negative. For example, a frequent positive benefit of development is that it can lead to reduced power differential between groups if the development benefit is shared equitably across different groups. Eshete and O'Reilly-Calthorp (2000) explain in their book – *Silent Revolution: The Role of Community Development in Reducing the Demand for Small Arms*, that programs that succeed in obtaining tangible development outcomes, even if they have no particular focus on conflict prevention, will often create conditions that naturally reduce the incidence of conflict. This is in many ways logical, since development results improve the community's lifestyle and, as a result, frequently communities become less interested in and involved in conflict. If, however, they continue to live in hardship, or if development benefit is not equitably shared, the opposite situation may occur, where the likelihood of conflict is actually increased by positive development results.

Therefore, successful economic and social development can provide a calming effect on conflict situations if it is undertaken sensitively and through a system that enables equitable distribution. The use of village-based planning and development approaches given their likelihood to provide long-term and continued economic and social outcomes and being based on fair, equitable and democratic processes, has a greater chance of delivering positive impacts with development gains rather than negative consequences (Eshete and O'Reilly-Calthorp 2000). In all 15 donor and NGO village-based planning and development programs investigated during the research, the overall program structure and development benefits obtained appeared to anecdotally produce a stabilising effect on local conflict, with few incidences of significant conflict between communities, between government and community and between community and local leaders be reported as a result of the program. As one male participant of such a program commented, *'we argue less with the officials now we work this way.'*

### **6.3 Alignment with Vietnam's Political Agenda**

The benefits of village-based planning and development approaches outlined above generally support the current political, economic and social direction of the government of Vietnam (United Nations Development Programme 2002a). The government's five-year and ten-year system of socio-economic planning sees national plans developed that reflect the lessons learned from the previous five years and the government's desired path for the country for the coming five-year period (McGrath 2005). Since the national socialist government was established in 1975, this planning process has evolved, reflecting the changing focus of government. It now includes greater input from the various levels of government, including line ministries and provinces and also input from NGO reference groups, donors, private enterprises and universities. Also, as the process of decentralisation continues, these plans now contain less detailed information at the national level and leave much of the key detailed planning to the corresponding provincial, district and commune level processes.

The *doi moi* reforms that commenced in the 1980s have had particularly significant effects on this planning process, with a significant shift towards both external and internal economic development and a greater embrace of global economic markets. This trend has continued through all five-yearly socio-economic plans including the current one for 2005-2010. The socio-economic plans from the 1990s onwards in particular began to more clearly tie in the issues of poverty reduction of the most vulnerable areas with economic growth, as a result of the growing level of disparity evident, especially in rural, mountainous and ethnic minority areas (Fritzen 2002). In particular, the last three five-yearly socio-economic plans have focussed on the dual aim of poverty reduction and economic growth, in addition to incorporating trends in governance reform including the promotion of improved community involvement and grassroots democracy (VUFO-NGO Resource Centre 2006).

It should be noted that although this dual government focus seems honourable, there is much debate around whether the continued national economic growth does really assist in reducing the deep level poverty that exists in Vietnam (United Nations Development Programme 2005a). It is often noted in Vietnam that economic growth is mostly experienced in urban areas, with an ever-wider gap emerging between rich and poor and subsequently between the rural mountainous and urban populations. The desire that the economic growth that Vietnam experiences as a nation will 'trickle down' to the poorest villages infrequently becomes a reality in Vietnam (VUFO-NGO Resource Centre 2003). The government has sought to specifically address this issue through dedicated programs for remote areas, however, as this thesis has highlighted, these programs often struggle to provide significant lasting change due to their limited budgets and programmatic constraints. Although Vietnam's reduction in overall poverty is often highlighted as a great achievement, the significant level of poverty that remains and its stratified nature still presents a major problem for the government (United Nations Development Programme 2005c). Although a common development dilemma in many countries worldwide, this is still a key issue for policy in Vietnam to address more effectively.

Village-based planning and development can provide much needed support to the development and poverty reduction agenda contained in the government's five-yearly socio-economic plans. Firstly, village-based approaches usually contain an overall goal of poverty reduction in economic and social terms that generally aligns nearly completely with the main goal of the government's plans. All 15 village-based planning and development programs investigated included goals that focussed on these areas. In addition, the variety of activities undertaken as part of village-based development programs often contribute towards the specific social and economic targets set out in the socio-economic plans of government including many of the VDGs. Village-based development approaches also often align with the main aspects of Vietnam's socio-economic development policy and also its plans for both poverty reduction and hunger eradication (VUFO-NGO Resource Centre 2006). The aspect of promoting community involvement in planning, implementation, monitoring and management in village-based planning and development programs, as this thesis has explored, directly supports the implementation of the GRDD and the government's process of decentralisation. The GRDD is clearly something the government wants to encourage, but as the 2,800 sample survey and focus groups revealed, it is very often something that it does not have the resources to implement effectively. Through both the financial contribution of such approaches and the elements of the approaches themselves,

village-based planning and development programs can clearly support the government agenda.

There are, however, areas of commune and village-based development approaches that can conflict with key government policy. One of the main areas is in relation to the government's poverty household selection criteria. The majority of the 15 village based-development approaches investigated, including the ADP, do not rely on government poverty lists due to their frequent inaccuracy, the often outdated and macro nature of the data and, particularly, the lack of applicability to local village and household dynamics. Instead, village-based development approaches often utilise village selection criteria that are developed and decided on by the village itself, based on the local knowledge and existing poverty ranking systems that are present at the village level. At times this aligns quite well with official poverty lists, however very often these also significantly diverge from each other. Interviews in case study areas revealed that the village-based selection system was felt to be far superior and provided distinct benefits, not the least being a more fair and equitable way of targeting programs benefits to the most deserving people.

Government programs, on the other hand, often assume that all communities are homogenous and, as a result, utilise inflexible and incorrect selection criteria. It was frequently reported that the wrong people were targeted and therefore many people who should have received assistance missed out, whilst others received it when they should not have. This is another factor contributing to the issue of disparity in Vietnam between rich and poor, the very thing the government is seeking to alleviate. Understanding the local issues of poverty and developing a effective selection criteria is again something that often only a long-term, hands-on approach can deliver. Given this step determines who the program will work with and why, it could be argued that this is the most important part of the village-based process. It is, of course, in many ways intuitive that the village must truly know best on a village or household level who is the most needy.

Many studies have confirmed that the household is an important level in many cultures, not the least in Vietnam (Hainsworth 1999; Tran Dinh Huou 1991; Young 1994). Fixed poverty lists and statistics cannot fully appreciate the dynamic and individual nature of households, especially across a nation as diverse as Vietnam. Only the development of a set of poverty criteria based on local factors and knowledge can be expected to effectively identify key groups and individuals within households. Therefore, despite the contradiction of this system with government lists, this is an important issue for any program to pursue and many programs, including the case study ADPs, have succeeded in convincing authorities to use this fairer and more transparent method of selection.

The government is also clear on the issue of 'social evils', another key issue often attributed to inequality in Vietnam (VUFO-NGO Resource Centre 2003). The government of Vietnam has clear social and moral codes of behaviour explained within its civil code, laws, and decrees. These outline key types of behaviours which are seen as moral and those which are seen as immoral or, to use the Vietnamese government term, which are 'social evils'. These behaviours are seen not just as wrong, but also to be anti-societal and therefore anti-state. These social evils are subsequently classified as criminal offences that can result in on the spot fines or often jail. Two main examples of social evils are being a sex worker or being an



Intravenous Drug User (IDU) and these two groups also happen to make up the vast majority of the estimated 60,000 HIV/AIDS cases in Vietnam (United Nations Development Programme 2005c). Given the potential retribution if you are discovered to be one of these people and therefore subjected to the laws on social evils, many such people stay hidden 'underground'. This makes it very difficult to include such people in community decisions or in programs that may help them, given many such people just do not want to be found. The Quan Hoa case study area is located close to the Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR) border where drugs, especially heroine, are easily obtainable and therefore drug use is common. Yet to involve an IDU in the planning and other decision-making processes of the program in Quan Hoa was reported by ADP staff to be very difficult. It was reported that IDUs feel stigmatised and fear possible ramifications, so remain uninvolved in community processes or 'invisible'. Village-based development programs seek, by their nature, to include all people in all processes regardless of their race, sex, age, class or any other factor, a process that at times runs contrary to government policy as typified by the social evils policy. Sensitivity and care needs to be exercised to ensure such marginalised groups are included in the programs yet avoiding adverse effects for these groups or with government authorities.

Similarly, difficulties exist when encouraging certain forms of civil society. Given the newness of non-government forms of organisation in Vietnam and the threat this may pose to government structures, sensitivity and care again needs to be exercised when forming or promoting such groups, as resistance may be evident given non-government groups have traditionally been granted only limited rights and powers. It is anticipated that involving civil society will become more commonplace as economic and political development continues in Vietnam.

Despite these areas of conflict between village-based approaches and key government policy, the challenges mentioned are not insurmountable, even though significant difficulties and the need for progress still remains. The examples above illustrate that programs undertaken need to operate smartly and flexibly to work around these issues on local and national levels to ensure they reflect equality and enable the spirit of the GRDD to be realised.

#### **6.4 Implications for Socialist and Other Country Contexts**

It seems evident that, despite the challenges, village-based approaches are applicable in Vietnam and produce some distinct benefits if carefully implemented. It is likely that village-based approaches, or at the key least elements included in these approaches, might also be applicable in other centrally administered countries where similar issues of powers difference and a lack of grassroots democracy may exist. Countries including China, Lao PDR, Cuba and Myanmar meet these criteria, as well as possibly others, as all such countries have a history of strong centrally administered governance and are trying, to various degrees, to involve the community more in local decision-making and development. As this thesis has explored for Vietnam, implementing such change processes provides the government with many distinct benefits, perhaps most of all freeing up often finite government resources to be involved more effectively in policy development, rather than development implementation (White and Smoke 2005). Village-based approaches can also provide more efficient development outcomes by being more responsive to development needs, more integrated in their approach, and attracting additional funding. Use of the

approaches can also help, implement reforms and agendas, even if slowly, which open up more space for decentralisation, civil society and the promotion of grassroots democracy.

China, which is going through a process of decentralising responsibility to the township and village level government, is perhaps the most parallel example to Vietnam (Jeans 1997). The township in China is a level of government similar to the commune and sits just above the village. Despite the fact that changes in policy that are associated with decentralisation of responsibility to this level of government have been communicated to the township government and the village, like Vietnam, little real change in the level of community involvement has occurred at the grassroots level (Salas et al 2003). Any significant change that has taken place has generally occurred in isolated cases and very slowly, particularly though the input of a small group of donors, NGOs and Chinese research organisations (Plummer and Taylor 2004). Despite China embarking on this similar process of grassroots democracy and decentralisation before Vietnam, it too could benefit from the lessons learned from village-based planning and development programs in Vietnam and the key elements that have been identified to contribute to its success in such a similar country context. In addition the structure and funding associated with such an approach could, in a similar manner, assist the community and the government meet their agendas more effectively.

World Vision is working in China to implement the ADP approach and it is already showing promise as being an applicable model for this context capable of delivering many of the same benefits as have been seen in Vietnam (Jayakaran 2003b). The benefit of such an approach to this context cannot be underestimated given the support it can give to the process of change that is required to put the government policy into practice. Again, the long duration of such approaches allows the shift in attitude, power and particularly practice to be 'less painful' since it occurs in a slower manner and with considerable support. Such approaches would naturally need to be tailored to the particular situation in China (or the other countries mentioned), however the main elements of long-term, participatory, holistic development could still be applied in many different cases and provide the benefit not just of assisted economic and social development, but also provide a vehicle for widespread policy, power and attitude change whilst also realising key democratic, decentralisation, civil society and community participation goals.

The village-based approach also aligns with countries that are deemed democratic already, but may experience 'real' democracy on a limited scale. As Diamond points out, many democracies are not as democratic as they may seem, often even being less democratic in practice than some of the countries labelled 'non-democratic' such as Vietnam (Diamond 1996 p21). Many such countries do not have effective and representative election processes and many do not have the ability to involve the community widely in development processes (Diamond 1992). These countries may, in fact, face many of the same issues of limited community participation that socialist or other centrally controlled countries experience.

Such countries, likewise, could potentially benefit from the structure that a long-term village-based development approach can bring. Such a model can assist change long standing systems of power difference or dominant attitudes that do not enable the village to be actively involved. Village-based planning and development approaches

should be able to be effectively applied to these contexts if they are used flexibly, amended based on local conditions and build on existing structures. Such amendments may require investigation and revision of key aspects of the approaches to ensure they complement local structures, cultures and traditions. This, for instance, may see a village committee in place in each village rather than the three-person team of Hamlet Facilitator, Village Head and Village Party Secretary that is preferred in Vietnam. However, as World Vision has noted, such approaches can bring lasting economic and social development in a variety of country contexts and, through a flexible, long-term and holistic process of learning and doing, promote the important principles of decentralisation, democratic decision-making, improved election processes, the establishment of civil society, and ultimately improved community participation and empowerment.

## 6.5 Conclusions

This chapter explored some of the key benefits of village-based development approaches, highlighting how a reduction in power difference between the state and community can build understanding and even assist alleviate conflict within the community and between the community and the government. Similarly, the approach can support the promotion of democratic processes that ensure open and fair election processes for local leaders, a process that builds greater trust, transparency and accountability in village-based positions and organisations. The direction towards open and direct democratic systems of deciding village needs and priorities has also made a significant difference to how all people in the village, regardless of age, sex, ethnic background or other factors, participate in deciding key village issues. The greater involvement of commune staff in commune budget and financial management can also be seen as a very positive method of ensuring funding is used effectively and in line with the villagers' wishes, as well as leading towards a greater degree of openness and transparency. The combination of these processes embraces community engagement and leads to more equitable resource distribution and effective development programs that better meet the needs of the whole community.

The other benefits noted of village-based planning and development approaches is their ability to work long-term on changing the attitudes and preconceptions held by both communities and local government leaders. The research indicates that this is a process that takes considerable time and needs considerable support that cannot simply happen over night. The long duration of many village-based approaches combined with the large-scale of delivery, often means that many of the priorities raised by the community can be met, a situation that often is not the case in more specific and targeted projects. Lastly and perhaps most importantly for the government of Vietnam, it seems likely that such approaches assisted reduce poverty in both social and economic terms, as could be best deduced from the four five-year independent end of phase evaluations of the case study ADPs conducted in 2005.

The benefits of these program approaches contribute to the main aims of Vietnam's socio-economic development policy and also its plans for both poverty reduction and hunger eradication. Increasing development of the most rural communities, and promoting grassroots democracy are key elements of the government's policies and also of village-based development approaches. Although the approaches can conflict with government agendas, particularly for issues of selection criteria, targeting the

poor, including marginalised groups and promoting civil society, these areas of conflict and challenges can often be overcome if carefully and sensitively implemented.

The seven key elements of village-based approaches that are explored in this thesis are also applicable in other centrally administered countries where similar issues of power differential and lack of grassroots democracy exist. Elements of the approach may also align with countries that are deemed democratic, yet experience difficulties enabling effective grassroots involvement. In both such contexts, village-based planning and development provides a long-term process for power redistribution and attitude change through a development program framework. For the approaches to be successful in other contexts, they would need significant tailoring to ensure program elements are contextualised to political, social, economic and cultural conditions, just as they need to be in Vietnam and the different areas within Vietnam, as this research has highlighted. Nonetheless, if the key elements of long-term, participatory, and holistic development are adhered to, it could be expected that subsequent approaches would be effective and deliver similar benefits to community, government and donors as the approaches have done in Vietnam.

Given the benefits, the issues associated with replicating these approaches and particularly the challenges, the final chapter of this thesis, *Chapter Seven*, outlines in more detail the key considerations for this approach in the future, particularly reflecting on the approach using the critical development studies conceptual framework.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### OVERALL CHALLENGES OF THE APPROACH

#### 7.1 Introduction

The preceding chapters of this thesis have highlighted the importance of village-based planning and development as a set of approaches that can promote democracy, decentralisation, civil society and community participation within the current Vietnamese context. The main elements of effective village-based approaches have been explored, as well as the benefits that the approaches may bring Vietnam and, for that matter, other countries that experience similar conditions. The detailed exploration of the benefits and applicability of these approaches in this thesis has also revealed the challenges that the village-based development and planning approach faces. These need to be carefully investigated and evaluated. From the outset, this thesis aimed to apply a critical development studies conceptual framework, looking at all issues critically, a process that requires any challenges associated with village-based planning and development to be fully explored alongside the benefits. It is hoped that this objective and pluralistic process will leave the reader with a balanced and accurate account of the applicability of the approaches.

The challenges that are explored in this chapter apply particularly to the Vietnam context and to the unique conditions currently present in Vietnam as a nation. That said, they might likewise be relevant to other country contexts that are exploring the application of similar approaches. The challenges are grouped into major themes that have emerged through the various stages of the research, including the case studies, NGO and donor program review and the literature review. As this chapter argues, some of these challenges can be overcome with relatively little difficulty as long as the correct conditions exist, and as long as careful program management occurs. Others pose a more serious threat to the approaches more generally and, in many ways, question some of the primary assumptions the approaches and, for that matter, development, hold true. This chapter explores each of these areas of challenge individually and critically and, where possible, recommendations are made that may assist overcome these challenges and hopefully ensure the effectiveness of the approaches in Vietnam in the future.

#### 7.2 Achieving Fully-Integrated Planning

The four case studies illustrated the benefits of an uninhibited process whereby villagers are able to discuss and determine their needs and then develop an annual or longer-term development plan. It could be argued that this is community participation in its strongest form. It aligns very well with the definition of the Asian Development Bank introduced at the start of this thesis that states that participation is a process where people have control of the processes, resources and decisions that affect them (Malvicini and Sweetser 2003). That said, the research has also uncovered the complexity and difficulties associated with such approaches and, in most cases, it is understandable and even justifiable why certain village-based development programs seek to work with one or two broad sectors only, rather than all the sectors in which the community might have need. In many ways, such targeted and defined approaches provide a greater likelihood that overall development outcomes will be achieved.

Experience of integrated development programs worldwide dating back to the 1970s has shown that the issue of a program being able to respond to all needs a community raises, although admirable, does put considerable pressure on the community and any agency facilitating the process. It exerts stress on the overall program in terms of having adequate funding to address a diverse set of activities or sectors effectively and, more importantly, requires sufficient skills and experience to ensure that different sector activities are completed effectively. So, although in theory such an approach may be seen as ideal in terms of uninhibited community participation given it allows communities to decide their own priorities in the broadest sense, this strength also poses the largest problem to such programs, if ultimately they cannot be effectively managed and do not achieve tangible development results.

Looking at this issue from a different perspective may assist in determining the importance of this issue within this research. Returning to Choguill's ladder of participation, where empowerment is the ultimate goal of any development activity, taking a stance on this issue of integration appears a more straightforward decision (Choguill 1995). The research revealed that programs that focused on one or two sectors of activity were often reported to do so based on little community input and rarely any process of broad community consultation. Very often such program approaches were decided upon through rapid appraisals, one-off meetings and high-level partner consultation. This often resulted in a technically robust program, but not one that necessarily addressed the real needs of the people. Even though on many occasions such programs provided very good technical outcomes, from a participatory point of view and when considering the importance of direct democratic processes in the Vietnamese context, these approaches support neither the development of grassroots democracy nor real empowerment. When considering Sen's thoughts on development this issue becomes clearer. If, as Sen says, development is largely concerned with individual capacities, desires and freedoms, it is important to allow a development program to work broadly and not restrict activities to pre-determined sectors (Sen 1999).

Interestingly, this issue was repeatedly raised during interviews with both beneficiaries and staff on a particular single-sector program that followed many village-based planning and development program principles. Although there were some differences in opinion, generally beneficiaries felt that it was strange that they were assisted to undertake fair, open and transparent village needs analyses, decision-making and planning processes, yet if wanted something outside the agreed set of sector activities on the project, it was not permitted. *'We are always asked to provide our ideas but the activities can only be in line with what the program wants to do'* said one male villager in Quang Ngai. This created a situation where the project was in essence, promoting one ideal on one hand yet doing something quite different on the other. As Cornwall and Pratt (2003) comment, such approaches, by being inflexible in this manner, may often undo the very work they are designed to achieve.

Even though maintaining the ability to work in all sectors is a clear issue based on a participatory line of thinking, the issue of obtaining program quality across all sectors still remains a considerable challenge. The four case studies, as well as the investigations into the other village-based development approaches in Vietnam, confirmed the real challenges associated with maintaining quality development across multiple program sectors. Many studies have confirmed the complexity of

development and the difficulty in obtaining quality development results in any project, yet alone complex multi-sector projects (Rondellini 1983). If programs are to work across multiple sectors, experience has frequently shown that the level of quality can often be reduced due to the lack of availability of skills required and complexity involved (Fowler 2000). Multi-sector approaches require specialised skills and expertise and very large support structures to avoid this occurring, which often makes them resource intensive, costly, time-consuming and highly complex to manage (Cusworth and Franks 1993).

Perhaps it is important to take a step back from this issue and unpack some of the assumptions associated with any such analysis. Firstly, the issue of 'quality' is very subjective and usually a more western notion than one the community is necessarily concerned about. Often poor communities are very happy with immediate impact and receiving assistance through a particular intervention, rather than being concerned with an activity being the highest or 'best practice' response (Milligan 2003). On average across the four districts 19.35% of survey respondents reported that the main benefit of the ADP to them is that it can tackle many activities, especially small local ones that the people see as important, quickly and efficiently. What villagers often explained they liked was the amount of response and its appropriateness, not the technical level of the interventions. Very few of the respondents highlighted technical issues as a major concern to them at all. It seems clear that if we are to be truly participatory and to ensure the community's involvement is closer to empowerment, then the donor should not restrict the sectors or activities because of quality issues or macro level considerations. True participation, especially at the village level within the current context of Vietnam, needs open and truly participatory needs identification and corresponding programs, not just agencies' quality agendas.

In Vietnam, this issue is particularly important given the government system is highly results orientated and technically focussed, rather than being orientated towards needs identification as perceived by the community. Many donors and NGOs in Vietnam frequently fall into the trap of focussing heavily on their own agendas rather than community identified priorities. One possible solution to handle this issue and that of the quality of village-based development programs is, as theory suggests, to undertake a careful community-based needs identification, analysis, ranking and planning exercise. If a long-term approach is also undertaken, perhaps the top ranked two to four interdependent sectors might be addressed in the first four or five year period of the program, rather than activities across all identified sectors. The remaining sector and activity priorities might then be addressed in future program phases, or possibly be agreed to be not completed at all, given their lower level of importance. This approach allows the community to be heard and their most important needs to be addressed, yet it also allows the program the ability to work on a smaller and more manageable scope of activities each year to ensure program quality is maintained. This approach can work successfully as long as the community is happy with the decision to phase activities or drop less important ones, if the community trusts that the needs not being addressed immediately and that have been agreed upon will still be addressed in future phases and if, most importantly, the program has the resources to fund a long-term engagement.

It is worth highlighting that single or limited sector projects or programs can produce important development results. Often, more technical projects can produce some of



the greatest poverty related outcomes because of the targeted nature of their approach. However, what they frequently do not do is allow full participation in the project identification process that enables the project to ultimately address the greatest needs of the beneficiaries. So, although single sector projects may gain very good technical results, perhaps these are not always the results that the beneficiaries require. On many, if not most, occasions, the community needs that such projects address are very important, however programs which are more open sectorally, are argued to be superior because they allow the beneficiaries to be empowered to choose what the scope of development will be from the very beginning.

### **7.3 Ensuring Applicability in Different Ethnic Areas**

Nearly all development programs in Vietnam come across the issue of ethnic and cultural diversity in some shape or form. Village-based planning and development approaches that have been implemented to date, including those in the case study areas and those of other NGOs and donors, have all in some way had to adapt to the fact that local governance, village structure and customs vary considerably between different areas in Vietnam. This has come through strongly in all research processes and results including interviews, surveys and focus groups. This level of diversity is perhaps most dramatic when comparing the 53 ethnic minority groups with the Kinh Vietnamese, the majority grouping of the Vietnamese people. The research confirms that significant differences exist between these groups in terms of family values, work culture and local governance (Nha Xuat Ban Giao Duc 2002). However, equally significant differences exist between ethnic minority groups, north and south Vietnamese, and urban and rural Vietnamese, as the research has illustrated across the four different case study districts (Dang Nghiem Van 1991). These differences in local village operations affect all parts of life, including how village development can be undertaken, an issue that poses a serious challenge to village-based planning and development programs that somehow need to adapt to these different cultural conditions if they are to be effective.

To possibly alleviate this issue, it is important not to apply too rigid an approach or framework when embarking on village-based development programs. The approaches usually include sensitive methods of village needs analysis, decision-making and other consensus processes embedded within in their overall structure. Several donors have tried to develop very regimented systems that outline in minute detail how village meetings, decision-making and planning processes should take place. This includes numerous spreadsheets and checklists to ensure needs are aggregated into corresponding commune, district and ultimately provincial plans and details of exactly how this should be completed. Such systems experience difficulties since authorities may be able to follow the system after significant training and with outside assistance, yet they may struggle to maintain the system after the project has finished. Many government officials and communities involved with such programs have failed to fully understand and, most importantly, believe in the system they are employing. Any integrated planning and development system needs to be flexible and contain minimal prescribed steps to make it as easy to follow as possible. Care needs to be taken to blend recommended processes with traditional decision-making processes that are in existence in local areas. Naturally, this requires considerable research and time to be completed and cannot be based on predetermined tools. A highly prescribed system will also not be suitable across diverse ethnic areas. For example, the type of process



that may be required in the Thai ethnic minority area where broad based and democratic decision-making has been common place for hundreds of years will not be the same support and processes as the system required in a Katu ethnic minority area where such systems are very new and require considerable support to make them both effective and sustainable.

The seven key elements for village-based planning and development that are outlined in this thesis are not complex and only involve a few key issues or processes. One of the main processes relates to the planning stage, where at least one overall village meeting with widespread attendance from the bulk of village households does seem to be necessary. This is an important step if the program is to be transparent, open to all and supports the principles of the GRDD that actually prescribes at least two such village wide meetings each year. The facilitators, depending on the local situation, should try and ensure good gender representation, ethnic representation and age representation and also that all opinions are both heard and encouraged at such meetings. Naturally, such a result will not be easy to obtain or, in some cases, may even be impossible. As a result, sub-village meetings, focus groups with specific village groups and follow up meetings may be required to ensure the principles of direct democracy, equality and representation are achieved throughout the planning process. The important principle here is that a standard set of meetings is not prescribed, which is often the case in many programs. Instead, a process is tailored based on local culture, traditions and the key elements, with minimal burden placed on the community. Overly prescribing the system will generally not help the success of the process, nor will it enable the key principle of open and transparent decision-making to occur. In fact, it is to be expected that all areas where such processes are to occur will undertake them in slightly different manners. If this does not happen, it probably means there is inadequate tailoring of the processes to local conditions. This challenges the facilitator of the processes to understand the culture, respect local knowledge and systems and be willing to amend how processes may operate. This notion of flexibility and contextualisation for different ethnic areas also applies to the other development cycle stages of implementation, monitoring and ongoing management.

#### **7.4 Ensuring Applicability in Diverse Geographical and Demographical Areas**

The same issues of flexibility equally apply to other issues related to geographical difference. One of the largest differences experienced in the case study was the difference between urban and rural populations and areas. In particular in Kim Dong, it was found to be very difficult to get people to attend village meetings, provide volunteer labour or collect local materials. People in such semi-urban areas who were interviewed and involved in focus groups obviously had different opportunities and motivations from rural people. This provided a strong contrast to rural areas where having nearly 100% of households attend a village planning meeting was commonplace. Some agencies have tried to enforce standards for attendance levels across all areas, but frequently this has not proved successful. This produces a dilemma for the facilitator of such programs, as how can the village-based planning and development approaches and their core principles of direct democracy be maintained across such diverse conditions if standards for attendance levels are not in place?

The solution again appears to be simple and rely on adaptability within the approaches to ensure they are not over prescriptive, but maintain the core elements. The principle of democratic decision-making is important, but as this research has demonstrated, it does not always occur in the same way in all areas. The trap of falling into western academic accepted theoretic norms for such processes needs to be avoided. It needs to be remembered that no developed country would ever assume that it would be able to achieve 100% attendance at a local community meeting or activity, nor could any country logically achieve this. What is often required in such circumstances where high attendance is not possible, is attendance from at least all major groups and parties represented in that community and for all groups to have the ability to be heard and involved equally and fairly.

Therefore, despite high levels of direct democracy being both possible and advantageous in some areas, these standards should not and cannot be expected in all areas of Vietnam, especially in those semi-urban areas where local conditions make this very difficult, if not impossible, to achieve. If quotas for attendance in activities are to be used in such areas, they need to be amended to match the local conditions and be based on local conditions and opinion. Good levels of representative decision-making should, nonetheless, be ensured to enable effective democratic processes to be maintained. Perhaps in an area like Kim Dong ADP, a program may aim for 50 appropriate people from a population of up to 1,000 to attend such planning and decision-making meetings, as long these people represent the main parts of the village, the main social groups and the main power groupings. If the meeting is well facilitated, this should provide an adequate mix of democratic decision-making to match the particular context. In other areas like Quan Hoa or Tra My, for instance, perhaps all households will be able to attend a similar meeting.

Another significant difference experienced in the lowlands or semi-urban areas concerns Hamlet Facilitators. This again poses a challenge to village-based approaches in how to handle such roles across different geographical conditions. In semi-urban areas like Kim Dong, the Hamlet Facilitators were often far more educated and in the case of Kim Dong, they ended up being offered jobs in key mass organisations or commune government because of their community skills, leadership and the contributions they had made. A very different situation existed in upland mountainous areas where most Hamlet Facilitators were still simple farmers with few such opportunities. Again, what this illustrates is that there is a need for adaptability and for the program not to see such positions as all being the same, but to be sophisticated enough to understand the context of each role, who may undertake it, what it may involve and what the future for such positions may be in each individual context. In different areas this may vary considerably with possibly higher expectations being placed on Hamlet Facilitators in one area compared to the next. This highlighted an important part of the village-based planning and development approach response, which is to acknowledge and work with difference and context.

### **7.5 Difficulties Promoting Civil Society**

To come up with a definitive explanation of civil society in Vietnam is problematic, as this as well as other research on Vietnam has shown. Due to the strong role of the centralised state government system and the blurred nature of government, non-government, private sector and community, civil society in Vietnam does not match the usual accepted definitions. What the research has shown, however, is that civil

society in Vietnam has at least one important aspect that forms part of the usual notion; that is, that it represents the space where community organisations and individuals can act, largely outside the control of government. The importance of such non-government involvement in village-based planning and development programs has already been highlighted in this thesis. In a country like Vietnam which is moving from a centralised largely top-down form of delivery, civil society groups arguably play a crucial role in taking on many of the tasks required of decentralisation, as well as being key voices in improved democratic processes.

However, as this thesis has highlighted, the environment in Vietnam is only just opening up to permit the involvement of such groups in both development programs and policy development arenas. This therefore poses a significant challenge to village-based planning and development approaches that not only benefit from such civil society involvement, but also ultimately depend on the involvement of any form of community non-government group or individual for it to be successful. This research has confirmed that poverty is still widespread across nearly the whole country, requiring considerable support, particularly from non-government civil society, to ensure development continues, especially in the most remote areas. Village-based planning and development approaches that involve the mobilisation of local people and promote the active participation of a wide variety of possible groups, which can loosely be termed civil society, are important as they enable such community-driven involvement to occur. As is the case in any country, Vietnam cannot reach its poverty related targets by government intervention alone; it must have the full involvement of the people and particularly local civil society.

It is important therefore to look openly at which players can fill this civil society void in Vietnam, given the importance of such involvement. It is necessary to consider all the possible forms of non-government agency or civil society, including mass organisations who are in many cases relatively 'non-government' at the grassroots level, various informal and formal groupings at the community level, including cooperatives, microfinance groups, mothers' and women's groups, health networks, groups of farmers, maintenance committees and supervision groups in line with the GRDD, and any other such groups. These groups, although often having some level of government control, still fulfil, at least in the context of Vietnam, many of the functions that civil society would typically encompass. Therefore, they cannot be overlooked as civil society players and they need to be included in development activities if change in local power structures are to take place and overall developmental change is to take place.

It is also important to acknowledge that civil society is also more than just groups of individuals, which is a common misconception. Civil society also importantly includes individual citizens. Certainly, when individuals form groups and undertake group collective action they can have significant impact, however, as individuals they also play an important role in non-government civil society intervention. The recent CIVICUS study in Vietnam, for example, made this same mistake and only measured organised groups, not including civil society activities undertaken by individuals (United Nations Development Programme 2005b). As Marr (1995) reports, Vietnam has a long history of action by groups and individuals questioning certain aspects of the state. Despite what often appears a high level of government control, there is frequently important input by individuals provided on government policy, whether

through newspaper articles, popular press, television, or through individual forms of grassroots action. Vietnam's current civil society plays an important part in the development process through both groups and individuals to provide additional resources, support and representation to ensure the community's voice is heard.

Despite there being some ability for civil society to act in Vietnam, significant limitations exist in the legal framework for such groups and individuals to operate. The law of associations is still very new in Vietnam with less than 100 Vietnamese non-government organisations existing. As mentioned, these groups often have limited charters, are often partly controlled by government and frequently have limited capacity. To offset this lack of strong local groups who can represent the wishes of the people and provide important dialogue, considerable attention needs to be given to build up such groups so they can provide the voice required, lobby government on important issues and help deliver development assistance, rather than relying on international NGOs. Many studies have confirmed the potential advantages of utilising local NGOs given their cultural understanding, grassroots skills and understanding of the development issues in their particular context (Arrossi 1994). Limitations of such groups that are also often quoted are their frequent impartiality, lack of standing (especially with government) and lack of capacity (Blair 1994). However, if such groups are supported by other agencies, they can potentially overcome these limitations and provide effective local support for village-based development approaches. The VNGOs interviewed all saw the important benefits that long-term and holistic approaches such as village-development approaches can bring Vietnam, however the VNGOs also acknowledged that given the current political environment in Vietnam and the limited capacity of VNGOs, it would be some time before VNGOs were able to be meaningfully involved in such approaches. This highlights the importance of strengthening these groups so they can, at least in the future, take on the responsibilities for program facilitation currently largely completed by INGOs and donors.

The case study in Quan Hoa illustrated that mass organisations can fulfil many of the functions of civil society since they can effectively mobilise the community at the grassroots level, can understand community versus government needs, can undertake effective development responses and can lobby the government for policy change. Despite the mixed accounts of agencies working with these quasi-government organisations, the researcher believes mass organisations should be explored as a potential partner for any village-based development program. Partnering with such organisations is in many ways similar to working with a VNGO, however given few high capacity VNGOs exist, mass organisations provide an important alternative that can be utilised currently in the specific context of Vietnam. Given the high level of sustainability of many local branches of the mass organisations, these, unlike other groups, also provide the chance for lasting local capacity. Naturally, care needs to be taken when deciding whether to partner with such agencies, especially given the relative strength and weakness of each local branch of each organisation. It is important to assess each local group's independence from government, its understanding of the community and development, and to evaluate its overall capacity. However, if these areas are deemed satisfactory, mass organisations may prove a valuable program partner.

Informal civil society groups are perhaps the most important civil society groups to include in any village development program. Frequently, donors and NGOs focus on formal civil society such as VNGOs and mass organisations, however informal groups are often the ones who end up undertaking the bulk of planning and development work. In many ways, these groups, which are usually made up of groups of beneficiaries, best represent local community interests. Although most are not specifically sanctioned under Vietnamese law, they are also not specifically discouraged under law, as long as their pursuits remain primarily in line with government agendas, which is usually the case for poverty-related programs. A recent study by the Rural Cooperative Group (RCG) of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) estimated that there are 70,000 informal groups in agriculture alone, let alone when looking at other sectors (Chu Tien Quang 2005). Such informal groups should be encouraged to be involved in development since they too play an important part in fulfilling the expectations of civil society and delivering effective development outcomes in the Vietnamese context and enabling village-based approaches to be effective. If village-based planning and development approaches focus heavily on working with a wide variety of informal groups, whether they are agriculture, health, water user or credit, it allows the program to utilise the community involvement and ultimately the local civil society that is available.

The last form of civil society, especially relevant to the case studies, is the Hamlet Facilitators network, a network of trained villagers enlisted as the key development facilitators. The importance of involving locally engaged development facilitators on a development activity, whether or not paid by the community, cannot be underestimated. These people are frequently the catalysts for development at a village level and also the ones who take a leading role in implementing change. Naturally, the establishment of such a network is costly and time-consuming not to mention ambitious across Vietnam's thousands of villages. Despite these difficulties, the involvement of such a network appears to be a key aspect of effective development facilitation. Due to deeply held beliefs and long standing patterns of behaviours, the government and the community does find it difficult to implement the level of change required in both village-based development and the GRDD. The research highlights that it can be these non-governmental village people that can be trained to provide essential input at the village level creating a strong chance that community planning is representative, fair, transparent and ultimately democratic, and that these principles are maintained during the later development stages.

Despite the benefit of such networks, challenges still remain, not the least of which is ensuring payment. Bilateral projects often use program funds to pay local facilitators, which raise a major question for sustainability of such positions, once program funding ceases. Many such programs abolish these positions at the end of the program given there is no further funding available. An alternate approach, as seen in the ADP, is not to provide funding for the positions from the program, but instead to encourage the community to support these positions financially themselves. This may appear to place a burden on the community, however if the positions are productive, experience from the case studies tells us that the community will pay for such input. Payment is usually fairly calculated based on the benefit these people provide and the number of days they work each month. The financial strain this can put on a community should not be ignored, however when the cost is spread across many households it often is quite minimal. If this cost does enable sustainable and effective ongoing development

facilitation to occur, then it is arguably money well spent. In many ways, this process produces a demand-driven system where the input is paid for only as long as it is effective. Such a system seems fair, to work efficiently and hopefully to be reasonably sustainable. Not surprisingly the system does receive some complaints from the villages that must bear this cost.

The involvement of all these civil society groups is important in any village-based development program in Vietnam, given the government cannot implement such approaches alone and also given the importance of supporting opportunities for non-government community voices to be heard. Despite civil society in Vietnam not meeting many of the widespread definitions often seen in development literature, there are a raft of players in Vietnam who can and should be involved in development activities to ensure the important elements within what is usually considered civil society are included in this unique country context. This assists in ensuring that decentralisation, democracy and a tangible level of participation can occur.

### **7.6 The Challenge of Scaling-Up and Replication**

Given the broad-based benefits of village-based planning and development in terms of promotion of democracy, decentralisation, use of civil society, promotion of GRDD and ultimately improved participation and potentially empowerment of communities, it is not surprising that these approaches are currently gaining more and more support in Vietnam. A recent report by the NGO Resource Centre highlighted the need to upscale village and commune development planning approaches (VDP & CDP) into a national framework given its contribution towards effective poverty reduction in Vietnam (VUFO-NGO Resource Centre 2006). The case study and this research comes to the same conclusion: that village-based planning and development approaches are an important and highly applicable method of reducing poverty in Vietnam and that they do assist the government and community implement the GRDD. Village-based planning and development approaches have wide applicability across Vietnam, however at the current time, they are still being implemented on a relatively small scale by a handful of NGOs and donors. The approach is continually being rolled out but in a slow and ad hoc fashion.

This raises the question of up-scaling or replicating the approach on a larger scale. The GTZ VDP model was in fact designed so it could be rapidly replicated, expanded and up-scaled in such a manner. This model, as this research revealed, focussed on a detailed and highly documented manner of facilitating village, commune and district planning processes annually, which then link into government socio-economic plans. Although being important elements of village-based development approaches, such a rapid roll-out with no additional support during implementation cannot be expected to effectively create the change in attitude, power structure and practice that is required to implement the GRDD and improved community participation. This thesis confirms that it is essential to include long-term support throughout the whole project cycle not just the planning stage, a process which some have coined the 'out-scaling' of participation (Gaventa 1998).

The AusAID Quang Ngai Rural Development Program (RUDEP) takes a ten-year approach to complete a similar process of planning, but also provides support for implementation, monitoring and ongoing community management of activities. This program has arguably had some of the most success in implementing a village-based

planning and implementation system and documenting it. Despite its success, some criticise the program for taking too long to complete the process in only one province. Also, it required nearly AUD 22 million to complete the exercise, which for many donors and for the government of Vietnam, seems a high price tag for such a process. Given the program is a pilot, it could be expected that it might be replicated at a reduced cost. This may be true, but a conservative estimate would be that it would still require at least AUD ten to 15 million to be able to be replicated in another province. This cost burden for such an ambitious program approach can be slightly alleviated, if community contribution is encouraged. However even with community-donor cost sharing systems being in place, the overall investment for such programs still remains very high. Therefore, despite the benefits of such models, the main constraints to replication still appear to be the long time frame, requiring at least five to 15 years engagement and also the large budget required to facilitate both the planning and implementation stages effectively in all villages, communes and districts in a single province.

The challenges of the cost and time required of such approaches cannot be easily dismissed (Chambers 2005). Any attempt to drastically reduce either of these issues will potentially limit the benefits of the village-based program and compromise the effectiveness of the model as a whole, as this research demonstrates (Leurs 1998). However, AUD 15 million over ten years is perhaps not as much money as it may initially seem. Vietnam has 65 provinces, meaning it would require AUD 975 million to implement this approach across all provinces. It needs to be remembered that each year Vietnam receives well over this amount in overseas development assistance (ODA). In 2005 alone, Vietnam received USD 2 billion (United Nations Development Programme 2005c). If the village-based planning and development approach is as beneficial as it appears, perhaps it could be rolled out on a large scale if donors, NGOs and government prioritised it as an approach and earmarked more funding for its implementation, rather than single sector and large infrastructure programs.

This focus would need a clear and renewed commitment to such a methodology by all parties concerned. Already momentum is gaining amongst the NGO community and donors like the World Bank, ADB and others to expand this methodology. Given the ad hoc nature of the implementation of the models so far, a more coordinated approach to address village-based programming systematically is required (Blackburn 1998). As a start, this would require a multi-sector working group to be set up to coordinate the process, especially since Vietnam has quite good experience setting up such effective groups to undertake similar processes. Ideally, the Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI), together with donors and NGOs could develop an integrated plan to roll out village-based planning and development across Vietnam, rather than in the current slow and random manner.

This then raises the issue of what type of model is required and the level of documentation required. Many of the bilateral donors have begun to document their preferred village-based planning and development approaches, particularly the German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ), The Governments of Sweden and Finland, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and also RUDEP. However, as this thesis confirms, care needs to be taken when creating such a framework to ensure it is not overly detailed and overly prescriptive. Any village-based planning and development program framework needs to encourage the key elements within the



western definitions of decentralisation, democracy and civil society and empowerment that are applicable, not just accept the whole of the notions as they are. In addition, systems and procedures need to have the ability to be tailored for the particular ethnic, geographical, and traditional decision-making processes and structures of the local cultural conditions (Eylers and Forster 1998). The current models that exist are perhaps all too rigid for this to be really possible and are either over-documented to ensure rapid roll-out or, in some instances, too broad and open to effectively clarify what is really expected. Given the environment in Vietnam is traditionally conducive to top-down direction with little ability for lateral thought, it is important that any framework is not prescriptive, but sets out key elements only, so that the balance of the program structure can be locally determined with input from the people themselves.

Therefore, what is required is a very simple framework that sets out the key elements of village-based planning and development as flexibly as possible. Such an approach will allocate broad parameters for budget, time, and key elements in line with those detailed in this thesis. Such a system will not require detailed proformas and rigid systems, but a loose framework to combine local decision-making and other cultural process with the core elements of the approach. This can then be implemented over a five to 15 year period if adequate funding is provided from government, donors and NGOs. This option also supports a notion of 'harmonisation' of funding where perhaps one agency takes the lead role facilitating such a process, reducing overlap and increasing efficiency (Latendresse and VICA Consultants Ltd 2004). This will provide the greatest chance of replication and up-scaling being possible, despite the challenges such a process usually faces.

The research highlighted several key limitations in commune and district planning processes. Despite the attempts of the GRDD to improve planning, the two decrees do not provide enough detail to support strong planning processes at these levels. The up-scaling of village-based planning and development approaches would be greatly assisted if a complementary government decree was developed to provide supplementary guidance for annual planning processes of the village, commune, district and province levels and how these processes are aggregated and integrated. A decree could be developed that is not overly prescriptive, but which sets out the minimum requirements of each level of government and community and the corresponding principles it needs to adhere to in order to ensure effective socio-economic planning and development not just for that particular level, but for village to national level. Development of such a decree is already gaining support from agencies involved in village-based planning and development and ideally the multi-stakeholder working group in charge of promoting village-based planning and development approaches would lobby the government to assist in getting such a decree approved and provide important policy support to the roll-out of the methodology.

If this overall process occurs, it will assist the whole government structure, from national to commune, to more effectively work with each other towards development and poverty reduction aims and to bridge what some call the 'democratic deficit' (Cornwall 2004, p1). Perhaps more importantly, it will enable this 'whole of government' to more effectively work with the community to implement the development approach in line with a systems-wide approach (Bainbridge et al 2000). If supported by a broad group of agencies through the multi-stakeholder working group



of donors and NGOs that can build capacity, obtain lessons learned from the processes and continually improve the roll-out of the methodology, it would be hoped that the approach will enable the GRDD to be implemented much more effectively and for community participation to be more fully realised.

## **7.7 Conclusions and Key Recommendations**

Considerable challenges do exist when implementing village-based planning and development approaches in Vietnam. Despite the great benefit in allowing truly participatory needs identification and activities to be undertaken by communities, it does produce significant technical and management issues for programs to deal with if such approaches are to deliver effective and 'quality' development outcomes across a variety of different sectors. This is always a key dilemma when seeking to implement projects based on broad community needs identification. The main solution to such issues is a staged focus that sees the program working over a long time period to ensure needs are progressively addressed over time and to enable technical skills and expertise to be brought in as required. Too rapid an approach across too many sectors often results in poor development, as experience in Vietnam and other countries has often proven. Despite these difficulties, what this approach does allow for is sensitivity to the nuances involved with improving community participation and grassroots processes including those associated with grassroots democracy. This provides a better chance at real empowerment rather than partial involvement within donor parameters occurring. It is important to highlight that the approach is not guaranteed. The goal of such an approach is in many ways less important than the process to get there, as key participation academics such as Chambers (1997) have frequently reminded us. So although challenges remain with such approaches, if the ultimate development goal is empowerment, as is set out in the GRDD, this style of approach is both appropriate and required, regardless of the challenges.

It was also clear that across a country as diverse as Vietnam, considerable geographical and cultural differences do exist. The case study clearly revealed that village decision-making processes could vary considerably based on these local conditions. Village-based approaches have to be flexible to accommodate this situation. They need to set loose 'levels of standard' for community decision-making, but also enable adaptability for different villages and local traditional processes. This requires cultural understanding, care and time by the facilitator to ensure this is completed properly. The facilitating organisation needs to enter a community with only a broad set of principles or program elements in mind and be willing to develop the details of such an approach with the communities themselves. These issues also apply to the expectations of Hamlet Facilitators and other volunteers, with care again being needed to tailor these approaches to each individual context.

The researcher believes that replication of village-based planning and development approaches and up-scaling across Vietnam is both possible and necessary to continue the effective reduction of poverty and to improve community participation. However, again openness to change and diversity is required. For example, democratic / whole of village decision-making and representative voting processes may ideally include complete attendance, but practically should only include as many as is appropriate in the local area and include a good mix of male and female, ethnic and non-ethnic and other groups. Civil society also needs to be viewed openly, to ensure all possible groups who can provide a non-government voice are included in

the program process, including cooperatives, microfinance groups, mothers' groups, health groups, maintenance and supervision boards groups in line with the GRDD. The use of a community paid Hamlet Facilitator network can provide an important and sustainable element of civil society program coordination. Such broad civil society involvement, combined with individual citizen action, allows optimum utilisation of community strengths and civil society capacity to ensure decentralisation and democracy can be improved.

The change expected of village-based planning and development programs cannot be rushed and does seem to require five to 15 years to influence essential development change to occur. Rushing such a process will only mean the approach is not tailored correctly, the expected change in attitudes and behaviours do not occur and the community's level of participation is not improved. Similarly, the related level of budget required to provide such long-term engagement that supports the whole development cycle across all villages, communes and ultimately districts in a province is essential for full realisation of the approach. Although this may require high levels of funding, if the result is more effective development and the achievement of the GRDD, government and donors alike are likely to support the approach as a good investment.

Ultimately, it is becoming more widely believed that this approach is ready for up-scaling and out-scaling in Vietnam given its benefits and success to date. The next step is for the government, donor and NGO community to look at the steps necessary to establish a broad national platform to introduce the approach, provide support for its continued and expanded implementation by pooling funding and expertise, and assist the development of additional government policy. It is worth highlighting that this recommendation is based on the current state of economic, social and political development in Vietnam, at a point in time when village-based planning and development approaches make logical sense to promote and scale-up. This may not always be the case in Vietnam and as the country evolves and develops this may become a less effective and therefore less attractive method of implementing such principles. Nonetheless, at this moment in time, this thesis argues that effective village-based development is both possible and important in Vietnam to assist implement change in decentralisation, democratic decision-making, civil society and participation and to ensure improved equity and tangibly assist Vietnam's journey in both poverty reduction and development.

## **7.8 Closing Comments on Village-Based Planning and Development Approaches**

It is important to reflect back on the critical development studies analysis technique used during this thesis. This conceptual framework sought to 'unpack' the key assumptions and prejudices of many of the key notions associated with community participation, development programs of NGOs, donors and government and underpinning areas of theory. In particular, when removing some of the widely held beliefs, it becomes clear that village-based planning and development is ultimately about a change in power in Vietnam. Decentralisation is concerned with a shift in power from higher levels of government to lower levels or outside players; democracy is about sharing power more appropriately between the state and community stakeholders; civil society is concerned with enabling local groups and individuals to have power and voice; and participation in many ways is the broadest manifestation of power that refers to how power sharing can enable meaningful involvement of the community in the whole development cycle. Changing such power relations, whether

between government and community, facilitating agency and community, community and local community leaders or between the different groups within a community, is not a simple process. In the context of Vietnam, such approaches require understanding of these differences, support and capacity building of key government departments especially at commune level and, for both government and village to understand, accept and act on such issues. In essence, it becomes a process largely associated with attitude and behaviour change, especially given the long-standing nature and deep-seatedness of such issues.

The critical development studies analysis also reminds us that power is not always a finite resource and that empowerment is not simply concerned with transferring power from one party to another (Nelson and Wright 1995). In many cases, as can be seen in this research, power can be transferred; however it can equally be created within the particular society group or environments as many of the programs illustrated. Given the sensitivities of power loss, especially in an environment like Vietnam, it is important to acknowledge that power is often created, especially when embarking on village-based planning and development approaches. Such an understanding can greatly affect the way a program is operated and can redirect a focus towards learning and growing from the program experience, rather than being simply concerned with compliance with constricting understandings of development issues. In many ways, this is the true intent of the critical development studies framework, when it manages to break down even the most widely held notions within structures and processes.

For this same reason, a set of seven key elements for village-based planning and development has been developed as part of this thesis. It is hoped that these will provide some guidance and clarification to aid replication or up-scaling of village-based development approaches, however they are also not meant to in any way inhibit the contextualisation of the approach within individual conditions or cultures, another key benefit of both the village-based planning and development approaches and also any form of critical development studies analysis.

It is hoped that the findings of this research can be used to take the issue of village-based planning and development forward in Vietnam and that this thesis will stimulate lively debate and discussion amongst interested parties that will ultimately lead to more support of the approach. It is important to note that what is recommended within this research is a significant undertaking and it will not necessarily be easy to complete, as the approaches do have their weaknesses and significant areas of challenge. Not the least of these is the fact that many of the key elements principles discussed in this thesis do not necessarily conform to all the widely held definitions and interpretations of much development theory, as well as the operating principles of many donors, NGOs and government agencies, as the critical development studies conceptual framework has revealed. Instead, in line with this form of analysis, these values have been contextualised to current day Vietnam based on the opinions of beneficiaries, mass organisations, local government, donors and in-country representatives from NGOs. It is this understanding and the reduced rigidity in approach which will hopefully reflect the actual situation in Vietnam and the real needs within that context.

It is becoming clear that for a variety of reasons, village-based planning and development is a key area to explore for effective development and poverty reduction in Vietnam. The government cannot continue to be intimately involved in local affairs;

it must continue to decentralise, promote democracy and involve non-government players. Village-based planning and development is one approach that can effectively be delivered in Vietnam to produce improved development assistance. This needs to be complemented by higher-level reforms in the areas of improved representative democracy, citizen participation and clearer government procedures and government capacity support if implementation of these approaches is to be the most effective.

This is a notion that the critical development studies understanding of 'big D' development and 'little d' development again clearly highlights. Despite the focus in this thesis largely on grassroots processes and what could be termed 'little d' development, the acknowledgement and analysis of the inter-connectedness in society through a critical development studies framework has highlighted the importance of not just focussing on the local but also on essential and related macro level conditions. With such an understanding in mind, village-based planning and development approaches, if undertaken sensitively in relation to the key elements outlined in this thesis, have the ability to improve the quality of life of all local people, help empower them and ultimately achieve effective developmental and poverty reduction outcomes within the current Vietnamese context.

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## APPENDICES

### A – LIST OF ORGANISATIONS AND PEOPLE MET

Organisation	Name	Position
<b>Donors</b>		
Asian Development Bank (ADB)	Mr Peter Smidt	Implementation Officer
	Mr Neil O’Sullivan	Participatory Rural Development Specialist – Japanese Fund for Poverty Project
Australian Agency for Development Assistance (AusAID)	Mr Trevor Ole	Australian Team Leader – Quang Ngai Rural Development program (RUDEP)
	Mr Bede Evans	Participation Specialist - Quang Ngai Rural Development program (RUDEP)
British Department for International Development (DFID)	Mr Simon Lucas	Infrastructure Advisor
German Agency for Technical Assistance (GtZ)	Mr Klaus Kirchman	Son La VDP Program
Government of Finland	Mr Hans Bissdorf	Agricultural Extension Advisor – Thua Thien Hue Rural Development Programme
	Mr Les Bolm	Capacity Building Advisor – Thua Thien Hue Rural Development Programme
	Dr Tim McGrath	Institutional Advisor / Consultant – Thua Thien Hue Rural Development Programme
Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA)	Mr Koji Oshikiri	Deputy Resident Representative
	Mr Sayaka Nakamura	Deputy Resident Representative



Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA)	Ms Dao Ngoc Nha	Researcher – MOLISA / Sweden Mountains Project
Swiss Agency for Development and Corporation (SDC)	Dr Walter Meyer  Mr Marcus Eggenberger  Mr Serg Berret	Country Director  First Secretary – Development and Cooperation  Chief Technical Advisor – Dong Hoi Development Project
United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)	Ms Katrine Pederson  Mr Klaus Kirchman  Mr Vu Ngoc Anh  Mr Do Thanh Lam  Mr Pham Thanh Hang  Ms Irene Norland  Ms Pamela McEwee	Programme Officer – Governance Cluster  Specialist - PAR Support Facility  Programme Officer - Poverty and Social Development Cluster  Programme Officer – Poverty and Social Development Cluster  Programme Officer – Social Equity and Environmental Unit  Consultant – CIVICUS Study / University of Norway  Consultant – Deepening Democracy Study / Yale University
USAID	Mr Daniel Levitt	Health and Humanitarian Program Manger
World Bank	Mr Steve Price-Thomas	Partnership Specialist

<b>International Non-Government Organisations (INGOs)</b>		
Actionaid Vietnam	Mr Phan Van Ngoc	Country Director
Canadian Centre for International Studies and Cooperation (CECI)	Mr Sohel Khan	Project Team Leader
Care International	Mr Rolf Herno	Rural Development Advisor
	Mr Nguyen Thanh Tung	Program Coordinator
Caritas Switzerland	Graham Adutt	Delegate
Catholic Relief Services	Mr Nguyen Van Gia	Emergency Program Manager
CCF (Christian Children's Fund) Australia	Mr Peter Walton	Country Director
CIDSE (Cooperation Internationale pour le Development et la Solidarite)	Ms Than Thi Chung	CDC Manager
	Mr Frank de Caires	Country Representative
East Meets West Foundation	Mr Mark Conny	Country Director
Helvetas Switzerland	Mr Rudi Luthi	Extension and Training Support Project (ETSP)
NAV (Nordic Assistance to Vietnam)	Ms Ho Thi Phuong Da	Project Officer
Oxfam GB (Great Britain)	Ms Nguyen Thi Le Hoa	Program Coordinator
Plan International	Mr Peter van Dommelen	Program Support Manager
	Mr Nguyen Duc Hoang	Program Area Manager – Quang Ngai
Save the Children Fund US	Mr Matthew Frey	Country Director
SNV – Netherlands Development Organisation	Mr Douglas Hainsworth	Senior Advisor – Sustainable Pro-Poor Tourism
World Concern	Mr Warwick Brown	Country Director
World Vision Vietnam	Mr Greg Kearns - Kim Dong ADP Team - Quan Hoa ADP Team - Tra My ADP Team - Hien ADP Team	National Program Director

<b>Vietnamese Non-Government Organisations (VNGOs)</b>		
Center for Cooperation and Human Resource Development	Mr Vo Van Tuyen	Specialist
CEPEW (Center for Education Promotion and Empowerment of Women )	Dr Vuong Thi Hanh	Director
RaPH (The Center for Reproductive and Family Health)	Mrs Nguyen Thi Hoai Duc	Director
RDSC (Rural Development Support Services)	Dr Nguyen Quang	Director
RDAC (Rural Development Assistance Centre)	Mr Vu The Danh	Technology Engineer

**B – GLOSSARY OF TERMS**

<b>Area Development Program (ADP)</b>	World Vision Program approach that began in the 1980's as a way of effectively using child sponsorship funds and achieving effective development outcomes. ADPs are ten to fifteen year, multi-sector development programs that include distinct planning, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation stages. Activities that are completed during the program are identified annually by the community as part of overall five-year program phases. Programs are typically funded by 2,000-5,000 associated sponsored children who live in the program area, an area with typically a population of between 20,000 to 100,000 people. The program relies on the theory that if a community focussed program is effective and efficient, sponsored children will benefit directly and indirectly through the ADP activities in their local area and act as proxy indicators for the overall program impact. The approach relies on a high level of community involvement throughout all program stages.
<b>Community Action Organisation (CAO)</b>	Specific term for a non-governmental organisation (NGO) or charitable organisation that has a specific focus on policy development or advocacy.
<b>Community-Based Organisation (CBO)</b>	A local organisation usually created and managed by local people in that area, that operates outside government control.
<b>Commune Development Planning (CDP)</b>	Development methodology used in Vietnam that focuses on determining village development needs and then prioritizing these into an overall village development plan (VDP). All village plans in a particular commune are then combined into an overall commune development plan (CDP). Resulting commune plans are often aggregated in a similar fashion into district and provincial plans to create a vertical planning system. This process can be done instead of the government planning process or in parallel.
<b>Community Development Project</b>	Second generation of World Vision's sponsorship projects that for the first time, saw funds pooled at a community level, to enable development activities to be completed for the whole community not just sponsored children. The projects also worked across a group of sectors and as they evolved, they began to work towards sustainable development rather than simple welfare aims. The programs were particularly popular in the 1980's.
<b>Critical Development Studies (CDS)</b>	An analysis approach that can be applied to development situations, projects or programs to enable them to be looked at more objectively. The analysis encourages the examination of widely held notions and definitions and the acknowledgement and analysis of all related assumptions. CDS encourages the analysis of issues affecting development on a macro level (big 'D' development) and also on a local level (little 'd' development).
<b>Development Assistance Centers (DAC)</b>	A World Vision development model that focussed on establishing centres that developed and implemented training programs for neighbouring villages. The approach was particularly successful in Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand and India. This approach was designed to build the geographical area's capacity, frequently through a group of democratically elected village development workers. The model often failed to address the overall development issues even

	though being successful as building solid community capacity.
<b>Design, Monitoring and Evaluation (DME)</b>	Design, Monitoring and Evaluation (DME), describes the key elements of the project or program cycle. Design being the process of planning and setting objectives, monitoring being the process of checking results against lower level objectives on a regular basis, and evaluation being the process of periodically checking whether the project has achieved its high level objectives. The term is used widely within World Vision and other agencies to describe the key technical elements of project management and the project cycle.
<b>Decentralisation</b>	The process of devolving administrative, financial or political duties and responsibilities to levels of government 'lower down' the government hierarchy or to outside groups such as private enterprise, civil society or individuals.
<b>Development Society Group (DSG)</b>	A World Vision model piloted in Vietnam, based on models used in Africa and elsewhere that seek to develop key groups within village communities who will demonstrate, test and lead development activities for their community. These groups, frequently made up of farmers, often take a lead role in development planning, implementation and monitoring.
<b>Focus Group (FG)</b>	A commonly used research methodology that uses small groups of people (typically 8-15) of similar backgrounds (age, sex, gender occupation) to create a comfortable environment to explore particular issues that affect the group. Questions are asked to the group in an 'open' manner to ensure multiple opinions are heard and compared. The methodology often provides greater insight into particular issues.
<b>Focal Group</b>	A grouping used as part of the development society group (DSG) approach. This grouping focuses on a manageable group of beneficiaries who are identified to work together on a common task, for example 6 farmers trialing improved rice production. The small group focus allows sharing and support locally and assists with overall program management.
<b>Grassroots Democracy Decree (GRDD)</b>	A government of Vietnam decree initially released in 1998 and subsequently updated in 2003 that sets out how village and commune people and officials can and should be involved in development.
<b>Hunger Eradication and Reduction Program (HERP)</b>	Programs implemented by the government of Vietnam that target the poorest districts and communes in Vietnam to eradicate the number of hunger months and to increase economic development and reduce poverty. Programs began operation in 1998 and typically focus on the provision of infrastructure, education, agriculture or forestry.
<b>Hamlet Facilitator (HF)</b>	A development worker role created by World Vision in Vietnam to assist in undertaking the key community mobilisation tasks on World Vision ADPs. These individuals are chosen from the village concerned, are non-political, have a minimal education level, are young, energetic and passionate to improve development. These individuals play a key role in village planning, design, implementing, managing, monitoring and evaluation processes within the ADP.
<b>International Non-Government Organisation (INGO)</b>	Development organisations who are registered in another, usually developed country and who are not under direct governmental control. These groups generally work on a non-for profit basis and have been

	key players in the promotion of participatory approaches in Vietnam through program and advocacy experience.
<b>Integrated Rural Development (IRD)</b>	Development programs, particularly popular in the 1970's and 1980's, that were undertaken by a variety of donors to attempt to address the multi-dimensional nature of poverty through a variety of sector activities. This for instance often saw a strong agricultural development program complemented with health or education activities to increase the level of both development integration and impact. Many such programs operated for several years over a large geographical area. Some of these programs were criticised however, especially those of the World Bank.
<b>Local Collaborator (LC)</b>	A World Vision program position used on ADPs in Vietnam. LCs are usually sectoral specialists that are locally engaged from an ADP district to help provide technical support and coordination assistance to that sector of the ADP. LCs usually have some relevant technical training and are further trained throughout the program period.
<b>Learning through Evaluation, Accountability and Planning (LEAP)</b>	World Vision International development framework that was developed to standardise World Vision's project and program processes in line with international best practice. The framework also has a strong focus on learning throughout the development process.
<b>Large Scale Development Programs (LSDP)</b>	World Vision program methodology particularly popular in Africa during the 1970's and 1980's. These programs were often of up to USD 1 million per year and operated over a five-year period. They usually worked with a large target population of up to 1000,000 people on a combination of emergency drought relief and long-term development initiatives. The programs were frequently run by expatriates and often included quality project management systems, something earlier WVI approaches had not managed to achieve.
<b>Monitoring and Evaluation (M&amp;E)</b>	Monitoring is the process of checking development results against lower level design objectives on a regular basis during the life of the project or program. Evaluation is the process of assessing the development results of a project or program against high-level design objectives. Monitoring and evaluation is often associated with the creation of indicators for measurement and associated tracking and analysis systems.
<b>Millennium Development Goals (MDG)</b>	A set of targets endorsed by the UN for development and poverty reduction based on the various charters of human rights.
<b>Non-Government Organisation (NGO)</b>	Groups who are not under direct governmental control and who implement development assistance, usually on a not-for profit basis.
<b>Overseas Development Assistance (ODA)</b>	The official term for the development, emergency relief and advocacy funding and programming that is undertaken in a particular country.
<b>People's Council (PC)</b>	A group of key elected officials at Provincial, District and Commune level in Vietnam that meet at least twice yearly to ratify key plans.
<b>Participatory Learning and Action (PLA)</b>	An umbrella term of all participatory development approaches that seek to ensure appropriate involvement and ultimately empowerment of development stakeholders. The terms includes the corresponding

	concepts of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) and Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) amongst others. PRA and RRA often refer to a suite of tools used in the development process, particularly for planning and design. However these terms, particularly PRA refer more broadly to a mindset and philosophy that encourages participant involvement.
<b>Project Management Board (PMB)</b>	Committee at either district or commune level that include broad-based government membership of key government department representatives. These groups oversee the design, implementation monitoring and ongoing management of ADP activities at district or commune level.
<b>Program Officer (PO)</b>	Common NGO project role that has responsibility for key project management functions on a particular project or group of projects
<b>Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA)</b>	An approach to development that actively aims to include the community and other stakeholders in the development processes, particularly in rural areas. The approach is often focused on the planning and design stage of the project cycle but can be applied broadly to the whole development cycle. The term is often associated with particular tools for gaining community input during the project cycle, particularly planning.
<b>Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA)</b>	A term used for processes that attempt to achieve PRA gains but in a limited timeframe or over a smaller geographical scale.
<b>Slopping Agricultural Land Technology (SALT)</b>	An agricultural technique that originated in the Philippines, that involves the establishment of terraces on moderately sloped land to improve agricultural production, promote diversity in cropping and reduce erosion and other negative effects. The model also relies on correctly created terraces and the use of nitrogen fixing trees on the terrace edges.
<b>Support Office (SO)</b>	World Vision term for an office that funds development activities and supports their implementation. Typically offices are located in more developed countries and focus on fund generation and program quality rather than detailed implementation issues.
<b>Transformational Development (TD)</b>	World Vision International term that articulates the organisation's approach to development. The approach focuses on development in the most holistic and integrated way. The approach is outlined in the WVI TD Policy and TD Frame which describes the 5 broad domains of change that WVI seeks to influence in all programs including <i>Well-Being of Children, their Families and Communities, Transformed Relations, Children as Agents of Change, Empowered Communities</i> and <i>Transformed Systems and Structures</i> .
<b>National Office (NO)</b>	World Vision International term for an office that focuses on development implementation. These are typically located in developing country contexts and focus more on project design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation than on fund generation.
<b>Transformational Development Indicators (TDI)</b>	A set of 12 indicators that measure the key issues WVI has identified in its programs that relate to the 5 domains of change they seek to influence in all development programs.

<b>VAC</b>	Vietnamese Integrated Farming System of Fishponds, Small Livestock and Fruit Trees that has gained in popularity in Vietnam in the last 15 years.
<b>Village-Based Planning and Development (VBPD)</b>	A process where villagers are actively involved with the planning of development programs and then their subsequent implementation, monitoring, management and evaluation. The process includes aspects of democracy, civil society, decentralisation and community participation.
<b>People's Council (VC)</b>	The government administrative unit at either Province, District or Village that takes responsibility for all socio-economic development at that level.
<b>Village Development Council / Committee (VDC)</b>	Model used in many countries to manage development activities. Frequently involves the establishment, training and support to a group of chosen or elected villager representatives who will manage development processes on behalf of the village.
<b>Village Development Planning (VDP)</b>	Development methodology used in Vietnam that focuses on identifying community needs and then ranking these into an overall village development plan (VDPs), that will operate for one or sometimes up to five years. Often these village plans are further aggregated with all villages within a commune, to create an overall commune development plan. Resulting commune plans are at times aggregated in a similar fashion into district and provincial plans to create a vertical planning hierarchy.
<b>Village Maintenance Board (VMB)</b>	Village level groups promoted under the grassroots democracy decree to take responsibility for village maintenance issues, especially for construction activities. Such committees typically involve three or more people who may be voted in by the village or selected by officials.
<b>Vietnamese Non-Government Organisation (VNGO)</b>	Vietnamese organisations that are registered with the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment (MOSTE) or a particular Provincial People's Committee, who are not under direct governmental control and who implement development assistance in Vietnam. These groups generally work on a non-for profit basis, have traditionally had limited scope however this is increasing, as Vietnam amends and broadens its laws on association for such non-government groups.
<b>Village Supervision Boards (VSB)</b>	Village level groups promoted under the grassroots democracy decree who take responsibility for development activity supervision, particularly for construction. Such committees typically involve three or more people who may be voted in by the village or selected by officials. At times this group and maintenance boards can be combined, sometime to form an overall village committee.



## **C – Large Sample Survey Questionnaire**

### **Household Survey – Extra Questions.**

1. *Do you know of the Government of Vietnam's grassroots democracy decree?*

1. *Yes*

2. *No*

2. *If yes, how did you hear about the Grassroots Democracy Decree? Select the ONE response most relevant.*

1. *District Government, District PMB*

2. *Commune Government / Commune PMB*

3. *Hamlet Leader*

4. *Hamlet Facilitator*

5. *Villager members*

6. *World Vision staff member*

7. *Staff from other NGOs*

8 *Other person. Please explain*

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9. *Don't know / no answer*

3. *What is the key message of the Grassroots democracy decree? Choose the ONE response that is most relevant.*

- 1. *The people know, the people discuss, the people decide; the people supervise.*
- 2. *Commune and hamlet people have more involvement in projects;*
- 3. *The hamlet and commune have more open elections;*
- 4. *The hamlet and commune have more involvement in budgeting and financial management of activities;*
- 5. *All the above*
- 6. *Don't know/ no answer*

4. *How do World Vision ADP activities work differently to government programs? Choose the ONE response most relevant.*

- 1. *More money than government*
- 2. *More involvement by the people in the project activities*
- 3. *More smaller activities and less large activities*
- 4. *Activities happen faster*
- 5. *Other. Please explain*

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- 6. *No difference*
- 7. *Don't know / no answer*

## D – Small Sample Survey Questionnaire

### TDI Beneficiary Interview

<b>Date:</b>	_____
<b>ADP:</b>	_____
<b>Commune:</b>	_____
<b>Hamlet:</b>	_____
<b>Time Start:</b>	_____
<b>Time End:</b>	_____
<b>Interviewer:</b>	_____

<p>1. 1. <input type="checkbox"/> Age of interviewee ? (write in years in box)</p> <p>2. <input type="checkbox"/> Sex? (male 1, female 2)</p> <p>3. <input type="checkbox"/> Household head? (yes 1, no 2)</p> <p>4. <input type="checkbox"/> Number of people in household ? (write number in box)</p> <p>5. <input type="checkbox"/> No. of children ? (write number in box)</p> <p>6. <input type="checkbox"/> Number of CIP in family? (write number in box)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Researcher only</b></p> <p>101 <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>102 <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>103 <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>104 <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>105 <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>106 <input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p>2. <i>What activities has World Vision undertaken in your hamlet / commune to develop your hamlet /commune? Select AS MANY as are relevant.</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 1. <i>Agriculture (Animal Husbandry; VAC, SALT, Crop Improvement, VET Programs etc);</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 2. <i>Health (nutrition programs, mother child health programs, child weighing, measuring height, VHW training, child safety; HIV / AIDS etc)</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 3. <i>Education (supply uniforms, textbooks, building schools and kindergartens, ECCD, adult literacy, vocational educations)</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 4. <i>MED (set up savings and credit schemes, villager back etc)</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 5. <i>Capacity Building (train PMB, mass organizations, hamlet facilitators etc set up savings and credit schemes, villager back etc)</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 6. <i>None</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 7. <i>Other. Please explain.</i></p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 8. <i>Don't know / no answer</i></p>	<p>201 <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>202 <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>203 <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>204 <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>205 <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>206 <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>207 <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>208 <input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p>3. <i>Why are these development activities taking place in your hamlet and commune? Mark the ONE item most relevant.</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 1. <i>Poverty level of hamlet village;</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 2. <i>Request of government</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 3. <i>Request of people</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 4. <i>War service of village members</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 5. <i>Other. Please explain.</i></p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 6. <i>Don't know / no answer</i></p>	<p>301 <input type="checkbox"/></p>

<p>4. <i>Where do the ideas for the World Vision development activities in your hamlet and commune come from each year? Mark the ONE group most relevant.</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 1. <i>Hamlet beneficiaries;</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 2. <i>Hamlet facilitator and beneficiaries;</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 3. <i>Hamlet head;</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 4. <i>Commune Government / Commune PMB</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 5. <i>District Government / District PMB</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 6. <i>World Vision Staff</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 7. <i>Other. Please explain.</i></p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 8. <i>Don't know / no answer</i></p>	<p>401 <input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p>5. <i>What involvement have you had in the choosing of project activities each year? Mark AS MANY items as are relevant.</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 1. <i>Attend hamlet meetings</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 2. <i>Provide suggestions for possible activities</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 3. <i>Assist prioritize options</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 4. <i>None</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 5. <i>Don't know / no answer</i></p>	<p>501 <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>502 <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>503 <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>504 <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>505 <input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p>6. <i>How do you hear each year what activities will be implemented? Mark the ONE item most relevant.</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 1. <i>Don't hear</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 2. <i>At hamlet meetings</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 3. <i>Hamlet Facilitators</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 4. <i>Hamlet leader</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 5. <i>Other hamlet people</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 6. <i>Commune Government / Commune PMB</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 7. <i>District Government / District PMB</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 8. <i>World Vision Staff</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 9. <i>Other. Please explain.</i></p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 10. <i>Don't know / no answer</i></p>	<p>601 <input type="checkbox"/></p>

<p>7. <i>How were the details of these chosen development activities planned ? (i.e. deciding the beneficiaries, location, timing) Mark UP TO THREE items most relevant.</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 1. <i>Hamlet beneficiaries decides;</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 2. <i>Hamlet facilitators decides</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 3. <i>Hamlet head decides</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 4. <i>Commune Government / Commune PMB decides</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 5. <i>District Government / District PMB decides</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 6. <i>World Vision Staff decides</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 7. <i>Other. Please explain.</i></p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 8. <i>Don't know / no answer</i></p>	<p>701 <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>702 <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>703 <input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p>8. <i>Who makes decisions about implementation of development activities in your hamlet and commune? Mark UP TO THREE items most relevant.</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 1. <i>Hamlet beneficiaries decides;</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 2. <i>Hamlet facilitators decides</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 3. <i>Hamlet head decides</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 4. <i>Commune Government / Commune PMB decides</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 5. <i>District Government / District PMB decides</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 6. <i>World Vision Staff decides</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 7. <i>Other. Please explain.</i></p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 8. <i>Don't know / no answer</i></p>	<p>801 <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>802 <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>803 <input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p>9. <i>Who do you speak to influence those decisions if you wish to? Mark ONE item most relevant.</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 1. <i>Hamlet beneficiaries;</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 2. <i>Hamlet facilitators</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 3. <i>Hamlet head</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 4. <i>Commune Government / Commune PMB</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 5. <i>District Government / District PMB</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 6. <i>World Vision Staff</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 7. <i>Other. Please explain.</i></p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 8. <i>Don't know / no answer</i></p>	<p>901 <input type="checkbox"/></p>

<p><b>10. What resources does the hamlet contribute. Mark AS MANY items as are relevant.</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 1. Cash (financial)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 2. Local materials</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 3. Labour;</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 4. None</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 5. Don't know / no answer</p>	<p>1001 <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>1002 <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>1003 <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>1004 <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>1005 <input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p><b>11. Who is responsible for budgeting and managing these resources? Mark ONE item most relevant.</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 1. Hamlet beneficiaries;</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 2. Hamlet facilitators</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 3. Hamlet head</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 4. Commune Government / Commune PMB</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 5. District Government / District PMB</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 6. World Vision Staff</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 7. Other. Please explain.</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 8. Don't know / no answer</p>	<p>1101 <input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p><b>12. Who actually implements/carries out the development activities in your hamlet or commune? Mark the ONE item most relevant.</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 1. Hamlet beneficiaries;</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 2. Hamlet facilitators</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 3. Hamlet head</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 4. Commune Government / Commune PMB</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 5. District Government / District PMB</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 6. World Vision Staff</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 7. Other. Please explain.</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 8. Don't know / no answer</p>	<p>1201 <input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p><b>13. Who manages/supervises the implementation of these development activities? Mark the ONE item most relevant.</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 1. Hamlet beneficiaries;</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 2. Hamlet facilitators</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 3. Hamlet head</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 4. Commune Government / Commune PMB</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 5. District Government / District PMB</p>	<p>1301 <input type="checkbox"/></p>

<input type="checkbox"/> 6. <i>World Vision Staff</i> <input type="checkbox"/> 7. <i>Other. Please explain.</i> <hr/> <hr/> <input type="checkbox"/> 8. <i>Don't know / no answer</i>	
<p><b>14. What involvement have you had in the implementation of activities each year? Select AS MANY items as are relevant.</b></p> <input type="checkbox"/> 1. <i>None</i> <input type="checkbox"/> 2. <i>Implement activities on my property</i> <input type="checkbox"/> 3. <i>Provide labour and materials</i> <input type="checkbox"/> 4. <i>Provide cash for activities</i> <input type="checkbox"/> 5. <i>Attend training courses</i> <input type="checkbox"/> 6. <i>Supervise other people</i> <input type="checkbox"/> 7. <i>Make decisions</i> <input type="checkbox"/> 8. <i>Don't know / no answer</i>	1401 <input type="checkbox"/> 1402 <input type="checkbox"/> 1403 <input type="checkbox"/> 1404 <input type="checkbox"/> 1405 <input type="checkbox"/> 1406 <input type="checkbox"/> 1407 <input type="checkbox"/> 1408 <input type="checkbox"/>
<p><b>15. Who is most involved in monitoring development activities in your hamlet and commune? Mark the ONE item most relevant.</b></p> <input type="checkbox"/> 1. <i>Hamlet beneficiaries;</i> <input type="checkbox"/> 2. <i>Hamlet facilitators</i> <input type="checkbox"/> 3. <i>Hamlet head</i> <input type="checkbox"/> 4. <i>Commune Government / Commune PMB</i> <input type="checkbox"/> 5. <i>District Government / District PMB</i> <input type="checkbox"/> 6. <i>World Vision Staff</i> <input type="checkbox"/> 7. <i>Other. Please explain.</i> <hr/> <hr/> <input type="checkbox"/> 8. <i>Don't know / no answer</i>	1501 <input type="checkbox"/>
<p><b>16. What involvement have you had in monitoring the progress of development programs in your village? Select AS MANY items as are relevant.</b></p> <input type="checkbox"/> 1. <i>None</i> <input type="checkbox"/> 2. <i>Monitor activities on my property</i> <input type="checkbox"/> 3. <i>Monitor activities of other people in the hamlet</i> <input type="checkbox"/> 4. <i>Part of community monitoring team</i> <input type="checkbox"/> 5. <i>Attend training course on monitoring</i> <input type="checkbox"/> 6. <i>Other. Please explain.</i> <hr/> <hr/> <input type="checkbox"/> 7. <i>Don't know / no answer</i>	1601 <input type="checkbox"/> 1602 <input type="checkbox"/> 1603 <input type="checkbox"/> 1604 <input type="checkbox"/> 1605 <input type="checkbox"/> 1606 <input type="checkbox"/> 1607 <input type="checkbox"/>



<p><b>17. How is your hamlet involved in the ongoing management of the completed project activities now they are completed? Select AS MANY items as are relevant.</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 1. No involvement</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 2. Hamlet management committees</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 3. Construction maintenance / management committees</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 4. Water User Groups</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 5. Attend training course on monitoring</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 6. Other. Please specify.</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 7. Don't know / no answer</p>	<p>1701 <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>1702 <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>1703 <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>1704 <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>1705 <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>1706 <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>1707 <input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p><b>18. What does the hamlet and commune contribute towards ongoing management and maintenance of the projects. Select AS MANY items as are relevant.</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 1. Nothing</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 2. Cash (financial)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 3. Local Materials</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 4. Labour</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 5. Management time</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 6. Don't know / no answer</p>	<p>1801 <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>1802 <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>1803 <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>1804 <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>1805 <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>1806 <input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p><b>19. Who is most responsible for budgeting and managing these resources? Mark the ONE item most relevant.</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 1. Hamlet beneficiaries;</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 2. Hamlet facilitators</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 3. Hamlet head</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 4. Commune Government / Commune PMB</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 5. District Government / District PMB</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 6. World Vision Staff</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 7. Other. Please explain.</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 8. Don't know / no answer</p>	<p>1901 <input type="checkbox"/></p>

<b>20. What involvement have you had in the ongoing management of development programs in your hamlet? Select AS MANY items as are relevant</b>	<b>2001</b> <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>1. None</b>	<b>2002</b> <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>2. Part of User Group / committee;</b>	<b>2003</b> <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>3. Part of hamlet management committees</b>	<b>2004</b> <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>4. Attend training course on management / maintenance</b>	<b>2005</b> <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>5. Provide labour or materials</b>	<b>2006</b> <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>6. Provide cash</b>	<b>2007</b> <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>7. Don't know / no answer</b>	

## E – Sample of Focus Group Questions – Village Beneficiaries

### Focus Group Question Matrix – Hamlet Beneficiaries.

- Aims:**
- i) To determine the quality and quantity of participation of beneficiaries in the ADP process throughout all program stages;
  - ii) To document the communities understanding of the participation process undertaken in the ADP;
  - iii) To determine how the ADP has influenced how community members view participation;
  - iv) To assist determine the role of key stakeholders in the ADP development process (community, HFs, LCs, district and commune PMBs and ADP staff);
  - v) To assist determine what methodologies of participation are possible (and appropriate) at commune level;

**No. of Interviews:** 3 mixed focus groups in each case study areas (6-8 beneficiaries each group) by researcher – 4 case study areas total  
8 focus groups in each case study area by national team - 4 case study areas total (32 focus groups)

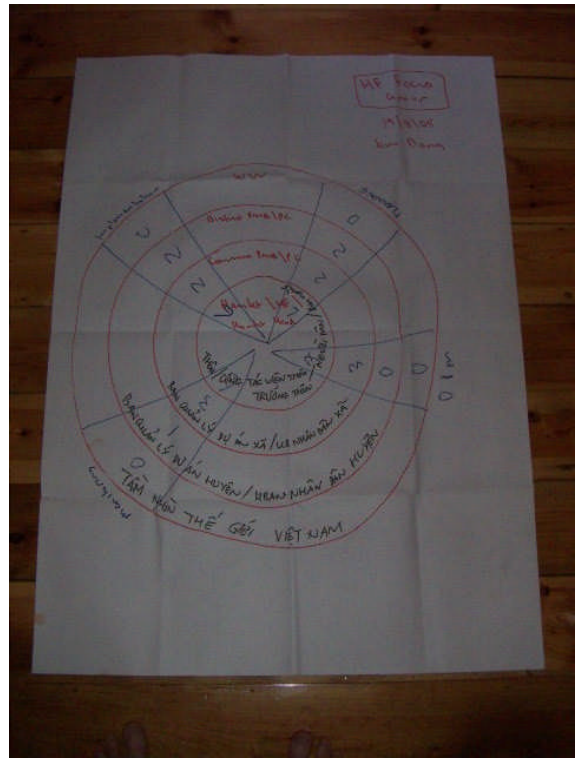
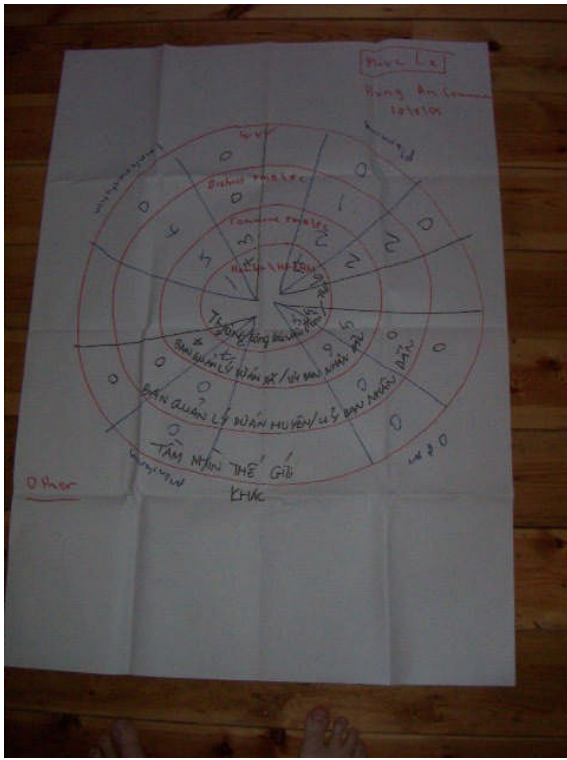
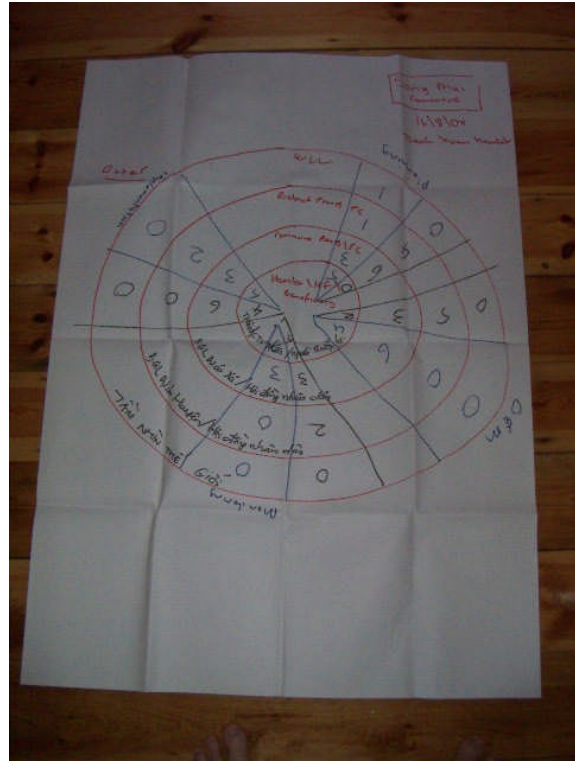
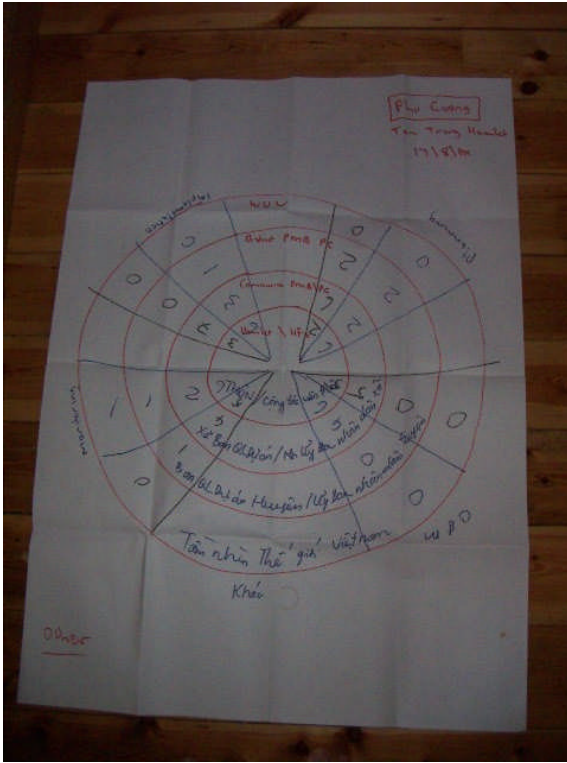
Project Stage	Topic	Concept to be Explored	Questions
<b>General Details:</b>	General focus group details	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The age, sex and position of the person interviewed;</li> </ul>	<p><b>2. - Number in focus group (men and women)</b>  <b>- Approximate age groups:</b>  <b>- Occupations</b>  <b>- Position in community- leader, mass org. etc</b></p>
<b>Planning</b>	Knowledge and understanding of development programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Level of knowledge of what development programs or initiatives exist in the village - can include both WV supported and others.</li> <li>• Understanding of the purpose of different development programs/activities</li> </ul>	<p><b>3. What does 'community development' mean to you?</b></p> <p><b>4. What activities has World Vision supported in your hamlet / commune to develop your hamlet /commune?</b></p> <p><b>5. Why are these development activities taking place in your hamlet and commune?</b></p>
	Source of development initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Origin of development activities and programs:  - From staff of World Vision and/or other development programs, or - From community together with WV/other agency staff (to what extent?), or - From the community, or - From GoV.</li> </ul>	<p><b>6. Rank out of 10 seeds the involvement of each key ADP stakeholder in planning ADP activities. Rank HF/ hamlets, commune, district, WV, others etc. Start with 5 seeds for male, 5 for female and then combine. Discuss the results including:</b></p>

			<p><b>7. Who initiated these development activities in your hamlet and commune, and how? Give examples. (If there is no response, prompt with examples such as community leaders, women, local government, community organisations, World Vision.)</b></p>
	Participation in program planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extent of involvement of community people in development planning processes: - Who was involved (e.g., no one, few, many)?</li> <li>• Type of involvement (e.g., responded to survey, PRA, attended meeting/s).</li> <li>• Regularity of involvement (never, rarely, sometimes, often).</li> </ul>	<p><b>8. How were the details of these development activities planned? What processes were used and why? Who was involved in this planning, and how?</b></p> <p><b>9. What involvement have you had in the selection and planning of activities?</b></p>
<b>Implementation</b>	Knowledge about program implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Means of communication in the community about development activities (e.g., no communication, people informed formally before or during, people consulted before).</li> </ul>	<p><b>10. Rank out of 10 seeds the involvement of each key ADP stakeholder in implementing ADP activities. Rank HF/ hamlets, commune, district, WV, others etc. Start with 5 seeds for male, 5 for female and then combine. Discuss the results including:</b></p> <p><b>11. How did the hamlet hear about these activities and their implementation? How was this communicated in your hamlet and commune?</b></p>
	Decision making in program implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Level of knowledge and understanding about decision making processes in program implementation (who decides, how).</li> <li>• Extent to which community people have opportunities to be involved in, and to influence, decision making.</li> </ul>	<p><b>12. Who makes the day to day decisions about implementation of development activities in your hamlet and commune?</b></p> <p><b>13. What opportunities do you have to be involved in, or influence, those decisions?</b></p>

	<p>Mutual responsibility for program resources and budget</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge about development program budgets/resourcing.</li> <li>• Level of community resource contribution toward program and activity budgets (type of resources - materials, labour, financial; size of contributions; diversity of sources).</li> <li>• Extent of involvement in managing program resources/budget.</li> </ul>	<p><b>14. What resources does the hamlet contribute (e.g., financial, material, labour) for these development activities? Give examples.</b></p> <p><b>15. Who is responsible for budgeting and managing these resources?</b></p>
	<p>Participation in, and management of program activities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Level of participation of community people in implementation of activities (any involvement of and/or dependence on non-community members, e.g., WV staff, GoV or contractors).</li> <li>• Extent of community involvement in supervision and management of activities (any involvement of and/or dependence on non-community members, e.g., WV staff, GoV or contractors).</li> </ul>	<p><b>16. Who manages/supervises the implementation of these development activities? Are hamlet people part of this? How?</b></p> <p><b>17. How have you been involved in implementation? Give examples</b></p>
<p><b>Monitoring and Evaluation</b></p>	<p>Participation in monitoring and evaluation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Awareness of monitoring and evaluation (M&amp;E) of programs and activities.</li> <li>• Extent of community ownership and management of M&amp;E.</li> <li>• Opportunities for community members to input and be involved in program and activity M&amp;E.</li> </ul>	<p><b>18. Rank out of 10 seeds the involvement of each key ADP stakeholder in monitoring and evaluation of ADP activities. Rank HF/ hamlets, commune, district, WV, others etc. Start with 5 seeds for male, 5 for female and then combine. Discuss the results including:</b></p> <p><b>19. Who is involved in monitoring and evaluation of development activities in your hamlet and commune? Who decides this? What do these people do?</b></p> <p><b>20. What involvement have you had in monitoring the progress of development programs in your village?</b></p>

<p><b>Ongoing Management of activities.</b></p>	<p>Participation following completion of project. Project ownership and sustainability.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Awareness of ongoing project management arrangements;</li> <li>• Level of community resource contribution toward ongoing program management (and maintenance) and activity budgets (type of resources - materials, labour, financial; size of contributions; diversity of sources).</li> <li>• Extent of involvement in ongoing management of program resources/budget.</li> <li>• Extent of community ownership and management of ongoing project management after project 'completed'.</li> </ul>	<p><b>21. Rank out of 10 seeds the involvement of each key ADP stakeholder in ongoing management and maintenance of ADP activities. Rank HF/ hamlets, commune, district, WV, others etc. Start with 5 seeds for male, 5 for female and then combine.</b></p> <p><b>22. Who is involved in ongoing management (and maintenance) in your hamlet and commune? Who decides this? What do these people do?</b></p> <p><b>23. What resources do the villagers contribute (e.g., financial, material, labour) for these ongoing management activities? Give examples.</b></p> <p><b>24. Who is responsible for budgeting and managing these resources?</b></p> <p><b>25. What involvement have you had in the ongoing management of development programs in your village?</b></p>
<p><b>Analysis and GRDD</b></p>	<p>Impact of the ADP</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding of the changes the ADP has brought in relation to stakeholder's roles;</li> <li>• Understanding of any links between GRDD and the ADP</li> <li>• Understanding of the links between WV ADP and GOV policies</li> </ul>	<p><b>26. Trend analysis – Next to the project stages, now ask the group to determine out of 10 seeds, how much involvement each stakeholder had in each project stage before the ADP. Compare the conditions before and after the ADP. Discuss the results including:</b></p> <p><b>27. How does the ADP activities work differently to government programs in the area?</b></p> <p><b>28. Do you know of the GoV's grassroots democracy decree? What are the key elements? How did you hear about this?</b></p>

### F – Photographs and Samples of Power and Trend Analysis Exercises

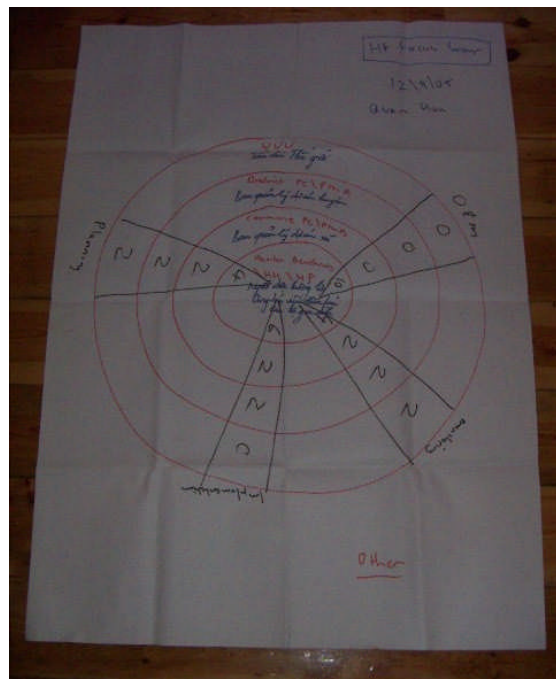
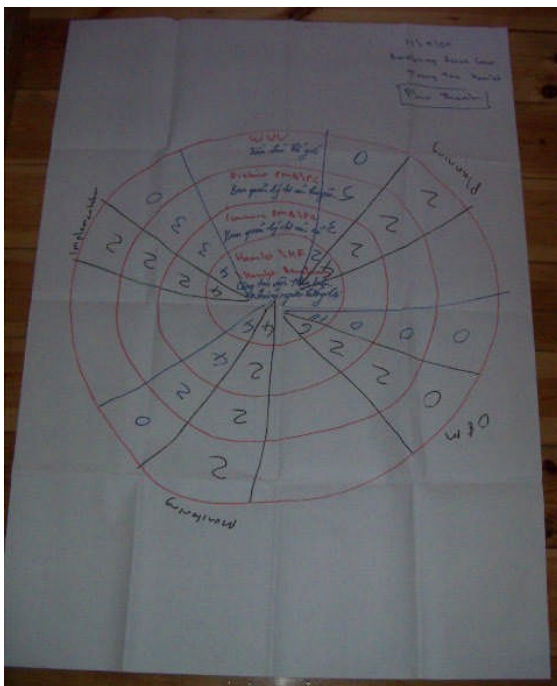
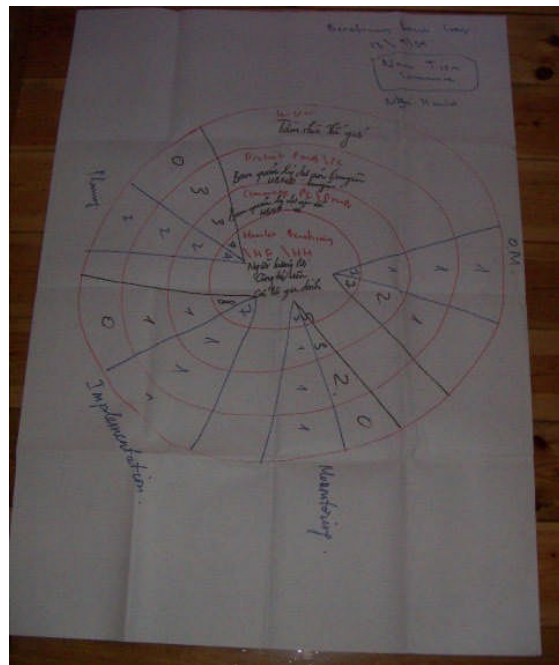
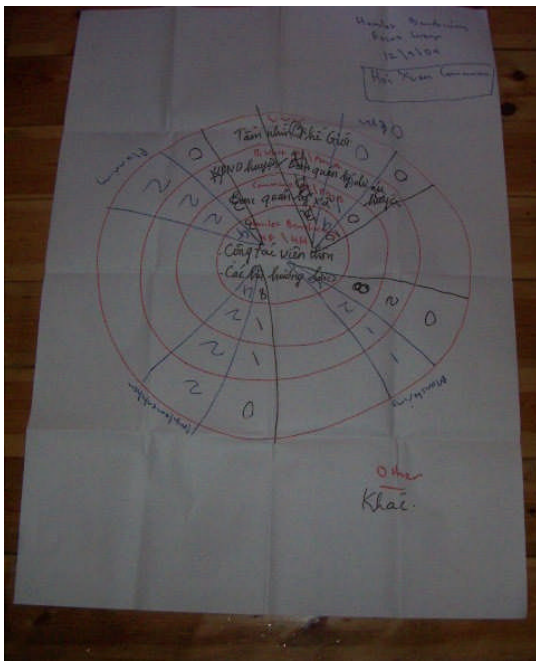


Power and Trend Analysis Results for 3 Villages and with Hamlet Facilitators – Kim Dong district

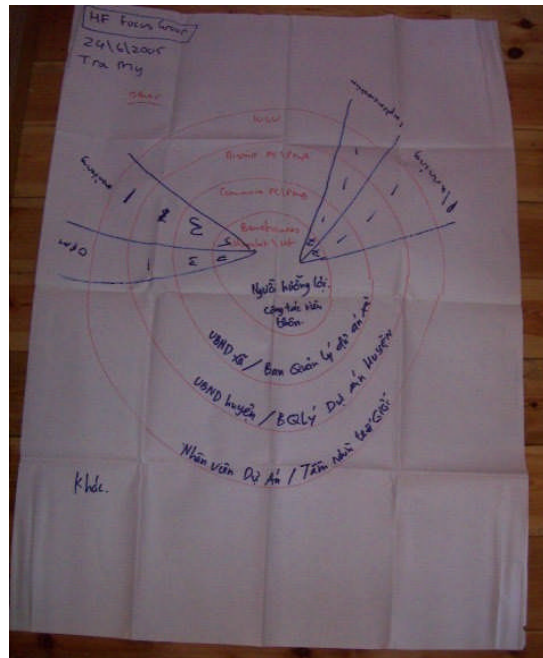
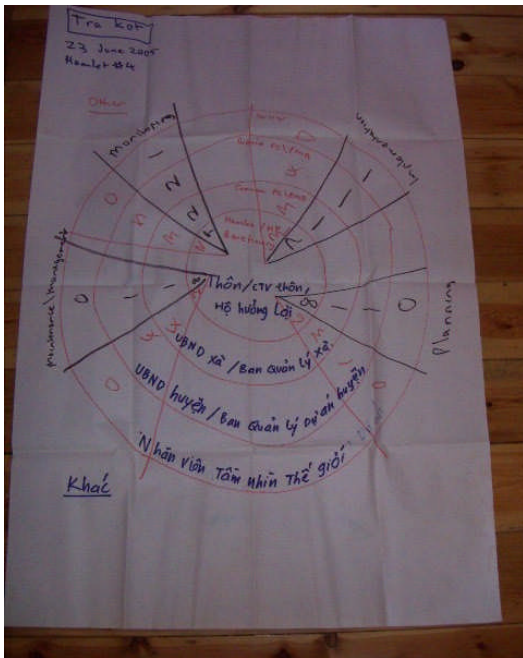








Power and Trend Analysis Results for 3 Villages and with Hamlet Facilitators – Quan Hoa district



Power and Trend Analysis Results for 3 Villages and with Hamlet Facilitators – Tra My district





**Villager Interview – Tra My district**



**PMB Meeting - Hein My district**



**Power and Trend Ranking – Tra My district**



**Power and Trend Ranking – Kim Dong district**



**Power and Trend Ranking – Kim Dong district**



**Power and Trend Ranking – Quan Hoa district**