



**Ministry of Agriculture
& Rural Development**

**United Nations De-
velopment Pro-
gramme**



Viet Nam

**External Evaluation of the PAR Project in MARD
VIE/02/016**

LESSONS LEARNT - RECOMMENDATIONS

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4 Recommendations

4.1 Lessons Learned

- 1 PAR is clearly of political nature. Strong leadership commitment from top leadership in MARD has undoubtedly contributed to the relative success of this project. We share the impression¹⁶ that a well functioning, strong and stable PAR steering mechanism (PAR SC), chaired by the Minister, is necessary to bring the PAR process forward. The PAR SC should have continuous membership over the full period and be supported by a well functioning PAR Secretariat.
- 2 During two UNDP PAR projects, several critical reform areas have been addressed and many good results have been obtained. It can be said, however, that focus to a large extent has been on activities and outputs rather than on strategic results.¹⁷ The next plan should move MARD forward by focussing on a limited number of strategic interventions focussed more on beneficiaries and how this can be translated to processes in MARD – for example developing monitoring systems to ensure enhanced deliveries to beneficiaries, improving quality of legal documents and developing participatory approaches to reflect farmers' needs more consequentially within MARD.
- 3 Interventions should be formulated in programme or projects, applying best international practice, ensuring that the SC, the PSU and the funding agencies all have a precise and shared perspective on where to go. The ongoing project has been very broad and with limited specificity. We believe that a continued PAR process is sufficiently complicated to deserve a solid project basis, formulated around selected key performance areas for which proper baseline studies are developed, specific targets identified and proper result monitoring systems developed.
- 4 Best results and most far-reaching achievements appear obtained with units where project support fully matches perceived needs and where beneficiaries demonstrate high degree of ownership, commitment and ability to initiate a change process. According to our impressions this seems to be the case for OMARD and the CMARD. Consequently, the issue of ownership and ability and willingness to function as change agents should be incorporated in any future support.

¹⁶ Evaluation of the Implementation of the PAR Action Plan for MARD 2005, Final Report, February 2006 p. 27

¹⁷ The Anti-Corruption Action Plan could be seen as an exception to this general observation.

- 5 Although Decree 86 has improved the situation functional overlaps still exist among the large number of organisational units within MARD. A continuous effort to reduce functional overlaps and to reduce the number of units should come high on the PAR agenda. This should ideally be combined with a process to fully separate service delivery functions from state management and to decentralise decision-making and financial powers to most appropriate level.
- 6 The PAR project has to some extent established links to other national and international projects. It might be worthwhile to explore the possibilities to establish better linkages and improved synergy to other technical assistance programmes (REFAS from GTZ, ASPS from Danida for example). PAR projects could possibly be seen as key elements in broader SWAp approaches and thus push the sector fast forward.

4.2 Recommendations

4.2.1 Relating to UNDP

- 1 The appraisal and internal review procedures stipulated in the NEX Guidelines have in this case not fully ensured the quality of the project document, and UNDP might consider including an external mid-term review for projects with three or more years duration.
- 2 To ensure that complex and politically sensitive areas like PAR have access to best available resources UNDP might investigate and - if needed – consider bringing the fee level more in line with prevailing market prices.

4.2.2 Directions for continuous support

Continuous donor support to PAR from 2006 to 2010 is anticipated to be offered in a programmatic manner within an overall support programme under which specific interventions will be formulated. The overall support programme will set priorities and it is understood that specific projects like the present, being implemented under NEX modality, will not be feasible under the new programmatic approach.

MARD has till now been one of the core partners for UNDP and the donor group. MoHA and Ho Chi Minh City have also been core partners in UNDP's PAR support portfolio.

Given that continuous PAR support will be allocated to MARD the following focal issues should be considered:

- 1 In general focus should be shifted more towards impact on beneficiaries. Farmers and farmers' needs should have higher priority and the impact on beneficiaries might be used as the principle to prioritise approaches and interventions.
- 2 Decentralisation, understood as devolution or allocating decision-making power to lowest appropriate level, should come clearly into focus. The process could entail (i) an assessment of what types of decisions can be allocated downwards, followed by (ii) a decision on priorities, (iii) organisational review of giving and receiving units to determine legal, financial and capability gaps and (iv) a time-bound implementation

plan ensuring the necessary revision of legal regulations, organisational redesign (mandate, responsibilities and job descriptions) and capacity development initiatives.

- 3 MARD should as a ministry organise service delivery to farmers and provide a favourable legal environment to facilitate this socialisation process. This would imply more consequent separation of service delivery functions from state management functions, reserving state management for MARD. The steps might include (i) an organisational review of MARD to establish proper baselines and identify what can and should be socialised; (ii) decision on priorities and a time-schedule ensuring that the number of units within MARD is significantly reduced over the next project period; (iii) technical assistance to units to be socialised using for example business planning approached, business process reengineering approaches or strategic planning approaches ensuring that units formulate vision and mission statements, develop relevant organisational structures, define responsibilities and job descriptions for units and key staff and, analyse demand and service prices and finally develop financial assessments. Separating service delivery from state management implies that new units will be more autonomous, also financially, and as a target may become financially self sustaining over time; (iv) develop and decide on appropriate financial models to regulate the relation to MARD for example using performance based contract systems where MARD is the 'client' and the unit is providing services to MARD's 'customers', the farmers.
- 4 In relation to the separation between service delivery and state management MARD should initiate pilots on how to develop quality standards for services. MARD should as the organiser of service delivery, design clear, precise and unambiguous quality standards identifying not only what service shall be delivered but more importantly to what quality level. This has been core factor in all outsourcing models in the developed countries.
- 5 The ISO pilot has proven successful and ISO could serve as one possible approach to streamline MARD's deliveries and could form an entry point when setting quality standards also for service provision. It is recommended that this aspect be further considered for continuous support.
- 6 Develop and initiate a fast-track approach to pilot different organisational forms for agricultural service delivery to farmers. What can and what should be delivered by for example co-operatives, enterprises (public or private), NGOs and mass organisations and what should remain in the public sector? There are some indications that the co-operative model, which has been used to provide major agricultural services like fertiliser, seeds, seedlings, veterinary medicine etc has been fairly successful which may form an input here.
- 7 Working principles for continuous support should include farmers' participation and empowerment. This could indicate a preference for example for co-operative models for service provision as voluntary co-operatives (user groups) are managed by the farmers and consequently include participatory and empowerment dimensions. Other models may offer similar benefits.
- 8 Empowerment and participation should be integrated also in the rural telecenters pilots. So far the rural telecenters are mostly understood as offering information to

farmers, but they could include an information flow from the farmers to MARD on pertinent issues for farming households: land tenure issues, denunciations and complaints, mismanagement, corruption and abuse of power and general performance feed back regarding MARD's and MARD organised services. MARD may consider establishing focus groups for pertinent issues regarding public service providers, legal documents, new services etc to give farmers' a say and enable MARD to make informed decisions in a cost effective manner.

- 9 Capacity development should be in clear focus also in the next PAR plan for MARD. This should include further support to CMARD, aiming at developing CMARD into Centres of Excellence with respect to teaching methods and subject matter issues of relevance for the sector. CMARD has demonstrated the necessary ownership and commitment and consequently is seen as a possible change agent for capacity development. Financial mechanisms ensuring that training is affordable under limited recurrent budgets should be developed.
- 10 Above all we recommend applying a significantly improved programmatic approach, based on best international practice also for components under the overall programme. This includes assessment of possible SWAp elements, improved project design, identification of limited number of key performance areas, establishment of specific baselines, targets and a state-of-the-art monitoring system, enabling result monitoring and evaluation. Applying this principle should include allocation of discretionary funds for upcoming initiatives to be allocated in a flexible manner on a need basis. Discretionary funds may include a small project support facility, offering support after decision by a PAR SC to sub-projects of high importance and of high quality.

For the remainder project period we recommend (i) to allocate sufficient resources to consolidate findings from the three important studies (Farmer Needs Survey, Legal Impact Assessment and Public Service Provider Study), aiming at identifying cross-cutting issues, which may serve as an input or a baseline for continuous support; and (ii) to allocate sufficient resources ensuring that relevant priorities seen from MARD's point of view are reflected timely and properly in the programme document for the new programmatic support.