

# Ha Giang Participatory Poverty Assessment

Hanoi, August 2003



## Foreword by the Poverty Task Force

In May 2002, the Government of Vietnam finalized its Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy (CPRGS) and embarked on a process to make the CPRGS a reality at local levels of Government. Through information campaigns and a series of regional workshops, officials from key national ministries have been explaining to representatives from local authorities how local level planning processes could be made more pro-poor, more evidence-based, more outcome-focused, better aligned to resource allocation decisions and better monitored.

During 2003 the Poverty Task Force (PTF) supported Participatory Poverty Assessments (PPAs) in twelve provinces in Vietnam. These PPAs used a common research framework and methodology to investigate issues around poverty that were not well captured by the available quantitative data. The intention was to produce research which could be used, together with data from the Vietnam Household Living Standards Survey, to inform the CPRGS secretariat on progress to date in implementing the CPRGS. The PPAs were also designed to provide information for new regional and national studies of poverty and these have now been published separately. The regional poverty assessments will, in turn, be used as an instrument in building capacity in pro-poor planning processes at sub-national levels of Government.

Eight donors contributed financial and human resources to support the PPAs underlying the preparation of this report and its complementary RPAs. These are the ADB, AusAID, DFID, GTZ, JICA, SCUK, UNDP and the World Bank. Each of the donors played a leading role in one of the regions of Vietnam. The distribution of regions among donors, summarized in Table, was based on the donors' trajectory in the field. By choosing regions where they are well-implanted, through projects and technical assistance activities, donors could take full advantage of the insights accumulated while working there.

Several teams conducted the PPA work in 43 communes scattered across the entire country. Among them were two international NGOs (Action Aid and SCUK) and various local NGOs and research institutes, including CRP, the Institute of Sociology (IOS), the Long An Primary Health Care Center, the Rural Development Service Center (RDSC) and Vietnam Solutions. In addition, two of the donors carried out the research by setting up teams of local researchers under their direct management. The local knowledge and expertise of these NGOs and research institutes was key to the quality of the exercise. A coordinating mechanism was set up for the PPAs. Members of most of the research teams were involved in drawing up the research framework and establishing a common understanding of what was to be achieved from the field research. The latter was piloted by several of the teams and the research outline was modified to reflect

the lessons learned. The final research framework covered the following areas of investigation:

- Perceptions of and trends in poverty, poverty dynamics and vulnerability;
- Progress in strengthening democracy at the grassroots level, especially the degree to which poor households can participate in a meaningful way in planning and budgeting processes;
- Challenges in the delivery of basic services, focusing on how poor households interact with service providers and how poor households can be empowered to claim their rights to basic services more effectively;
- The current mechanisms for delivery of social assistance (linked to the targeting work above) and how they might be improved;
- How the reform of the public administration is taking place at local levels of Government;
- The challenges of migration and the link between household mobility, poverty and access to services; and,
- Information about the environment of the poor and how it is changing.

These PPAs are now being published as a series. A separate report will synthesise the findings across the 43 communes and provide a more aggregated analysis of these themes. Another report summarizes the approach to the research, the methodology use and sets out the detailed research questions.

This report entitled “Ha Giang – A Participatory Poverty Assessment” is the result of a research team consisting of selected AAV staff and local officials. The content of the report focuses on seven themes mentioned above. Information for this report is synthesised from interviews with different audiences including local officials (at provincial, district, commune and village levels), groups of villagers (men and women separate), groups of teachers and children, and individual households; from the observation during the research; and from secondary sources such as reports and statistics of local People Committees and various departments of Ha Giang province and of two districts - Vi Xuyen and Dong Van during the 1996-2003 period.

**Table A: Partnerships for the Regional Poverty Work**

Region	Provinces included in the region	Donor in charge of the RPAs	PPAs			Team in charge of the PPAs
			Province	District	Communes	
Northeast Uplands	Ha Giang , Cao Bang, Lao Cai, Bac Kan, Lang Son, Tuyen Quang, Yen Bai, Thai Nguyen, Phu Tho, Vinh Phuc, Bac Giang, Bac Ninh, Quang Ninh	DFID and UNDP	Lao Cai	Bao Thang	Ban Cam Phong Nien	Ageless Consultants (funded by DFID)
				Muong Khuong	Pha Long Ta Gia Khau	
			Ha Giang	Vi Xuyen	Cao Bo Thuan Hoa	Action Aid (funded by UNDP)
				Dong Van	Sang Tung Thai Pin Tung	
Northwest Uplands	Lai Chau, Son La, Hoa Binh					
Red River Delta	Ha Noi, Hai Phong, Ha Tay, Hai Duong, Hung Yen, Ha Nam, Nam Dinh, Thai Binh, Ninh Binh	WB	Hai Duong	Nam Sach	Nam Sach Nam Trung	RDSC (funded by WB)
			Ha Tay	Dan Phuong	Tho An Lien Ha	
				My Duc	Te Tieu Phuc Lam	
North Central	Thanh Hoa, Nghe An, Ha Tinh, Quang Binh, Quang Tri, Thua Thien Hue	GTZ and JICA	Nghe An	Nghi Loc	Nghi Thai	IOS (funded by JICA)
				Tuong Duong	Tam Dinh	
			Quang Tri	Hai Lang	Hai Son Hai An	Team comprising MOLISA, ILSSA and independent researchers (funded by GTZ)
				Gio Linh	Gio Thanh Linh Thuong	
Central Coast	Da Nang, Quang Nam, Quang Ngai, Binh Dinh, Phu Yen, Khanh Hoa	ADB	Quang Ngai	Son Ha	Son Ba Son Cao	Vietnam Solutions (funded by ADB)
				Tu Nghia	Nghia Tho Nghia An	

Table A: Partnerships for the Regional Poverty Work (continued)

Region	Provinces included in the region	Donor in charge of the RPAs	PPAs			Team in charge of the PPAs
			Province	District	Communes	
Central Highlands	Kon Tum, Gia Lai, Dak Lak	ADB	Dak Lak	EaHleo	Eaheo Ea Ral	Action Aid (funded by ADB)
				Daclap	Đao Nghia Quang Tan	
				Buon Ma Thuot city	Ea Tam town	
Southeast	HCMC, Lam Dong, Ninh Thuan, Binh Phuoc, Tay Ninh, Binh Duong, Dong Nai, Binh Than, Ba Ria-Vung Tau	WB	HCMC	Binh Chanh District	An Lac Township Tan Tao	SCUK (Funded by itself)
				District 8	Ward 4 Ward 5	
			Ninh Thuan	Ninh Phuoc	Phuoc Hai Phuoc Dinh	CRP (Funded by WB)
				Ninh Son	Luong Son My Son	
Mekong River Delta	Long An, Dong Thap, An Giang, Tien Giang, Vinh Long, Ben Tre, Kien Giang, Can Tho, Tra Vinh, Soc Trang, Bac Lieu, Ca Mau	UNDP and AusAid	Dong Thap	Tam Nong	Phu Hiep Phu Tho	Long An Primary Health Care Centre (Funded by UNDP and AusAid)
				Thap Muoi	Thanh Loi	
			Ben Tre	Thanh Phu	My Hung Thoi Thanh	
				Mo Cay	Thanh Thoi	

## Acronyms and Abbreviations

AAV	ActionAid Vietnam
ADB	Asian Development Bank
AusAID	Australian Agency for International Development
BARD	(District) Bureau of Agriculture and Rural Development
BOET	Bureau of Education and Training
BOLISA	Bureau of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs
BPI	Bureau of Planning and Investment
Commune 135	A commune benefiting from the Programme 135
CPRGS	Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy
DARD	(Provincial) Department of Agriculture and Rural Development
DFID	British Department for International Development
DHC	District Health Centre
DOET	Department of Education and Training
DOH	Department of Health
DOLISA	(Provincial) Department of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs
DPC	District People's Committee
DPI	Department of Planning and Investment
GTZ	German Technical Cooperation
HEPR	Hunger eradication and poverty reduction
HH(s)	Household(s)
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
Kg	Kilogram
Km	Kilometre
MOLISA	Ministry of Labours, Invalids and Social Affairs
MPI	Ministry of Planning and Investment
PC	People's Committee
PPA	Participatory Poverty Assessment
PPC	Provincial People's Committee
RPA	Regional Poverty Assessment
PTF	Poverty Task Force
SCUK	Save Children United Kingdom
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
VHLSS	Vietnam Household Living Standards Survey
VND	Vietnamese Dong (currency)
WU	Women's Union
YO	Youth Organisation



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# Overview

## Ha Giang Province:

Ha Giang province is located in the northernmost part of Vietnam – it borders with the People’s Republic of China to the north (with more than 274 km long border line and the Thanh Thuy international border-cross point), with Tuyen Quang province to the south, Cao Bang province to the east, and Lao Cai and Yen Bai provinces to the west. The total land area of the province is 7,884 sq. km and total population is 632,500 people (50.4% were women) comprising 22 ethnic groups. The five major groups are the HMong (30.75% of total population), Tay (24.94%), Dzao (15.16%), Kinh (12.13%) and Nung (9.69%). Administratively, Ha Giang is divided into 9 districts and 1 town and 191 communes/wards. More than 88% of people live in rural areas<sup>1</sup>. Population growth rate was 1.81% in 2002. Based on geographical, climate and land characteristics Ha Giang can be divided into three distinctive zones:

**Zone 1:** the northern high rocky mountain area consisting of four districts: Dong Van, Meo Vac, Quan Ba and Yen Minh. Total land area is 2,221 sq. km and population of 213,000 people. These 4 district are among the 9 district classified as the most difficult districts in Vietnam. Local harsh natural conditions are suitable for temperate plants, raising cow, horse, goat and poultry; and maize as the main food crop.

**Zone 2:** the western high hilly area consisting of two districts: Hoang Su Phi and Xin Man. The total area is 1,453 sq. km and population of 108,000 people. Natural topography is mixed with lowland and highly slope areas favourable for temperate plants and cash crops like tea (with the famous San Tuyet brand), pine etc. Main food crops are rice and maize; while buffalo, horse, goat and poultry are main husbandry products.

**Zone 3:** the low mountainous area consisting of 3 districts - Bac Quang, Vi Xuyen, Bac Me, and the Ha Giang Town. The total land area is 4,174 sq. km and population of 306,000 people. The climate conditions are favourable for tropical plants and forestry; fruit trees like orange, lemon, mandarin; cash crops like tea. Rice is the key food crop and key animal are cow, buffalo, horse, goat and poultry<sup>2</sup>.

Economically, during the 1996-2002 period Ha Giang was able to sustain a high economic growth rate of around 10% per year. GDP per capita was VND 2,14 million in 2002 (compared with VND1.7 million in 2000). According to the provincial Statistical Year Book 2002 about 48% of the provincial GPD was generated by agriculture, forestry and fishery; 21.28% came from industry and

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<sup>1</sup> Ha Giang Statistical Year Book 2002

<sup>2</sup> Report of Ha Giang Department of Planning and Investment at the scientific workshop “Ha Giang and Its Human Development”, March, 2003.

construction and 30.66% came from services<sup>3</sup>. The figures for year 1995 were 61.8%; 17.1% and 21.1% respectively<sup>4</sup>. These figures show Ha Giang is shifting its economic structure from mainly agricultural toward services, commercial and industry-construction. However, the industrial base in the province is still very small and there is no foreign investment. The provincial revenues come mainly from the central government - in 2002 local contributions counted for just 18% of its total budget (of VND 953 billion<sup>5</sup>).

The poverty rate in Ha Giang in 1996 (using the old MOLISA criteria) was 35.07% (of which 24.2% of households were classified as hunger). The wealth ranking exercises completed in 2001 (using new MOLISA criteria) show that 25.7% of total provincial population lived in poverty. By the end of 2002 the figure declined to 18% and local authorities claim there are *no hunger households* in the province (*Report of DOLISA*). In terms of geography, Ha Giang Town has the lowest rate of poor households (only 2.39%) while Meo Vac district is the poorest (37.91%)<sup>6</sup>. In terms of ethnicity, the HMong is classified as the poorest group (they accounted for 50% of total poor households in 2001) while the Tay and Kinh are recognised as the two most developed groups.

There are 142 communes in Ha Giang in the list of 1,870 most difficult communes in Vietnam that have been benefiting from the implementation of a national targeted programme called “Programme 135” since 1999. The districts with the largest numbers of “*communes 135*” were Xin Man (all 20 communes and town), Dong Van (all 19 communes and town) and Meo Vac (all 16 communes and town); following were Hoang Su Phi (26/27), Bac Me (12/13), Yen Minh (16/18) and Quan Ba (11/13).

### Surveyed communes:

Of the four communes selected for conducting the PPA - Thuan Hoa and Cao Bo are located in Vi Xuyen District; Sang Tung and Thai Phin Tung in Dong Van District. All these communes were also selected sites for collection of quantitative data for the VHLSS in 2002 (see Appendix 3).

The selection of the PPA sites also took into consideration representativeness of these communes in terms of specific natural, geographical, economic and social conditions. In this regard Thuan Hoa and Cao Bo represent zone 2 and zone 3, and Sang Tung and Thai Phin Tung represent zone 1. Different geographical conditions are the reason for different forms of livelihood – people in Sang Tung and Thai Phin Tung, who are mostly of HMong ethnicity, grow maize as their main food crop and raise cow, goat and pig... On the other hand, people in Thuan

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<sup>3</sup> Ha Giang Statistical Year Book 2002

<sup>4</sup> Ha Giang Statistical Year Book 1996

<sup>5</sup> Report of Provincial People’s Committee 2002

<sup>6</sup> *Mid-term Review Report of the Ha Giang HEPR Board*, July 2003

Hoa and Cao Bo, most of them are of Tay and Dzao ethnicity, plant rice and raise water buffalo, cow and pig.

All selected communes are among the communes identified as poorest in Ha Giang and under the cover of the Programme 135. In terms of ethnicity key ethnic groups in Ha Giang such as the HMong, Tay and Dzao have been included in the research. In terms of accessibility Thai Phin Tung and Thuan Hoa are among the easily accessible communes since they are situated along the highway No 4C. To reach the centres of Cao Bo and Sang Tung communes it takes about an hour drive by car. Thank to the Programme 135 key infrastructure constructions like communal schools, health stations, electricity, post offices etc. have been built except in Thai Phin Tung commune where they are yet connected to national grid.

### Research objectives:

- To update information on poverty situation, its aspects/issues relating to poverty and poverty reduction in Ha Giang;
- To produce a Ha Giang PPA report and supply information to the *Report on Poverty in Northern Upland Region of Vietnam*; and at the same time contribute to policy dialogue at national and regional levels; and to contribute to the *Report on PPA in Vietnam* by the Poverty Task Force;
- To help ActionAid Vietnam and its partners develop a long-term strategy 2003-07 for its Ha Giang Programme.
- To help ActionAid Vietnam staff as well as relevant provincial and district officials in Ha Giang build capacity and understand better the situation and issues related to poverty and poverty reduction.

### The research team:

In total 23 people took part in the PPA: 21 directly and two played coordinating/supporting roles (see Appendix 1)

*Time:* from 9 to 29 July 2003

### Methodology:

1. Semi-structured interviews with provincial and district departments, commune leaders and village heads;
2. Semi-structured interviews with separate groups of men, women, children, teachers and households (poor, middle and better off) in selected communes and villages;
3. Use of PPA tools like village wealth ranking, trend mapping, pair-wise ranking, matrix, cause and effect trees, 24 hours agenda and observation etc.);
4. Collection of secondary data (reports and statistical documents of the province and two district and 4 communes selected for the 1996-2003 period)

## Locality and research objectives:

1. *Ha Giang Province*: DOLISA, DPI, DARD, DOET, DOH, Fatherland Front and WU.
2. *Vi Xuyen District (low mountainous area)*: BOLISA, BARD, BPI, BOET, DHC, WU  
*Thuan Hoa commune (low land area)*: Hoa Bac village (large village along the highway 4C) and Lung Ray village (poor and remote village);  
*Cao Bo commune (highly situated commune)*: Thac Tau village (far from the commune centre) and Chat Tien village (along the inter-communal road)
3. *Dong Van District (high mountainous areas)*: BOLISA, BPI, BOET, BARD, WU  
*Sang Tung commune (poor and remote commune)*: Ta Lung A village (along the road to the commune centre) and Lung Thang village (far from the commune centre);  
*Thai Phin Tung commune (poor commune along the highway 4C)*: Nheo Lung village (close to the commune centre) and Ta Lung Chu village (remote village)

In total, the research team has conducted **104 interviews**, of which:

- 7 interviews with provincial departments;
- 12 interview with district bureaus;
- 8 interviews with commune leaders;
- 8 interviews with village heads;
- 4 groups of children and 4 groups of teachers ;
- 20 interviews with separate groups of heads of household;
- 41 interviews with single households.

## Some key points of the PPA:

- This research is mainly qualitative and therefore its report should be read with other quantitative research done by the World Bank.
- The PPA exercise has been conducted in rainy season which is difficult in terms of transportation but favourable in terms of cultivation and living conditions of local people, especially those living in the high rocky areas. The information collected therefore may reflect positive trends/results rather than the negative/difficult ones.
- All surveyed communes are under the Programmes 135 covered areas and have also been benefiting from other support programmes/projects implemented by local authority and international agencies (like IFAD, SIDA, UNICEF...), therefore the findings may be limited in terms of representation.
- Requirements for inquiring Public Administration Reforms came when the research was already underway therefore the information gathered is incomplete.

## Key findings:

1. *During the last ten years*, especially during the past 5 years, local authorities and people of all ethnic groups in Ha Giang have made great efforts, combining internal resources with support from the central government and international organisations, and *achieved remarkable results* in economic, cultural and social devolvement as well as in poverty reduction - high annual economic growth rate; shifting local economic structure from mainly agricultural to a more diverse structure, the percentage of contribution of industrial-construction and commercial-services sectors to the provincial GDP has been increasing. However, Ha Giang is still a poor province with GDP per capita in 2002 of VND 2.14 million is well bellow the national standard (around VND 6 million); *some potential sectors still remain underexplored* (trade, forestry, tourism...)
2. *Life* of overwhelming majority of people, including ethnic minority groups and poor people living in high/remote areas, has been improved – the number of better off households increased while the number of poor HHs declined; improved capacity of local people in applying productive scientific/technical knowledge resulting in higher food and husbandry production; better housing conditions (a number of households can now afford expensive things like motorbikes, TV sets, milling machines etc.) and higher demands on spiritual and cultural life; declined negative social problems or “social evils” etc. However, there are disparities between groups of people in term improvement (private enterprise owners and officials with high income versus ordinary workers and poor farmers), between different ethic groups (the Tay and the Kinh versus the HMong and other poor groups). There is still a small part of households who have improved their life very little or even suffered deterioration. Sustainability of the changes is questionable.
3. *HEPR* has become one of the top priorities on the agenda of local authorities, received huge investments and achieved very promising results - poverty rate reduced considerably to 18% in 2002 from 25.7% in 2001 and the are *no hunger households* (PPC Annual Report 2002). In some places (Ha Giang Town, Bac Quang and Vi Xuyen Districts) the poverty rate has declined under the 10% mark. However, results from the village wealth ranking exercises conducted by the PPA team together with local officials and people in surveyed communities show a greyer picture – in all surveyed villages but two, the *poverty rate is considerably higher, particularly in remote and difficult areas* (see Table 1.2). For example, the rate in Lung Ray village (Thuan Hoa commune) is 32.4%; in Chat Tien village (Cao Bo commune) is 38.89%; in Lung Thang village (Sang Tung commune) 29% and in Ta Lung Chu village (Thai Phin Tung commune) 73,47% etc. Local people said that *hunger households still exist* as they suffer from food shortage from 4 up to 6 months per year. Officials and people in better off communities consider the poverty line set by the government acceptable or even low, but the people from poorer communities think the line is rather high. *The sustainability* of HEPR is probably low because

is over-dependent on the support from the central and provincial governments.

4. *Improved infrastructure* (electricity grid, roads, telephone links, schools, health stations, irrigation canals, water tanks etc.) in Ha Giang, especially in high/remote areas has *played a crucial role* in improving socio-economic and cultural development as well in poverty reduction. Grassroots officials and people living in high/remote areas still expect the central or provincial/district governments provide further investments to upgrade/expand road and electrical systems so that they will be able to improve their life.
5. *The education system* has been strengthened and worked effectively: during the past three years hundreds of school buildings and single classrooms have been built resulting in improvement in both teaching and learning quality; families and the society have better awareness of the importance of education; the school enrolment rates increased while the drop out rates declined. However, the enrolment rates to pre-school and upper secondary education are still low; the rate of illiterate people over 35, especially of women, is as high as 50% in some communities. There are differences between the criteria used by the DOET in Ha Giang and the PPA TOR in categorising literate people – the former considers only the 6-14 and 15-25 age groups and neglecting the over 25 category. People over 25 are in general the breadwinners in their families and therefore they should have received adequate education.
6. *The health care programmes* have also contributed greatly to improved health conditions of local people, especially women and children. Since 1997, a large number of local people, especially poor people, have access to free healthcare services. The number of people visiting commune health stations for treatment and/or delivery increased; health stations have been built/upgraded in every commune; a network of commune and village health workers has been strengthened; the birth rate has reduced etc. However, just only half of the doctors and 1/5 of commune health workers are of local origin, and the quality of health workers remains problematic. These problems pose questions about the stability and sustainability of local health system as well as the need for capacity building of local health workers. The Decision No 139 is in its early stage of implementation, local officials are in the process of compiling beneficiary lists. Only local officials know about of the Decision while local people do not know anything.
7. *Extension/veterinary systems* have been strengthened, further developed and played a crucial role in improving agricultural production (application of new high yielding varieties, improved husbandry etc). Extension services are highly appreciated by local people including poor people. *Forestry extension* has also done a good job in terms of improving awareness of local people on forest protection; the coverage of forests increased to over 39%. Poor people expect the government continue to improve the quality of local

extension/veterinary cadres; subsidise seeds, fertilisers and credit; provide production and market information timely to them. So far, local people have invested very little in their forestland and most of the forests are mixed and of low economic value. The Decision No 80 has not yet come to life and there is very little involvement of scientists in helping the farmers.

8. *Participation of people, including poor people*, in local governance remains limited mostly in forms of contributing to various funds and fulfilling citizens' obligations (such as contributing labour and materials). Directives, decisions from higher layers of governments including the Decree No. 29 have been disseminated mainly to local cadres and party members at the commune and village levels. For most local people village meetings are the main source of information even though they do not get much of it during the meetings. This is a factor limiting people's understanding and consequent application of what they are told to do or not to do. Local officials from the district to grass roots levels have to attend too many meetings with so large number of policies/instructions/resolutions but they have either sufficient time to implement them nor disseminate them to local people. The budget allocated for *infrastructure construction* is huge but is quite common that district project management boards do all the work with contractors and leave grassroots officials and people with only one task - accept completed projects. The latter are rarely involved in discussion and oversight of big projects. People living in high/remote areas still have a very limited access to information – a post office at district level does not have spare newspapers/magazines for sale, just only for distribution to the subscribers. This fact hampers the dissemination of government policies and guidelines to the people of ethnic groups as well as to their own development.
9. *Regular social assistance programmes* such as supporting people with contribution to the revolution, people in difficulties (very poor people, elderly people living alone, handicapped people, enfant children etc) seem to have good targeting. *Emergency programmes* (specially designed to households suffering heavy losses from natural and man-made disasters etc.) target all categories of households disregarding whether the households are poor or not. In general, the assistance programmes have been implemented quite well in Ha Giang - various sources have been mobilised helping the needy households to overcome their difficulties. However, interviewed people said that emergency assistance had only short-term effect because the loss was often more than the compensation. Some people complained about delays in provision of emergency assistance. Some poor households have worsened their life because of the risks.
10. *Social order has been maintained well with low rate of "social evils"*: in all surveyed communities the PPA team has heard that negative social problems or "evils" like drug addiction, prostitution, HIV/AIDS infection were rare or on decrease. This is a comparative advantage of Ha Giang, a border province with a large number of ethnic groups - it has contributed

positively to the socio-economic development of the province. However, drinking habit is still widespread in Ha Giang causing negative impacts such as low productivity, domestic violence etc. It therefore should be considered as a social evil.

11. **Public administration reforms:** There are wide disparities in terms of capacity/capability between grassroots officials in lowland areas and those in the highland/remote areas and between officials of different ethnic groups. For example, officials in one HMong commune cannot do planning and budgeting themselves and have to ask for support from district authority. This phenomenon limits the effectiveness of the state apparatus. Standardization of civil servants has completed just at the district level, and yet at the commune level although this is a very important administrative unit. The PPC has applied various policies such as rotation of cadre, secondment of staff to difficult areas etc. However, they have achieved just some initial results.
12. **Women** are key labour in nearly all families. Their position has been improved though slowly - they now have better knowledge of economy, society and culture; the quality of life (health, clothing, accommodation, transportation and cultural needs) has improved; the birth rate has declined. Women (particularly the Tay and Dzao women) start to take part more actively in community activities such as village meetings. Women's Union is considered as an active mass organisation at the grassroots level. However, lots of old practices/traditions still prevail and hinder women's advancement (men still want to be main participants in social engagements leaving the women work long hours for agricultural production and housework). There is common situation in which husbands beat their wives once they get drunk. There are more illiterate and/or re-illiterate women than men. Gender awareness/sensitivity is still an issue to be addressed in Ha Giang.
13. **Environment:** Ha Giang has begun with implementation of its forest protection/ reforestation policies quite early – since the early 1990s, together with allocation of forest land to farmers, these policies have brought about tangible and positive results: people's awareness of forest protection increased, the "slash and burn" practice has almost ceased, forest coverage has increased to 39% in 2002, land erosion reduced, the environment improved etc. However, understanding of local officials, especially of grassroots officials and people about the environment and its importance to their life is still limited, there are still vast bare land areas in Ha Giang. In surveyed communes people have invested very little on their forestland and there are lots of problems related to sanitation and hygiene.
14. Uncontrolled **migration** was a serious social phenomenon in Ha Giang three years ago (mainly among the HMong people who left for southern provinces due to religious reasons) has now almost stopped. Provincial and district authorities are making resettlement planning by encouraging people move from high to low areas. However, this work requires time and close

collaboration between several related departments. People who come to Ha Giang at present are mainly freelance labourers (construction workers, small trades ...) from the plain rural provinces.

15. **Market economy is less developed:** there are quite few private enterprises in Ha Giang. Private services like repair, tailoring, supplying agricultural materials etc. are still not developed even non-existent in several ethnic minority communities. To access to these services, local people have to go to towns or markets.

## Recommendations:

### *General recommendations:*

- If in the first phase, Ha Giang invested heavily in infrastructure, then in the second phase the focus should be on capacity building for people, both local officials and people (training for grass roots officials, especially ethnic minority officials, together with improving education and enhancing business capacity for local people).
- The province should exploit its potentials/comparative advantages to increase sustainability of the development process and make better use of support from the central government and international organisations to invest in forestry (zone planning, forestation and explorations of industrial timber), in husbandry and tourism (Lung Cu, Khau Vai love market...) trade (Thanh Thuy international border cross point...)

### *Specific recommendation:*

1. The province should continue HEPR activities at current scale and priority should be given to remote/difficult areas, combining various resources with the aim of enhancing active attitude of local official and people. Develop and promote good economic/HEPR models; further diversify agriculture/forestry/aquaculture, experiment and promote “safe food” such as organic vegetable and local animal; introduce appropriate preserving/processing technologies for staple food (maize, rice) to households.
2. The province needs to develop specific policies/strategies to enhance pro-active, self-reliance thinking to reduce the dependence mentality of local officials and people including of those in remote/difficult areas. **Building capacity for and utilising cadre of ethnic origin should be a long-term strategic goal.** Grassroots officials (at commune and village levels) should be strengthened in terms of both quantity and quality. Review rotation and secondment policies.
3. The province should pay more attention to **the sustainability** of development and poverty reduction activities in Ha Giang by focusing on capacity building for both local officials and people. In order to do so the province should reduce the level of subsidy from the central government, mobilise all possible internal resources etc; hold workshops/seminaries to assess HEPR

initiatives/model to draw necessary lessons and experience, avoid the practice of “achieving success at any price” (Benh thanh tich).

4. Continue investing in infrastructure (roads, bridges, electricity supply, telephone links, TV coverage etc.) in remote and difficult areas. Develop plans and find out solutions for maintenance of completed infrastructure projects so that they could serve local people for long time and effectively.
5. **Health services:** the province should work out plans to build local cadre of health workers including doctors/nurses/midwives in order to improve the quality and sustainability of health services. Learn experiences from other provinces where the Decision 139 has already been implemented so that Ha Giang will implement it more effectively and efficiently.
6. **Education:** continue providing current education services (free education plus support of textbooks etc.) to ethnic minority people and people living in remote/difficult areas. Education should focus on the quality and efficiency, avoid setting unrealistic goals. More boarding schools are needed so that more ethnic minority children could be attended. Improve the content and methodology of teaching focusing on quality and technical/skills aspects so that the students can learn useful things and become valuable human resource in the future. Socialisation of education should be applied first in lowland and less disadvantaged areas.
7. **Extension:** continue strengthening and improving the agriculture/forestry/aquaculture extension systems/networks focusing on increasing quality and quantity of extension workers, ensuring that all villages have extension staff. Implement the Government Decision No. 80 and get the scientists involved in the development and HEPR processes. Provide market information directly to the farmers so that they know what to plant and raise, what, when and where to sell; improve agriculture materials supply. Get the scientists involved in conducting research with the aim of improving the quality and productivity of plants and animal (rice, maize, soybean, tea, fruit trees and timber, cow, goat, pig, chicken etc.). Develop new varieties and help farmers overcome difficulties whilst applying them. *Continue subsidise* seeds and fertilisers to poor farmers and farmers in remote and difficult areas. Provide instructions on appropriate pest prevention/treatment and grain preservation techniques to farmers. Develop master plans, promote and provide guidance for farmers to invest in forestry, increase the value of forests. Support HMong people in developing husbandry (cows, goats, pigs) so that they can increase incomes.
8. **Social assistance:** improve communication between district and commune, between commune and village to upgrade list of beneficiaries. Consider setting up support funds in communes or villages under the management of Fatherland Front or Red Cross organisations and supervised by local PC. Amend emergency policies to put poor people on priority list.

9. **Environment:** Institutionalise current policies/laws/regulations on environment protection into suitable specific programmes to people in particular zones. Enhance the managerial role of government, mobilising various resources to protect the environment. Strengthen monitoring and control over observation of environmental law/regulations. Continue enhancing environmental awareness for local officials and people; apply strict measures to people who violence the law on forest (illegal logging, polluting water sources...); promote and provide support to farmers in planting trees (programme of planting 30.000 pine trees); integrate various programmes with the aim of economic development, environmental protection and addressing social problems.
10. Continue the implementation of resettlement programmes by the Department for Resettlement and its district branches. It is important that the programmes are implemented scientifically, step by step with full participation of local governments and people in both original and new places. The province should draw lessons from the implementation; avoid formalism and false emulation; promote good models; combine master planning with reallocating; seek support from central government and international organisations.
11. Develop effective and practical measures in order to help the most difficult communities integrate with more developed ones. Eradicate information hunger by using various means and forms of communication – leaflets, posters, IT, groups actions, village meetings... Enable them with better access to mass media (radio, TV, newspapers), telephone, movies, cultural events etc. Combine campaigning with administrative measures, requesting party members to act as examples, focus on the youth etc.
12. Perceive improving the position of women as an important task not only of Women’s Union but also of other governmental and mass organisations at all levels. Organise training courses on gender awareness and gender sensitivity for local leaders and mass organizations officials; build the capacity for female cadre and promote capable women to managerial positions at various levels, especially at commune and village levels.

## Perception of Poverty

### Trends:

The vast majority of interviewed people answered that their life had been improved over the past five years. Number of better-off and middle households has increased while those of poor households reduced clearly at all levels - from the provincial to district, commune and village. Per capita income in 2002 is VND 2.14 million (compared with VND 1.75 million in 2000 and VND 946,000 in 1996). Per capita income by food increased from 274 kg in 1998 to 350 kg in 2002 (*2002 Annual Report of Ha Giang People's Committee*). Figures in Table 1.1 show the rapid rate of poverty reduction in Ha Giang during the 1996-2002 period. It also shows that the improvement is particularly impressive for the period from 2000 up to now.

Table 1.1: Changes in percentage of poor household in Ha Giang (report of local authority):

Year	1996	1998	2000	2001	2002
Percentage of poor households (%)	35.7	28.3	20.0	25.7	18

(Sources: Review Report 1996-2000 and Report 2002 of the provincial HEPR Committee)

Table 1.2: Changes in percentage of poor households in Ha Giang (ranked by selected villagers):

Group/Village/Year	1998 (%)		2003 (%)		After 5 years (%)	
	Hunger and poor	Better off	Hunger and poor	Better off	Hunger and poor	Better off
Women group, Lung Ray Village, Thuan Hoa Commune, Vi Xuyen District	81.2	9.4	32.4	32.4		
Women group, Hoa Bac Village, Thuan Hoa Commune, Vi Xuyen District	63.16	5.3	23.4	19		
Men group, Chat Tien Village, Cao Bo Commune, Vi Xuyen District	32	6	21	31		
Men group, Thac Tau Village, Cao Bo Commune, Vi Xuyen District	86	0	21	28		
Men group, Ta Lung A Village, Sang Tung Commune, Dong Van District	70.9	10.9	40.58	34.78		
Men group, Lung Thang Village, Sang Tung Commune, Dong Van District	92	0	39.28	7.14		
Men group, Ta Lung Chu Village, Thai Phin Tung Commune, Dong Van District	75.86	10.34	51.02	18.37		
Men group, Nheo Lung Village, Thai Phin Tung Commune, Dong Van District	89.47	7.9	54.35	13.04	21.43	16.07

(Source: PPA Group discussions and interviews)

According to assessment of poor villagers (Table 1.2) the poverty rate, especially in poorer communities, has reduced quite fast during the 1998-2003 period. One may say that it is due to the positive impact of the so called “9 Policies and 7 Projects” implemented in Ha Giang during this period. Another observation is that the poverty rate declined quite fast in the areas occupied by HMong people (in Dong Van District), but it is still slower compared with the improvement of the Tay and Dao people. One explanation can be the harsh living conditions of the HMong (high rocky mountains, lack of cultivated land and water), and their limited capability in exploiting opportunities created by HEPR programmes.

Table 1.3: Development trends (men group in Ta Lung Chu village, Thai Phin Tung Commune, Dong Van District)

Type of HH/timing	1998	2003
Better off	3	9
Middle	4	15
Poor	5	13
Hunger	17	12
Total	29	49

Looking at Table 1.3 one can say the positive trends are obvious, especially among the groups of better off and middle households. On the other hand, there are still households who have managed to improve very little or even get worse during the same period. There is still a large number of hunger households. This may imply that the extent of change is not deep and compared with the better-off and the middle the poorest people have not made use much of offered opportunities.

Majority of interviewees also answered that their life would continue to improve in the future and the government’s twin objectives in general are feasible (see chart below).

Table 1.4: Solutions to the two objectives of the CPRGS

Objectives	Solutions
Reducing percentage of poor households under 10%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Government continues its support/investments on infrastructure upgrade roads to communes centers, build new bridges, drains), supplying new varieties/fertilizer, preferential loans</li> <li>Capacity building for grass roots officials</li> <li>Continuing support on education, healthcare (free education and curative healthcare)</li> <li>Expanding coverage of national electric grid and TV to all villages</li> <li>Effective implementation of provincial HEPR programmes (raising of cow, goat), and resolutions of the Provincial People’s Council</li> <li>More subsidized of seeds (maize), fertilizer</li> </ul>
Increasing income two fold by 2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provision of scientific knowledge (new varieties of plant and animal) for local people</li> <li>Expanding food cultivation areas</li> <li>Developing husbandry (cow, goat). Government supports in planting grass.</li> <li>Diversifying production, applying new patterns of planting and animal husbandry</li> <li>Demonstrating good economic models to farmers, giving them right orientations</li> <li>Establishment of intensive cultivated areas focusing on cash crops (tea, soybean)</li> <li>Helping farmers with their outputs of agricultural produce, provision of market information</li> <li>Opens shops for selling of agricultural materials in each communes</li> <li>Zero interest rate loan</li> </ul>

As figures show in order to obtain two above objectives, it would require support from [central, provincial, international agencies], as well as building capacity for local officials at grassroots level, construction of infrastructure for agricultural production.

Most of interviewed groups perceived that reduction of poor household percentage to below 10% by 2005 is possible, but the doubling income generation is difficult, especially to poor areas. According to some commune officials in Dong Van District they could manage increase income by 30-50% because their economy is dependent mostly on maize growing which has low value (apart from lack of cultivated land and high requirement on fertilizer).

Some local officials said: *“if the government cut the supports, the number of poor will surely increased.”* This raises a concern about the sustainability of improvement. If the improvements happened by mobilising internal resources combining with some support from outside, they would sustain for long time. But if they happened mainly because of the support from outside, their sustainability is questionable.

## Evidence:

According to interview results following evidence have been raised by all groups: **Improved infrastructure:** 100% of the commune centres and a large number of villages are now accessible by car enabling people to get in and out of the commune easily to do business; hundreds of kilometres of canal have been upgraded with concrete/stone/brick providing water stably to cultivation areas (people in many areas can now plant two crops per year instead of one crop); hundreds of schools, health stations and schools have been built, many villages are connected to the national grid.

***According to 2002 Report of the provincial PC 2002, by the end of 2002 Ha Giang managed to build:***

- 114 two-storey commune PC offices;
- 890 village offices;
- 90 two-storey health stations;
- 285 two-storey schools; 890 individual classrooms in villages; 66 houses for teachers and pupils;
- 360,7 km of rural road
- 565,6 km of concrete canals;
- National grid reaches 140/191 communes/wards, 40% of local people have access to electricity.

**Improved production:** the yield of some main crops like maize, rice has increased, people have more food and animal (cattle, pigs, chicken etc); additional income from selling fruit trees (mango, longan, plum-tree) and from selling cash crops (tea, peanut, bean, flax etc...)

*Living conditions of local people have been improved:* better housing conditions (tiled roof, wooden floor and wall); expensive things such as motorbike, TV sets, milling machines etc; poor households are supported with new roof; women and children are dressed more neatly; quality of daily meals is improved; improved water is available from water tanks.

The province has invested more than VND 40 millions for construction of 19 water supply projects, installation of 166 km of pipeline and construction of 27,195 water tanks for poor households (*Report of DPI on socio-economic and HEPR situation of Ha Giang since the renovation period to date, March 2003*). In addition, the province has mobilised resources to eradicate 31,000 slumps, providing new roofs to 26,025 households (*Report of DOLISA*). Construction of water tank has helped people, especially women and children in saving time and labour the women need to collect water, the water is available even during the dry season. However, the quality of water, especially the use of rainwater collected from fibro-cement roof, is not safe for the health (includes some harmful chemicals and there are many insects in the water tanks mosquito larvae, tadpoles etc.).

*The intellectual level of people including poor people, has increased:* people now have higher demands on spiritual and cultural life (watching TV, listening to radio, information on new productive knowledge), women give fewer births than before, children are taken care off better etc. It is quite common that poor households in Ha Giang including the Dzao and HMong, have only 2 kids.

*Basic social services like health, education have been basically improved* both in term of quality and quantity. Higher enrolment rate (over 96% for the age from 6-14); reduced illiterate rate (in 6-25 age groups); women's and children's health conditions have been improved because of free curative healthcare, the work of commune/village health education and family planning. In some remote communes such as Sang Tung and Thai Phin Tung that used to have high illiterate rate are doing universalisation of primary education now while lowly situated and more advantaged communes like Thuan Hoa and Cao Bo are doing universalisation of lower secondary education. More people visit commune health stations for free medicine and treatment, in case of more serious illnesses they can go to district and provincial hospitals. Family planning has been paid with great attention and contributed to reducing the birth rate to 1.8% in 2002; fewer cases of inflicting malaria are recorded.

*Social evils are declining:* interviewed officials and people said that social evils such as thievery, growing opium, prostitution, drug addiction, HIV/AIDS were on decline. But the drinking is still a prevalent custom.

*The life of women has also improved:* they have acquired scientific/technical knowledge through training courses, applied new varieties, new patterns in planting and animal husbandry etc.). Their health conditions are better now as women have fewer children, more beautiful cloths. Dzao and Tay women participate more and more in community activities. Interviewed men said that women are now treated more equally (less being beaten by their husbands while

they get drunk!!). Due to the availability of electricity HMong women have no longer to stay up late at night for maize grinding. Women's Union is recognized as one of the most active mass organisations at grassroots level even though with the fact that they do not meet regularly as they should.

**Women remain key labour within the family.** They are the first to get up in the morning but the last go to bed in the evening because they do all housework and production. The illiterate and/or re-illiterate rates amongst people over 35, especially among women are high (in the Dzao or HMong communities, the percentage can be up to more than 50%). There is still a number of cases where girls get married early (before reaching age 18) and have to drop out of school. Very low percentage of women have some position in the government apparatus - in all four surveyed communes there is no woman, other than head of WU, acting as commune or village leader.

### Reasons:

Following are the reasons given by groups of interviewees in Ha Giang as forces for change to the life of local people:

*Support from (central, provincial) government and international agencies in forms of pro-poor policies/guidelines, programmes/projects implemented, some example:*

- Infrastructure construction (Programme 135, Rural Roads, HPM ...).
- Training on/dissemination of new extension techniques.
- Subsidy for new plant and animal varieties
- Support poor households to raise goats,
- Preferential loans plus subsidised interest rates
- Construction of water tanks, provision of roof material, liquidation of slumps
- Investments on education and healthcare fields
- Enhancing capacity for local officials etc.

Interviewed provincial and district officials said that the central and provincial programmes on socio-economic development and HEPR have brought about tangible results – Ha Giang is implementing “9 policies and 7 projects” – Programme 135 and HPM, UNICEF, SIDA... (see Appendix 4). A number of pro-poor initiatives by local authorities have been applied such as “one roof, one water tank, one cow” for each poor household; asking all organizations and rich peoples within province to be a patron for a poor commune and/or household, subsidising seeds, fertilizers and interest rate for raising cow/buffaloes and agricultural machines; construction of rural road, eradication of slumps, provision of preferential loan to each poor household so that they could raise two goats etc.

Most of interviewed official and people but one group highly appreciate the government support, especially the support in subsidising seeds, providing preferential credit and construction of water tank. In regard to health services, family planning is frequently mentioned as a factor bringing improvement to the life of people, especially women.

Table 1.4: Support from Government

**Funding sources:** Programmes 327, 661, 135, Settlement programme 06, Support for the most disadvantaged ethnic groups, National programmes on education and health, culture, information, internal sources, people's investment etc.

**Cultivation** (investment from VND 5-17 billions annually):

- *subsidising 70% of price for high yield rice and maize varieties for people living in the high/remote areas and disadvantaged lowland communes, and 50% for other lowland communes*
- *Free provision of 5 kg of high yield variety and 20 kg of fertilizer per crop for poor households*
- *Subsidy 30-50% of prices for the fruit trees (mango, pear, orange, mandarin) for all local people who want to plant fruit trees*
- *Support 100% of interest rate for people pursuing tea farming*
- *Support of VND 5 million/ha for land reclamation and VND 2 million/ha for transforming terrace fields to rice field (increase of 300-700 ha annually)*
- *Assign one extension staff for each commune to help people apply progressive productive techniques (The province pays VND 300,000/staff.month)*
- *Setting specialized zones for cash crops (9,226 ha of soybean; 13,332 ha of tea in 2002) and fruit trees.*

**Husbandry:**

- *Support 100% of interest rate in 3 three years for buying of one cow/buffaloes*
- *Supports two goats for each poor households with the cost around VND 1 million*
- *Support 50% of vaccination cost for cattle*

(Source: DPI Report on socio-economic and HEPR of Ha Giang since renovation period, March 2003).

Table 1.5: Budget allocated for HEPR 2001-02 of Ha Giang:

Descriptions/year	2001 (billion)	2002 (billion)
Central Government Budget	89.828	-
Local budget	33.84	179.891
Mobilization from community	10.994	377.675
International Cooperation	60.47	2.029
Preferential loan	30.00	17.08
<b>Total</b>	<b>225.083</b>	<b>576.675</b>
Accommodation for poor people (budget from local authority and community)	17,895	17,396
Infrastructure construction	56.8	72.191
Education assistance (education equipment)	1.15	8.314
Free curative healthcare	2.016	5.789

(Source: Mid-term Report of Provincial HEPR Committee, 2003)

*People's own efforts:* all interviewed people mentioned the attributions of the people who succeeded in improving their life: strong-will and wanted to do new things; hardworking and thrift; having adequate productive knowledge and good calculation and labour; applying new techniques, reclaiming more cultivated land.

#### Get rich because of having smart mind and productive knowledge

Mr Dinh Van Ch. aged 56 is of Kinh origin, he lives with his family (his father, his wife, two sons, daughter, daughter-in-law and her baby). Mr Ch. left Phu Tho province and settled here since 1979. His family is considered the richest in Hoa Bac village, Thuan Hoa commune, Vi Xuyen District. Apart from a big 5 room brick house and 3 room adjacent house, there is a large garden of fruit trees and a fish pond. Mr Ch's family has 5 water buffaloes, 4 goats, four acres of rice plots (above the average). Every year the family harvest 2.5 ton of rice, selling buffalo, fish, fruits and other things and could earn VND 50 million. He attributes his success equally to government support programmes and to his family's own efforts. Talking about his secrecy of getting rich Mr Ch. says that because he has smart mind knowing what he should do and how to do it. He is one of the best farmers in the village who has a wealth of productive knowledge and experience. He wants to do new things and knows a lot about the market. He likes doing experiment and combines agriculture with horticulture and services. Mr Ch. says that the income of his family has increased five fold since 1999 and the trend is positive.

*Improved irrigation:* new upgraded concrete canals supply water sufficiently to larger cultivation areas. People can apply new varieties (hybrid rice and maize) with higher yield. Improved irrigation is particularly recognized in communities with rice cultivation like Thuan Hoa and Cao Bo.

*Improved rural infrastructure:* People living in remote areas far from roads (Cao Bo and Sang Tung) highly appreciate the improvement in transportation. Because of the roads connect highway with the commune centres it is easier for people in buying agricultural inputs (seeds, fertilizer), in selling products using bicycles, motorbikes, carts etc. Officials and people of Thuan Hoa commune also want the government help them build a bridge over Tiem river so that they can easily get to the highway 4C.

*Government policy on land and forestland allocation* give people the right to own and the certainty to invest in their land. It also helps reduce conflicts related to land issues within and amongst communities. Particularly the policy has a very positive impact on environmental protection. In surveyed communes, 100% people answered they were allocated with land since 1996 and with forestland since 1999. The way land was allocated: commune authority allocated land to villages and then village officials allocated it to households. In general, the allocation is quite fair except some cases where households are allocated with land/forestland far from their home. For HMong people lots of allocated areas are rocky mountains difficult for cultivation.

*Connection to national grid:* because of having electricity people can access mass media like radio, TV as well as to useful information. For children, they no longer have to use gas lamps for study during the night. The availability of electricity also encourages some households to purchase milling machines - the HMong women have no longer to stay up at night for grinding maize.

*Capacity of local officials increased:* agricultural and forestry extension services have been improved in terms of both quantity and quality. Village agricultural extension network and village health worker network have been strengthened and worked more effectively in giving instructions on cultivation of new varieties, in demonstration models, vaccination and treatment for animal when some diseases occur.

### Differences in improvement:

*Geographically:* Ha Giang Town is the place with the lowest percentage of poor people (2.39%), while Meo Vac is the poorest one (37.91%) – nearly 16 times gap!!! Similar to others districts like (Dong Van, Quan Ba, Xin Man) Meo Vac is located in the high rocky mountainous area difficult for cultivation – there is very little land only rugged rocks and lacks water during the dry seasons, forests have been destroyed and very little left.

*Ethically:* HMong people are recognized as the poorest community (accounted for 50% of poor households in Ha Giang in 2001). According to local official and people the HMong people usually live in the high rocky mountain areas and face a number of difficulties in agricultural production. Maize is their main crop but is usually insufficient, major income comes from animal raising (cow, goat, pig, chicken). Moreover, the HMong community is rather close with little communication with the outside world. They are also thought to have some old traditions like early marriage, costly funerals, keeping dead people long in their house etc... On the other hand the Tay and the Kinh are recognized as two most developed groups capable in acquiring new knowledge and having no obstacle with communication.

*By income:* the groups with highest incomes are owners of private enterprises and government officials (at all levels from provincials to district, commune and village) with stable and high salary), merchants; opposite to these groups are the farmers. It is interesting about the members of getting-rich-fast group are officials (village level upward) and innovative people who had courage in doing investing on the new things. However, most of the interviewed said that these groups are quite small, and in general the improvements have happened gradually.

### Overcome poverty because of education and will to change

Mr Dang Van L. is 42, of Dzao origin and lives in Chat Tien village, Cao Bo commune, Vi Xuyen District with his mother, his wife, two kids, his sister and her husband. Before 2000 his family often suffered food shortage for 2 month a year. During the hunger period he had to borrow from neighbours or labouring. Since 2000 up to now, Mr L's family has started faring very well: they no longer suffer hunger, have purchased milling machine, motorbike ... According to Mr L. the reasons for improvement are government support in upgrading the canal system and his family can plant two crops per year with high yield. Beside that, because he is not illiterate Mr L. can read and understand useful things. He follow the instructions given by extension staff and plant hybrid rice, rotate crops. He has also saved money from selling rice and invested in tea growing. All these have contributed to increase incomes of his family. When the road connecting Cao Bo with highway No 2 was built, his family has been benefiting from better transportation and flow of goods. Well aware of the importance of education Mr L. says: "*It is important that the kids go to school. They will know how to write and do calculation. After school, they can help me selling tea without fear of being cheated. I want to provide the kids with good education so that they will be able to run business...*"

Through the PPA, the research team has observed *a stark difference* in terms of improvement of spiritual life between people living in the lowland areas and those living in remote and mountainous areas. There is even a phenomenon called "information hunger" among the HMong groups living in remote areas. They have very little access to the outside world (local markets and cultural events), the language barrier keeps them out, they do not watch TV because of no electricity or no coverage. Furthermore, local officials (commune and village) are so weak in terms of capacity and skills etc. All these have caused that ordinary people, especially poor people and women, know very little about the outside world and therefore have very little chance for improvement.

Life of a small percentage of people has **not been improved, even worsen off**. Most of groups shared the same view on the reasons that make people vulnerable (in priority order):

- House burning
- Natural calamity, epidemics
- Serious illness within family
- Death of cattle

*Women groups added one reason:* the death of main labour. This shows the difficult situation that a man or woman is in if they head their household, especially for women.

Following are the frequent solutions households use when *they facing risks*:

- Inform village head expecting the village head would inform commune authorities and asking for assistance.
- Get support from neighbors
- Selling of furniture

**Women groups added solutions:** working as hired labour (paid VND 10-15,000 per day), collecting firewood and ask for support from the women.

#### Becoming poorer because of risks

Mr Vang Chung C., 46, of HMong origin, lives with his wife Giang Thi C., 46 and two daughters, one of them goes to 2 grade. They live in a house with thatched roof, clay walls and three rooms in Nheo Lung village, Thai Phin Tung commune. Mr C. family used to be among the middle households, but currently they are classified as poor. The reasons for this are that they have faced risks. First, two dead cows cause loss of VND 5 million. Second, lack of labour - all work in his family lies on his shoulder. His wife had an accident while working on the field and since that time can't contribute anything. The daughters are small. Though they have enough land but he cannot cultivate all this. Every year Mr C. harvests 5-600 kg of maize and his family suffers food shortage for 2 months a year. They also do not have enough water. As alternative measures, Mr C. collects vegetable for sale or does labouring (about VND 12,000 per day). Mr C. wishes he could borrow VND 2.5 million to raise cow, the government supported new maize seeds and roofing materials. At present, Mr C. has a loan of VND 1.5 million but is still unable to repay.

According to opinions of official groups, the groups of households *improved very little* are the HMong because they live closely, in high area with difficulties of production conditions (lack of land for cultivation, poor soil quality, far from water sources so even have high investment but results with low yield and income) beside, a small number know common language, low level of intellectual and old traditions. Another group often perceived as worsen off are the newly separate households, especially those separated from poor households since they lack productive means (land, productive tools, capital), and productive knowledge.

#### Differences in the opinions:

It's easy to see that all the interviewed groups have raised similar evidence of the better off or worse off as well as its reasons. The differences are just the priority of the ranking. Local officials from provincial to commune level perceived the improvement on policy and infrastructure as the most important, while village officials and villagers were impressed more with improvements in terms of production, housing conditions, daily needs (food, cloth, culture...) that directly affect their lives.

There have been differences between the officials (from provincial to commune level) and people's view about the reasons of improvements – the official groups focused into the factors of government policy and infrastructure while people seemed to appreciate more their own efforts. Both groups have agreed on the supports from the government.

Table 1.6: Differences between official statistic provided by village head and result of wealth ranking in majority villages (*synthesis the wealth rankings from village heads, two groups of men and women*):

Village (Commune, district)	Poor households by government report (%)	Poor households as ranked by local people (%)
Hoa Bac (Thuan Hoa, Vi Xuyen)	8.5	24
Lung Ray (Thuan Hoa, Vi Xuyen)	13.51	32.4
Thac Tau (Cao Bo, Vi Xuyen)	6.5 (in 2003)	32.6
Chat Tien (Cao Bo, Vi Xuyen)	6.0 (in 2003)	38.89
Ta Lung A (Sang Tung, Dong Van)	39.4	23.19
Lung Thang (Sang Tung, Dong Van)	42.8	29
Nheo Lung (Thai Phin Tung, Dong Van)	25.5	54
Ta Lung Chu (Thai Phin Tung, Dong Van)	22.4	73.47

One thing need to be mentioned here is *the existence of hunger households* in every surveyed village – these households suffer food deficit for 4-6 months. According to villagers these households live in slump house with no valuable assets, often no cattle, low capacity to earn for living).

### Differences in poverty criteria between local people and government:

Table 1.6 shows differences in perceiving poor households between official figures and people's ranking. Except two villages in Sang Tung commune, people's ranking often shows grayer picture, and the differences ranges from 1-3 times. Naturally, different criteria give different results.

According to the interviewees, especially officials at grassroots level the government poverty line is simply income-based and to assess exact income of each farming household is very difficult. Criteria for assessment by villagers are usually based on the following:

- Housing conditions and furniture
- Land (wet land, upland, forest land): quality and area of land, location of land, is it near the water resource
- Food availability
- Quantity of cattle (buffalo, cow, goat)
- Inherited assets
- Capacity in doing business, level of intellectual
- Labour sources

The measures seem quite sufficient and accurate, and are not dependent on the timing of assessment. It's weakness is in low representation because it is normally done at village level and therefore difficult to compare between larger communities. However, under the trend analysis angle villagers' ranking is good and scientific.

**Poor household identification.** The identification of poor households using new MOLISA's criteria was implemented by local authorities in 2001. District and commune officials went directly to each household to fill in the form and then village head compiled a list and submitted to commune PC. Some villagers said, the list of poor households was announced at village meetings, but the majority said that was the job of local officials, people just were only informed, there was weak participation.

**Unregistered in-migrant households** are not on the poor household list; they have not got land certificate therefore are disadvantaged. However their children can go to school as other children. According to the local officials, in the long term these households will be registered and enjoy the same benefits as local people (hundreds of HMong people from Quan Ba and Yen Minh migrated to Thuan Hoa commune since 1979 and have been resettled and given with land certificate)

Generally, all interviewed poor people said they knew about their benefits through the village officials, TV and radio. Men know more than women (because they are the people who attend village meetings regularly). Poor people benefit from the subsidy of seeds (50%), roofing material (70 pieces per household), construction of water tank, provision of preferential loan to raise buffaloes/cows and recently goat. They have access to free curative healthcare, exempted from contribution for their children's education etc. The poor have more benefits than non-poor households. However, because the programme 135 is targeting whole disadvantaged communes the non-poor households in these areas also benefit from subsidy of seed (30%), free curative healthcare, construction of water tank, provision of preferential loans etc.

*"Even the better off households need to be supported because the poor do not have much knowledge as the better off, and the latter would start applying new things first and for the former to follow."* (Chairman of Thai Phin Tung commune)

**Preservation of agricultural produce:** the Dzaio and HMong people are worried because their maize becomes unusable after four or five months by traditional preserving methods. On the other hand the Kinh are quite experienced in this matter: they first separate grains from maize ears and then dry the grains carefully under the sun 2-3 times. After that the grains can be used whole year. This problem poses the need of helping ethnic minority people with simple and efficient methods of preserving food products at household level.

**Land management:** according to the interviewees, Ha Giang started quite early implementation of land and forestland allocation - since 1992. By 1996 the allocation was completed and all local people including the poor were provided with land certificates (red books). Since 1999 Ha Giang has begun with allocating forestland to people and in many places certificates have been issued. All these activities have made local people feel more confident and invested on production and forest protection. *People appreciate* the positive impact of this policy on environmental protection. They said that they stopped destruction of forests and increased the forest coverage to 39%.

Currently, a number of provinces are in the process of land consolidation. This process does not take place in the surveyed communes so there is no information available.

### Recommendations:

1. The province should continue its HEPR activities as current scales – priority should be given to remote areas, combining resources and enhancing local pro-active attitude.
2. Support and encourage the good economic and HEPR models; diversifying and shifting crop and husbandry patterns; investing on market research and on “safe food”- organic produce; introducing simple technologies for food preservation and processing (maize) for households.
3. Pay more attention to the sustainability of HEPR and development in Ha Giang through the mobilisation of internal resources. The province should assess the HEPR initiatives, models for drawing experiences and necessary lessons. Avoid “fetishism of success”, formalism
4. Continue infrastructure projects (road, drain, electricity, telephone links, TV coverage...) for remote areas. Develop solutions for maintenance of infrastructure for long term and efficient use.

## Participation in Decision Making and Empowerment of Poor Households

*Implementation of Decree No. 29 at commune level.* According to the 2002 Report of Provincial PC, the Chairman of province PC is acting as the Head of the Steering Committee for implementation of the Decree. The committee held one meeting in 2002. Similar to other provinces, the Fatherland Front is assigned with the task of implementing this Decree. At grassroots level, the Fatherland Front devolves the task of disseminating the decree to local cadre and party members to village heads or village party chiefs, and after that to villagers at village meetings. In surveyed communities, people said that there was no discussion on the content of this Decree with local people. Most of commune and village officials answered they were informed about the Decree No. 29, except the newly appointed ones. Most of interviewed ordinary people say that they “probably heard about the Decree from village head or party chief at a village meeting, but they did not catch its content well.”

*There have been some complaints by local people about being asked for contributing labour instead of the fact that they are over the age limit (in Thuan Hoa commune). People say that the government policies are right but its implementation at grassroots level is not always fair - some preferences have been given to relatives of local officials, losses of construction materials ...*

A number of local officials perceive local participation as dissemination of information and contribution in term of finance, labour or in-kind – it means just people “know and do” but not to “discuss and supervise.” For instance: people’s contributions in rural transportation work are about 30-40% of the total cost mainly, by labour and timber. Interviewed people said that “*they are just informed about the policies/resolutions from above but rarely have chance to give feedback, once the things have been decided people have no choice but to follow.*”

*Implementation of infrastructure construction:* At the start of programme 135, provincial PC has decentralised its power and authorised chairmen of District PCs to decide on investment, technical designs, forecast and appraisal of the infrastructure construction projects at three levels: ≤ VND 200 million; ≤ VND 100 million and ≤ VND 50 million (*Report on implementation of Programme 135 in 2001 of the Ha Giang PPC*). Most of grassroots officials said that they knew very little about big construction projects (two storey schools, health stations, PC offices) in their communes. In most cases it is a matter between the District Management Boards and contractors. Commune officials and people have very little say and mostly are to receive finished projects. Provincial and district officials explain because of weak capacity of local cadre in a number of communes – they do not understand the design, not mentioning about managing and overseeing these projects. It is common that communes are given with the tasks of implementing small constructions like village office or single class rooms, concrete canals etc.

All these situations reconfirm the need of enhancing the capacity of local cadre at commune and village level so that they will be able to undertake more complicated/technical tasks in the future.

*“If the government know how to mobilise resources from people, generate income for poor people, improve effectiveness of constructions etc., then the government should allow villagers to implement rural road projects. The villagers are surely able to complete these projects. If things are to meet people’s need, then they are easy to implement because there is a consensus amongst people.”* (Officials in Ta Lung Chu village, Thai Phin Tung commune)

Grassroots officials know clearly about the effectiveness of grassroots democracy - once local people know and discuss, local officials can win the supports from people easily and thus enhances people’s participation. For example: normally for a rural construction project, the province only need to provide VND 40-50 million per kilometer plus contribution from local people. This amount could be as high as VND 300 million if it is done through contractors. For construction of water tanks, people know clearly that the government support 700 kg of cement and VND 300,000 for each household to build a tank. In practice, local people purchase cheap material and build larger tanks. The water tanks help people, especially women and children save time to collect water and have water for use in the dry season.

The interviews show that grassroots officials behave to local people reasonably. Most arising issues are usually solved at village level by village heads or policeman. In more serious cases commune authorities would intervene. There have been cases that some people submitted their complaints directly to District or even provincial PC (mostly related to land issues). However, at the surveyed communes such cases have been resolved. Commune officials often go to villages to implement new activities or supervise on-going activities. People, especially men know the key leaders of their commune but meet them only sporadically when members of People’s Council come to meet the voters. Some women living in remote villages say they do not know well commune leaders. Apart from that ordinary people go to commune PC office when they need something (approval of loan, settling disputes etc.).

Disparities in capacity between grassroots officials from high and lowland areas, between the Kinh, the Tay and other ethnic groups like Dzao and HMong are obvious - commune leaders in lowland communes often have lower secondary education while their colleagues in remote/highland areas have only primary education. In a commune a district staff seconded there to help local PC as vice chairman seems to do all the work even for the chairman of the commune. Another commune in Dong Van district has to ask the Bureau of Finance to help them with preparation of commune plans and budget. There are lots of opinions that the provincial PC should consider the rotation/secondment policy as a temporary solution. For longer term and sustainable development the key tasks

are building capacity of and utilising local/indigenous officials. Quick rotation (less than 3 years) of key positions at district and commune levels (chairman and vice chairman) sometimes has the impact of creating instability because the seconded staffs do not have enough time to implement what they would like to do, hand over responsibility properly.

The research team has also observed that village heads play an important role at grassroots level. However, even in the lowland communes, most of village heads have only education equal to 4 for 5 grade. Village heads are the persons who know best their villages and villagers. Village heads are responsible for multiple tasks – disseminating/channeling information (guideline, resolution, policies, announcement) from commune to villager and vice versa, solving problems occurred between households, collecting contributions etc. Village meetings usually take place one a month. Although the Ha Giang PPC has put a lot of efforts in building capacity for the commune and village officials, there are still lots of things need to be done, especially in remote areas.

People say that they want commune officials visit them more often, listen to their voices, disseminate information to them and at the end let people “know, discuss, do and supervise.”

Commune and district officials share that they have to attend too many meetings, receive too many policies/resolutions/guidelines etc. As a result sometimes they do not have enough time to disseminate the information and implement activities properly as requested. Policies and resolutions are often right, but if they are not understood and implemented properly at grassroots level they will be of little value to local officials and people. This situation is not typical in Ha Giang only, if leaders at different levels are well aware of this problem, they should have some sort of “priority list” and the management will get better results.

*Local planning and budgeting:* basically at the beginning of the process the finance officer of the commune PC drafts a proposal, then submits it to the commune leaders (PC chairman and party chief), after that the proposal is ready for discussion at the commune People’s Council and then get approved in form of a resolution for implementation. Ordinary people do not participate in this process unless they are informed or consulted on contributions. Village officials know about the commune approved plans. Commune officials do not know about provincial and district’s budgets. This situation requires that higher local authorities conduct consultation with grassroots officials and people during the planning and budgeting processes. Only by doing so it can attract wide participation of local people, help the PPC and DPCs identify the right needs and collect valuable opinions for the development of good socio-economic development plans.

It is widely recognised that, during the past few years Ha Giang has done a good job in terms of improving integration of local people through programmes such as rural road, expanding national grid to communes. For the lowland communes the

integration has taken place earlier and easier because people have good access to mass media like radio, TV, newspapers, as well as access to the market. Majority of people there can understand and use Vietnamese as common language; local officials are more capable... It is easier to disseminate information from party, government to local people. On the other hand, local officials and people in some highland and remote areas have limited access to electricity, TV, newspapers etc. Amongst the HMong and Dzao quite a large number of people cannot speak Vietnamese since they communicate themselves in local dialects, the capacity of local officials is weak. As a result local people often do not know about government policies/strategies/laws etc. Information flow is mainly via commune, village officials, from neighbours and market places.

## Recommendations:

*Capacity building for local officials* is necessary and important, the province should focus in this area. The educational level of local people has improved, though slower than in the plain provinces. Understanding of poor people of their interests and obligations are still limited.

It is advisable that the province develop solutions to help local people and cadre improve education, awareness of self-development and getting rich, need to learn new knowledge, practices by enhancing access to mass media, campaigns etc., the changes will clearer cut and sustainable.

Implementation of Decree No. 29 and Decision No. 79 is really important and necessary the Province should pay more attention to them.

## Provision of Basic Social Services to Poor People

### Education:

*“If the kids drop out of school now, the teachers will come and ask them to get back to school because education is paid with great attention now.”*  
(Group of poor men, Ta Lung A village, Sang Tung commune)

During the last three years, with adequate investments, both in material and policies, education in Ha Giang has achieved encouraging result: the school enrolment rate for children aged 6-14 in the school year 2001-02 is 95.6% (for lowland communes like Thuan Hoa the rate is 98.5%, while is only 90% for the remote communes like Thai Phin Tung), drop out rates have reduced remarkably; illiterate and re-illiterate rates have also decreased. The lowland communes are in process of universalising lower secondary education while the disadvantaged communes are working on the primary level. All 191 communes and wards have primary school, 135 communes and wards have lower secondary schools. It is encouraging that the enrolment rates in remote and mountainous communes are quite high. One of the explanations is that the province has invested heavily in improving infrastructure (schools), number of teachers, and apply some special support (exemption of school fees, provision of book, teaching tools and high salary coefficient of 0.7 for disadvantaged areas).

Figure 3.1 Investment on education (schools and hostels)

Year	1999	2000	2001	2002
<i>Construction expenditure (billion)</i>	7.125	15.232	3.00	
<i>Exempted amount</i>	2.809	4.007		
<i>Number of pupil supported with learning equipment</i>			79,908	100,230
<i>Amount (billion)</i>			1.150	8.314

(Source: Report 2001 and 2002 of the Provincial Poverty Alleviation Committee)

However, the enrolment rates to upper secondary education in high/remote areas remain lower compared to the lowland districts instead of the implementation of the preferential education policy on direct recruitment – (Ha Giang Town: 2,312 pupils; Bac Quang: 4,142 pupils; Vi Xuyen: 1,336 pupils; Hoang Su Phi: 223 pupils; Dong Van: 172 pupils and Meo Vac: 38 pupils - *Statistical Year Book 2002*). The main reasons are given by interviewees: long distance (schools are far from home), parents have difficulty in paying for food and lodging for their children at boarding schools. The small number of pupils would cause problems in preparation of next generation of local officials for these districts.

On the quality of education, the PPA team did not have enough time to conduct thorough research but some feedback suggested that the quality was rather low. Moreover, the fetishism of success is widespread amongst education authorities and teachers.

*“The objectives set by the authorities are not realistic and too high compared to the knowledge level of our pupils” (A teacher in Sang Tung commune)*

Pre-school enrolment rate has increased in comparison to previous period but is still low. In 2001 only 6.1% of children at the right age were going to kindergartens, and the rate for pre-school was 46.5% (*Ha Giang Statistical Year Book 2002*). This situation happens because of lack of teachers at village level (for both public and private schools); difficult terrains that prevent children from poor households go to school; and organisational, management and policy limitations that not focus properly on this issue.

Local official know the actual enrolment rates. Schools and local authority have good relationship, and the local authorities are in general conducive to schools. The drop out rate though reduced however still exists, especially in the remote and mountainous communes. Local authority and schools have many measures to overcome this situation.

*“I really want to send my kids to schools so that they can learn how to read and calculate, however I can’t make it because I’m too poor” (A lady in Hoa Bac village, Thuan Hoa commune)*

The interviewed give main reasons for the school dropping as follows:

- Poor family, facing difficulties (for people living in the high area, paying 220 kg of maize per year and VND 15,000 per month for a kid go to boarding school is quite difficult)
- Long distance from home to school
- Parents are not fully aware of the importance of education and often want their children to stay home and work
- Children themselves do not want to learn
- Early marriages leading to the dropping out of girls.

The illiterate and re-illiterate rates amongst adult people are still high (in some places over 30% of the over 35 age, especially the rates for women sometimes are up to 50%). There are literacy classes for adults but people say the quality is low since after graduating these classes, lots of people can write only his/her name. Provincial education authorities classify two categories to be paid attention with: 6-14 and 15-25. People over 25 are often heads or breadwinners of their respective families, they need to be literate in order to learn useful knowledge for production and raising children. In general, interviewed poor people understood importance of education to their children and would like the government continue supporting them as it is doing now. The Parents-Teachers Associations (PTAs) exist in some

communes but not all. The research team suggests the province to:

- Advocating widely for the communities about the importance of gender, enhancing the knowledge for women.
- Encouraging women to participate in class (more sharing of house works from other member within family)
- Training on application of education for adults (REFLECT). This is an effective method, not only teach people how to read and write but also equips them with knowledge, communication tools and capacity to earn for living. Currently AAV is implementing REFLECT classes in Vi Xuyen and Quan Ba district.
- Providing spaces for more participation in community activities (village meetings, training etc.)

### Recommendations:

The PPA team quotes some recommendations from the interviewees, it's also the recommendations from the team:

1. Continue providing the current support to poor people, and people living in the remote/mountainous areas and their children (free of school fee and contribution, and provision of books and textbooks etc.). Socialisation of education should be applied first in lowland and less disadvantaged areas.
2. Focus on the quality of education avoid the "fetishism of success"
3. Open more boarding schools or increasing their capacity to receive more pupils. (A Han women was keen on sending one of her children to boarding school, but she did not succeed). Improve the policy on teaching quality so that it has good specialised knowledge and contents so that the pupils are better equipped as resources of future cadre.
4. Consider the teaching in indigenous languages
5. Apply the REFLECT programme in literacy campaigns

### Health:

Similar to education, during the last few years, Ha Giang has gained great results in local health care and treatment. The province has 199 health institutions, including 10 hospitals, 17 regional general policlinics and 172 health stations at commune and ward level. All districts are available with district hospitals, and from one to two policlinics. There are 29 doctors in 191 communes in 2002.

Figure 3.2 Investment on healthcare services

Year	1999	2000	2001	2002
<i>Construction expenditures (billion)</i>	1,218	1,603		
<i>Total number are provided free curative healthcare and treatment</i>	25.150	21.047		
<i>Free curative health care cost</i>	1,217	1,197	2,016	5,789

(Source: Report of Provincial Committee for Poverty alleviation 2002)

As the results of interviews, Ha Giang has implemented the provision of free healthcare services for poor people and those living in the commune 135 areas since 1997 (for all types of household - poor, middle and better off). The total budget for this programme is quite high with large number of beneficiaries. In line with the Directive No 156 of the Prime Minister, every poor person is entitled to VND 5,000 per month when they go hospital. In 2002 the provincial hospital provided free health care services of VND 4,000 per bed (the total expenditure is VND 800 million; district hospitals have spent VND 2.8-3 million per bed per year (total expenditure on medicine was VND 2 billion). Apart from that, there are other projects like Support to village health workers (they are allocated in nearly all villages and get involved in health education, extended vaccination campaigns etc., but not allowed to do diagnosis or treatment) and receive every month VND 20,000/worker); HPM project on reproductive health for ethnic people; Compulsory health cards for civil servants; Project on 9 National Goals etc. (*Report 2002 of the Health Department*).

Local people highly appreciate health services because it really helps them, especially women and children, improve their health conditions, reduce the birth rate and costs related to health treatment. People seem satisfied because they can access health services either at commune health stations or at higher levels (district and provincial hospitals), the attitude of government health workers. However, there are some complaints about some doctors and nurses who shout at patients, as well as the fact that they have to buy expensive medicines etc. Overall the health services have contributed to the better living styles, poverty reduction and economic development.

According to the provincial Health Department only 50% of the doctors and 1/5 of commune health workers in Ha Giang are of local origin and the quality of health workers is still problematic. These problems pose serious questions about the stability and sustainability of the local health systems (since the workers from outside would not stay long in their current positions) as well as the urgent need for capacity building for local health workers.

Decision No. 139 has just been implemented, only local officials know about this decision while ordinary people know nothing. The DOH and DOLISA are in charge of implementing this Decree with estimated expenditure for 2003 of around VND 5 billion. Village heads are preparing lists of poor households and submit to commune PC. After that the commune PC will compile the lists and submit to the BOLISA. With wealth of experiences in providing healthcare services, it is expected that Ha Giang will implement the Decision No. 139 successfully.

## Recommendations:

1. The province continues providing free healthcare services to poor people and people living in difficult/poor areas.
2. The province needs to develop capacity building plans for local health workers (doctors, nurses) to ensure sustainability of the healthcare system.
3. To learn experiences from other provinces that have already implemented the Decision No. 139 to foresee its difficulties/challenges as well as its solutions.

## Agricultural, forestry and veterinary extension:

In Ha Giang agricultural/forestry and veterinary extension networks have been established from provincial down to village level and have been working effectively. There are the Provincial Extension Centre, Extension Stations at district level, extension workers in all 191 commune and village extension workers in 1,285 out of 3,035 villages (*Report 2002 of DARD*). Interviewed poor people including ethnic minority people have expressed positive opinions on the role of extension workers in shifting crop and animal patterns, in application of science and technology to their plantation and animal husbandry. As a result it helps people to increase the yield, income and improve their life. Each commune extension worker is paid with VND 300,000 – 400,000 per month and village extension worker VND 100,000 per month from commune budget. In practice extension workers say that they are paid with only VND 40,000 per month.

Forestry extension has been working very well in Ha Giang, forestland allocation to households has been implemented since the late 1990s and contributed very positively to environmental protection – the “slash and burn” pattern has nearly ceased, people’s awareness on forest protection and the benefit from it has improved radically. However, majority of forests are either regenerated or mixed and therefore of low value. The coverage rate is high but overall economic value is low. In surveyed communities people are aware of forest protection but invest very little in forestry. People in one commune plant tea or fruit trees, in another commune they just started planting grass with government support for cattle and goat raising.

According to DARD and BARD officials, there exist a number of shortcomings because of the low capacity of commune and village extension workers – they are usually trained/specialised on only one field but have to practise in various fields; the intellectual level of most village workers is primary or lower secondary level, and have just attended 3-4 training courses before taking their job, therefore village extension workers can not satisfy the needs of local people. When animal epidemics occur commune veterinary staff are not able to deal with it but have to ask for the support from district veterinary station. In surveyed communities, there is no extension club though it is a very good forum at which local people can

gather, share and learn experiences. Poor people say that they wish to have extension worker in each village. Interviewed people know about extension activities that are currently being run in their communities (subsidy of transportation costs for seeds and fertilisers; training on techniques of high yielding varieties of rice and maize, training on veterinary science; vaccination for cattle, training on goat raising, forest plantation etc.

**Policy on supporting poor people with productive materials:** in 2002 the province supported 4,950 poor households borrow 4,950 cows at the cost of VND 7.425 bn. The total number of cows provided by this policy is 36,982.

**Policy on exempting tax on land use for poor people:** in 2002 the province exempted tax for 35,745 households (of them 25,214 households in 135 zones; 3,380 poor households and 1,223 special households) with the total amount of VND 4.26 bn

**Project on production and job development:** during the 2001-02 period, the PPC allocated budget of VND 31.94 bn to implement 7 focused agricultural programmes – support poor HHs plant tea, coffee, raise cattle, plant fruit trees, and develop rice planting...

**The credit for the poor project:** during the 2001-02 period supported 33,538 poor borrowers with total investment of VND 72.7 bn.

(Source: *Midterm review report of Provincial HERP Board*)

Information on extension comes to people mainly through dissemination by extension workers or village heads. Other channels are radio, TV, neighbours etc. Information from district to commune is in Vietnamese and in multi-ethnic communes the information is disseminated to people in Vietnamese whilst in mono-ethnic communes local officials disseminate the information in their own language. It is obvious that the latter have more difficulty because of technical concepts/words that are difficult to translate/interpret to local dialects. Interviewed people complain that extension training courses have been provided mostly to local officials (in a expectation that they would channel the information to local people). Very few people have had chance to attend such training courses though they have a desire to do so. The research team has found the following things and would like to inform local officials:

1. The re-use of old varieties (like Bao Thai rice, maize) by local people because of the failure in applying new varieties due to pest impact.
2. In a spirit of “completing plans at any price” local authorities in some HMong communes gave poor people with un-quarantined goats purchased from China and the goats died after a short time.

**Market information:** interviewed people said that they had to deal themselves with selling their produce, and extension workers have so far played no role in this matter. This fact shows how difficult and risky situation the farmers are in as they lack market information (demands, prices). Agricultural extension services

are free but people have to pay for cattle vaccination (VND 500 – 1,000 for a dose with 50% subsidy from the government).

Scientists are still not involved in the development process in Ha Giang. The Decision No. 80 about the connection between the 4 players has not been materialised.

### **Recommendations:**

1. The province needs to continue strengthening and completing the networks of extension workers at grassroots level both the quality and quantity; make sure there is an extension worker in each village.
2. Provide market information directly for local people so they know what to plan and what to raise; improve material inputs supply to local people
3. Engage the scientists in improving quality and effectiveness of new animal and plant varieties. Help farmers overcome difficulties when applying new varieties (continue subsidising seeds and fertiliser, introduce ways to prevent pests, to preserve food after the harvests)
4. Prepare master plans and guide/encourage local people to invest in forestry, increase the value of the forest
5. Support H'Mong people in raising (cow, goat) for their income generation

# Quality and Effectiveness of Social Assistance Programmes

## Current situation:

Interviewed commune and village officials know quite clearly about the people receiving social assistance (both permanent and emergency relief). Villagers know clearly too about the beneficiaries.

*Permanent assistance* is given to households of war invalids, dead soldiers, people who have some contribution to revolution etc. Also there is special support to difficult households under policy 202 - elderly people living alone, handicapped people, orphans etc. Each person receives VND 70,000 per month equivalent to 20 kg of rice (national standard for this assistance is 12 kg of rice per month per head, Ha Giang authorities adds 8 kg more). The support is distributed monthly by BOLISA. It is obvious that permanent assistance programmes target poor and difficult households.

There are some issues such as the beneficiary lists are not updated timely - sometimes a beneficiary died but is still on the list while new households are not included. There exist cases that few very poor or difficult households who meet the criteria for receiving assistance but are not in the list. This issue requires the agencies in charge of giving the assistance (BOLISA) work closely with commune PC to update regularly the lists of beneficiaries.

*Emergency assistance* is applied for the households who face some risks like (house burnt, disasters etc). According to interviewed people when a household or group of households face a risk, they inform village head in writing, the village head will inform commune authority. Commune authority then submit proposal to the district authority (BOLISA) asking for assistance. The BOLISA will check the report and provide support – in average each family with house burnt receives VND 2-2.5 million (in kind - roofing material, fertilizer, seeds and in cash). Apart from support from BOLISA, local authority and community (neighbours, relatives) also contribute as much as they can to assist the households (labour and material to rebuild the house, cloth, fertilizers, money etc.). The emergency assistance targets all affected households disregarding whether they are poor or better off.

Social assistance programmes, together with other social programmes and services, are of great importance: they do not only help affected people overcome their difficulties but also make them believe in the preeminence of the government, contribute to the social solidarity and stability.

**Emergency aid (disasters, epidemics...)**

In 2001 Ha Giang province allocated VND 865 million to help people in difficulties (targeted people in Yen Minh, Bac Quang, Bac Me, Hoang Su Phi Districts), the budget allocated for helping hunger households was VND 784.7 million (targeted Bac Me, Meo Vac, Bac Quang, Yen Minh and Xin Man Districts). In 2000 the budget was VND 8,2 billion and 3,285 hunger households received aid.

In general, the social assistance programmes help people overcome the most difficult times but do not have long time effect because the assistance is usually much smaller than the loss of assets or people. Sometimes the assistance comes late because of the problem in communication from village to commune, and from commune to district.

**Recommendations:**

It is important to improve communication between district, commune and village, to update regularly the beneficiary lists. Local authorities can consider establishing Assistance Fund at commune level under the management of the Red Cross organisation or Father Front and supervision of commune people's committee. Some amendment in policy is necessary so that poor and difficult households are always the primary target group.

## Public Administration Reform

This is an additional theme that came after the start of PPA work in Ha Giang therefore the information gathered is not adequate

### Current situation:

According to the Report of Ha Giang PPC, the Chairman of the province is in charge as Head of the provincial Committee for PAR. The Committee has checked all current administrative documents and procedures to find out overlaps and contradictions, and under the jurisdiction of local authorities propose necessary amendments, supplementations or abolishment. So far 1,422 documents have been amended, 1,700 supplemented and 1,100 abolished. Applying new personnel policies in line with the Law on Civil Servants (related to personnel management, recruitment and use) the province has reviewed and rearranged the current government structure - the number of PPC's units has reduced to 22 from 23, provincial departments to 92 from 104, sections to 5 from 6. The province is piloting structural rearrangement of Vi Xuyen District PC: reduced the number of its bureaus to 12 from 14; administrative units to 5 from 6. As a result of implementing the Government Resolution No 16 the number of civil servants in Ha Giang has reduced by 86.

Also, the PPC held training on government management for 40 people, trained 60 students seconded as re-enforcement to communes, 70 commune officials and 1,247 village heads. However, as the report mentioned, so far the PAR have not brought real effects - reduction in personnel number sometimes caused heavier workload for the civil servants as their capacity has not improved as required.

Ha Giang is a mountainous province and therefore communication is always a problem, especially communication with communes - many communes still have no telephone links. The link to and use of Internet, though a powerful tool serving for economic development and business exchange, is very limited - only few people are capable of using it and there are only 7 access points.

Through interviews and survey the research teams learn that in Ha Giang standardisation of civil servant cadre has just completed at district level and there are some pilot activities at commune level. To standardise civil servants at all level is a very difficult task for Ha Giang as it is a mountainous and multi-ethnic province. There are *clear disparities in terms of intellectual level and capacity* between grassroots officials (commune and village levels) at lowland and highland areas; between officials of ethnic minority origins and their colleagues of Kinh and Tay origins. Most grassroots officials in highland areas have 5-7 grade education level, and very few of them have finished lower secondary school, even if so it is often in form of continuous education. Some of them have difficulty in making

commune plans and budget and in an extreme case they have to ask for help from district. In some communes seconded officials have to take on too much tasks for local officials. The intellectual and capacity of village officials are even more problematic than with commune officials. All these problems hinder the development process and lower the effectiveness of local government apparatus. Communes (and villages) are very important administrative units, all government policies/resolutions/programmes etc. are channeled through them. If their capacity is weak both government and people will suffer. The province has made lots of efforts - implementing rotation/secondment policy (sending provincial and district staff to help most needed communes), but just achieved some initial results.

The interviews also show that *cadre rotation* can bring immediate effect in terms of helping weak communes. However it is not sustainable because the seconded officials cannot stay forever at these localities. Another problem is that not every seconded official is a real re-enforcement because some of them do not have adequate capacity, and in this case the re-enforcement becomes a burden for the communes. The rotation in key positions such as commune chairman and vice chairman is rather too fast (below 3 years). It may cause that the new staff do not have enough time to realise his/her capacity, and together with improper handover process, it would create difficulties for the newcomers as well as local officials. The rotation also create additional work burden for those staff who stay in the office because the seconded staff still keep their regular status/registration there.

## Recommendations:

1. The province should review and draw experience from its rotation policy.
2. It is important to develop particular policy/strategy to enhance the proactive attitude and self-reliance mentality, reduce dependence mentality and passiveness among local officials and people, especially among those in the remote areas. *Investment in and the use of officials of local origin should be considered as a long-term and important strategy.* Boarding schools for ethnic minority pupils should be upgraded in terms of both quantity and quality of learning and teaching. The province should train on government management for young and capable cadre, build resource officials from ethnic minority people, have policy to attract graduated local students from colleges/universities go back to and work in Ha Giang. Apply gradual standardisation of commune cadre where it is possible. The province may consider possible use of senior people who have lots of experience and prestige and who are eager to work as village heads.

## Environment

*"It is so pitiful that in the past people destroyed the forests for no reason."*  
(officials from Thac Tau village, Cao Bo commune)

### Environment - perception at different levels:

Ordinary people perceive the environment simply as everything existing around them – things they can see as well as its direct effects to the daily life of community such as land, forest, river, streams, water sources etc. The level of interest in and understanding of the environment varies between different regions: people living close to the provincial and district towns seem more interested in the environment because they have better access to mass media like TV, radio, newspapers etc. therefore they think that the environment is important.

Teacher groups added climate and weather to the concept of environment while air has rarely been mentioned as air pollution has not been yet an issue for rural people. However, some people have raised issue related to a local custom of keeping cattle too close to houses or even on the ground floor that would affect their living environment.

Interviewed local officials said that environment was a broad and complex concept. It includes air, water sources, land and social environment. According to their understanding, the environment is a very important issue affecting directly people's life. If the environment in mountainous areas is not well protected it will have negative impacts on the plain areas. Commune and village officials seem less interested in the environment and their understanding of it is also very limited.

Local officials and people understand that *environment degradation* is the result of widespread forest burning, pollution of water sources, soil erosion, air pollution etc., and *environment protection* means protect forests, water sources, build cattle cages and toilet far from houses.

The PPA team recognises remarkable improvement in environment in Ha Giang. For example Ha Giang town is truly green, clean, and beautiful. Local authorities have set regulations requiring car washing before entering the town; most of possible areas are planted with trees, forests are well-protected, incidence of forest fire decreases.

### Trends:

*"Nowadays the areas covered with forest are widening but they are still smaller than those 30-40 years ago"* (Official in Lung Thang village, Sang Tung commune)

Disregarding to the level of interest in the environment, 100% of interviewed officials and people said that the local environment had been improved remarkably during the past 5 years. The improvements are reduced incidence of forest fire and forest destruction, increased forest coverage, enhanced awareness of forest protection among local people and more plentiful water sources. According to local statistics, the current forests cover 39.1% of the total area of the province compared to 33% in 1998. The lowest coverage was at the end of the 1980s – just under 15% when local people were free to destroy forests for timber and cultivated land. However, the interviewees also said that current forests were far poorer than the forests 30-40 years ago. Plant and animal are not copious as it used to though there is some evidence of wild beast coming back. People are just aware of forest protection but have so far invested very little on forestation and their forest land. Regenerated forests are mainly mixed and of low economic value.

*The government policy on land and forestland allocation* has helped local people feel confident to protect the environment, especially the forests, to invest in forestry and to reduce community conflicts. In surveyed communes, 100% of local people say that they have been allocated with land since 1992-93 and with forest since 1999. The way the allocation took place was commune authority allocated forestland to village officials, then village officials allocated to households. In general the allocation was fair except some cases people reported that they had been allocated with forest far from their home and HMong people were allocated with rocky areas of poor soil. There has been no complaint about access to forests. People say that they are supported in forestation, in forest protection and are allowed to prune off branches for firewood and raising animal. In case they want to cut down timbers they have to get the permission from commune PC.

Local people and officials are of an opinion that the environment has been improved because of: (i) forestland allocation to local people has made them the real owners of forests (ii) old support projects such as 327, 661 and the current forestation programmes have supported people in forestation and forest protection. This factor has greatly contributed to reforestation and development (iii) although limited, local people are better aware of and more interested in environment protection and (iv) local authorities have set particular regulations (permission from local authority for logging timbers). A number of regulations have been integrated into village commitment like washing cars before entering Ha Giang Town, draining river, streams regularly.

### Concerns:

Generally, there has been no concern on environment. However some groups living close to urban areas have expressed their concerns over the environment, mainly on the factors affecting directly the life of community. In fact some of them are big issues that need to be paid with great attention:

- Road construction projects have caused pollution of streams.
- As a result of low awareness of people, sometime illegal forest destruction or forest fire happens.
- Sudden changes of the climate cause negatively to the farmer's crops.
- Rock and landslide
- Population increase.

Provincial and district officials pay more attention to issues at macro-level that is environment pollution. In addition to this there are some concerns arisen from urban/industrial/processing zone:

- Pollution by factories producing construction material such as cement, brick and pulp...
- Waste from agricultural production (chemical, pesticide...), livestock rearing
- Treatment of waste from urban areas/hospitals

## Recommendations and solutions:

Following are recommendations and solutions raised by local people:

- (i) Increase the awareness of local people on forest protection – there has been existence of village regulation in some places (about livestock rearing, solving of died cattle) but it was not fully implemented;
- (ii) Apply strict measures on illegal wood exploration;
- (iii) Continues government supports in improving water sources, construct more water tanks, especially for people living in high rocky mountainous areas;
- (iv) Subsidize of seed for forestation.

In addition to the points i, iii, iv above mentioned solutions, local authorities add some other solution for forest protection:

- (i) Institutionalise directives/policies and the law on environment protection into particular action plan suitable with each region;
- (ii) Enhance the role of state management and mobilise resources to protect the environment. Increase control on and supervision of the observation of law and regulation related to environment;
- (iii) Implement different programmes in an integrated manner to ensure the combination between environment protection and resolving social issues.

# Migration

## Free migration:

The Vietnam-Sino border war/conflict during the 1979-1985 period forced hundred of households living near the borderline to evacuate to other localities. The authorities in Ha Giang first allowed the households to resettle in new places and then provided them with land and forestland (the case of Thuan Hoa commune, Vi Xuyen district), and most recently resettled them along the borderline (in Dong Van district).

Free migration used to be a burning issue during the 2000-2001 period. Through the interviews the following reasons were given:

- (i) religion (seducement of local people by missionaries).
- (ii) family (following call from relatives who had been migrated earlier),
- (iii) large family, lack of land for cultivation, lack of water.

It is clear that economic reason was only one of the reasons. About 300 households mostly of them were the HMong people migrated to southern provinces in Central Highlands. 50 of them have returned to original places because they failed to find what they had wanted. These people could not stay there because they lacked land and proper means of livelihood. Since 2002 the migration out has reduced greatly as both Ha Giang and provinces in Central Highland have implemented various strict measures. Interviewed people said that there was no free migration in their communities. According to local officials, all returnees have been re-registered, and got back their land and are treated equally as of others.

Free migration will surely have its effects. For out-migration places the migration has caused the uncertainty thinking. With in-migration places, there was no information collected. Hopefully, the PPA in Dak Lak will provide more insight into this matter.

*Seasonal labouring:* interviewed people said that after busy times some young people, most of them are poor men, go out for short time period labouring in order to earn additional income. Women are less involved in this business since they have to “*stay at home and do housework*”. The labourers often work for the owners of private construction companies involved in road construction. Nearly all of them lack technical skills, sometimes they do not speak Vietnamese, therefore they usually do simple tasks such as digging land and stone, transportation of construction materials ... and get paid in average from VND 10,000-15,000 per day. However there have been complaints that some owners did not pay the labourer and the total amount may be up to tens of million of

Vietnamese dong. In case the labourers dared to ask for money the contractors have threaten or even beaten them and created a fear among the labourers.

**In-migration** There are about several thousands migrants, mainly as freelance labourers (builder, carpenter, workers of construction companies from Vinh Phuc, Ha Tay, Nam Dinh provinces etc...). They worked in Ha Giang for a short time. As reported from local authority, there were no problem occurred with this group.

### Organised migration:

To solve the problem of household living in high and remote area in accessing to resources such as land for cultivation, infrastructure, education and health care services...local authorities have the orientation on the resettlement of these groups – the most common modes were in-place resettlement or moving to two district of Bac Me and Vi Xuyen. All migrated households received supports from government in form of homestead and arable land, construction of infrastructure projects, subsidizes of seeds and food. According to a report of the PPC, in 2002 the province was able to resettle 2,115 households. However, implementation of the resettlement project has been insignificant.

The PPA team is of an opinion that planned resettlement and encouraging people to move down to foothill places are the right policies and activities - they have an importance role in HEPR and community development of Ha Giang. These policies have not only helped local people have better access to but also make better use of social services (agricultural/forestry extension, education, healthcare...), help people to mobilise the community spirit, and local officials in government management therefore the sooner their implementation the better. However, this is a tough task – it is difficult to change the traditions and habits of local people. It should be done by a task force at provincial level applying a “learning by doing” approach.

Migration was not the burning issue of Ha Giang. However, considerate attention should be paid on this matter as well as support polices.

### Recommendations:

Continue the implementation of resettlement programme and overall responsibility should be with the Resettlement Board. The implementation should be done in a scientific and cautious manner with full participation of local authority and people, - learning by doing, avoid the formalism; apply good model of province, other provinces or form outside; combining land and population zoning; seeking for the supports from central government and international organisations.

## Appendix 1: List of Research Team Members

1. Mr Nguyen Tat Quan, AAV, Team Leader
2. Mr Vu Ngoc Anh, AAV, in charge of information collection, analysis, synthesis, and report writing
3. Mr Le Van Dinh, AAV
4. Ms Nguyen Thu Hien, AAV
5. Ms Phan Le Thuy, AAV
6. Ms Lo Thi Huong, AAV
7. Ms Nguyen Kim Ha, Deputy Director, Ha Giang DOLISA
8. Mr Pham Ngoc Dung, Head, Invalids and social Affairs Section, DOLISA
9. Mr Vuong Duc Thiet, DOLISA, member
10. Mr Tran Duc Truyen, Ha Giang Department for Foreign relations, member
11. Mr Nguyen Dinh Du, Department of Health, member
12. Ms Dinh Thi Tuyen, Ha Giang Women's Union, member
13. Mr Nguyen Ngoc Ha, Ha Giang Youth Union, member
14. Ms Nguyen Thi Tuoi, BARD, member
15. Ms Mao Xuan Thu, DOLISA, member
16. Mr Mai Tuan, DPI, member
17. Mr Dang Van Thi, Vi Xuyen district BOLISA, member
18. Mr Do Anh Tuan, Vi Xuyen district BPI, member
19. Ms Hoang Lan Huong, Vi Xuyen district Women's Union, member
20. Mr Thai Thuong Luong, Vice Chairman, Thuan Hoa Commune, member
21. Ms Be Van Anh, Thuan Hoa Primary school, member
22. Mr Nguyen Van Hung, Cao Bo Primary school, member
23. Mr Pham Van Thuy, Dong Van Personnel Department, member
24. Mr Vu Thai Ha, Dong Van district BOET, member

## Appendix 2: Advantages and Disadvantages of the PPA

### Advantages:

- In general, the PPA team has received enthusiastic and effective collaboration and support from Provincial People's Committee, related Departments, mass organisations from provincial to district, commune, and village levels and from villagers. The team was received by Vice Chairman of Ha Giang People's Committee, Vice Chairman of Vi Xuyen District People's Committee and Chairman of Dong Van People's Committee.
- The PPC has assigned DOLISA as key partner to coordinate and support for the PPA team. DOLISA has also appointed a Vice Director and a Head of Section for Social Protection to be directly in charge of facilitating the PPA. People's Committees of two districts of Vi Xuyen and Dong Van worked together with the DOLISA to assign two deputy directors of BOLISA to work with the research team and provide necessary support.
- Provincial departments (DOLISA, DARD, DPI, Foreign Relations, DOET, DOH); District bureaus of Vi Xuyen and Dong Van (BOLISA, BPI, BOET), mass organisations (Women's Union, Youth Organisation), Thuan Hoa and Cao Bo commune have appointed its officials to participate in the training on research methodology and collection of information with PPA team. Several officials have participated whole three weeks with the PPA team.
- Despite the fact that there was very little times for informing communes/village people, poor means of communication, large area, but generally speaking the preparation work has been done well creating good conditions for the collection of information of PPA team.
- Because of the flexible style of working, the team has held regular feedback meetings to share and to learn among its members, as a result there was high collaboration between stakeholders and the PPA team was able collected all necessary information at aimed targets (provincial/district/commune departments, officials and villagers).

### Constraints:

- High demanding short preparation: too short preparation that could not avoid the short coming in the coordination, supporting between the PPA team and localities the first days working in Ha Giang. Some questions are confusing for both interviewer and interviewees. Working with HMong and Dao (except the Commune and village heads) have required the interpretation,

these have lengthen the working time and effecting to the accuracy of information as well.

- Some members of the team have limited experience in doing research. Long questionnaires with various themes have required team member to have broad knowledge and skills in collection of information.
- Some local agencies (Education, Extension etc.) were busy during the PPA work. There is also the rainy season so the PPA team could not meet some leaders (such as Directors, Department Heads, Chairman and Party Chief) of provincial/district and commune departments. Some information collected was not sufficient.
- There systematic secondary data are lacking; sometimes there exist different sources of the same information, so it makes some difficulties for analysis, the lack of information on budget. Collection of secondary data (reports, statistical) also got difficulties, especially those of budget for the period 1995-2000.
- Short time for compiling data/results and report writing.

## Appendix 3: Surveyed Communes

### Thuan Hoa Commune, Vi Xuyen District:

Thuan Hoa commune is situated to the north of Vi Xuyen District, bordering with the Ha Giang town to the south and Quan Ba District to the north. The distance from the commune centre to Ha Giang town is about 8 km and to Vi Xuyen District Town is 32 km. The terrain of Thuan Hoa is complex and mixed between low clay mountains and low rocky mountains typical to the zone 1 of Ha Giang. There are 15 villages in a commune with Mich A village the centre, and other villages situated along highway 4C and Tiem river. There are 924 households with 4,902 people in the commune (of them 2,473 are women, *2002 Statistics*). It is a multi-ethnic commune of which main ethnic groups are the HMong (2,186 people), Tay (1,534), Dao (905), Kinh (153), Hoa (60), Dzao (64).

In the dry season, cars can get to the commune centre and its adjacent villages, however the road needs to be upgraded. Some villages along highway 4C are linked to national grid from March 2003 and about 25% of households have access to electricity. At the commune centre there are newly built two-storey school, PC office and health station buildings but without telephone link.

Though adjacent to Ha Giang Town, Thuan Hoa is a poor commune and is in a list of communes 135 (the official poverty rate in 2002 was 14.4%), per capita GDP in 2002 was VND 2.350 M. Among the poor households 4.8% (or 11 HHs) are woman-headed (of the total of 25 woman headed HHs) and nearly half of poor households are the HMong.

Agriculture is the key economic activity (cultivated land for rice is 176 ha, for maize 280 ha). Animal husbandry (buffalo, goat, pig and chicken) is an important source of income. The malnourishment rate among children is as high as 31.57% (173 kids), the rate of women having some diseases (gynecological, water-borne diseases) in 2002 was 28.83%. Only 28.3% of HHs uses clean water.

### Cao Bo Commune, Vi Xuyen District:

Cao Bo is a commune of complex terrain – high soil mountains with high slope situated to the southwestern of Vi Xuyen District about 35 km to the district town. There are in the commune 590 HHs with 3,300 people. The population comprises 2 main ethnic groups – the Dzao count for 95%, and the Tay (nearly 5%). People use their own languages in daily communication but majority of them can hear and understand Vietnamese. There still exist senior people, especially women who are illiterate.

The road to the commune centre was upgraded three years ago and cars can get there, the commune centre is also connected to the national grid (but only few HHs have access to electricity); the commune also has no telephone connection. Apart from a two-storey school building the PC office and the health centre are yet to be built. Close to the school building is the tea processing facility of Hung Cuong company ltd.

Cao Bo is in the list of most difficult communes benefiting from programme 135, per capita GDP in 2002 was VND 1.8 million, 39 HHs are classified as poor. Though there are no hunger households in the commune, their income is rather low and capacity to contribute to local budget is limited. Agriculture is the main form of economy and there is cultivated land area of 162 hectare. Tea plantation is considered important second source of income for local population. Malnutrition and diarrhoea are common problems with the children, malaria is not yet under control. People often use water taken from streams by simple pipe system made from bamboo or plastics. None of households have proper sanitation facility (toilet and bathroom).

### Sang Tung Commune, Dong Van District:

Sang Tung commune is situated to the southwest of Dong Van District, about one hour drive to the district town. There are 16 villages with 503 HHs and 2,892 people (of them 1,504 are women) almost all of the commune population are HMong (only 14 Tay, 10 Kinh and 1 Hoa inhabitants) and HMong is also the main language there. The terrain is highly mountainous and local population live in small clusters. Sang Tung is on the list of most difficult commune and Dong Van is one of the poorest district in Vietnam. The poverty rate here is 42.17% and only 4.62% of HHs are classified as better off (local ranking at the end of 2002).

There is an unpaved road connecting commune centre with the highway 4C. However, people have to walk from commune centre to some villages and it can take them up to 4 hours. Due to the programme 135 the commune centre is connected to the national grid and telephone system, and equipped with satellite antenna. There are new buildings of health station and primary boarding school near the PC office. Though the construction of water tanks by the government people in Sang Tung still face difficulty in securing enough water for daily use. There is a big reservoir in the Rong cave but it would require installing a more powerful pumping machine.

Agriculture is the main form of livelihood for local people and the main staple crop is maize (816 hectare, old varieties give yield of 1,400 kg per ha while the new varieties give 2,000 kg per ha). Because of the lack of cultivated land local people plant maize in the slopes of rocky mountain but they can plant only one crop per year (in rainy season only). Apart from maize, flax, soybean and China squash are secondary crops. Main husbandry products are cow, pig, goat and chicken.

## **Thai Phin Tung Commune, Dong Van District:**

Thai Phin Tung has 9 villages with 461 HHs and 2,763 people (of them 1,424 are women). The HMong are majority group, there are only 35 Tay and 17 Kinh inhabitants. HMong is also the common language here, but many people under 25 can speak Vietnamese. A number of people over 25, especially women, are illiterate. Thai Phin Tung is also on the list of communes 135, according to local wealth ranking in 2002 there are 25% poor HHs and only 1.75% better off HHs.

The total land area of the commune is 1,513 ha, mainly rocky mountains. Cultivable area is only 446 ha. Main staple crop is maize but people can plant only one crop per year. Apart from that there are 22 ha for rice (one crop per year), people plant secondary crops like flax, soybean and China squash. Main husbandry products are cow, pig, and chicken.

The commune centre is located just by the highway 4C and 14 km from Dong Van town to the south. Due to the programme 135 the primary school building has been upgraded (two storey building plus boarding house for teachers) while the health station and PC office are still provisional and waiting for upgrading. Though situated along the Highway 4C, Thai Phin Tung is yet connected to the national grid. Similar to other communes in Dong Van district households in Thai Phin Tung have built water tanks with support from the government. People now have more water to use but still lack water during the dry season and the quality of water is not safe.

## Appendix 4: “9 HEPR Policies and 7 Project” of Ha Giang Province

(Report of the Provincial HEPR Committee for the 2001–02 period)

### 9 Policies:

1. *Policy on supporting productive materials to poor HHs* (cow and buffalo for ploughing and slaughtering, agricultural machines, land reallocation): budget 2001-02 was VND 55.5 bn and 37,005 poor HHs benefited.
2. *Policy on land use exemption for poor HHs*: 37,745 poor HHs benefited and the total amount was VND 4.2 bn.
3. *Policy on education and vocational education*: 288 solid schools and 617 single classrooms have been built. 180,138 pupils of poor and ethnic minority HHs received books, textbooks and tools at the costs of VND 12.464 bn. Illiterate classes were organised for 1,229 people, universalised primary education for 4,645 people, post-literate education for 1,179 people. 5,379 people received vocational training.
4. *Policy on Health and Family Planning*: 810,497 poor people/people from 135 areas received free diagnosis or treatment at the costs of VND 7.8 bn. The population growth rate reduced to 1.81% in 2002.
5. *Policy on social assistance*: emergency support to 5,750 HHs affecting risks (house burning, natural calamity), distributed 300 ton of food from the central government to 2,637 hunger HHs due to flooding, provided aid to 7,396 hunger HHs (35,485 people). Regular assistance to over 1,000 people in need.
6. *Policy on housing support*: provided roofing material to 26,871 poor HHs living in slump. Provided construction materials to 203 preferential HHs, built and handed over 41 houses to HHs having great contribution to revolution.
7. *Policy on supporting poor HHs selling their products*: built 23 market places in communes/commune centres. Encouraged and provided preferential credit/loan to HHs who pursued processing or selling products, particularly agricultural/forest products like tea, pulp, handicrafts...
8. *Policy on supporting cultural and information needs of poor people*: Built new 17 commune post and cultural service points; provided TV and radio to 16,957 poor HHs; built 20 FM stations and distributed 150 sets of TVRO to villages in the most difficult areas.
9. *Policy on supporting people in difficulties*: provided material/capital to 1,849 ethnic minority HHs in difficulties.

## Projects:

1. *Project on building infrastructure:* The province combined various capital sources (focused infrastructure, 135 programme, HPM programme etc), mobilised internal resources in the spirit of “government and people do together” to build 319 km of concrete rural road, 1,259 km of new road of category B to villages; over 1,000 small-scale irrigation systems were built or upgraded, 747 km of canal was concretised. 288 schools and boarding houses for teachers and pupils, 617 single classrooms were built (of them 278 were two-storey buildings at commune centres); 78 new two-storey buildings for commune health stations were built; the national grid was extended to 10,121 HHs in all districts and 140/191 communes/wards (40% of population have access to electricity). Continued implementing “Great Construction Works” by mobilising labour for infrastructure construction of total costs of VND 21.9 bn; mobilised internal sources to build roads, schools, stations, canals etc at the total costs of VND 377 bn.
2. *Project to support production and vocation development:* The PPC allocated VND 31.94 bn from budget to implement 7 focused agricultural programmes (support poor HHs in planting crops and trees/raising animal adaptable to local conditions and of high value such as tea, coffee, fruit trees, new rice strands, buffalo, cow and goat).
3. *Project to provide credit to poor HHs:* 33,538 poor HHs borrowed VND 72.7 bn from government/private/individuals sources.
4. *Project to assist poor HHs learn productive knowledge, agricultural and forestry extension:* 1,794 training courses on production techniques and experiences for 87,998 people were held; support to agricultural extension was provided to 142 communes 135, 331 demonstration models were developed.
5. *Project on resettlement and new economic zones:* assistance was provided to 207 HHs along the border line to resettle, 825 HHs in new economic zones, 55 HHs to move from highland to lowland areas; 8 irrigation systems, 2 water supply systems and 2 road systems were built.
6. *Project to provide legal support to poor people:* offices to provide legal support for poor people were established, campaigns/training courses were organised to help people in highland areas understand/know party policies/guidelines/resolutions as well as government law/regulations.
7. *Project to build capacity for cadre involved in HEPR:* so far 159 training courses for 9,298 local officials were organised.

## Appendix 5: Assistance from Central and Local Governments

### Dong Van District BPI:

- **Rural transportation projects** (category B roads): the government supports VND 40-50 million per km, local people contribute, by labour and in-kind, about 30-40% of the project costs.
- **Regular and emergency assistance:** 8-12 metric tons of food a year.
- **Plantation of pine trees (sa moc):** better off households receive support in seeds and foods, poor household receive 700 kg of maize grain per hectare.
- **Goat raising:** plan target for 2003 is 2,000 goats. So far people have raised 1,400 goats.
- **Land reclamation:** government support is VND 5 million per hectare
- **Forest protection:** government pays VND 50,000 per ha. Local people can cut small branches for firewood and exploit some forest products.
- **Resettlement:** each HH is supported with transportation, house building, food for one year consumption and 1.5 ha of land.

### Dong Van District BOLISA:

- Assistance to hunger HHs: for 3 months each member receives 10 kg of rice per month. People receive the assistance directly at the district PC.
- Support 100% of interest rate for goat/cow raising
- Secondment of civil servants: VND 400,000 per month for each provincial staff and VND 300,000 per month for each district staff.
- Higher salary: the coefficient for difficult areas is 1,7
- Other support: local authorities are applying policy of scaling down giving hand outs, only education is an exception (fully subsidised)

### Vi Xuyen District BOLISA:

- **Emergency assistance:** each HH affected by fire or natural calamity is given VND 500,000 and each member of these HHs receives 2 kg of rice.
- **Regular assistance under 202 Directive:** government policy is to give each person 12 kg of rice but Ha Giang adds 8 kg more. In money term each person receives VND 70,000 per month.
- **PAR:** have been implemented for 2 years. It requires that all district cadres are university graduated but it is difficult to apply. The greatest barriers are capacity and awareness of some officials.

## Vi Xuyen District BARD:

- **Extension system:** it would be more appropriate in terms of personnel that 23 commune extension workers were under management of the District Extension Station (DES), but they are under management of the BARD and this factor has created lots of problems for proper functioning of the system. In Vi Xuyen BARD there are 7 staff (4 of them graduated university), in the DES there are 6 staff (2 of them graduated university). There are 23 commune extension workers with average income (salary and other supplements) around VND 300,000-400,000 per month. 99 out of 170 villages have extension workers and it is a goal of having extension workers in all 170 villages. The annual budget of the DES is VND 9 million.
- **Veterinary staff:** all 23 communes and district town have vet workers. They receive 10 days of training every year. Few villages also have vet workers. Government subsidises half of the cost of vaccination.
- Each extension/vet worker is given VND 5-10.000 per day when they attend training courses.
- **Subsidy of rice HYV:** hunger HHs are subsidised 70%; poor HHs 50% and middle HHs 30%
- **Support in cattle raising:** each poor HH can borrow VND 1.5 M, the DPC subsidises 100% of interest rate (paid to the Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development), loan period: 3 years.
- **Agricultural materials services:** There are 3 government outlets in Vi Xuyen District and the rest are private. In general government services outlets operation rather passively in contrast to private services providers. For example making a decision takes lot of time because it requires approval at many levels. A positive point of government enterprises is their goods are of better quality compared with those of private businesses.
- **Provide in-kind credit (fertiliser) to poor HHs:** it is no longer applied since poor HHs already receive lots of preferential policies.