

# **MID-TERM EVALUATION REPORT OF VONG TAY LON PROGRAM**

Madeline M. Suva and Ma. Stella C. Tirol  
College of Development Communication  
UP Los Baños, College, Laguna  
Philippines

## **Overview of the Vong Tay Lon Program in Vietnam**

### *Rationale and Justification for VTL Program*

Vong Tay Lon is a participatory development communication (PDC) learning and networking program in Vietnamese language. It is jointly implemented by five Vietnamese universities, namely, 1) Hue University of Agriculture and Forestry (HUAF), 2) Hanoi Agricultural University (HAU), 3) Thai Nguyen University of Agriculture and Forestry (TUAF), 4) Tay Nguyen University; and 5) Nong Lam University of Agriculture and Forestry. Two other participating institutions are NETNAM Corporation and Information Centre for Agriculture and Rural Development (ICARD).

PDC is a research and development initiative which seeks to increase the capacity of the researchers, development practitioners and associated stakeholders active in environment and natural resources management (NRM) to use participatory development communication in order to work more effectively with local communities, stakeholders, and policy-makers.

In NRM, the participatory development communication approach suggests using communication to build capability within local communities: 1) to discuss natural resources management practices and problems; 2) to identify, analyze and prioritize problems and needs; 3) to identify and implement activities to respond to specific problems; 4) to identify and acquire the knowledge required to implement NRM initiatives; and 5) to monitor and evaluate their efforts in PDC.

### *Objectives of the VTL Program*

The Vong Tay Lon program is expected to enhance joint learning in participatory development communication to improve competencies of researchers who are conducting participatory action research at the local level in issues relating to NRM in Vietnam. The implementation of PDC process in NRM upland research projects aims to improve research quality, relevance, and effectiveness and to foster communication and support improved decision among relevant stakeholders.

The Vong Tay Lon program will incorporate a communication component in the research process. Using PDC approach, the program will foster dialogue between natural resource management agencies and local communities and enhance joint learning in participatory development communication in issues relating to NRM in the uplands.

Specifically, the VTL program seeks to 1) establish a web-based learning and electronic information forum for agricultural university networks; 2) enhance the capacity of the VUF network members to use the electronic forum and website and to access the Internet; and 3) develop a web-based learning for researchers on participatory development communication.

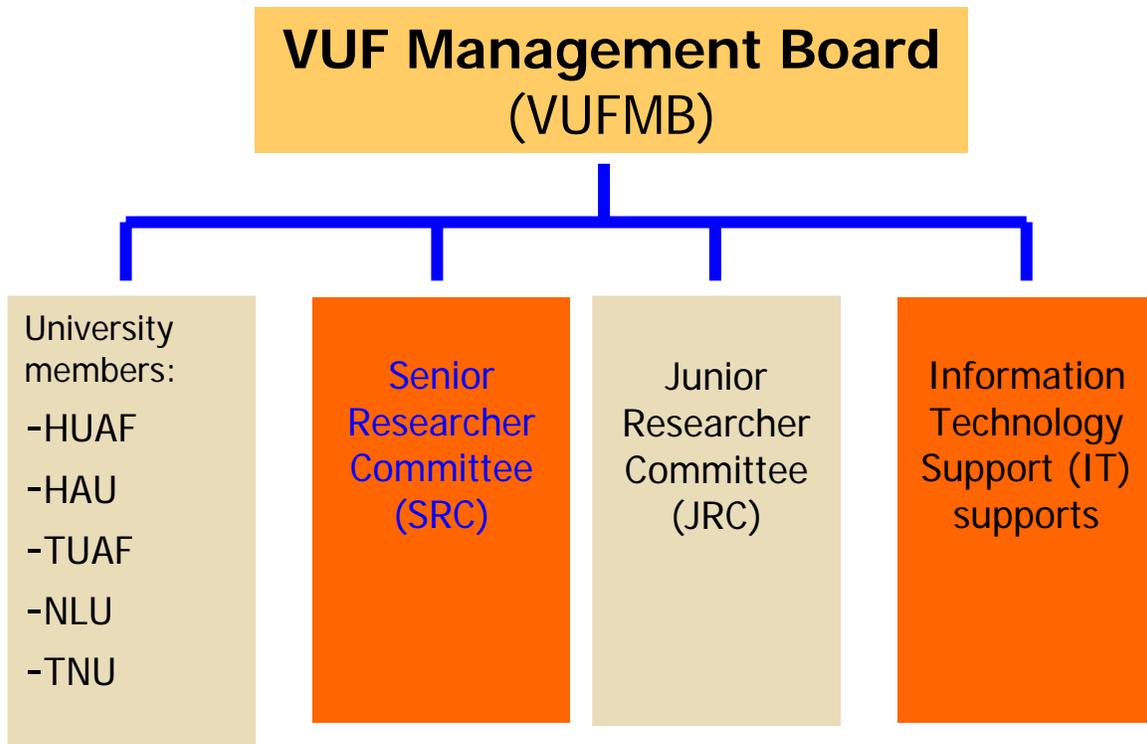
#### Methodology of the VTL Program

The Vietnamese PDC -Vong Tay Lon Program is implemented by researchers from the five universities in the network and facilitated by Hue University of Agriculture and Forestry. It started in December 2004 and will end in April 2006. The set of activities to be implemented in the program includes the following:

1. Translation and adaptation of Isang Bagsak materials into Vietnamese;
2. Training of facilitators;
3. Planning of program activities;
4. Selection of participants from each university;
5. Preparation of introductory workshop, mid-term workshop and evaluation workshop;
6. Facilitation of the forum; and
7. Development of a strategy to link these activities to the main Isang Bagsak program.

#### The VUF Management System

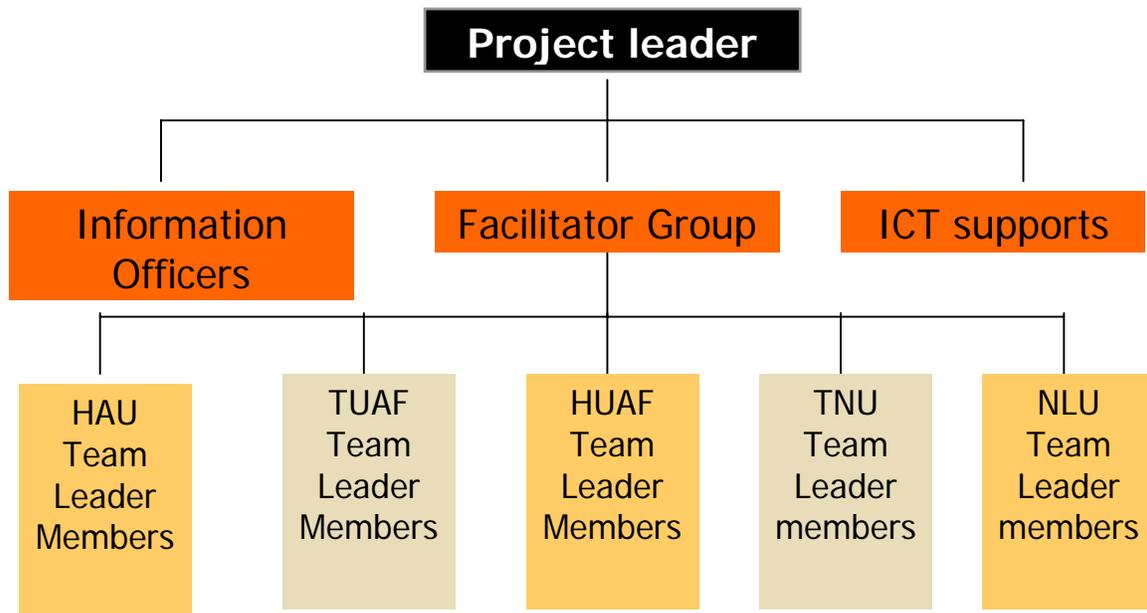
The Vietnam Upland Forum (VUF) is governed by a management board comprised of one representative each from its five-university members. It manages four major committees, namely, 1) university team members – HUAF, HAU, TUAF, NLU, and TNU; 2) senior committee researchers; 3) junior committee researchers; and 4) information technology support.



#### The VTL-PDC Management System

The project leader, who is from HUA, takes charge of all the activities of the PDC-VTL project. A full-time project assistant supports the project leader's office.

The facilitator group consists of nine members who have been working with PDC in the first phase. These facilitators will be in charge of the nine themes of the PDC project.



The responsibilities of facilitators are 1) to facilitate forum discussions among researchers theme by theme; 2) to facilitate the development of PDC content which is suitable to the context of Vietnam; and 3) to document each part of the discussion. The role of the facilitator is rotated for each discussion topic.

The responsibilities of information officers are 1) to produce material for the program; 2) to prepare contents for putting on the web site; 3) to build linkage with the PDC network; and 4) to translate relevant documents into Vietnamese and post them on the web.

The IT support staff will help establish the website platform and provide IT training for faculty-researchers of the five participating universities. Netnam Corporation provides the information technology support to the project.

### The VTL Program Outputs

The planned outputs of the VTL program include the following: 1) a website and forum on upland development for Vietnamese researchers; 2) more information on upland are available in website and through electronic-based exchanges; 3) improved Internet access in five universities; 4) web-based learning and information sharing; 5) established linkage and exchange among researchers; 6) Isang Bagsak program documentation translated and adapted in Vietnamese; 7) Isang Bagsak program implemented in Vietnamese; 8) one Vietnamese publication on PDC; 9) strengthened capacity among researchers and practitioners in the agricultural university network through training and application of PDC in the field; 10) improved livelihoods for upland communities through the application of PDC in the CBNRM project; 11) linkages and exchange of information/ knowledge between Vietnamese PDC and the regional PDC

program; and 12) one researcher from HUAF with completed master of science in development communication.

## **The Vong Tay Lon Mid-Term Evaluation Study**

### Objectives

#### General:

The mid-term evaluation (January – July 2005) study of the PDC-VTL program was undertaken in July 2005 in order to: 1) review the steps of the participatory development communication (PDC) process in the context of the Vietnamese universities with insistence on the communication plan; 2) evaluate the learning program and the learning process in each university; and 4) recommend for future activities of the Vong Tay Lon program.

#### Specific:

An FGD was conducted with PDC-VTL participating team members in four Vietnamese Universities in order to:

1. describe their participation in the VTL learning and networking program
2. find out their experiences and lessons learned in using PDC in the NRM project in the community
3. determine their extent of knowledge, attitude, and practice of PDC; and
4. list their problems, solutions, concerns, and suggestions in participating in the VTL learning and networking program and in implementing PDC in the field or community

Meanwhile, the FGD with community representatives aimed to:

1. find out their experiences with implementation of PDC in the NRM project of VTL participating teams;
2. determine their reactions to and perceptions of the PDC process;
3. describe their knowledge, attitude, and practice; and
4. find out the problems and solutions they encountered in the PDC implementation process.

### Methodology

A focus group discussion (FGD) was held on July 19, 20, and 22, 2005, with members of Vong Tay Lon (VTL) participating teams from three Vietnamese universities, namely, Hue University of Agriculture and Forestry (HUAF), Hanoi Agricultural University (HAU), Thai Nguyen University of Agriculture and Forestry (TUAF). A focused group interview was conducted with three VTL members of Nong Lam University (NLU) Ho Chi Minh City on July 25, 2005. The FGD aimed to review and evaluate the Vong Tay Lon program and implementation of the PDC process in the field or community.

A visit to the community and meeting with community representatives in Hue, Hanoi, and Thai Nguyen were also carried out to get feedback about the implementation of PDC in the NRM projects in the areas. Guide questions were prepared in English and translated into Vietnamese. A volunteer from the VTL participating team facilitated the focus group discussion with the community representatives using the guide questions.

Secondary data from reports of the VTL participating teams, particularly on lessons learned and experiences in VTL program and in PDC implementation were used as data sources.

Data were analyzed qualitatively. Direct quotes from the participating team members were included to substantiate qualitative descriptions in the review and evaluation analysis.

### Results and Discussion

## **HANOI AGRICULTURAL UNIVERSITY (HAU)**

### **FGD Participants**

A total of 14 Vong Tay Lon (VTL) team members of Hanoi Agricultural University (HAU) participated in the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) to evaluate the mid-term status of the Vong Tay Lon program. The VTL participants of Hanoi Agricultural University (HAU) were junior faculty members and researchers of HAU who have expertise in various sciences. They were mostly male, young (below 36 years old), have a bachelor's degree but with little to no experience on participatory development communication (PDC). Despite their age and limited experience in the use of PDC, they were highly motivated, enthusiastic, and eager to learn about PDC.

The names of the FGD participants are listed in Appendix \_\_\_\_.

### **Participatory Action Research Projects**

The HAU junior faculty members and researchers undertake the following participatory action research projects:

- “Influenced factors on the adaptation of Agro-forestry models; a case study in Seo hamlet, Da Bac district, Hoa Binh province.” This research is carried out in Hoa Binh community.
- “Geographical Information System (GIS) and Remote Sensing (RS) Application.” This project seeks to evaluate land allocation policy and land use system in the upper part of the Ca River Basin. The project site is in Nghe An.

- Eight junior staff for each study conduct field work, collect information/data, and prepare the final report for publication

## **PARTICIPATION IN THE VONG TAY LON (VTL) LEARNING AND NETWORKING PROGRAM**

### **The E-Mail Process in the VTL Learning Program**

The Hanoi Agricultural University team participated in the Vong Tay Long (VTL) learning and networking program through the e-mail instead of the e-forum. This was because the Ministry of Culture and Information in Vietnam still had to approve the request of Hue University of Agriculture and Forestry (HUAF) for permission to post the e-forum of VTL on the web. HAU followed the following steps in e-mailing and responding to the PDC theme questions from HUAF facilitators.

1. HUAF facilitator emails the discussion questions for each PDC theme to each HAU-VTL team member.
2. HAU team leader and members receive PDC questions regarding the theme in each of their e-mail box.
3. HAU team leader facilitates face-to-face discussion to answer theme questions with HAU team members.
4. After the discussion, HAU team leader makes a synthesis of the discussion and e-mails it to the HUAF theme facilitator. Copies are also sent to the team leaders and team members of the participating VTL universities.
5. HUAF facilitator or team member e-mails his/her individual comments on the theme discussion to all HAU team members.
6. HAU team leader and members individually react to comments of HUAF and other VTL members and e-mails their individual reactions to all university and institutional team members.
7. HUAF makes a synthesis of all theme discussions of each participating university team and emails the synthesis to all VTL teams.
8. HUAF theme facilitator closes discussion for each theme.

### **Problems Encountered in the VTL Program (as listed on meta cards)**

Participants in the FGD articulated the following problems:

#### **A. Time-related**

- *Limited time for field exposure; researchers are busy*
- *Time-consuming due to many participants*
- *Sometimes too busy to attend PDC activity (because of field trip, other training)*
- *Time constraint due to other projects*
- *Sometimes the members were absent in theme's discussion meetings because they had different works*

- *Too busy with other activities thus did not always react to a theme in/on time*
- *Time for discussion in group is not enough*
- *Can't know example of each problem*
- *Team members are busy with other projects – difficult to gather in a meeting with all members*
- *Sometimes go to the fields for 2 weeks – cannot participate*

A suggestion was made to meet for 30 minutes to one hour to discuss and clarify some comments. Another proposal was to have an open discussion during their regular monthly meetings.

#### B. Internet-related

- *Sometimes not received discussions from other partners – couldn't share ideas*
- *We received mails later the day mails were sent. I don't know if this this problem happens to other universities.*
- *Loss file or can't receive idea from other members*
- *Mail listserv – not interesting as a “forum”*
- *Everyone can read all posting topics; suggestion was to use the e-mail for some*

#### C. Others

- *Understanding the ideas*
- *Can't see overview of the program*

## **APPLICATION OF PARTICIPATORY DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION (PDC) PROCESS IN THE FIELD/COMMUNITY**

### **Advantages of Using PDC**

The HAU researchers enumerated the following advantages of using PDC in the NRM project in the community:

- *Cooperation from local authorities and farmers (accommodations, food, transportation)*
- *Applicable to a wide range of interviewees*
- *More accurate responses due to participation of interviewees*
- *Shorten distance/gaps between interviewers and interviewees*

### **Lessons Learned in Using PDC**

The following are the issues and lessons learned by the HAU researchers who participated in the VTL program:

- *Interviewees have low educations*

- Explain carefully and discuss examples
- Inequality of participants (gender/social standing etc.)
- Clarify interviewers' criteria before doing the interview
- Dominance of individuals (local officers, man, wealthy people, old people)
  - Ask people who talked little
  - Divided into two groups
- Local officials (uninvited interviewees)
  - Use 'fishpond' technique – separate uninvited local officials from invited group members

### **Other Lessons Learned in Using PDC**

The HAU researchers who applied PDC in their NRM projects in the community listed other lessons that they learned such as the following:

- Discuss what strategy and what information to collect from the community
- Liked the learning program because the participants learned new skills to communicate with community
- Learned from Dr. Cai's discussion on the e-mail
- Conduct meeting at field site (local district) to get background information about the people and the community
- Drink and eat with farmers in the evening
- Let the farmers draw their own map of land use; based on the farmers' map. Researchers will then verify or validate the information and improve land use map that will be used in the project
- Let the farmers rank their farm and other activities in the community
- Meet community people by group – have separate meeting with female members, male members, village leaders; then go on a village tour with the community groups and observe the community to get data or background information about the community
- When visiting the community, the research team members should be divided into different groups – one group to act as observers; another as print documentors; and the third as video or camera recorders
- Use local teachers also as facilitators during meetings
- Know first the important dates or schedules in the community before coming over to save on time and to avoid an extra day in the community
- We need to understand community before we approach them.
- Based on the real need of community, we research what people need and not what we need as researchers
- Two-way of information-sharing between farmer and researcher
- Avoid what makes the community misunderstand

### **Difficulties and Solutions in Using PDC**

In using the PDC approach in the community, the HAU researchers experienced the following difficulties and their solutions:

- *When we select the community for research, we had to select a community that is not too large or too small and represents the area. We have to find out whether or not the community has a many research because if there are many research there, local farmers will feel bored and will not want to answer the questions. Farmers may even hide from researchers. We can have small gift to give the local farmers to establish friendly relation and rapport.*
- *Too many interviewees (more than expectation)*  
→ *Divide into groups*
- *Problems with interpretations (biased information)*  
→ *See 'proper' interpreter*
- *Time conflict with communities' activities (weddings, funerals, celebrations)*  
→ *Participate in activities for information/ relations with people.*  
→ *Plan extra time for such 'risks'*
- *Establishing relationship with community*
- *Language barrier*
- *Farmer gives a different reply to a facilitator's question (may be out of misunderstanding)*
- *Understanding of community; the community has different level of standard – activities based on their customs and habit*

### **Changes in Researchers' Behavior**

The HAU researchers described the following changes in their behavior when they used PDC:

- *Experience in carrying out projects*
- *Increase skills to communicate with communities*
- *More self confident*
- *Flexible to overcome difficulties*
- *More experience to contribute to future projects*

### **Researchers' Observation of Changes in Interviewees**

The HAU researchers mentioned the following observations that they noted in the behavior of their interviewees in the community:

- *Their roles are increased.*
- *The issues discussed are useful to the development of communities*

### **Recommendations to Improve Vong Tay Lon in Hanoi Agricultural University (HAU)**

The HAU researchers gave the following recommendations for the HAU-VTL program:

- *The junior researchers need to go out more to the field/community to practice PDC and gain more experience in PDC.*
- *The junior researchers need to develop discipline to react and respond individually to theme discussions in the e-mail.*
- *The junior researchers should find the time to schedule their field visits and face-to-face discussions so that everybody can attend to both field tasks and VTL program tasks and responsibilities.*
- *There is a need to plan out more carefully the communication tools and strategies that should be used in the participatory action research project.*

## **THAI NGUYEN UNIVERSITY OF AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY (TUAF)**

### **FGD Participants**

A total of 13 Vong Tay Lon (VTL) team members of Thai Nguyen University of Agriculture and Forestry (TUAF) participated in the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) held on July 22, 2005 in the University to evaluate the mid-term status of the Vietnamese Vong Tay Lon program. The VTL participants of TUAF consisted of senior and junior faculty members and researchers who have expertise in agricultural extension, agronomy, forestry, social forestry, animal husbandry, rural development, natural resources and environment, veterinary medicine, biodiversity conservation, and biotechnology (See Appendix \_\_\_\_). They were mostly junior staff members who are male, young (below 36 years old), have a bachelor's or master's degree, and little experience on participatory development communication (PDS).

The older members of TUAF-VTL team have many years of research experience accumulated by working part time as local or national consultants for NGO projects. The younger members have little field experience but they are very eager to learn and share their experiences.

### **TUAF'S PDC GROUP**

TUAF's PDC group is a member of the Vietnam Upland Forum (VUF), based in HUAF. TUAF's PDC group was formed and started in January 2005. It comprises of more than 20 members who are faculty members and researchers at TUAF.

TUAF's PDC group is divided into two sub-groups: (1) consultation group; and (2) working group. The consultation group is composed of very experienced members. Dr Tran Ngoc Ngoan is Vice Rector and Director of the Centre for Agriculture and Forestry Research and Development for Mountainous Zone. He has worked as national consultant for NGO projects for many years. Dr Ngo Xuan Binh is a coordinator for an ADB project

and heads the TUAFF-PDC team. Dr Nguyen Huu Hong is the director of Training and International Cooperation Department. He has many years working as national consultant or coordinator for NGO projects. Dr Tran Van Dien has worked full time and part time for many projects. He is an international consultant for Plan International in Vietnam.

The working group mainly comprised young members, participating in the forum on voluntary basis. Working group members are allocated into 10 sub-groups following 10 PDC themes. Each subgroup is led by a group leader and supported by an advisory member. However, the adviser does not interfere with group discussion or decision. He is there to provide some guidance if needed.

### **Participatory Action Research Projects**

TUAF has the responsibility to develop the northern upland areas in Thai Nguyen where 40 percent are ethnic minorities. Based on initial research, TUAF found there is a need for education, research, and transfer of technology in the upland areas. Moreover, there is a need for sustainable development in the upland and for information dissemination. TUAF has many technical experts but lack lecturers-researchers in social sciences and rural development. Thus, participation in the VTL-PDC program is very timely, according to Dr. Binh. The PDC program is a suitable remedy for capacity building of its young staff in communication and preparing them for rural development extension. TUAF is planning to establish its center for rural development and extension.

The Agriculture and Forestry R&D for Northern Mountainous Region (AFRD) Formation and the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) and Ministry of Science and Technology (MOST), Vietnam, with which TUAF has established collaborative ties, aims to:

- Conduct research and training on agriculture and forestry through TUAF;
- Transfer/upgrade knowledge and technology to upland farmers;
- Apply research results in demonstration plots; and
- Study socio knowledge and rural approaches that are appropriate for ethnic minorities.

The participatory action research and training projects of TUAF are mostly sub-projects of the Vietnam Upland Forum Program and focus on sustainable agriculture development; natural resources management, and poverty reduction.

TUAF projects also focus on agriculture and forestry research and development in the northern mountainous regions of Thai Nguyen.

## **PARTICIPATION IN THE VONG TAY LON (VTL) LEARNING AND NETWORKING PROGRAM**

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The Thai Nguyen University of Agriculture and Forestry (TUAF) team participate in the Vong Tay Long (VTL) learning and networking program through the e-mail instead of the e-forum. This was because the Ministry of Culture and Information in Vietnam still had to approve the request of Hue University of Agriculture and Forestry (HUAF) for permission to post the e-forum of VTL on the web. TUAF follows the following steps in e-mailing and responding to the PDC theme questions from HUAF facilitators.

1. HUAF facilitator e-mails the discussion questions for each PDC theme to all TUAF team members.
2. TUAF consultant group reminds working group members that discussion questions have been mailed individually to them.
3. Each working sub-group will discuss answers to theme discussion questions in a face-to-face meeting with sub-group team leader as facilitator.
4. After discussion, sub-team leader circulates theme discussion results to all working sub-team members for comments and validation.
5. The working sub-group team leader will e-mail the discussion results to all the VTL team members.
6. TUAF working sub-group members wait for feedback from VTL members.
7. TUAF working sub-group members can give and e-mail their feedback individually to theme discussions e-mailed by VTL members.
8. Sometimes, the consultant group and working team group members meet face-to-face and respond to the feedback. Sub-group team leader e-mails discussion results.
9. HUAF makes synthesis of theme discussions of five university teams and e-mails these to all university team members.
10. HUAF theme facilitator closes discussion.
11. TUAF working sub-group team leader downloads all information exchanged in the e-mail and makes a hard copy and distributes hard copy to all team members.
12. TUAF working sub-group members are requested to keep document of all information exchanges on PDC in the e-mail and to read them for further learning.

### **Lessons Learned through Participation in the VTL Program (as reported by Dr. Binh)**

- The e-mail exchange provides very good opportunities for group members to learn and share experiences.

The TUAF-VTL working sub-group is a good way of sharing experiences and learning from each other. The PDC e-mail exchange is also not an exception. The young members have learned a lot from lessons or field stories shared by other more experienced members in the e-mail exchange. In fact, the young members have many difficulties in working with local people. Case studies or field stories of unreal promises, and the disturbance created when working with local people that were shared by e-mail of PDC program members were valuable lessons for the young members. All group members said they had received

benefits from participating in the e-mail discussion. However, it is the young members who benefit most.

- The e-mail exchange also provides an opportunity for group members to get to know and communicate with each other.  
Through participating in the PDC e-mail discussion and in the introductory workshop, the members became friends and then partners. By involving the members in the e-mail discussion, they are joining a network of learning and sharing experiences in PDC.
- The e-mail exchange strengthens the knowledge of development communication.  
Through learning and sharing experiences from other members in the forum, group members, especially young members have strengthened their knowledge of development communication, especially participatory approaches to development.
- The e-mail exchange also improves skills in documenting field work experience.  
It has been realized that the e-mail exchange has improved the skills of TUAFF-VTL working sub-group members in documenting field work experience. Many members said that if they did not participate in the e-mail exchange, their fieldwork experiences in the form of case studies or field stories could be forgotten. Now, the PDC learning and networking program gives them an opportunity to recall the field stories of their field experiences. Thus, the members feel it is really beneficial to document and share their fieldwork experience with other university members.
- The e-mail exchange improves the skills of TUAFF-VTL working sub-group members in using IT for development.  
Some working group members, who had not frequently used email/IT in their work, became more familiar with using IT. They have become more confident in using email for doing research or exchanging information.

### **Problems Encountered in the PDC E-Mail Exchange/Discussion**

- The communication between working members is still not very good.  
The e-mail exchange/discussion has gone through five themes. We realized that we have done quite well in the first three theme discussions. However, the last two theme discussions presented us with some problems (e.g., the late response to the due date). For some reason, the working group leaders were unable to respond to the e-mail exchange in time.
- Problems of responsibility and enthusiasm of group members  
The TUAFF-VT group works on voluntary basis. It seems that sometimes the group members do not pay enough attention to the email-based discussions.

However, the group members are frequently encouraged to participate in the e-mail exchange/discussion.

- Lack of fieldwork experiences among young members

The TUAFF-VTL group has a policy to encourage young members to participate in the e-mail exchange. In fact, the young members are very willing to participate, are very active and are very eager to learn through participation in the email exchange/discussion. However, it has been found that some young members do not have much fieldwork experience. In addition, it seems that some members are not good at documenting fieldwork experiences *since they do not have a background on communication*. Thus, it seems to be difficult for them to contribute "field stories" to the e-mail discussion. It can be said that young members learn more than they share.

- Lack connection to Internet and low skill in using IT

Only some working group members have connection to Internet at home. The others are dependent on public Internet. Although the University has an electronic library of 50 computers connected to high speed Internet and is open 8 hours a day, the lecturer-researchers cannot access the Internet because they normally have to teach during this time. Thus, it is not convenient for researchers to access the Internet during day time when they are teaching. Recently, two computers were provided by the project but they are still not connected to the internet for some reason. Also, some members are not familiar with working online/using e-mail for discussion. Furthermore, they were not oriented at the beginning on how to use the e-mail for discussion.

- Time management for group discussion
- TUAFF-PDC group – participation is voluntary; members change due to graduate study

### **Solutions to Problems Encountered in the PDC E-mail Exchange/Discussion**

- Discussion

For Theme 6, all working group members will be involved in the theme discussion through a group discussion chaired by a group leader for the first face-to-face discussion. For the second face-to-face discussion, the theme-allocated group (working sub-group) will be responsible for the discussion while others can contribute online if they are interested.

- Consultation

Members of the theme-allocated working sub-group are encouraged to consult the experienced members/advisers for "field stories" as much as possible.

Normally, the experienced/senior members are busy but it is worthwhile to consult them if possible.

## **APPLICATION OF PARTICIPATORY DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION (PDC) PROCESS IN THE FIELD/COMMUNITY**

### **Advantages of Using PDC**

The TUAf researchers who applied PDC in the NRM project in the upland communities enumerated the following advantages of PDC:

- *Very useful, easy to find out what action plan be developed from farmers' ideas*
- *To know the real needs from the farmers*
- *Two-way communication*
- *To make the project become more sustainable*
- *Flexible and having close relationship with farmers*
- *Learning experiences from farmers*

### **Disadvantages of Using PDC**

On the other hand, the TUAf researchers experienced the following disadvantages of using PDC:

- *PDC is time consuming*
- *The villagers tend to stray away from the topic being discussed.*
- *Sometimes, incorrect information is given.*

### **Lessons Learned in Using PDC**

TUAf researchers learned three important lessons were learned in using PDC in the community. These were:

- *Provide money for farmers at the meeting; in the second meeting, do not give money. A financial incentive motivates villagers to attend a meeting but money should not be given to encourage participation in every meeting.*
- *Promise some actions will be done for farmers, but not be implemented like clean water for irrigation*

### **Difficulties and Solutions in Using PDC**

The following difficulties and consequent solutions were shared by the TUAf researchers who used PDC in the community:

- *Step 4: difficult to understand; we need to learn more about communication planning; the other PDC steps are okay*
- *Some people are very conservative.*
  - *Ask respected people in the community for help*
- *Attending training course not on time, especially women*
  - *Organize time/place suitable for farmers*
- *Gender issue (more men attend meeting)*
  - *Require gender balance with community leader*

### **Changes in Researchers' Behavior**

Having applied PDC in an NRM project in the community, TUAF researchers observed the following changes in their cognitive behavior:

- *More clear about identifying stakeholder groups*
- *Know more about communication tools*

### **Recommendations to Improve Vong Tay Lon in TUAF**

The following recommendations to improve VTL in TUAF were elicited from the TUAF-VTL participants:

1. TUAF staff recognized weakness in communication and realized the need for capacity building in communication.
2. The lessons learned on PDC can be applied in various sustainable upland projects of TUAF.
3. There is a need to improve values and technical skill of TUAF staff on IT. To continue learning and application/practice of PDC, TUAF staff need to source and look for small fund to carry out 3-4 research projects that will implement PDC approaches and steps based on PDC experience of TUAF staff. One of the team members (Son) has developed a proposal to apply PDC and has submitted it to European Union for funding.
4. There is a need to document each step of PDC.

## **NONG LAM UNIVERSITY HO CHI MINH CITY (REPORT)**

### **FGD Participants**

Only three out of 18 VTL team members of Nong Lam University participated in the FGD held on July 25, 2005 at the University conference room. The rest of the team members were on vacation leave, on graduate study leave, or attending a training-workshop in Hanoi.

## **Participatory Action Research Project**

Nong Lam University has implemented the Community-Based Natural Resources Management (CBNRM) project as part of the Vietnam Upland Forum (VUF) program. CBNRM is a participatory approach to NRM with emphasis on forest, land and water resources as well as common property management. The two main objectives of the CBNRM project were: 1) to understand better the livelihood of three ethnic groups, namely, Chils, Churu, and K'ho that were resettled in Kado commune, Don Duong district, Lam Dong province; and 2) to assist local communities in the sustainable management of their resources. The first phase of the CBNRM project was carried out in 1994-1997 while the second phase was in 1997-2000. The project was completed only in 2001 due to unavoidable circumstances.

An interdisciplinary team of researchers from the various departments of Nong Lam University Ho Chi Minh City participated in the CBNRM project. The CBNRM team collaborated with local institutions in the implementation of the project. These as the state-run Don Duong Forest Enterprise, the Don Duong District Extension Station, and the People's Committee in Kado commune. These local partners jointly decided on what research to conduct in the commune. Meanwhile, local villagers were organized into 'interest' groups based on gender, wealth, and ethnicity. They were involved in on-farm research techniques to help implement and monitor research experiments. Undergraduate and graduate students were likewise involved in the research process.

The results of research experiments were presented in local stakeholder workshops. During these workshops, the villagers voiced out their concerns regarding CBNRM.

The CBNRM project accomplished three key outputs. It helped the villagers to shift toward fixed agriculture systems, to diversify production, and to participate in forest management. It gave them confidence in negotiating for a contractual forest management scheme that will lead to the development of a co-management system. Lastly, the project enhanced the competencies of Nong Lam University researchers in implementing participatory action research.

The CBNRM staff identified two major weaknesses of the project. There was a decrease in the number of research team members which, in turn, affected project management. Most of the junior researchers had to leave the team in order to pursue graduate study abroad. Moreover, the research team lacked communication skills in generating and documenting research reports and in producing communication tools needed in the research process.

The CBNRM team learned three important lessons from the project. One, helping local stakeholders shift to a participatory NRM paradigm required a lot of patience. Two, participatory rapid appraisal (PRA) tools such as participatory mapping could also be used as communication tools to foster dialogue between villagers and researchers. And,

three, a cross-visit could broaden the NRM perspectives of farmers and other stakeholders and allow them to practice their communication skills.

## **PARTICIPATION IN THE VONG TAY LON (VTL) LEARNING AND NETWORKING PROGRAM**

### **The E-Mail Process in the VTL Learning Program**

1. The HUAF facilitator e-mails discussion questions for each PDC theme simultaneously to all VTL team members, including Nong Lam University team members.
2. The Nong Lam University VTL team leader receives e-mail on PDC theme from HUAF and invites VTL team members in the University to an informal meeting in order to discuss answers to theme questions.
3. The Nong Lam University teams (Nong Lam teams) discuss answers to questions face-to-face
4. After discussion, university team leader makes synthesis of discussion and emails discussion synthesis to HUAF facilitator and other university team leaders/members
5. HUAF facilitator emails university team discussions to other university team members
6. Other university team members react to discussion of HAU
7. HUAF makes synthesis of discussions of 5 university teams and emails to all university team members
8. HUAF theme facilitator closes discussion.

### **Problems/Weaknesses of VTL Program as Experienced in Nong Lam University**

Nong Lam University (NLU) has 18 members in the VTL program. But, six junior staff members have left for abroad to pursue graduate study. According to the NLU-VTL team leader, about 56 percent of the junior researchers moved to study abroad or in Hanoi. On the other hand, senior researchers were overloaded with teaching, research, and consultation work. Thus, the NLU-VTL team faces an unstable membership.

The NLU-VTL team leader pointed out that the NLU-VTL team members did not have sufficient background about PDC when they started to apply it in their CBNRM project. Their understanding of the PDC process was not really holistic since the PDC-VTL program came in much later into the CBNRM project. It appears that when VTL members lack background on development communication, it becomes a little difficult for them to understand how to apply PDC in a participatory action research project on natural resource management. There is a need to synchronize field-based PDC learning with e-mail exchange on PDC. One way is to involve VTL members in applying PDC even at the planning and conceptualization of a new NRM project.

It was hard to have all the team members together for the face-to-face discussion of answers to the theme questions. Sometimes, the team did not have face-to-face discussion. The team leader had to e-mail a *one-man* (without face-to-face discussion) report on the theme questions to share the team's contribution to the VTL program. To encourage participation of team members, a member was assigned to prepare and e-mail the synthesis of theme discussion questions to HUAF facilitator and to all members of the VTL network. This task was rotated among the team members.

For Themes 1-2, the Nong Lam-VTL team leader collected information from individual team members and e-mailed the synthesis of theme discussion. The team, however, was unable to contribute to Theme 3 discussion on involving the community in the identification and solution of an NRM problem mainly because the members could not recall what they did in the project in relation to this theme since their CBNRM project was almost finished when PDC-VTL came in. Other contributing factors for non-submission of Theme 3 discussion to the e-mail exchange were members going abroad for graduate study, members going on vacation or in out-of-town workshop, or members busy in other projects. Meanwhile, facilitation for Themes 4-5 was assigned to two different members of NLU-VTL team.

The team leader of the VTL program at Nong Lam University observed that there was no synthesis of the discussion at the network level. Although preparing the synthesis will consume a person's time, there should be a synthesis of all VTL network responses to each PDC theme.

Based on the experience of Nong Lam-VTL members, they received a lot of spam mail during their e-mail exchange on the theme discussions with VTL network members from other universities and institutions. The e-mail was sometimes unreliable due to slow connection. Also, the e-mail could not provide the entire Vietnamese font. The e-mail exchange was observed to occupy a large file in the e-mail folder.

The NLU-VTL team leader felt that the university was marginalized from the agricultural system since it had no organized, formal group on agriculture and forestry. There is a need to consolidate and institutionalize the NLU-VTL team. Nong Lam University has not yet developed an institutional-based PDC-PAR group similar to that of HUAF'S Center for Agricultural Forestry Research and Development (CARD) or a HAU'S (Center for Agricultural Research and Ecological Studies (CARES).

### **Benefits of Joining VTL Program**

Through the VTL learning and networking program, the NLU-VTL team members said they gained knowledge on what others do on PDC in the field. For instance, they learned about how to solve cultural barriers in drinking with local villagers when collecting information.

The face-to-face discussion among NLU-VTL team members encouraged them to tell and share their stories about their experiences in the field and in the research. Thus,

they also learned from one another. During this discussion, some members turned out to be technology-oriented while others were communication-oriented in their perspective. The facilitator also summarized the discussion and made it clearer. The summary at the end of their discussion was good and helped them to remember key points. It can also be deduced that the facilitator's skills were enhanced and improved in the face-to-face discussion.

Nong Lam University has established a webpage ([www.hcmuaf.edu.vn/English](http://www.hcmuaf.edu.vn/English)) on participatory development communication (PDC) in 2002. The NLU-VTL team leader has prepared a learning module in Vietnamese language to capture the PDC process based on the Isang Bagsak workbook and compendium. This learning module has been posted on a personal webpage and linked to the NLU webpage and is accessible to NLU-VTL team members. By reading the PDC modules on the webpage, the NLU-VTL team, especially its new members were able to catch up on their knowledge and understanding of the PDC process.

The NLU-VTL team leader has burned in a CD-ROM all the PDC contents of the e-mail exchange among VTL network members. A copy of the CD is being distributed to all NLU-VTL team members so that they can read and reflect on the PDC experiences of their team and of VTL network teams. Besides the CD, the NHU-VTL team leader also prints a hard copy of the contents of the e-mail exchange and circulates a photocopy to the team members, especially those who could not regularly access the e-mail..

The NLU-VTL team members who are faculty-researchers were also able to lecture about PDC and share their knowledge of it with their students. Hence, they applied PDC not only in the field but also in lecture class.

The NLU faculty have requested for a new course in communication. The NLU-VTL leader will develop one in the area of PDC.

The University has received equipment for VTL program which includes one laptop computer and one video camera.

## **APPLICATION OF PARTICIPATORY DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION (PDC) PROCESS IN THE FIELD/COMMUNITY**

*The junior researchers initially went to CBNRM site for participatory action research (PAR). They were learning participatory development communication (PDC) on site much later when Vong Tay Lon program came in.*

*The junior researchers highly possessed technical skills but did not have communication skills. There is a need to develop the competency of researchers on communication knowledge and skills. The conditions for researchers to communicate with confidence to farmers, village authorities, and other stakeholders need to be established.*

### **Lessons Learned in Using PDC**

Doing stakeholder analysis was difficult because the NLU-VTL team lacked the experience. It was also challenging because they had to interact with many different people. The NLU-VTL team realized that doing a stakeholder analysis requires a good communication facilitation and negotiation skills.

Building of trust among researchers and stakeholders is important in PDC. It takes a long, continuous process.

PDC is time consuming but it also allows the researcher to improve upon communication skills. Rapid rural appraisal is shorter and easier to do.

PDC is still a challenge because changing people's way of doing things at the local level is difficult and will take time.

### **Difficulties and Solutions in Using PDC**

The Nong Lam-VTL team members had difficulty in catching up with PDC learning. One reason was that the VTL program came late into their CBNRM project. Another factor was that CBNRM was implemented without having a clear communication strategy at the beginning. Lastly, new members had missed other PDC steps and themes because they were coming in at different stages in the VTL program to replace those who had gone. To make the PDC learning process more meaningful to NLU-VTL members, the team decided to include a field-based PDC learning system in Da Nhar village in Da Tech district of Lam Dong province. NLU's Department of Social Forestry selected Da Nhar village as the site for field-based practicum and learning of student as well as VTL team members on the nine steps of PDC: 1) using PDC to enhance participation; 2) approach the local community; 3) involving community in problem identification and solution; 4) developing a communication plan; 5) using communication tools; 6) fostering exchange of knowledge; 7) evaluation and documentation; 8) dissemination of results; and 9) evaluation of PDC program.

### **Recommendations to Improve Vong Tay Lon in Nong Lam University (NLU)**

Since the VTL program came in much later into the CBNRM project, the NLU-VTL team members had difficulty in recalling what they did in the project at the field to be able to answer the discussion questions for Themes 1-3. They were also not sure if they had properly applied PDC in approaching the community, in collecting and sharing information in the community, and even in planning the research for the project. Thus, the NLU-VTL team leader recommended that a *synchronized* project would be best. This means that all VTL network members will learn and apply PDC-PAR in a newly-started NRM project so their learning will be synchronized too.

The NLU-VTL team recommended involving extension agencies (e.g., Provincial Information Centre for Agricultural Development) and non-government organizations (NGOs) in the PDC learning and networking program. The team wanted to involve extension workers and NGO staff members because they worked directly with local villagers and will learn a lot from the PDC paradigm. Their lack of knowledge on a good monitoring and evaluation system can also be met through their participation in the PDC on-line learning network.

The NLU faculty and junior researchers need competency development in participatory development communication.