MID-TERM EVALUATION REPORT

TA PROJECT VIE/02/001

SUPPORT FOR THE IMPROVEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NATIONAL TARGETED PROGRAMMES ON POVERTY REDUCTION
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The extended project VIE/02/001 was designed to continue provision of technical support to the National Targeted Programme on Poverty Reduction and the Socio-economic development programme for communes facing with extreme difficulties in the ethnic and mountainous areas, in order to (i) complement to GOVN’s own TA and (ii) to ensure sound design and effective implementation of the national target programmes for poverty reduction during 2006-2010. The project is implemented with adoption of a partnership with Ministry of Labour, war Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA) and the Committee for Ethnic Minority (CEM) as two National Executing Agencies in coordination with government agencies involved in management and implementation of two programmes. The project was designed with five key outputs to contribute to increasing the effectiveness of the targeted programmes for poverty reduction, in the following areas: (i) transparency and participation in programme design and implementation guidelines; (ii) monitoring and evaluation; (iii) targeting and improved people’s participation; (iv) transparent budget allocation and financial management; and (v) improved capacity for officers and people.

This mid-term evaluation is the first evaluation effort in the second phase of the project since 2006. The evaluation exercise is designed on the basis of the extended project document and is aimed at providing analysis of (i) relevance of the project concept via context verification, and (ii) efficiency of the project implementation, on which basis to produce practical recommendations to address arising issues in the current context, and adjustments for the remaining period of the project life, as well as orientations for the future. The evaluation focuses on (i) 5 outputs as stated in the project result framework; (ii) new arising issues; (iii) contribution of project to achieving Output 1 of the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) and Output 1.1 of the One UN Plan. Common evaluation of both components and consideration of each programme features was conducted in combination with dynamic evaluation on the basis of context evolutions, to assess project activities in line with contextual changes from initial design.

In the last three years, it was proved that the designed outputs are relevant to the NTPs needs; project activities and products have brought practical results, contributing to improved quality of programme design, policies and implementation. The National Execution Modality is a relevant mechanism for the government to assume full ownership in identifying needs for improved effectiveness of the project. Capacity of staff involved in project management and implementation has been strengthened, especially with regard to programme management knowledge and skills. The project has assumed the coordination role between the donors and the Government fairly well. There remain, however, some issues to be addressed: (i) to strengthen coordination role with the government agencies, promoting pro-activeness of the line ministries; (ii) to increase TA to local levels to ensure effective implementation of programmes and policies; (iii) to work more closely with other donors on the basis of common TA Plans to optimize use of resources; (iv) to review, revise some project indicators, record and sort out project projects to facilitate final evaluation; and (v) overcome delays in implementation of activities caused by processes, procedures of recruitment and contracting.

In addition to continued support to improved implementation of two NTPs as initially designed, project VIE/02/001 has also taken on new tasks, which have arisen in the new context. Donor’s targeted budget support accompanied by a policy matrix with policy actions committed by the Government, and the Government’s resolution on fast and sustainable poverty reduction programme for 61 poorest districts issued in December 2008 raise new TA requirements for the project, which go beyond the initial design.

The report also provides some lessons learnt and recommendations for Project VIE/02/001 in the
remaining two years. The lessons include (i) Programme design and learning of lessons from evaluations for a good design is very important to attract donor’s interest; (ii) strengthened monitoring of programme implementation is the best way to ensure TA activities are in line with and effectively contribute to programme implementation; and (iii) Involvement of policy making officials is crucial to the effectiveness of the project. The recommendations include: (i) focus on support to improve programme implementation; (ii) support to local governments need in identifying TA needs; (iii) strengthen support to local capacity building; (iv) develop TA plan for NTP-PR and improve TA Plan for P135-II as the bases for coordination of TA supports to both programmes; (v) support tracking findings and implementation of recommendations of programme mid-term evaluations to improve programme performance in the remaining time and draw lessons for better design and implementation of support activities to Programme of 61 districts; (vi) review, revise and rearrange project indicators; sort out project products to serve final evaluation; and (vii) strengthen project management and operation, optimize use of resources.
1 INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

1.1. Project description

The current project VIE/02/001 is the extension of the initial UNDP-supported project VIE/02/001 implemented between 2001 and 2005 which provided technical support to the National Targeted Programme on Poverty Reduction. The project extension was necessitated by the decision of the GoV to continue the targeted programmes for poverty reduction until 2010, including the National Targeted Programme on Poverty Reduction (NTP-PR) and the Socio-economic development programme for communes facing with extreme difficulties in the ethnic and mountainous areas (P135 phase 2). The development of the extension was made to (i) formalize the recommendations of the last Annual Project Review Meeting of project VIE/02/001 organized in April 2005, (ii) provide a framework for other donors to jointly provide technical assistance to two programmes and (iii) to follow the newly introduced UNDP Project Document format.

Aiming at achieving the original VIE/02/001 development objective of “support the poverty reduction efforts in Viet Nam through the formulation and implementation of a sound poverty reduction strategy and corresponding action plans” and building on the results of the VIE/02/001 project implementation since 2002, the extended project would continue the focus on providing technical assistance (TA) that is (i) complementary to GOVN’s own TA and (ii) necessary for ensuring sound design and effective implementation of the national target programmes for poverty reduction 2006-2010. The project is implemented with adoption of a partnership with Ministry of Labour, war Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA) and the Committee for Ethnic Minority (CEM) as two National Executing Agencies in coordination with government agencies involved in management and implementation of two programmes.

1.1.1 Outcome

The project was designed with specific outputs to contribute to achieving the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) outcome 1 “Economic growth is more equitable, inclusive and sustainable” and Output 1.1 of One UN Country Programme Document “Improved design and more effective implementation of national target programme for poverty reduction and national programme for socio-economic development for poorest communes”, as well as Outcome 1.1 in Country Programme 2006-2010 Action Plan “National pro-poor policies and interventions that support more equitable and inclusive growth”.

1.1.2 Outputs

Between 2005-2010, the extended project VIE/02/001 is expected to deliver five key outputs that will contribute towards increasing the effectiveness of the targeted programmes for poverty reduction:

(i) The targeted programmes for poverty reduction and its implementation guidelines are designed in a transparent and participatory manner, are gender-sensitive and take into account the lessons of the evaluation;

(ii) Efficient and participatory M&E systems at central and local levels established to systematically monitor progress of the targeted programmes on poverty reduction and disseminate outputs timely to the wider public and policy makers for continuously increasing program effectiveness;
(iii) Effective mechanisms for improved targeting and participation are in place that enhance the access of poor men, women and children to and their benefits from the targeted programmes;
(iv) Transparent and participatory budget allocation and financial managements systems established and used for targeted poverty reduction programs; and
(v) Improved capacity of responsible programme staffs, including the people themselves, for more effective and participatory decentralized local level planning, implementation and monitoring of the targeted programmes for poverty reduction at all levels.

Both programmes – NTP-PR and P135-2 are designed for the period 2006-2010 and have completed the third year of their life. Mid-term evaluation activities have been commissioned to evaluate the progress of two programme implementation, identify key problems to be resolved and develop appropriate recommendations aimed at improving management and implementation of two programmes, as well as contribute to informing development of poverty policy in the coming period. A consultation workshop on the mid-term review of P135-2 organized in November 2008 with participation of central and local government agencies and donors, and preparatory activities towards review workshops on NTP-PR to be held in mid Quarter 1, 2009 are good opportunities for stakeholders to discuss important issues of two programmes, develop improved implementation measures and make recommendations on how to improve future poverty policy.

1.2. Objectives and scope of evaluation

1.2.1 Objectives:
The mid-term evaluation of project VIE/02/001 “Support for the improvement and implementation of the national targeted programmes on poverty reductions” is conducted in late 2008 in accordance with the UNDP Office evaluation plan. This is the first evaluation effort in the second phase of the project since 2006. Two national targeted programmes on poverty reduction supported by the project have also been implemented for 3 years, hence this is the time not only for evaluation of project performance as usual, but also a good time to draw lessons from the practice of supporting two programmes, in order to suggest appropriate adjustment measures in the remaining time of the project life, and provide information to development of poverty policy for the future period. The objective of this mid-term evaluation is to provide analysis of (i) relevance of the project concept via context verification, and (ii) efficiency of the project implementation, on which basis to produce practical recommendations to address arising issues in the current context, and adjustments for the remaining period of the project life, as well as orientations for the future.

According to the TORs (Annex 5), the evaluation work should address the following issues:
Relevance: (i) relevance of issues stated in the project document, designed outputs and activities in the new socio-economic context (budget support to P135-2, and new poverty policy directions of the Government …); (ii) relevance of indicators provided in the project result framework and annual plans, against the priorities and needs of the supported national targeted programmes; (iii) gaps/weaknesses in the project design and necessary adjustments/additions.
Effectiveness: (i) progress of achieving project outputs; (ii) effectiveness of project activities; (iii) partnerships with government agencies and donors; (iv) project management; and (v) sustainability of the project achievements.
1.2.2 Scope of evaluation:

The evaluation effort will focus on: (i) 5 outputs as stated in the project result framework; (ii) new arising issues; (iii) contribution of project to achieving Output 1 of the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) and Output 1.1 of the One UN Plan.

1.3. Approach and Methodology

While the project was designed as a common framework to provide technical support to two programmes with shared objective of poverty reduction, two programmes are characterized by different structure, design features and implementation mechanisms. On the one hand, the evaluation team conducted a combined evaluation of two programmes in consideration of their differences; on the other hand, a dynamic evaluation of five key outputs as designed in the Project Result Framework was adopted, with analysis of changing context since the initial design, in order to assess the relevance and effectiveness of the project support activities, which then serves as the basis for recommendations to improve effectiveness of the project interventions in the new context.

In order to obtain sufficient information for the evaluation work, the team (i) collected and reviewed relevant secondary information and documents with the assistance of UNDP office, Project Management Unit at MOLISA and CEMA, to better understand the backgrounds, rationale and performance of project VIE/02/001 and the supported national targeted programmes on poverty reduction, and to identify the key issues to be addressed (List of references is provided in Annex 6); (ii) collected secondary information through in-depth interviews with key staff of relevant central agencies and representatives of selected donors to gather feedbacks of stakeholders on the relevance and effectiveness of the project, verify the issues identified through document review, and obtain comments on recommendations aimed at improving the project support in the coming period. As the evaluation was conducted in a short period of time at the end of the year, the evaluation team failed to some provinces as planned in the beginning, and could not access some relevant agencies. Nevertheless, the team managed to meet with representatives of some provinces involved in project pilot activities at the P135-2 Mid-term Review Workshop held in Hanoi in late November, to discuss their needs and expectations regarding the project technical assistance to provinces in the coming time.

1.4. Report structure

Section 1 provides an overview of the project and evaluation methodology. To better understand changes in the socio-economic situation after 3 years of implementation against the original design, a context analysis is provided in Section 2. Section 3 evaluates the project performance, looking into the support activities for their relevance and effectiveness against the five key outputs of the result framework. This section also considers the issues of coordination, partnership, project management, use of resources and working method of the project. Key findings from the analysis and evaluation of project performance are provided in Section 4. Section 5 presents lessons learnt and recommendations on measures and adjustments to address the arising issues, in order to improve the effectiveness of project support to two programmes in the remaining period.
2. CONTEXT ANALYSIS

Significant poverty reduction outcomes were recognized after nearly 10 years of implementation of the National Targeted Programme on Poverty Reduction and Programme 135 phase 1. The Taking Stock, Planning Ahead Report in 2004 evaluating these two programmes provided useful findings and recommendations, which helped the design of the next phase of two programmes, serving also as the basis for designing project VIE/02/001 to provide technical assistance to the targeted programmes, in the context of unavailability of baseline data for the design work. The report noted, that despite impressive outcomes, the poverty reduction work in Vietnam was facing new challenges, such as (i) increasing inequality between urban and rural areas, between Kinh minority and ethnic minorities; (ii) poverty increasingly concentrated in remote and rural areas and among ethnic minorities; and (iii) risks to poverty reduction efforts including frequent natural disasters, epidemic diseases, and market changes. In that context, the effectiveness of two programmes is seriously constrained by limited capacities for (i) participatory and effective programme design, (ii) decentralized and participatory implementation and management including monitoring and financial management, and (iii) facilitating peoples' participation and building their capacities to monitor and supervise the implementation of two programmes.

It should be noted that in 2001, when project VIE/02/001 started its phase 1, the NTP-PR had already been approved, and the project was the only technical assistance for the programme. In period 2006-2010, the project was extended not only in time but also scope of support, to include also Programme 135 phase 2. However, attention should be drawn to the fact that the new project started when neither programme document had been approved, hence there was much work to do in terms of developing programme documents and relevant guidelines that require technical assistance. Both targeted programmes with new contents and approaches received significant attention of the donors. The project then was meant to become a common technical assistance framework for donors. However, in 2006 and 2007, UNDP remained the single donor providing technical assistance project to two programmes, and only in mid 2008 did Finland and IrishAid (late 2008) join in the TA to P135-2.

During project implementation, there have been a number of changes in the socio-economic situation in general, and in two programmes’ management and implementation framework in particular. The first important change was the shift from donor’s sectoral support to budget support to P135-2, which allows for greater concentration of resources for the programme, harmonization of procedures and especially improvement of the partnership relationship between the Government of Vietnam and the donors in policy dialogues to improve poverty reduction measures. On the other hand, to improve the institutional capacity in direction, management and coordination of national targeted programmes for poverty reduction, the Government decided to establish the Steering Committee for poverty reduction programmes led by a Deputy Prime Minister, and Coordination Offices of two programmes at two leading agencies – MOLISA and CEM. A Government-Donor Partnership Committee for P135-2 was also established in 2007. This presents new requirements for the role and capacity of CEM in coordination of M&E activities jointly with donors. These changes were not recorded in the initial project document, but play an important role for the project, as they prompted a number of TA needs for these mechanisms to function well.

Despite Vietnam’s spectacular outcomes in poverty reduction thanks to the impressive economic growth since early 1990s, the poverty reduction has slowed down in recent years, while the poverty gap has widened, especially between rural and urban areas, due to differences in participation in and benefits from economic growth of different population groups. These
increasing gaps mean that to sustain its poverty reduction achievements, Vietnam needs more complex and diversified poverty reduction policies. Poverty reduction efforts are also more difficult than before, requiring increased resources for poverty objective. In the meantime, the economic downturn in 2008, which is expected to stay in 2009 and maybe longer creates even greater pressure on social security and poverty reduction in general. All this implies that poverty policy making requires strong and fundamental shifts, from approaches to formulation of key principles and directions, as well as specific implementation measures. Technical assistance, including policy advice, information exchange and capacity building, therefore, plays an ever important role in poverty reduction work in general and implementation of national targeted programmes for poverty reduction in particular.

Contextual changes since the project design, with the involvement of donors supporting P135-2 in the form of budget support instead of conventional sectoral support, changes in institutional arrangements introduced by the Government, the strong decentralization trend in Vietnam and the issuance of Resolution 30a/2008/CP-NQ on Programme to support fast and sustainable poverty reduction in 61 poorest districts in December 2008\(^1\) (Resolution of 61 poorest districts) presents new requirements and issues to be addressed. At the national level, the Resolution requires the central agencies and line ministries to develop special policies and mechanisms to operate the programme, as well as to monitor and evaluate it. Strong decentralization, on the other hand, it requires the provincial and district governments to shift from direct management and implementation programme/project activities to providing technical assistance to the lower level, and maintain coordination with other levels to fulfill programme/project objectives. The capacity to undertake these two functions, especially at the district level, remains limited. One of the objectives of P135-2 is 100% of participating commune acting as investment owners by 2010. The mid-term evaluation shows that the number of communes currently acting as investment owners is still limited, with the common explanation by the provincial and district governments being that the commune officials and staff capacity is still limited. The Government’s determination in strengthening decentralization reflected in Directive 04/2008/CT-Ttg dated 25 January 2008 gives further emphasis on the needs for capacity building at the local levels.

Resolution on 61 districts was issued in late 2008, and huge resources are needed to implement this programme. This is a big challenge, given the current difficult economic situation with its negative impacts on people’s lives, and the foreseen reduction in concessional assistance from donors when Vietnam gets out from the poor countries list. The programme implementation is faced with resource risk, when the number of poor needing programme support increases and resources are likely more limited, accentuated by lack of local capacity, especially at the district level with the tasks of putting together the local needs, developing and implementing projects. Another risk for implementation of Resolution of 61 districts is institutional. The resolution was adopted in the context of other ongoing national targeted programmes, while the nature of the programme requires specific mechanisms, and this is a challenge to poverty policy making – how to balance between specific mechanisms for a specific programme on the one hand, and to ensure that poverty reduction interventions follow general directions and principles of decentralization, empowerment, transparency and improved grassroots democracy. These issues have not been resolved in the current format of the NTP-PR. Without a better mechanism to coordinate and integrate activities and resources for poverty reduction objective, the chronic concerns about fragmented, uncoordinated and ineffective efforts will remain valid.

\(^1\) The project role in this process is work on issues arising from NTP-PR to provide advice to the Government on improvements of design of Resolution on 61 districts. This is a flexible move, as this activity was not anticipated in the project design.
The above mentioned changes lead to changes in TA needs that the project can and is expected to provide. They are at the same time challenges, not only for implementation of the targeted programmes but also the TA project, as these issues could not be anticipated at the point of project design.
3. EVALUATION OF PROJECT PERFORMANCE

3.1. Relevance

3.1.1 Project Design

First and foremost, project VIE/02/001 is highly relevant to the practical needs of two targeted programmes, as it had been designed as an extension to the original VIE/02/001 on the basis of the Government of Vietnam’s request for TA for the programmes to ensure reasonable design and effective implementation. On the other hand, with the typical characteristic of UNDP’s TAs of policy advice and capacity building, the project is also relevant with respect to UNDP’s key functions as stated in the UN’s One Plan.

The project is designed to operate with the National Execution Modality (NEX) and programmatic approach, which is a relevant mechanism for the government to assume full ownership in identifying needs and suggesting TA activities, allowing for the relevant government agencies to fully participate in their respective area under the framework of the targeted programmes supported by the project. The TA activities have responded to support needs of partners and significantly contributed to design of two programmes, as well as development of corresponding implementation circulars and guidelines (See Annex 1 – Summary of Project VIE/02/001 Results). However, for the NEX modality to function efficiently, the ownership, initiatives and coordination capacity of the government agencies as the programme standing/leading agencies is very important. In particular instances, when the government agency initiated activities for TA support, the latter proved effective and making meaningful contributions; on the contrary, some partners did not demonstrate their ownership in identifying TA activities, therefore limiting project efficiency.

In the initial design, interventions were mainly concentrated at the national level, due to the most urgent needs of two programmes at the time being development of policies, programme documents and implementation guidelines. After 3 years of implementation, the programme policy frameworks have been basically completed and functioning well, and local implementation becomes more important. It is expected that project activities be increasingly redirected to supporting local governments to translate policies into reality. In P-135-2 component, three provinces have been selected to pilot local implementation. Design of activities continues to be based on actual needs of and identified by beneficiary, therefore it is important to engage local governments most effectively in designing activities. Local implementation has taken initial steps in 2008, however the actual performance is still limited. The reason might be that local governments are not yet familiar with the way the project operates and inexperienced in proactively identifying priorities for technical support or do not see how project products can be used most efficiently. Coordination, guidance and empowerment from Central PMU has not been

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2 As soon as P135-2 was approved, CEM promptly identified activities needing support, including development of inter-ministerial circular guiding programme implementation (Circular 676). During implementation, certain weaknesses in Circular 676 were revealed such as issues related to commune ownership, which prompted CEM to work with relevant ministries to develop Circular 01, which is highly appreciated by local governments. Early-defined TA activities in MOLISA component including annual process of poor household review and poverty reporting mechanism, studies on labor export, vocational training for the poor and housing support to the poor were effective. On the other hand, the support to development of guidelines on budget cost norms under NTP-PR included in 2007 Annual Work Plan was not conducted as MOF found it less necessary than other priorities. Another activity designed for 2007, which was support to the Bank of Social Policy in a research on intermediary credit and support the poor to establish their own institutions, was also found unnecessary and cancelled.
efficient. Lessons drawn from initial stage of project in working relations and coordination with central agencies should play an important role in working with local governments in the coming future, while local characteristics should also be taken into consideration for appropriate design. NPT-PR component, on the other hand, has not identified specific arrangements at the local level, partly for the too-broad design of the programme, and local support is not seen as a priority at the Coordination Office of NTP-PR. TA activities at local levels have been confined to regional TOTs on selected contents and programme management skills. Development, improvement and implementation of M&E system for programme implementation is not designed in the project, which could result in project difficult access to local implementation. This approach would pose challenges to project in measuring its impacts on staff capacity and effectiveness of management system as expected in the project design.

With regard to partnership, achievements in Vietnam’s poverty reduction programmes have attracted significant interest of international organizations and donors, and the project was designed with an expectation of becoming a common framework for donors to be engaged in technical assistance to the Government. This is also in line with the GOV’s commitments and the donors spelled out in Hanoi Core Statement regarding strengthened coordination between the government and development partners to reduce transaction costs, improve effectiveness and avoid duplication. While some donors are still running separate TA projects beyond the project result framework, a positive move has been taken recently: CEM with UNDP support has introduced a TA Plan in 2009 to facilitate implementation of P135-2, with activities and expected outputs clearly provided. This TA Plan has been consulted with relevant stakeholders, and the donors have defined their respective roles, in line with their objectives, resources and priorities. Especially, Irish Aid’s TA has been designed on the basis of optimal integration into UNDP-supported VIE/02/001 management system. This is an useful initiative, which is highly recommended for NTP-PR for a similar TA Plan. However, given this programme’s complexity, the initial step should be strengthening capacity and coordination between NTP-PR Coordination Office and the Department of Social Protection and other central agencies involved in programme implementation to make sure that designed activities respond to practical needs and provide really useful products for beneficiaries, which would add real value to the programme.

3.1.2 Outputs

The project design was built on considerations of situation at the designing time: effectiveness of two programmes was seriously constrained by limited capacities, in terms of limited institutional capacities, inadequate systems and staff skills. The extended project design was based on recommendations made in the UNDP-supported evaluation report “Taking Stock, Planning Ahead” in 2004 to focus on (i) establishment of monitoring and financial systems, (ii) research to support effective, informed and transparent design of programmes and implementation guidelines, and (iii) support to effective implementation of programme components via capacity building training and workshops, dissemination of information and lessons learnt. Once the gaps and weaknesses have been identified, the project designers developed corresponding activities to help solve the above mentioned problems.

Five specific outputs concerning five priority areas were identified, namely: (i) transparency and participation in design of programme and implementation guidelines; (ii) monitoring and evaluation; (iii) targeting and improved people’s participation; (iv) transparency in budget allocation and financial management; and (v) capacity building for officials and people. These outputs cover almost all areas of concern in implementation of two programmes in the first phase, and contributing to achieving Output 1.1 of UNDP Country Programme Document under One
UN Initiative: “Improved design and more effective implementation of NTP-PR and SEDEMA”.

In the first three years, the majority of TA activities were concentrated under Outputs 1, 2 and 5, while few activities were put under Outputs 3 and 4, especially for NTP-PR component. This might prompt a question over the relevance of these two outputs in the project design. However, it should be confirmed that strengthening targeting and participation to increase access and benefits of the poor, as well as transparency and participation in budget allocation and financial management systems are always crucial to the success of the programmes. The limited number of activities seen under these two outputs may be interpreted in several ways: (i) TA activities needed for development of targeting and participation mechanisms at the central level have been conducted in the first years of the project, where products have been used effectively by central agencies in issuance of fairly complete and clear guidelines. Programme effectiveness now relies on local implementation, therefore, technical assistance in this aspect (guideline development), if necessary, is no longer focused at the central level, or at least no longer primary priority. In the coming years, when the project shifts its focus to the local level, there will certainly be particular needs translated into project activities; (ii) some activities initially identified as necessary were then cancelled because of the rise of other priorities, or became no longer appropriate as specific sectoral policies or regulations are made available, leaving limited room for adjustment.

In the face of new evolvements in the project and programme context, adjustments are needed for project outputs and products to meet the practical needs. These outputs and products need both to contribute to effective implementation of two programmes, and to address arising issues, such as support to development of implementation mechanisms at the central level and capacity building at the local levels for implementation of Resolution of 61 poor districts. New implementation approaches beyond the conventional project activities can be considered.

3.1.3 Indicators

Some indicators provided in project result framework do not correspond to activities they were designed to measure. Or in other words, it is difficult to use these indicators to measure effectiveness of designed activities. Many indicators are indeed to measure effectiveness of the programmes that the project is supposed to support, rather than effectiveness of the project itself.

The mentioned lack of correspondence may be the result of the way the project result framework was designed. The indicators were identified according to project outputs, therefore meant to measure output-related aspects, while few were specified to measure project activities. While this is a logical way of designing project result framework as project activities were at the time uncertain or unavailable, it certainly causes difficulties for monitoring and evaluation, as there are not adequate date for evaluation at programme level, given the project evaluation scope and resources.

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3 In 2005, under NTP-PR component support to development of poor household review and poverty reporting system was conducted. In 2007, MOLISA issued Circular No.04 04/2007/TB-L&D TBXH on annual review of poor households and poverty reporting. Under P135-II component, research on mechanisms and processes for graduation and participation was conducted, whose products were used for development of Circular 676, Decisions 163 and 164 of the Prime Minister on the list of graduating and participating communes in P135-II.

4 For example, there is a view that fragmented, uncoordinated activities in some provinces would not be as useful as a creating of a broader Poverty Forum, for at least a cluster of provinces in one region, to serve as a platform for information dissemination and knowledge exchange, raising and discussing policy issues and options, as well as conduct of capacity building activities for local staff. Creating of such a forum is not necessarily more costly than conventional piloting activities as it will be a good start to mobilize resources from interested parties. However, lack of motivation may be an obstacle to this idea.
For this reason, indicators in the project document need to be reviewed and revised, which will better facilitate the final project evaluation. In 2008, PMU started development of a system for annual indicators and targets for specific outputs under the annual plan framework, and this work continues in 2009 with consideration of contextual changes and necessary adjustments.

### 3.2 Effectiveness

Project support activities were designed on the basis of actual needs identified by partners involved in programme implementations, therefore project products have generally contributed to improved implementation of the programmes – to various extents. The extent of contribution of some project products in certain cases may be more difficult to define, especially in terms of research aimed at supporting development of policies and implementation guidelines, if compared with training, workshops or capacity building activities. However, a quantitative assessment based on document review and interviews with key officials at relevant government agencies shows that even when the use of results or recommendations of TA-supported research is not officially reflected in specific documents, but the spirit and ideas of these recommendations have actually been reflected in improved policy documents\(^5\), and for a technical assistance project, this is enough to confirm the project positive impact on beneficiaries.

General assessment shows that TA activities/products have contributed to achieving project outcome, as well as Output 1 of *UN Development Framework* “Equitable, inclusive and more sustainable economic growth” and Output 1.1 of *UNDP Country Programme Document* under One UN Initiative: “Improved design and effective implementation of NTP-PR and SEDEMA” through effective contributions to initially designed outputs (see Annex 1 for details: Project Implementation Results);

#### 3.2.1 Progress

Progress of activities implementation and delivery of products of project VIE 02/001 is an issue, as many activities were delayed or implemented slowly, which affected project effectiveness; some delays or slow implementation even neutralized the effectiveness of the activity.

Project progress in 2006-2008 were heavily affected by challenges arising during implementation, including (i) staffing challenge in both components; (ii) UN-EU cost norms were lower than prevailing market rates, causing difficulties to recruitment of qualified and experienced consultants; (iii) UNDP procedures are considered demanding and more complicated than some other donor-funded TAs, resulting in delays; (iv) delay in Government’s approval of NTP-PR\(^6\), and UNDP’s approval of annual plans for NTP-PR; (v) late approval and assignment of government staff to cooperate in implementation and slow acceptance process from beneficiary agency in SEDEMA component; and (v) difficulties in identifying TA needs among relevant government agencies, while the coordination role of MOLISA and CEM as project implementing agencies in relation with other government agencies participating in two programmes has not

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\(^5\) Recommendations of research on increased people’s participation in NTP-PR period 2006-2010 and Incentives for poverty reduction, identification of drivers and barriers to the poor’s access to policies and programmes, while not having been institutionalized into policies or mechanisms, have been mainstreamed into Training Manuals of NTP-PR and used by MOLISA as inputs for development of poverty reduction strategy by 2020.

\(^6\) NTP-PR was expected to be approved in 2006, but the Prime Minister did not approve the programme until 5 February 2007, after budget planning and allocation for programmes, which made programme implementers to redirect project TA interventions; which explains why many project activities were delayed.
been strong enough, as there are too many agencies involved, especially for NTP-PR.

3.2.2 Evaluation of Specific Outputs

Output 1: The targeted programmes for poverty reduction and its implementation guidelines are designed in a transparent and participatory manner, are gender-sensitive and take into account the lessons of the evaluation

Under this Output, the project has made significant contribution and created added value to design and development of implementation guidelines for both programmes. Through project activities, both programme documents as well as implementation guidelines were developed with all relevant ministries involved and widely consulted with local governments and donors. Both programme documents were also designed on the basis of considering lessons drawn from evaluations of the previous phase of two programmes. However, given the differences of two programmes, contributions to P135-II seemed clearer. Four components of P135-II, their contents, targeted beneficiaries and budget allocation are clear, which makes it easier to identify specific TA needs. Furthermore, the donors’ interest and decision to provide budget support to P135-II was linked with a policy matrix and series of policy actions required form the programme to strengthen implementation effectiveness under an agreed Result Framework, and conduct of annual joint reviews by the Government and the donors, which leads to recommendations on policy improvements to adapt to programme implementation realities. This policy framework and recommendation updates help facilitate identification of TA needs and activities. As a result, activities are designed with specific objectives, high applicability, hence more positive evaluation of intervention effectiveness. On the other hand, for NTP-PR, some lessons and recommendations of previous evaluations were not taken into responsive account. The new design was not much different from the previous one, still a big, complex programme with many implementing agencies and a financial allocation mechanism totally different from that of P135-II. Policies and projects under this programme are implemented within an established framework of each sector, therefore the room for improvement and adjustment is more limited than that of P135-II. What is found difficult for this component of the TA is to identify the objective for improvement and the feasibility of introducing recommended changes into programme’s policies and projects. This depends a great deal on policy making and commitments of sectors involved in programme implementation, where difficulties in coordination by the NTP-PR Coordination Office are a big challenge to designing project outputs. As such, it is important to be able to identify important TA

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7 Support activities include (i) direct support to development of programme implementation guidelines (guidelines for programme components; programme implementation guiding manual; revision of Inter-ministerial circular 676; improvement of policies and mechanisms for the poor (education, health, vocational training, housing) under NTP-PR; (ii) support to consultations on programme documents (national consultations on P135-II documents; consultations for development of implementation guidelines; regional and local consultations on NTP-PR documents); and (iii) support to research (evaluation of P135-I performance; studies for mid-term evaluation of two programmes; research on participatory planning…)
8 Some lessons drawn from previous phase provided in Taking Stock, Planning Ahead report in 2004 were not taken in the NTP-PR documents (eg. recommendation on development of a transparent and manageable budget allocation mechanism for provinces; development of incentives by linking resource allocation with performance; development of mechanisms to improve transparency and accountability in financial management; improvement of programme design for easier management by reducing number of component policies, such as separating social policies (education, health) from NTP and treat them as regular, ongoing tasks of line ministries).
9 Public Expenditure Review in 2 NTP-PR (December 2008) shows that while resources for P135-II mainly comes from the central state budget in a clear, transparent manner directly to communes, villages and programme components, the portion of resources coming from the state budget in NTP-PR accounts to only 6.2% of the total approved budget estimates; budget allocation criteria for some components are not clear (agricultural and forestry extension) and investments use different channels (directly to the programme and/or directly to sectors)
activities, that can create added value and “breakthrough” solutions to policies and projects under NTP-PR; and it is also important to identify clear focal points responsible for programme implementation at relevant agencies.

The effective implementation of project has resulted primarily from its relevant and timely design which is highly responsive to the beneficiaries’ needs. Second, the programme design was relevant and improved on the basis of lessons learnt, attracting donors’ interest on the one hand, and helping easier and clearer identification of TA needs. Third, annual monitoring missions provided recommendations for timely adjustments and development of more appropriate and useful activities. Fourth, project products have been timely incorporated into development of programme policies and implementation guidelines.

Output 2: Efficient and participatory M&E systems at central and local levels established to systematically monitor progress of the targeted programmes on poverty reduction and disseminate outputs timely to the wider public and policy makers for continuously increasing program effectiveness

Building on evaluations of previous phase of programme implementation, M&E systems for both programmes have been established and institutionalized. Contributions of this output have been highly appreciated by many ministries and relevant stakeholders. Establishment of M&E systems is a big step, not only in comparison with the previous phase (2001-2005) of both programmes, but also in comparison with other NTPs. Project contributions would be more effective under this output should there are more activities in the coming time to support implementation at local levels. Despite the project support to regional and provincial TOTs to launch the set of indicators and M&E systems, it seems that the support has not been adequate and there are still gaps in implementation. Research for mid-term review of NTP-PR shows that “the system of poverty monitoring and assessment has not been popularized, lacking conditions for implementation, leading to limited M&E performance”, and “At present, there is very limited commune participation in NTP-PR supervision. People are involved mostly in surveys, identifying poor households and households that get out of poverty every year. Other activities, due to limited information, involve limited commune and people participation”.

Current monitoring is basically monitoring of practice (compliance with policies, accuracy of targeting) rather than monitoring for indicators. The current staff capacity is not sufficient to meet the demand. For this reason, it is recommended that project support in the coming time should focus on (i) support to dissemination of M&E systems; (ii) continued support to TOTs on use of indicators and M&E, and (iii) support to pilot provinces in implementation of M&E and use of indicators.

Nevertheless, the delay of baseline survey on P135-II has influenced on Output 2 effectiveness. Should this baseline survey have been conducted at the beginning of programme phase 2, it would have contributed significantly to the programme mid-term evaluation. For various reasons,

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10 In the previous period 2001-2005, the TA was designed after the NTP-PR had been developed and approved.
11 Positive evidence are circulars and guidelines of both programmes, such as Circular 676, Circular 01, criteria for communes to act as investment owners, to participate in and graduate from P135-II etc. On the contrary, some research products have not been taken into account and institutionalised which hinders local implementation. Research on NTP-PR implementation mechanism conducted by ILSSA (December 2008) shows that some aspects of the programme lack implementation guidelines, such as near-poor criteria for health insurance card subsidy; or incentives for poverty reduction.
the survey results could only be made available until the mid-term evaluation had been completed, therefore the data now can only be expected to serve the final evaluation of the programme in 2010. On the other hand, part of these baseline data come from GSO’s VHLSS 2006, and the analysis was not completed until 2008, while there have been dramatic changes between 2006 and 2008 in economic and social terms, which have influenced people’s lives and poverty picture.

At CEM component, at the outset of the programme, the project supported CEM to develop implementation roadmap for P135-II, which also serves as the basis for annual planning. In the meantime, NTP-PR roadmap was not developed until mid 2007, which is seen as an obstacle to identification of TA needs for this component.

**Output 3: Effective mechanisms for improved targeting and participation are in place that enhance the access of poor men, women and children to and their benefits from the targeted programmes**

On the basis of annual plans and reports, it seems that the number designed under Output 3 has been limited, which could have affected the performance of this output. On the one hand, this can be explained as in the previous section on relevance; on the other hand, a number of activities could have been put under different outputs, for example support to development of targeting mechanism in the form of a guiding document (Circular 01 for P135-II or Circular 042007/TT-BLĐTBXH for NTP-PR) were put under Output 1, while in nature they could have been put under Output 3. In addition, when two programmes are compared, P135-II component does have more activities than NTP-PR component. Again, the differences in programme design, nature of activities and regulations established for separate sectors under NTP-PR might be used to explain this.

**Output 4. Transparent and participatory budget allocation and financial management systems established and used for targeted poverty reduction programs**

The project has made contributions to improved resource allocation and financial management of both programmes. Improvements have been made under P135-II, with clearer and more transparent resource allocation and improved financial management to facilitate local implementation, however budget allocation criteria for districts and communes have not been developed. On the other hand, there remain many issues with regard to NTP-PR, despite certain improvements in budget allocation and financial management. Therefore, there are potentials for technical support to this output, which depends a great deal on the pro-activeness and commitments of relevant agencies.

**Output 5: Improved capacity of responsible programme staffs, including the people themselves, for more effective and participatory decentralized local level planning, implementation and monitoring of the targeted programmes for poverty reduction at all levels**

It is also acknowledged that the project has contributed actively to capacity building of leading agencies of two NTPs, both in policy making and programme implementation, as well as monitoring and evaluation. Not only staff in the two project components, but also staff of two

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14 Transparency in budget allocation in some projects/components (eg. agricultural extension); no information available on financial allocations for the programme during the whole period; It is hard to know the actual budget allocation and if expenses correspond to what is received from the central budget; etc. (Public Expenditure Review under NTP-PR, December 2008)
programme leading agencies have benefited from capacity improvement through project activities and active working with project and programme partners\textsuperscript{15}. Especially, CEM’s ownership and pro-activeness have improved significantly in the second phase of the programme in relation to development partners. Project VIE/02/001 is considered as a bridge between CEM and the donors, helping reduce lots of pressure on this agency, given its limited resources and huge workload.

A communication strategy for P135-II was developed, and CEM closely works with VTV and VOV in dissemination of the programme contents and messages to ethnic minority people. This is the result of the project support and is highly appreciated by relevant stakeholders. It is also a useful experience for NTP-PR for possible replication in the future\textsuperscript{16}.

3.2.3 Coordination and Partnership

Partnership is an important factor to ensure success of a TA project. Under this project, partnerships can be considered from three perspectives: partnership between UNDP and government agencies; partnership among government agencies; and partnership among donors. From the first perspective, UNDP has developed close relationship with Government’s agencies and gained their trust. While being very active in raising issues and involved in dialogues, UNDP has always reserved the proactive position for the government agencies, in line with the national execution principle. Many have expressed the expectation that UNDP be the focal point from the donor side so that assistance from these development partners can be provided in a focused, systematic, coordinated and coherent manner.

Partnership among government agencies, on the other hand, has plenty of room for improvement. Objectively speaking, both NTPs supported by project VIE02001 are big, complex multi-sectoral programmes, and given the huge workload in each sector, fragmentation and sometimes negligence are not difficult to understand. Subjectively, poor coordination is a long-standing issue in the relationship between Vietnam’s central agencies. In donor-funded projects, it is not unusual that the sectoral agencies have better coordination with the donor, but poorer coordination among themselves. Furthermore, identification of a stable focal point to follow up project in one central agency is sometimes hard, and information may not have been communicated effectively to decision makers, which is one of the reasons behind lower than expected performance.

Project VIE/02/001 is expected to become a common mechanism for the donors to provide technical assistance for the two NTPs. In this aspect, more needs to and can be done to improve the project role and bring more benefits to the programmes. The relationships between donors have been encouraging in supporting two NTPs and there has been a high level of agreement in support directions. At present, P135-II Coordination Office at CEM is running two TAs, and many donors are expressing their interests in supporting the geographical areas covered by P135;

\textsuperscript{15} CEM has been proactive in developing implementation roadmap – a new approach in implementation of NTPs. CEM has also shown major improvements in application of participatory approach in consultations with stakeholders before issuance of circulars, decisions; stakeholders comments have been considered and incorporated in circulars and guidelines of the programme. Both P135-II and NTP-PR are the first NTPs to have good, detailed M&E systems developed by officials of the programme leading agencies.

\textsuperscript{16} Research on Capacity Assessment of district and commune poverty reduction staff (December 2008) of ILSSA (MOLISA) shows that at the commune level, only 60% of cadres are aware of Party’s and Government’s policies on poverty reduction and can identify tasks of local cadres in this work, while 40% are not. Another research also conducted by ILSSA shows that for poor communication of the programme, a significant number of targeted population are not informed of some policies/components of the programme, for example 25% of respondents are not informed of the vocational training project for the poor; 40% of household have needs for legal assistance but have not received support due to lack of information; 12% do not receive education support for lack of information.
and given its position and reputation, UNDP has taken care of coordination and adjustment of its agenda to accommodate other donors’ interests, in order to improve coordination. Existence of a comprehensive TA framework is particularly useful for donors to plan their interventions in accordance with their own purposes, requirements and capacities, avoiding overlaps, reducing transaction costs and ensuring better coordination among themselves, as well as with the Government. With UNDP TA support, CEM has drafted a P135-II Joint TA Plan in with stakeholders. It would take time to implement and evaluate the performance of the plan, as well as to develop and run a similar plan for NTP-PR. For this purpose, apart from UNDP’s support and promotion, initiatives from NTP-PR Coordination Office are crucial.

3.2.4 Project Management and Working Method

Project management has faced with many challenges. The national execution modality has the advantage of government ownership and decision making power, resulting in support activities closely linked with beneficiary’s practical needs; however it also has a disadvantage of weak mechanism of government accountability. In case a government agency is not active, project activities will be at risk, and depend on the commitments of individuals involved in the activity. Moreover, this modality also requires strong capacity from partner agencies to identify accurate TA needs, or/and a strong coordination agency, which is powerful enough to coordinate and consolidate TA needs from all partners.

The project provides TA to two NTPs in different mechanisms (CEM leads P135-II in coordination with donors, while MOLISA leads NTP-PR with involvement of other central agencies and mass organizations). Correspondingly, there are two project components, and different programme implementation arrangements and institutions have resulted in different issues in coordination. Observations show that mobilization of policy making officials of the programme Coordination Office in direct management of project is a major advantage, because identification of project activities is well informed of programme activities and policy directions and needs, resulting in well designed activities and optimal use of products. On the contrary, the lack of policy making or programme coordination officials is a disadvantage, because development of activities was not well-informed and not raised by policy makers, which might have led to limited use of project TA products.

Project regulations ad procedures in recruiting consultants and contracting are another source of difficulties. Independent consultants without limited experience of policy making and public administration are less likely to provide products suitable to state management needs, and in a difficult position to have influence on relevant policies. Restrictions in using TA fund for direct support also discourage participation of some agencies, which might again have resulted in reduced policy influence. Some consultants are of poor quality, which explain why product quality is low and not meeting the requirements. Recruitment of consultants on individual basis is not suitable to certain TA forms, causing issues such as lack of coordination, reduced utilization

17 P135-II component PMU benefits from involvement of officials of CEM’s Policy Department. Feedbacks on application of implementation guidelines have been timely reflected to policy makers and taken into consideration for document revision (Circular 01 adjusting Circular 676) or communicated to other relevant government agencies for prompt actions (e.g. State Treasury issued a special mechanism of fund allocation for production development component). On the contrary, NTP-PR does not have policy making officials involved in direct management and faced with more difficulties in using project products for policy making (e.g. results of research on financing agricultural extension has not been translated into policy as these are independent consultant’s recommendations only, rather than suggested by policy makers). It is agreed that policy influence is limited in absence of policy makers in project management.
of consultant products by beneficiary in case no staff from this agency is directly involved in TA or provides suggestions. In addition to consultant issue, lack of human resources and cumbersome procedures in recruiting admin staff and managers in general are seen as obstacles to project progress and consultant quality.

Human resources has always been a challenge to project, especially under NTP-PR component. The project has experienced significant staff turnover, including long-term international consultant, project manager and some administrative support positions. Lengthy UNDP’s procedures for recruitment and uncompetitive cost norms are obstacles to recruitment of project staff. From the programme implementing agencies, appointment of staff to PMU has faced with difficulties, mainly due to limited resources of the focal unit and the excessive workload. Moreover, sectoral ministries involved in implementation of NTPs cannot ensure stable focal points to work with the project, which results in ineffective coordination.

4 KEY FINDINGS

1. Evaluation confirms relevance and effectiveness of project VIE/02/001 in contributing to design, development of programme documents and guidelines. Project activities have made positive impacts and contributed to development of policies for the poor. Capacity of staff involved in implementation and benefiting from project has been improved in various aspects, including consultation-based policy making, development of instruments and implementation of programme M&E, improved ownership and accountability. Identification of TA activities in the first two years of project life was fairly easy as both programmes then focused on development of programme documents and implementation guidelines. However, the project focus shifts to support to effective implementation, meaning that support activities are redirected towards local implementation levels. At this point, considerations are necessary to select the right support modalities and scopes to ensure optimal effectiveness with the given resources.

2. Effectiveness of project activities under two components has been mixed. While activities under P135-II seem to better respond to the programme specific needs and more effective, contributions of activities under NTP-PR seem to be more difficult to measure. One way to explain this different performance is the different structure and nature of the two programmes. P135-II has four components with clearly defined funding, the donors provide budget support with a specific policy framework, which facilitates the programme implementing agency to identify TA needs; fewer implementing agencies and better structured design also facilitates coordination; while NTP-PR has 11 policies/projects implemented within established sectoral framework of various line ministries, different financial allocation mechanism from that of P135-II, less room for adjustment of the established sectoral policy framework, therefore identification of TA needs as well as use of project products for policy improvement is more difficult. On the other hand, it seems that findings and recommendations of previous evaluations have been taken and reflected in P135-II design more clearly than in NTP-PR. One of the recommendations of Taking Stock, Planning Ahead Report in 2004 was to separate social protection policies from the NTP-PR, as these are sectoral policies and should be integrated in the sector’s regular work rather than separated in an NTP, which complicates management and coordination. This recommendation was highly appreciated by many interested parties, however the subsequent design of NTP-PR did not change.

3. Even though the project is identified for both central and local levels, but the activities assessed as effective so far are mainly concentrated at the national level, including supports to programme design, development of implementation guidelines, improvement of management mechanisms, development of M&E systems, budget allocation and capacity building. Few activities have been
organized at the local levels, except for some TOTs. In the meantime, both programmes have
been undergone half of their lives, and supports are needed to take stock, assessment and sharing
good practices. While it might be argued that the focus of the project is to contribute to policy
making and institutionalization at the national level to bring about strongest influence on the
programmes as a whole, but when the policy framework has been fairly completed, the pressure
of achieving programme objectives is now on the implementation role of the local levels. In the
coming period, the implementation of Resolution of 61 poor districts places even greater
emphasis on capacity building for local levels, and a need for a major, separate TA for this
purpose may be considered.

4. The project is highly appreciated for its contribution to development of an M&E system for the
two NTPs, or training and capacity building for using the systems. However, the project itself
does not have a complete M&E framework, which makes monitoring of the project performance
and level of achieving set targets and objectives for subsequent planning and adjustments
difficult. While annual planning since 2008 has become more concrete with introduction of
specific indicators to monitor performance, many indicators provided in the initial project result
framework remain either indicators to measure the two NTPs rather than the project, or indicators
meant to measure project impact rather than outputs or outcome, which are difficult to measure
within the project timeframe and resources. In the meantime, project inputs and products are not
recorded in a traceable, clear, available and accessible manner (See Appendix 2 for details).

5. Project VIE/02/001 operates in the National Execution Modality, in which the Government
assumes decision making. The project is also expected to be a common mechanism for the donors
to use to provide technical assistance for both NTPs on poverty reduction. This is particularly
relevant in the spirit of Hanoi Core Statement when the Government and the donors are
committed to harmonization and simplification to reduce transaction cost, improved country
ownership and alignment to the country system, and improved mutual accountability. Project
VIE/02/001 is in a good position to assume this role, thanks to UNDP’s advantages and
reputation as a leading donor in policy support and advisor to the Government of Vietnam. With
UNDP’s support, CEM has taken initiative in developing a TA Plan for P135-II implementation,
as a common framework to mark roles for donors. This approach should be replicated for NTP-
PR, but it should be noted that given the complexity of the programme and the constrained
capacity of government agencies both in proactive identification of TA needs and coordination
with other players, coordination role of UNDP is very important.

5. LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Lessons Learnt

1. Programme design and learning of lessons from evaluations for a good design is very important
to attract donor’s interest. P135-II has better, clearer design compared to the last period with
specific projects/components. Programme budget allocation is clear and transparent to
components and to communes/villages. Building on lessons learnt and recommendations from
evaluations and other programmes, P135-II design addresses issues of common interest of the
Government and donors, including strengthened decentralization, openness and transparency.
Significant improvements have been made (broadened targeting to extremely difficult villages;
fund allocation to capacity building component increased; fund to O&M allocated; M&E system
developed and baseline survey conducted…) which helped to attract donor’s interests, evidenced
by increased funding for the programme through the donors’ budget support, and establishment of
the Partnership Committee between the Government and the donors for P135-II in 2007. Policy
dialogues led by the Partnership Committee have also helped identify TA needs. On the contrary, NTP-PR design does not really make it a programme, and does not show major improvements compared to the previous phase. It is still complex with components managed by multiple agencies as analyzed before, which makes it difficult to see room for improvement. This hinders attraction of donor’s interest and causes difficulties in identifying TA needs.

2. Regular and periodical monitoring of programme implementation is important to introduce timely adjustment/additions. Experience with P135-II shows that recommendations of joint programme progress review conducted by the Government and donors have been taken into consideration by CEM. They also provide basis for identification of TA needs in line with the programme activities.

3. Involvement of policy making officials is crucial to the success of the project. Thorough analysis has been provided in the previous section.

5.2. Recommendations

1. Project future activities should give more emphasis on support to improve programme implementation. To reduce the number of activities and ensure improved effectiveness, focus should be given to activities typical for poverty reduction projects. Also, in support to Government’s development of poverty policy, support should be given to research on how to separate social protection policies from NTP-PR.

2. Attention should be given to strengthened coordination with local levels in identification of TA needs in the coming period. It should be noted that local agencies have not been familiar with the project and its approach, as well as how to identify needs in line with project objectives and principles. Therefore, local governments need support in identifying needs and separating TA and direct support to avoid unnecessary expectations, which is common in the initial phase of a TA project.

3. In the last two years, TA needs to be strengthened to the local levels in (i) support to development/improvement of local policies and mechanisms; (ii) capacity building to local staff and people, through TOTs; (iii) development of models for sharing experience and lessons learnt; (iv) support to stock-taking of experiences and best practices, information sharing and study tours. Research shows that one of the drivers for good implementation of NTPs is that policies/mechanisms for implementation and guidelines (including training materials) are “localized” and tailored to local needs and conditions. In reality, even though a large number of policies and guidelines have been developed and local authorities have been assigned to develop detailed and localized guidelines, many provinces have not done this properly.

4. To facilitate project progress monitoring and evaluation, it is necessary to review, revise and

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18 Under CEM component, initial activities were started with 3 pilot provinces in late 2007, but results so far have been minimal. One of the reasons is that specific activities meeting both the project objectives and mechanisms and local urgent needs have not been identified. NTP-PR Component has not yet even started at the local level.

19 Research on participatory planning and resource allocation in P135-II commissioned by Finland; research on factors for effective implementation of P135-II commissioned by AusAID.

20 For example, development of fund allocation criteria; training programme for P135-II while CEM has issued guidelines (Circular 01; Decision No.04/2007/QD-UBDT on Core Training Programme for local officers and community.
rearrange some of the initially designed indicators. It is important to distinguish between various result levels which the indicators are designed to measure, and on that basis to identify appropriate indicators to suit project M&E objectives, as well as the available resources and scope. A more appropriate set of indicators for the project framework is provided in Table 1. In 2009, there need to be some activities to review and sort out project products as a database for evaluation, based on the mentioned revised M&E framework.

5. Development of TA Plan for NTP-PR needs to be done in a similar way to P135-II. But for the complexity of the programme, special attention needs to be paid to coordination between MOLISA and other ministries involved in NTP-PR to ensure a meaningful TA framework. These TA frameworks are useful instruments for enhancing coordination mechanism between the Government and the donors and partnerships among all stakeholders.

6. To be prepared for implementation of Programme of 61 districts, a number of support activities can be considered at both central and local levels: At the central level, support can be made to programme implementing agencies in identifying TA needs for development and revision of necessary policies for implementation; mechanisms to integrate Programme of 61 districts with other existing NTPs and SEDP. Support to designing implementation of Programme of 61 districts should be built on recommendations of the Mid-term Evaluation of NTP-PR so as to minimize the issues faced by NTP-PR. At the local levels, supports can focus on development of policies and implementation mechanisms, capacity building via TOTs, development of models for learning, sharing information and exchanging knowledge for replication of good practices. Support to TA needs analysis to design a large-scale Capacity Building Project to promote implementation of Programme of 61 districts might also be considered.

7. Finally, for optimal use of project resources, full use should be made of every opportunity to enhance coordination with other donors in providing TA for the Government, so as to create best value of the spent resources. In the meantime, it is necessary to review cost norms and regulations of consultant use within possible capacity, in order to access quality consultants for project activities, as well as to engage experienced experts from the Government or those who have influence on policy making.

Some specific recommendations on possible activities under two project components are presented in Annex 3 and 4.
### Annex 1. SUMMARY OF PROJECT OUTPUTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main outputs/activities</th>
<th>Results for the Government</th>
<th>Project contributions</th>
<th>Performance versus expectation</th>
<th>Recommendations for future improvement</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>OUTPUT 1:</strong> The targeted programmes for poverty reduction and its implementation guidelines are designed in a transparent and participatory manner, are gender-sensitive, and take into account the lessons of the evaluation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Support the Government to develop program documents</td>
<td>- Program documents of the two program approved by the Government (Program 135-II approved in January 2006 and National Target Program for Poverty Reduction in May 2007)</td>
<td>With the project supports, program documents were developed with the participation of relevant government ministries, agencies; and comment inputs from local levels as well as contributions of donors. Program documents were also designed taking into accounts lessons learnt from performance assessment results of previous program phase. The project has made great contributions to the Government, ministries and agencies to timely and efficiently develop program document and implementation guidelines.</td>
<td>- Some lessons in previous phase performance evaluation reports namely Evaluation and Planning Ahead Report 2004 were not followed up in program documents of the NTP-PR program (e.g. separation of social security polices like educational and healthcare policies out of the Program)</td>
<td>- The project should support studies to split social security policies out of the NTP-PR program so that the Government can use those study results as basis for the design of next phase or formulation of better poverty reduction policies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Support the development of policies and implementation guidelines for the two programs.</td>
<td>Circulars and implementation guidelines for the two programs issued by relevant ministries and agencies. + Program 135-II: Inter-ministerial Circular No.676; No.01 providing guideline for</td>
<td></td>
<td>As expected.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main outputs/activities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Support research studies to develop program policies and implementation</td>
<td>the implementation of Program 135-II; Roadmap, Strategic Training Plan; Communication Strategy, Investment Manual for Investment Owner at Commune level, Financial management guideline, Guideline of AMT/PMT Monitoring and Evaluation Instruments Use, Bidding and Procurement Manual, Training Material on 11 topics, Program Implementation Guideline etc. + NTP-PR program: Implementation roadmap and Results Framework, Financial Management Guideline, completion of education, housing, employment training and legal support for the poor policy; Communication framework and training materials; Program Training Materials etc.</td>
<td>Some studies have positively contributed to the development of policies, implementation guidelines, for example study on criteria</td>
<td>Some studies have indicated lessons learnt, recommendations for improvement but the incorporation of such recommendations into</td>
<td>Implementation agencies should be active in voicing their demand for technical assistance. The project should have an</td>
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<td>guidelines with high quality.</td>
<td>special policy to support the poor in Mekong delta.</td>
<td>for communes to be investment owners, procedures and mechanism to indentify the poor commune’s access to benefit the program; study on labour exportation.</td>
<td>government policies remain limited or contribution level is not clearly defined, such as study on community development fund, study to improve agriculture extension policy and incentive mechanism for the poor, development of agriculture extension cost limits; study on incentive mechanism for the poor and poor commune ridders;</td>
<td>appropriate mechanism to encourage the participation of policy makers in project studies.</td>
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</table>

**OUTPUT 2.** More participatory and efficient M&E systems at central and local levels established to systematically monitor progress of the poverty-targeted programmes and disseminate outputs timely to the wider public and policy makers for continuously increasing program effectiveness

Support the development of M&E indicators and a comprehensive M&E system

<p>| Developed M&amp;E systems and indicators were approved and used in the two programs (Decision No. 1053/2007 dated 23/7/2007 on monitoring and evaluation framework for the NTP-PR program and Decision No. 23/2007 dated 5/10/2007 on the application of M&amp;E indicators for the NTP-PR program of the MOLISA; Decision No. 04/2008-UBDT on the application of forms and reporting formats for Program | Project contributions are highly appreciated by ministries, agencies and other stakeholders. | Good |</p>
<table>
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<tr>
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</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Support the design and implementation of baseline survey for monitoring and evaluation purpose in Program 135-II</td>
<td>Baseline survey results of Program 135-II has completed. CRC instrument was trialed in the mid-term evaluation. Mid-term evaluation of the two programs was designed based on the joint coordination between two program executive agencies.</td>
<td>Support the design and implementation of baseline survey and data analysis</td>
<td>Slow progress leads to impossibility to conduct a second survey in the mid-term evaluation. It is expected to be used for final evaluation. Some results were extracted from 2006 surveys, therefore, there is a concern over its meaning as socio-economic conditions have greatly changed in Vietnam in the two recent years.</td>
<td>Baseline survey results need to be reviewed to identify appropriate data/numbers and to design for the second baseline survey at end of program Main findings and policy recommendations from mid-term assessment reports should be incorporated into policy dialogue agenda with government authority and donors. The follow up of these recommendations will greatly contribute to the development of a mechanism to implement 61 districts Resolution and create a foundation framework for poverty reduction policies in the future stages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support the implementation of M&amp;E indicators and M&amp;E system</td>
<td></td>
<td>ToT training supports by provinces (NTP-PR program) and by regions (Program 135-II) received good feedbacks.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main outputs/activities</td>
<td>Results for the Government</td>
<td>Project contributions</td>
<td>Performance versus expectation</td>
<td>Recommendations for future improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td><strong>OUTPUT 3.</strong> Effective mechanisms for improved targeting and participation are in place that enhance the poor men’s and women’s access to, benefits from and participating in all stages of the poverty targeted programmes</td>
<td>Circular No. 04/2007/TT-BLĐTBXH on the procedures to identify poor households annually and poverty line reporting system was issued by the MoLISA on 28 February 2007. Decision No.163, 164 by the Prime Minister on the list of communes completing and benefiting Program 135-II; criteria for communes eligible to be investment owners in Program 135-II developed.</td>
<td>The project made significant contribution by a range of supports provided to the development of policies and implementation guidelines. The project also supported research studies to enhance community participation; introduce the participatory approach.</td>
<td>- There are different understandings and implementations practices about participatory approach among provinces and levels (please refer to participatory planning and resource allocation reports of Program 135-II)</td>
<td>- Continue to develop participatory planning guideline for the two programs, as well as provide supports to the institutionalization of participatory M&amp;E system for Program 135-II.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>OUTPUT 4.</strong> Transparent budget allocation and participatory financial managements systems are established and used in poverty reduction targeted programs</td>
<td>Circular No. 2849/KBNN-KHTH dated 29/12/2006 of the Ministry of Finance providing guidelines for financial management and disbursements under Program 135-II</td>
<td>Program 135-II : Studied financial management system and budget allocation formula for Program 135-II and Conducted consultation between CEM and MPI on the development of budget allocation criteria for provinces; Supported the State Audit of Vietnam in</td>
<td>Non-equitable budget allocation formula has not been established in several provinces as requested. Most of program budget were equally allocated for districts and communes. Though improved, budget allocation and financial management system in the</td>
<td>The project should support provinces to develop budget allocation criteria for the remaining period. Need for commitment and active participation of government authorities, especially the Ministry of Finance.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

28
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main outputs/activities</th>
<th>Results for the Government</th>
<th>Project contributions</th>
<th>Performance versus expectation</th>
<th>Recommendations for future improvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Capacity building program for the two programs</td>
<td>- The project need to further focus on local level activities including (i) Support the development/finalization local level policies and mechanism; (ii) Support capacity building activities and ToT training; (iii) develop pilot models at</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Communication strategy for Program 135-II</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Project activities received high appreciation for their great contributions to the development of capacity building program via the following supportive activities: training need assessment, training curriculum and materials development, ToT training in</td>
<td>Most activities are at central level.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NTP-PR program still revealed weaknesses (non-stable annual budget allocation and lower than practical demand; allocation criteria are not clear for agriculture extension component; it is hard to define whether practical expenditure meets central allocated budget)</td>
<td>- Some activities were not implemented due to other prioritized activities.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>The NTP-PR program: Supports were provided to develop and finalize financial management system and resource allocation mechanism.</td>
<td>NTP-PR program still revealed weaknesses (non-stable annual budget allocation and lower than practical demand; allocation criteria are not clear for agriculture extension component; it is hard to define whether practical expenditure meets central allocated budget)</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**OUTPUT** 5. Improved capacity of programme staffs, including the people themselves for more effective, participatory decentralized local level planning, implementation and coordination of the poverty reduction targeted programmes at all levels.

21 Public Expenditure Review Report in the NTP-PR in the mid-term evaluation.)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main outputs/activities</th>
<th>Results for the Government</th>
<th>Project contributions</th>
<th>Performance versus expectation</th>
<th>Recommendations for future improvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>provinces, communication strategy development and dissemination in mass media for ethnic minority group areas.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>local level; (iv) Support the assessment for lessons learnt, study tour to learn good practices, exchange information and experience.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Annex 2. PROJECT INDICATOR MAPPING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intended Output</th>
<th>Assessment/Comments</th>
<th>Recommended substitute indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OUTPUT 1. The targeted programmes for poverty reduction and its implementation guidelines are designed in a transparent and participatory manner, are gender-sensitive, and take into account the lessons of the evaluation</td>
<td>Some lessons and recommendations of the evaluation were used and incorporated in the program documents while others are not taken into account. However, it is impossible to calculate the specific number of lessons/recommendations used.</td>
<td>Number of policies, implementation guidelines developed with project supports in the research, design and consultation process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicator: Number of lessons/findings and recommendations of the evaluation taken into the program documents.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of TA reports completed on time and used as inputs to the program documents</td>
<td>A few TA reports were on time but most were used as inputs to the program documents and implementation guidelines</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number and levels of consultations taken place and number of comments inputs taken into the program documents.</td>
<td>Consultation sessions were taken place and comments were considered. However (i) Number of consultation is measurable but there is a question of how to measure levels of consultations? (ii) It is hard to measure number of comment inputs taken into the program documents.</td>
<td>• Number of policies, implementation guidelines exposed to consultation before formal decision. • Number of consultation participants by central, provincial, district and commune level and by sex.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree of gender mainstreaming into /gender issues</td>
<td>Gender issues were considered in the</td>
<td>• Number of policies,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intended Output</td>
<td>Assessment/Comments</td>
<td>Recommended substitute indicators</td>
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| addressed the program documents.                                               | program documents however, the question is how to measure the degree of gender mainstreaming into/gender issues addressed in the program documents? Therefore, the indicator should be revised as whether gender issues are taken into account in the program documents and implementation guidelines. In addition to the inclusion of gender issues, other indicators can be considered such as whether comment inputs of women are taken into the program documents. | implementation guidelines that address gender issues/gender mainstreaming.  
• Number of program documents on gender issues generated with TA support (e.g. guidelines and training materials on gender issues etc.)  
• Number of male/female participants to consultation sessions; and project capacity building activities.                                                                                     |
| Number of pilot test and lessons learned/results of the pilot-tests incorporated in the implementation guideline. | No pilot test found.                                                                                                                                                                                                 | • Number of policies, implementation guidelines that have project supported pilot tests  
• Number of pilot tests to demonstrate project supported policies                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| The level of awareness about and number of consultations on the final program documents at provincial, district and commune levels before the start of implementation. | Consultations were not taken place at different levels before the start of implementation. This indicator is indeed not necessary.                                                                                          | Number of policies, implementation guidelines that receive project supports in dissemination to wider public.                                                                                                                                                                           |

**OUTPUT 2. More participatory and efficient M&E systems at central and local levels established to systematically monitor**
### Intended Output

*progress of the poverty-targeted programmes and disseminate outputs timely to the wider public and policy makers for continuously increasing program effectiveness.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Assessment/Comments</th>
<th>Recommended substitute indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>List of two programs’ result-based M&amp;E indicators (disaggregated as much as possible by sex, ages, locations and ethnicities)</td>
<td>Relevant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Baseline survey report, number of indicators having the disaggregated baseline data, number of programmes’ staff at different levels have/use the baseline data for programmes’ planning and M&E. | The indicator on the number of program staff at different levels having/using the baseline data for program planning and M&E is actually applied to the two programs as a whole, not for this particular project. | • Number of indicators that have baseline data  
• Number of program staff at different level and by sex that participate in baseline surveys  
• Baseline survey reporting formats are clear and disclosed to wider public |
| Number of M&E reports generated by different levels using monitoring indicators. | This is also a program indicator rather than project indicator. | • M&E reporting forms and formats are simple, clear and easy to use at different levels (commune, district, provincial and central level)  
• Number of training courses and number of trainees on M&E system at different levels and by sex can be used. |
<p>| Number of central and local level agencies receiving relevant and timely information to monitor the progress and make plans for implementation of the poverty targeted programmes. | Again, this is a program indicator rather than project indicator. In substitution, number of training courses and number of trainees on M&amp;E system at different levels and by sex can be used. | |
| Increased public awareness on annual programme progress.                  |                     |                                   |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intended Output</th>
<th>Assessment/Comments</th>
<th>Recommended substitute indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level of participation, especially the poor men and women, into programmes’ M&amp;E</td>
<td></td>
<td>(iii) Formats for planning, progress and performance reports are widely disclosed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of local governments and local sector departments publicize their plans, budgets and activities under the two programmes.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>OUTPUT 3. Effective mechanisms for improved targeting and participation are in place that enhance the poor men’s and women’s access to, benefits from and participating in all stages of the poverty targeted programmes</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator:</strong> Coverage of beneficiaries under different components of the two programmes, disaggregated by sex, locations and ethnicity.</td>
<td>This is not a project indicator but a program indicator.</td>
<td>Number of procedures, policies developed with the project support to improve the efficiency of targeting mechanism and enhance community, the poor and women’s participation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of mis-targeted beneficiaries in each programme component, disaggregated by sex, locations and ethnicity.</td>
<td>This is not a project indicator but a program indicator.</td>
<td>Number of consultation sessions taken place on program activities (planning, poor household identification, investment prioritization and selection etc) with project support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of people and program staff that know about the eligibility of and how to get access to the programmes’ services.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Number of training courses on participatory improvement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transparent and participatory procedure applied for</strong></td>
<td>Criteria to identify poor households,</td>
<td>Number of consultation sessions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intended Output</td>
<td>Assessment/Comments</td>
<td>Recommended substitute indicators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>identification of poor households</td>
<td>new poverty line and guidelines to execute poor households voting and poor households eligible to benefit Program 135-II were issued and widely disseminated.</td>
<td>taken place on program activities (planning, poor households identification, investment prioritization and selection etc.) with project supports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OUTPUT 4. Transparent budget allocation and participatory financial management systems are established and used in poverty reduction targeted programs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Indicator: Formula based or other transparent budget allocation criteria/mechanisms applied in the two programmes | Relevant                                                                            | • Number of provinces benefiting the TA in the development of program budget allocation formula  
• Number of guidelines on budget allocation and financial management developed with the TA support. |
| Levels of the public awareness and understanding about the two programs’ budget allocation criteria and mechanisms. | These indicators are hard to be measured.                                               | • Simple and clear financial report formats applicable for different levels  
• Clear forms and formats on budget allocation, expenditure reports by components on quarterly/annual basis are widely disseminated. |
<p>| Number of people (and means/levels of their) involving in the programs’ budget management. |                                                                                      |                                                                                                     |
| Level of clarity of the Financial management Guides in terms of enforcing transparency, division of respective functions and expenditure authorities between different |                                                                                      |                                                                                                     |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intended Output</th>
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<th>Recommended substitute indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>levels and staff under the two programs,</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Clear forms and formats on audit results are widely publicized.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of central and local authorities adopt and apply/comply with the Guides.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amount of two programs’ budgetary resources and expenditure information made available to the public.</td>
<td>These indicators are hard to be measured.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of mis-used/mis-managed/’leaked’ funds in the two programs.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number, timeliness and quality of financial reports produced by different levels; and number of ‘settlements of expenditures’ made on time.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of compliance to the audit plans, and to the auditors’ recommendations</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

**OUTPUT 5. Improved capacity of programme staffs, including the people themselves for more effective, participatory decentralized local level planning, implementation and coordination of the poverty reduction targeted programmes at all levels.**

**Indicator:** Number of communes that are investment owners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intended Output</th>
<th>Assessment/Comments</th>
<th>Recommended substitute indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of communes that are investment owners</td>
<td>This is not a project indicator. This should be a program indicator.</td>
<td>• Training plan/program for different levels (province, district, commune and villages) with project supports;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Training needs assessment at</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is not a project indicator. This should be a program indicator.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intended Output</th>
<th>Assessment/Comments</th>
<th>Recommended substitute indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Levels of awareness of commune’s leaders and people on their roles and responsibility in planning, implementation, management of the poverty targeted programmes and projects in their locations | How to measure levels of awareness? This is an impact indicator rather than output indicator. | In localities which receive direct support of the project:  
- Number of commune cadres and people attending training courses on participatory planning/program management with project supports  
- Number of commune cadres/people involving in planning/program activities.  
- Number of village/commune plans subject to community consultations  
- Number of commune/village cadre having ability and skills to facilitate community consultations on program |
<p>| Skills obtained by the commune’s leaders and people to carry out their roles and responsibility in planning, implementation, management of the poverty targeted programmes and projects in their locations | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intended Output</th>
<th>Assessment/Comments</th>
<th>Recommended substitute indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Roles and mechanisms (defined and actually implemented) for (i) community based organizations involving in planning, implementation, and management and (ii) local elected bodies in overseeing the implementation of, the poverty reduction targeted programmes.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Number of community based organization involving in program planning, implementation and management.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Views/comments/suggestions of the people and their organizations taken into plans/decisions.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Number of plans/decisions subject to community consultations/comments before final decision is made.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Annex 3. RECOMMENDED ACTIVITIES FOR THE NTP-PR PROGRAM, PROJECT VIE/02/001, IN 2009

Output 1: The targeted programmes for poverty reduction and its implementation guidelines are designed in a transparent and participatory manner, are gender-sensitive, and take into account the lessons of the evaluation.

Issue: Facilitation of government-donor partnership under the NTP-PR program is proved to be inefficient, with the absence of specific measures to enhance the relationship between the Government and donor organisations; Information transparency and disclose among related parties remain limited: information flow is internally closed, it is hard for other industries to obtain sufficient information to efficiently cooperate, also creating difficulties for parallel monitoring and cross-checking.

Recommended activities:
- (Support the NTP-PR Program Steering Committee – MOLISA to) develop a technical assistance, sharing with donors, working with government/local authorities to identify appropriate TA activities, allocate the resources, ensure close coordination and efficient interaction while avoiding overlaps.
- Develop a new in kind subsidy based educational module for Mekong delta.
- Support the development of specific guidelines to implement Resolution for 61 districts (roadmap, guideline, evaluation criteria, feedbacks from pilot districts in 2009) based on the recommendations of mid-term evaluation for the NTP-PR program.
- Support the organisation of NTP-PR program coordination conference with the participation of related government agencies (MoLISA, MARD, MoH, MoET, MoF, Bank of Social Policy).

Output 2: More participatory and efficient M&E systems at central and local levels established to systematically monitor progress of the poverty-targeted programmes and disseminate outputs timely to the wider public and policy makers for continuously increasing program effectiveness.

Issue: Though the M&E system was developed, it has not been widely and systematically implemented at local levels; monitoring and evaluation capacity of local cadres are also limited.

Recommended activities:
- Support local levels in training to use M&E software; enhance the wide application of M&E system to evaluate program progress; explore the ability to extend the TA across regions to broaden support coverage.
- Support the dissemination of the M&E system to wider public
- Support pilot tests of M&E system and indicators implementation
- Work out an action plan to review and improve existing policies and guidelines, follow up recommendations of the mid-term evaluation.
- Study to develop M&E system for 61 district program and national targeted poverty reduction program in the future.
Output 3. Effective mechanisms for improved targeting and participation are in place that enhance the poor men’s and women’s access to, benefits from and participating in all stages of the poverty targeted programmes

- Support the development of a mechanism to promote the application and implementation guidelines on participatory approach
- Support research studies on new poverty line, poverty-marginal line
- Support gender mainstreaming and incorporation of children issues into the NTP-PR program activities
- Organise training on participatory planning in three pilot districts to improve program performance of national targeted poverty reduction programs and support the implementation of 61 district program.

Output 4: Transparent budget allocation and participatory financial managements systems are established and used in poverty reduction targeted programs

Issue: Transparency of project implementation process has not been improved, especially in projects that provinces and districts are investment owners and communes are beneficiary only. Budget allocation for specific componenets are not clearly informed. Transparency is also significantly limited when programs and projects are incorporated with others.

Recommended activities:
Support the completion of budget allocation formula to ensure fairness and transparency. Support research studies on good practices in incorporating different poverty reduction projects at local level.

Output 5: Improved capacity of programme staffs, including the people themselves for more effective, participatory decentralized local level planning, implementation and coordination of the poverty reduction targeted programmes at all levels.

Issue: Studies showed that merely 80% of district staff, 60% of commune staff have good understandings about poverty reduction policies. Commune people are lack of information on effective policies/ongoing programs/projects in their areas, especially projects managed by provincial and district level. Capacity of local staff is limited, especially in poverty reduction planning, implementation and monitoring.

Recommended activities:
- Develop action plan to continue ToT training which were started in 2007-2008 period; adopt recommendations of the mid-term evaluation on capacity building.
- Organise ToT training to improve capacity and awareness about poverty reduction for poverty reduction local staff.
- Based on experience of Program 135-2, coordinate with mass media agencies like VTV, VOV in disseminating poverty reduction policies and projects.
- Support the organisation of ToT training for poverty reduction local staff on participatory
planning, monitoring and evaluation, financial management, vocational training and communication, managerial skills. Combine with capacity building activities of national targeted poverty reduction programs.

- Support the arrangement of events to exchange lessons, experience and replicate good practices probably in the form of regional poverty reduction forum to broaden support coverage.
Annex 4. RECOMMENDED ACTIVITIES FOR PROGRAM 135-II, 
PROJECT VIE/02/001, IN 2009

At the mid-term evaluation workshop of Program 135-2 taken place on 24-25 November 2008, 
many issues on the implementation of Program 135-2 were raised by local participants and 
suggestions were made on the areas that provinces expect to receive technical assistance from 
central agencies and donors. Based on the workshop’s assessments and discussions with some 
provinces and related paties, the consultants have recommendations for activities of Project 
VIE/02/001 in 2009 as follows:

Output 1: The targeted programmes for poverty reduction and its implementation guidelines are 
designed in a transparent and participatory manner, are gender-sensitive, and take into account the 
lessons of the evaluation

Issue: The Production Development project has slow progress, low efficiency with inconsistent 
guidelines and market studies are not in place to identify appropriate activities.

Recommended activities:
Support MARD in reviewing, weighing the need to revise/amend implementation guidelines of 
production development project.
Support ministries and industries to improve implementation guidelines as specified by Circular 
01.
Support local levels to conduct studies on market-oriented production development orientation 
(local agriculture production features, production-market linkage etc)
Develop and disseminate guidelines on gender mainstreaming.

Issue: Capacity of communes as investment owner remains limited, with a lack of guideline 
documents.

Recommended activities:
Support to develop guideline documents/training materials for commune level on investment, 
disbursement procedures and financial management etc.

Issue: Coordination and partnership facilitation are of low efficiency.

Recommended activities:
(Support the Program Standing Committee) to develop a joint technical assistance for several 
donors, working with government agencies/local authorities to identify appropriate technical 
assistance activities, resource allocation while ensuring efficient coordination and linkage and 
avoiding overlaps.
Support the organization of Program 135 Coordination Workshop for all related government 
agencies (CEMA. MPI, MARD, MOC, MOF)

Output 2: More participatory and efficient M&E systems at central and local levels established
to systematically monitor progress of the poverty-targeted programmes and disseminate outputs timely to the wider public and policy makers for continuously increasing program effectiveness.

**Recommended activities:**
- Support the implementation of AMT system in all communes of three pilot provinces.
- Support the application of CRC instrument in all communes of three pilot provinces

**Output 3. Effective mechanisms for improved targeting and participation are in place that enhance the poor men’s and women’s access to, benefits from and participating in all stages of the poverty targeted programmes**

**Recommended activities:**
- Support provinces to identify communes eligible to get out of the program in according to issued guidelines.
- Support the organization of consultations for participatory planning activities (next step to training activities on participatory planning)
- Support provinces (pilot provinces) to enforce budget allocation decision for operation and maintenance activities.

**Output 4: Transparent budget allocation and participatory financial managements systems are established and used in poverty reduction targeted programs**

**Issue:** According to statistic reports, 41 among 47 provinces have not equally allocated program budget, however, practical observation showed that equal allocation formula is still applicable for communes.

**Recommended activities:**
- Support provinces to improve budget allocation criteria to ensure equal allocation formula is no longer in use, efficient targeting mechanism and prioritized investments so as to ensure investment efficiency and avoid spread investment.
- Support the application of competitive bidding procedures in three pilot provinces.

**Output 5: Improved capacity of programme staffs, including the people themselves for more effective, participatory decentralized local level planning, implementation and coordination of the poverty reduction targeted programmes at all levels.**

**Issue:** The objective of communes as investment owners is unlikely to be met/the performance is different among locations; capacity of communes as investment owners is limited and need further supports from provinces and districts; training plans have many gaps and TA project progress is slow.

**Recommended activities:**
- Support provinces to develop training plans/programs, curriculum and training materials.
- Support CEM to review, revise training plans/programs and improve training methods for higher efficiency;
- Support provinces to develop and implement ToT training on participatory planning, investment,
disbursement procedures and financial management etc.
Support provinces to understand/develop capacity building and staff supplementation for communes (e.g Community Development Staff module) to improve capacity of communes to assume investment owner roles;
Support the development and implementation of communication plan, conduct research studies on the demand, resource availability, appropriate patterns to use ethnic minority languages in training and communication activities;
Support the arrangement of National Program 135 Workshop;
Support the organization of events, study tours to exchange lessons learnt, experience and replicate good practices.
ATTACHMENT 1. Terms of Reference
Mid-term Evaluation
Project “Support for the Improvement and Implementation of the National Targeted Programmes on Poverty Reduction”

Background

According to the evaluation plan of the UNDP County Office in Vietnam (hereinafter referred to as UNDP), a mid-term evaluation is to be conducted in 2008 for the project VIE/02/001 “Support to the Improvement and Implementation of the National Target Programmes for Poverty Reduction”. The “Support to the Improvement and Implementation of the National Target Programmes for Poverty Reduction” project was developed to make a sound contribution to achieving the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) outcome 1 “Economic growth is more equitable, inclusive and sustainable” and outcome 1.1 in the Country Programme Action Plan 2006-2010: “National pro-poor policies and interventions that support more equitable and inclusive growth”.

Under the One UN Initiative, the objective has been put under Output 1.1 of One Plan II: “Improved design and more effective implementation of national target programmes for poverty reduction and national programme for socio-economic development for poorest communes”. The Project supports to the improvement and implementation of the National Target Programmes for Poverty Reduction (NTPs), specifically the National Target Programme for Poverty Reduction (NTP-PR) and Socio-Economic Development Programme for in the communes facing severe difficulties in Ethnic and Mountainous Areas (SEDEMA or P135-II) via providing technical assistance (TA) that is (i) complementary to GOVN’s own TA and (ii) necessary for ensuring sound design and effective implementation of the national target programmes for poverty reduction 2006-2010. The support will be delivered via partnership with Ministry of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA) and Committee for Ethnic Minorities Affairs (CEMA) as leading agencies for the two NTPs, and related national agencies involvement in the management and implementation of the two NTPs. Key expected results of the Project are reflected via five key outputs:

- Output 1: The targeted programmes for poverty reduction and its implementation guidelines are designed in a transparent and participatory manner, are gender-sensitive, and take into account the lessons of the evaluation.
- Output 2: More participatory and efficient M&E systems at central and local levels established to systematically monitor progress of the poverty-targeted programmes and disseminate outputs timely to the wider public and policy makers for continuously increasing program effectiveness.
- Output 3: Effective mechanisms for improved targeting and participation are in place that enhance the poor men’s and women’s access to, benefits from and participating in all stages of the poverty targeted programmes.
- Output 4: Transparent budget allocation and participatory financial managements systems are established and used in poverty reduction targeted programs.
- Output 5: Improved capacity of programme staffs, including the people themselves for
more effective, participatory decentralized local level planning, implementation and coordination of the poverty reduction targeted programmes at all levels.

Overall objective

The main objective of the project mid-term evaluation is to provide analysis of (i) relevance of the project concept via context verification, and (ii) efficiency of the project implementation. The two national target programs that the project is supporting are also under a joint mid-term review process undertaken by the Government. Recommendations should be made for plausible adjustment of the project in the remaining of the project life cycle accordingly.

III. Specific Objectives and scope of work

The specific objectives of the MTE are the following:

Related to relevance:

- Context verification by stock taking of past achievements and new socio-economic situation to identified if the issues raised in the project document and the relevance of the designed project outputs and activities are still valid and relevant for each component at MOLISA and CEMA. Context of the target budget support for P135-2 and new direction for poverty reduction policy under NTPPR should be considered carefully.
- Review the annual targets and indicative activities set in the project document result framework and the annual workplans.
- Assess to what extent the objectives and targets set in the project document and annual workplans are aligned with the priorities and needs of the two NTPs.
- Identify gaps/weakness in the current project design and provide possible interventions and measures that would increase the relevance of the project to support the NTPs in short-term in the context of analysis.

Related to efficiency:

- Evaluate the progress of the outputs delivered by the project towards achievement of the poverty reduction outcome as identified in the Country Programme Action Plan.
- Review effectiveness of the overall programme interventions, it’s main achievements, compliance with expanding country’s needs in terms of poverty reduction and overall impact in building national capacity to implement pro poor economic policies and facilitating economic growth and employment generation.
- Review and assess the Project’s partnership with the government agencies, and donor community in the project implementation;
- Review and assess the efficiency of implementation and management arrangements of the Project;
- Review sustainability of the achievements undertaken by the Project.

Recommendations: Based on the above analysis,

- What are the new issues or indicators should be considered in the new context? What are the risks that should be updated in the new context?
How should UNDP adjust the project interventions, partnership arrangements, resource mobilization strategies, working methods and/or management structures to ensure that the proposed output is fully achieved by the end of the CPAP period?

What corrective actions are recommended to take ahead in the remain period of the project life?

Provide preliminary recommendations on how the project can do better to most effectively continue to support the Government.

IV. Specific Activities

The consultant team will conduct the following activities:

- Propose a detailed workplan, interview questionnaires;
- Collect relevant documentation with the support of MOLISA, CEMA and UNDP;
- Conduct a desk study of the UN/UNDP CPAP, One UN context (One UN Plan and outputs of VIE02001 in contribution to the One Plan), key related project documents, annual and quarterly plan, progress reports, annual review minutes, key notes and minutes with Leader of MOLISA and CEMA on the project implementation, as well as other related documents to the two NTPs implementation (including P135-2 joint progress review minutes, key P135-2 partnership papers, mid-term review reports of the two NTPs, etc.).
- Conduct in-depth interviews with key informants at central level (MOLISA, CEMA, MPI, MOF, co-implementing ministries, UNDP and donors) and local level (one-two pilot provinces) to better understand the reasons for identified gaps in relevance and efficiency
- Prepare the draft report to be shared with the PMUs at MOLISA and CEMA during the project 2009 annual planning workshops for comments from the key informants and project management units.
- Finalize the report to share with GACA and other project co-implementing partners
- Present the key results in the Annual Progress Review Meeting.

V. Expected deliverables

The Evaluation Team is expected to produce an comprehensive analytical Project MTE Report that highlights the findings, recommendations and lessons learnt, and give a rating of performance. The report is maximum 30 pages including annexes, which might include, but is not limited to, the following components:

- Executive summary;
- Introduction;
- Description of the evaluation methodology;
- Analysis of the situation with regard to outcome, outputs, resources, partnerships, management and working methods;
- Key findings;
• Conclusions and recommendations

Evaluation Team

The Evaluation Team will consist of 2 national consultants: one Team Leader and one national consultant with poverty reduction expertise. Under the overall supervision of UNDP Programme Officer, the Evaluation Team will conduct a participatory project MTE.

**Qualification requirements for the team leader:**

- Higher education (a degree) in economics, business administration or any other social sciences related to the pro poor economic growth and poverty reduction;
- Extensive experience in conducting evaluations, strong working knowledge of UNDP, the civil society sector and working with state public authorities in the field of pro poor economic growth and poverty reduction.
- Extensive knowledge of result-based management evaluation, UNDP policies, procedures, as well as participatory monitoring and evaluation methodologies and approaches;
- Experience in applying SMART indicators and reconstructing or validating baseline scenarios;
- Minimum 7-10 years professional expertise in international development co-operation, in poverty reduction area, in programme evaluation, impact assessment and strategic recommendations for continued support/development of programming/strategies including strong reporting skills;
- Extensive experience in working with the donors;
- Excellent analytical, communication and report writing skills;
- Excellent interviewing, public speaking at high levels;
- Teamwork capacity to work with the target group representatives;
- Fluency in written and spoken English.

The Evaluation Team Leader will have overall responsibility for the quality and timely submission of the final evaluation report to UNDP. Specifically, the team leader will perform the following tasks:

- Lead and manage the evaluation mission;
- Design the detailed evaluation scope and methodology and approach;
- Ensure efficient division of tasks between the mission members;
- Conduct the outcome evaluation in accordance with the proposed objective and scope of the evaluation;
- Draft and communicate the evaluation report;
- Finalize the evaluation report in Vietnamese and English and submit it to UNDP.

**Qualification requirements for the Poverty Reduction Expert/Team member:**

- University degree in economics, business administration, social sciences or any other relevant disciplines;
• At least 3-5 years of professional experience with Government agencies and international organizations in the area of pro-poor economic growth in Vietnam
• Deep knowledge and understanding of pro-poor economic growth concept in Vietnam
• Experience in conducting researches and other analytical works in the area of pro-poor economic growth
• Experience in conducting evaluations is desirable
• Good communication and presentation skills

S/he will perform the following tasks:
• Review documents;
• Participate in the design of the evaluation methodology;
• Conduct the outcome evaluation in accordance with the proposed objective and scope of the evaluation;
• Draft related parts of the evaluation report;
• Assist the Team Leader in finalizing the draft evaluation report through incorporating suggestions received.

Progress Supervision and Control

The Consultants will work closely with UNDP Head of Poverty and Social Development Cluster, UNDP PO focal point of Poverty reduction, the VIE/02/001 Project Management Unit at MOLISA, and CEMA, in order to implement the work and achieve the required results. The team will report directly to the NPD and NPM of VIE02001 at MOLISA.

The two partner agencies and the project offices will be responsible for providing all documents and reference materials required to conduct the MTE.

Quality criteria

The deliverables/reports are submitted according to planned. The findings of the mission should be disaggregated by gender where possible, and should follow the ethical code of conducts for UNDP evaluations as specified in the annex 1. The recommendations of the final report are feasible to be used by the project to improve the project implementations. The content of final report of the MTE is endorsed by MOLISA/CEMA.

Timeline and schedule (tentative)

The mission will commence in November 2008. The duration of the assignment is up to 30 working days for each consultant during November – December 2008.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Estimated number of working days</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initial briefing at project offices, MPI and UNDP, Desk review, Evaluation design, methodology and detailed</td>
<td>5 days</td>
<td>10 November</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task</td>
<td>Duration</td>
<td>Date</td>
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<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Consultations, meetings as well as for phone/in-person interviews at national and provincial level</td>
<td>10 days</td>
<td>20 November</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation of draft evaluation report</td>
<td>6 days</td>
<td>30 November</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debriefing with PMU at MOLISA and CEMA, UNDP, MPI</td>
<td>1 day</td>
<td>5 December</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation of the findings at 2009 planning workshops at MOLISA and CEMA to collect comments from key informants</td>
<td>2 days</td>
<td>15 December</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second draft submitted to MOLISA and CEMA to send to GACA for comments</td>
<td>2 days</td>
<td>18 December</td>
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<tr>
<td>Compile the comments from GACA, co-implementing agencies and final Presentation of final findings at APR Meeting</td>
<td>2 days</td>
<td>25 December</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finalization of evaluation report to send to UNDP</td>
<td>2 days</td>
<td>31 December 2008</td>
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