

AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION IN VIETNAM: ITS ROLES, PROBLEMS AND OPPORTUNITIES¹

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY²

The Vietnamese Government/public extension system was founded in 1993 and organized into 5 levels: Central (National), Provincial, District, Commune and Village/Hamlet. Currently, on average, there are only 4 public extension workers per 10,000 farming households.

Beside the Government extension system, research institutions, universities, enterprises and NGOs are also involved in the provision of extension activities. However, the government extension service plays the key role.

Current extension functions are focused on conducting demonstration sites and field-days, training, organizing science-technology forums in the fields of crops, livestock, veterinary care, forestry, water resource management, agro-forestry processing and engineering. Technologies for transfer come from research institutions, universities and abroad. In addition, the extension system also provides farmers information related to new policies, and market prices. Top down, supply-driven extension is still the main operation method.

The future direction for extension in Vietnam is to promote “socialising the extension program”. The intention is to encourage two way information flow and build farmer-led and demand-driven extension.

Total number of public extension workers in Vietnam (up to 31 Dec 2011) accounting for 34,747 people, making on average 1 public extension worker per 280 farming households. Funding for extension is small, accounting for 20 millions USD, or 2USD/farming household/year

EVOLUTION AND REFORMS OF PUBLIC EXTENSION SYSTEM IN VIETNAM

On 2nd March 1993, the Vietnam Extension System was officially established accordingly to the Decree 13/NĐ-CP of the Government. According to this decree, the Department of Agriculture and Forestry Extension (DAFE) belongs to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD). In the Ministry of Fishery, the fishery extension activities were assigned to be handle by the Department of Aquaculture management. Those departments function as a state governing organisation (managing production) as well as technology transfer bodies.

However, serving two assignments at the same time: governance and providing public services, had showed many problems. Therefore, on 18th July 2003, the Government divided DAFE into

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two organizations belonging to MARD, they are the Department of Agriculture, and the National Agriculture Extension Center (NAEC). In the same year, according to the Decree 43/2003/NĐ-CP dated on 2nd May 2003, the National Fishery Extension Center was founded within the Ministry of Fishery.

After merging the Ministry of Fishery with MARD, on 3rd January 2008, the Government established a single National Agriculture Extension Center based on the existing Agriculture and Fishery Extension Centers.

According to the current regulations, the National Agriculture Extension Center has the following responsibilities: i) Developing policies and mechanisms of management for extension in agriculture, forestry, fishery, rural industry; ii) developing economic-technical cost-norms for extension works; lead, organize and guide the transfer of advanced techniques through setting up demonstration models, disseminating information, training, providing services and international collaboration in related fields. At present, NAEC headquarter has 82 staffs (of which: 6 PhD, 15 Masters and 54 bachelors) working in 9 Divisions and 1 representative office in Ho Chi Minh City. The extension system from the central to the grass-root levels was formed and operates as shown in the Diagram 1.

Up to now, the extension system is still improving. Total number of public extension workers in Vietnam (up to 31 Dec 2011) accounting for 34,747 people, making on average 1 public extension worker per 280 farming households. Out of 34,747 people, 31.6% is female and 34.8% is ethnic groups.

All 63 provinces/cities have their own Extension Centers with a total of 1,903 staff (5.5% of total), with an average 30 persons per center. At the district level, only 585 districts out of total 648 districts have Extension Stations (90,3%) which are directly under the control of the provincial extension Centers or the District People Committees. Total number of extension workers at district extension level accounts for 4,025 people (11.6% of total), the average is 6 persons per station. At commune level, there are 11,232 extension workers (32.3% of total), or 1.2 people per commune. At village/hamlet level, there are 17,587 staff. They are mainly working as part-time extension workers.

So, even though there were attempts to improve the extension system, up to the present, there are only just over 4,000 specialized/professional extension workers, others are non-professional extension staff serving 60,7 million farmers. In reality the number of extension staff is small and inadequate to meet the demand.

Funding for extension is also limited. In 2011, total budget for all extension activities accounting for 20 millions USD, or 2USD/farming household/year (Table 3).

CURRENT STATUS, ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND POSSIBLE REMEDIES IN PUBLIC EXTENSION

Being a diverse country stretching from latitude 23⁰23' to 8⁰34', Vietnam has a variety in climate, from tropical, sub-tropical, semi-drought climate, and temperate zone. Consequently, crop systems are also very diverse. Main crops/crops systems are shown in table 2.

It is clear that Vietnam agriculture is mainly crop cultivation. Large scale husbandary is not yet developed, although the trend is in the direction of expansion. Additionally, agricultural production is still at small and/or medium scales, in average each household has 1,0ha of agricultural land (in the lowland, this figure accounting only 0.3 ha). This makes the research and extension service meet many difficulties, and must be site-specific to meet the requirements.

The current extension activities are focusing on the following content:

1) Setting up models demonstrating advanced techniques for transferring to farmers. The models concentrate on introducing new varieties, techniques/ technologies. Parallel to this, extension workers organize field days to train and respond to questions from farmers.

2) Organizing training farmers. Not all new techniques are demonstrated in the fields, therefore training is a means to transfer them quickly to farmers. Training methods are face-to-face training, training via TV, radio, brochures, CD, VCD, DVD, and via websites. Training of trainers (ToT) is also an effective training method to expand the number of skilled extension practitioners. Additionally the extension system also creates opportunities for some advanced farmers to utilise advanced technologies from overseas.

3) Organizing science and technology forums, specific festival and exhibitions, where farmers can exchange directly with scientists, managers and examples of successful cases of applying new technology.

The advanced technologies used in demonstration models, and training are coming from research institutions, universities and imported from overseas. In order to avoid risks for farmers, those technologies must be recognized/approved by the Scientific Council at the Ministry level (for being applied at a national scale) or at the provincial level (for being applied at regional scale).

Beside the responsibility of transferring technologies and training, the extension system also takes responsibility for disseminating new policies related to agriculture, farmers, rural areas and markets. Meanwhile, extension workers receive feedback on weaknesses, constraints from the practices for proposing development of new technologies or adjusting new policies.

Today, the following actors participate in carrying out extension duties: i) The government extension system (Extension centers); ii) Research institutions; iii) Universities; iv) Enterprises; v) NGOs; and vi) Volunteer extension organizations (Associations, Local Common Interest Groups). Of course, research institutions, universities, enterprises are mainly transferring their own technologies and products.

Although successful in obtaining certain results, Vietnam extension system, especially the government extension still has some limitations as follows:

1) Human resources are lacking in both quantity and quality. Currently the professional staff accounts for only 1 people per 280 farming households. Among extension workers, there are only 15% who received professional training in the field of extension, the rest have mainly shifted from other technical professions. In 2010, the number of extension staff with Master and PhD degree is 210; Undergraduate is 6,000 people, accounting for only 17.6% of total number of extension workers.

2) The extension workers specialities not yet meet the requirements for improving production to achievable levels. Most of them are specialized in crops and husbandary; other fields are lacking. At village/hamlet level, even at commune level, there is only less than 1 extension worker, therefore they have to carry out works related to the whole production process, including crops, livestock, fishery, forestry, irrigation, rural economy and markets. This means that a general and integrated knowledge are required for grassroot level extension, which is difficult to find.

3) Extension has focused mainly on hunger alleviation and poverty reduction. It has not yet really developed to provide support in the processing and marketing of products. This is a reason why small and medium farm owners and agricultural enterprises have received very limited attention and services from Government extension departments.

4) The extension methods do not yet satisfy the diversified demands of the different farming systems, the differences in terms of knowledge and culture of farmers in many varied localities. In addition, the barrier of languages in communication with ethnic groups also limits the effectiveness of extension workers. A top down approach is still a common method in planning and carrying out government extension activities.

5) The current extension policies and program is mainly focused on the government extension system, extension without any payment. Therefore, this does not create a motivation to socialize this activity, and does not promote the participation of other organizations in extension works such as enterprises, associations, NGOs. The linkages among extension – research - education are not yet well developed.

6) The system of monitoring and evaluation of extension activities is still lacking and working improperly. The involvement of local authorities is still very limited. Farmers are not yet involved in the extension works at the stage of planning, therefore extension activities do not really meet the requirement of farmers as well as the reality of the agricultural production.

SOLUTIONS FOR STRENGTHENING AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION

The basic solutions suggested below should be taken for improvement of agricultural extension performance:

1) Socialize the agricultural extension system, where government plays a role in coordination, building legal frameworks for technology transfer, technical standards and agricultural extension services for poverty elimination in remote areas and ethnic minority groups.

2) Agricultural extension approaches should be shifted from top down and one way to two way information flow; from supply-driven to farmer-led, community-led and demand-driven and participatory agricultural extension as well as from single technical recommendations to packages of technical advice. Demand-based agricultural extension services with payment should be tested and scaled out as well.

3) Strengthen linkages between research and extension for improving quality of technology transfer.

4) Prioritize agricultural extension services for the high value crops and wealthy commodity chains where they can support and harmonize with extension systems for the poor. Special priority should be given to key agricultural products with large areas or significant export value, like rice, coffee, rubber, tea, cashew nut, and fisheries... as well as focus on high technology adaptation and building new rural areas.

5) Strengthen international cooperation on agricultural extension to update new technology, approaches and methodologies.

6) Improve human resources training in both professional knowledge as well as ethnic languages. Update and improve training materials, as well as training methods and curriculum. Maximise advantages of the internet and mass media in knowledge transfer; establish technical forums; and build online knowledge banks. Harmonize transfer and advisory services.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions:

1) The State/Government agricultural extension system of Vietnam has been established since 1993. The whole system from central to village levels has been set up after almost 20 years of operations. There are only 1 extension worker per 280 farming households. In addition to state extension services, the entities involved in agricultural extension are research institutes, universities, enterprises, NGOs. However, socialization of agricultural extension has not been performed widely, state/government agricultural extension still plays a key role.

2) Agricultural extension services currently concentrate on establishing demonstration models, and training of farmers. There is a focus on field days, forum organization, and training courses. In general, agricultural extension approaches are still top down, supply-driven and one way information flow that have not been highly effective.

Recommendations:

1) Strengthen agricultural extension socialization and gradually shift from top down, one-way to two-way information flow; from supply-driven to farmer-led, community-led and demand-driven and participatory agricultural extension; as well as from single technical recommendation to a holistic package of technical advice. A demand-based agricultural extension service approach with payment should be tested and scaled out.

2) Human resources training towards technical transfer packages instead of single technology need to be developed. Prioritise agricultural extension services for large size commercial production with strong links to poor farmers. For filling the gap in lacking extension workers, training farmers to become key farmer – extension workers should be given high priority.

3) Build up regional agricultural extension network, firstly with Asian countries with similar natural conditions, crops and animals to exchange lessons learnt, technology and human resources training.

References

1. Agricultural statistics, GSO, 2005-2011
2. Annual reports of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development
3. Annual reports of the National Center for Agricultural Extension

Diagram 1. Government Extension System (National Center for Agricultural Extension)

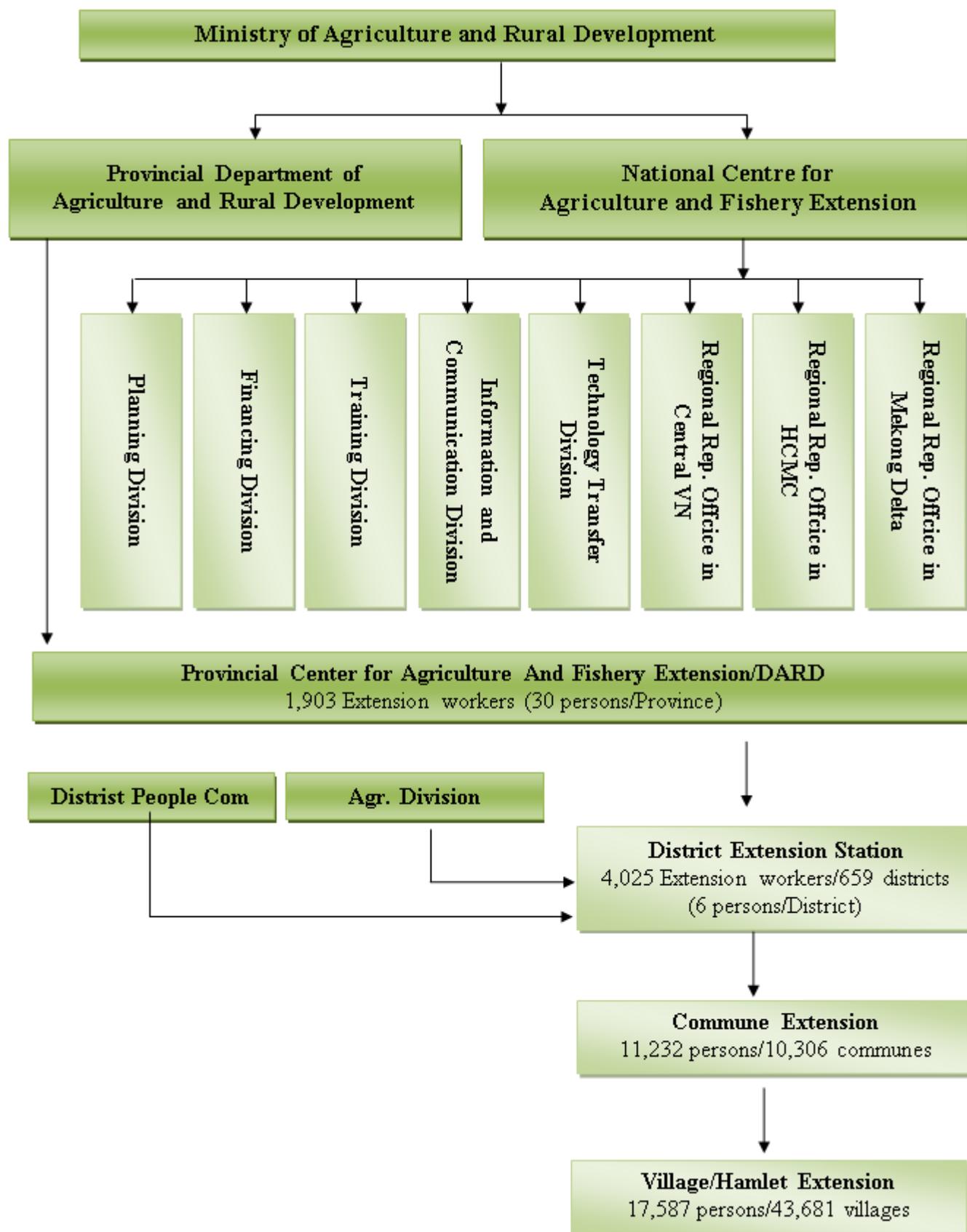


Table 1: Structure of GDP 1990-2010, %

	1990	2000	2005	2010
Agriculture, Forestry and fishery	38.7	24.5	20.9	20.6
Industry and construction	22.7	36.7	41.0	40.9
Services	38.6	38.8	38.1	38.5

Source: GSO, 2011

Table 2. Current land use (inland) in Vietnam (2009)

Land-use types	1,000 ha	%
Total natural area, out of which	33,105	100.0
Agricultural land	9,598	29,0
- Paddy land	4,089	-
- Other annual crops	2,134	-
- Perennial crops	3,316	-
Forestry land	14,757	44,6
Aquaculture	738	2,2
Non-Agricultural land	3,469	10.5
Unused land	4,543	13.7
- Unused flat land	305	-
- Unused slopping land	3,867	-
- Rocky mountain	371	-

Source: MONRE, 2009

Table 3. Budget for Government extension activities (2011)

	Total	State budget	Provincial budget
Billions VND	407 (20 mil. USD)	222.0 (11 mil. USD)	185 (9 mil. USD)
%	100.0	54.5	45.5

Source: NAEC, 2012