

QUANG NGAI RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM (RUDEP) - PHASE 2

Participatory Planning Process 2004-2005 Report



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Acronyms

AMC	Australian Management Contractor
APD	Australian Program Director
ATL	Australian Team Leader
CBO	Capacity Building Officer
CCG	Commune Contact Group
CPC	Commune People's Committee
CPO	Communications and Promotions Officer
DARD	Department of Agriculture and Rural Development
DCG	District Contact Group
DDO	District Development Officer
DPC	District People's Committee
DPI	Department of Planning and Investment
FCO	Finance and Credit Officer
GOA	Government of Australia
GOV	Government of Vietnam
HH	Household
IEO	Infrastructure and Environment Officer
MARD	Department of Agriculture and Rural Development
MEGO	Monitoring, Evaluation & GIS Officer
PCC	Program Co-ordinating Committee
PC/PA/PS	Problem Census/Problem Analysis/Problem Solving
PDA	Participatory Development Advisor
PDD	Program Design Document
PMU	Program Management Unit
PPC	Province People's Committee
PPP	Participatory Planning Process
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
QNRDP	Quang Ngai Rural Development Program
RUDEP	Quang Ngai Rural Development Program
VIEO	Vietnamese Infrastructure and Environment Officer
VND	Vietnamese Dong
VPD	Vietnamese Program Director
VPDA	Vietnamese Participatory Development Advisor
VTL	Vietnamese Team Leader
WU	Women's Union

1 Introduction

The participatory planning process (PPP) applied by RUDEP to inform program activities in the 2004-2005 financial year is a continuation of the processes used in the two previous years. Modifications to the process are part of its ongoing evolution and reflect the attempts of RUDEP and governments within Quang Ngai to find a process which is appropriate and acceptable to all concerned. It reflects a conscious effort from RUDEP to make the first moves towards a process which can be institutionalised, at least in part, into the government's own planning system.

Naturally, the participation of all stakeholders was retained as the central element of the planning process. Similar to previous years, all household representatives in participating communes were invited to a series of community consultation meetings¹ at which they listed out their difficulties and proposed activities to address them. As in previous years, the outcomes of the meetings were collated, analysed and used to inform the formation of activity groups and implementation of activities in 2004 – 2005.

However, numerous modifications were made, new ideas trialled, new documents and forms produced and new people involved, all accompanied by a range of difficulties and challenges which are to be expected whenever change is instigated. This report aims to document this year's process and thereby contribute to its 'continuous improvement', an aim which applies not only to the planning process but to all aspects of the RUDEP's work. More specifically, the reports' aims can be summarised as follows:

- o Document the 2004 – 2005 participatory planning process;
- o Highlight the difficulties and successes of the process;
- o Bring together a wealth of documents and training materials for reference in future years;
- o Use this year's experiences to recommend continued modifications to next year's process;
- o Propose broader assessments and training which can be conducted in preparation for the 2005-2006 PPP.

The next section will summarise the 2004 – 2005 process. This section is intended to be used as both a stand-alone document to introduce the process as well as to set the scene for the more detailed description and discussion which follow in subsequent chapters.

Section 3 provides some background to the process, including brief descriptions of PPP used in previous years, to facilitate comparison with this year's process. It also outlines some of the debates held within the PMU leading up to PPP's implementation.

¹ These were referred to as 'problem census – problem analysis – problem solving meetings' in the previous two cycles but were most commonly referred to as 'village planning meetings' during the 2004 – 2005 planning process. The term 'village planning meetings' will be used in this report.

Sections 4 to 7 document the main steps of the process and highlight the difficulties and successes of each step. Section 8 summarises the results of the village planning and commune plan preparation meetings.

This report was written in June 2004 and at that stage some important steps in the 2004-2005 PPP were yet to be conducted: the announcement of planned activities in each of the villages, the establishment of activity groups and the formation of activity group/VSCF group plans for the 2004-2005 period. Section 9 outlines these final steps of PPP.

Sections 10 and 11 focus on analysing the 2004 – 2005 process and looking for lessons learned to be incorporated into next year's process. In Section 10 community and local government evaluations of the 2004 – 2005 process are reported. In Section 11, some additional recommendations are made for further modifications to PPP and preparatory work to be conducted prior to the commencement of next year's process.

2 Summary of PPP in 2004 – 2005

The 2004 – 2005 participatory planning process began in early March 2004, with the PPP presentation at the quarterly contact group meeting, and is expected to conclude in August when the village savings and credit groups complete their own group plans.

RUDEP co-ordinated with households and all four levels of local government to carry out the process. Figure 1 below illustrates PPP's 'W'-shaped flow between the program and the various government and community levels. The diagram reveals that communes, villages and household groups were actively involved in many stages of the process. It also reveals some gaps, particularly the relatively minor role of district government.

This section will outline each step in the 2004-2005 process as illustrated by Figure 1.

1. PMU Agreement (finalised in late February – early March 2004)

From September 2003 through until March 2004 the PMU held many discussions concerning PPP.² These discussions were principally between the Australian and Vietnamese PMU Directors, with some input from the Australian advisors and PMU Vice-Director. Once general agreement was reached between the provincial and Australian sides of the program, further discussions were held within the AMC to finalise the details for the process.

One of the Australian Participatory Development Advisors wrote a report on RUDEP's Participatory Rural Appraisal activities to be used as an input to the planning process.

2. DDO Training (March 15 & 16)

The PMU conducted a two-day training course on PPP for the DDOs.³ The course included an outline of the process in general, detailed explanation of the new format for village planning meetings, facilitator training, an exercise on problem analysis and workshopping of the content for facilitator training. It was conducted principally by the Australian Participatory Development Advisors and Communications and Promotions Officer.

3. Facilitator Training (March 22 – April 5)

In contrast to previous years, local officials and leading community members played the role of facilitators at the village planning meetings. There were several reasons for transferring the facilitator role from DDOs to local officials but chief among them were the need to promote greater local ownership of the process and the practical difficulties of DDOs alone conducting 55 meetings over nine communes.

The DDOs conducted one-day training sessions in their respective communes and invited the commune contact groups and 5 to 10 potential facilitators from each village in the

² See Section 3.4

³ See Section 4

commune.⁴ The training included an overview of the Program and PPP, detailed explanation and training on the village planning meetings, particularly the facilitators' role, and a 'mock village planning meeting' to give the facilitators practical experience as well as the opportunity to raise their own difficulties and propose corresponding activities.

4. Village Planning Meetings (April 5 – April 21)⁵

The community consultative meetings were held at a village level, except in the case of villages with over 600 households. At the commencement of the meeting the DDO, sometimes with assistance from a CCG representative or village leader, introduced RUDEP activities in the commune and village during the previous 12 months and presented the results of PRA activities conducted in the commune. They then announced RUDEP's budget for the commune for the coming financial year and explained the format to be used to learn of the community's difficulties and proposed activities.

5. Group Discussion

The meetings then split into groups of approximately 10 to 15 household representatives, usually comprising members from the same hamlet. The facilitators asked each group member in turn to state the difficulties they were encountering. The difficulties were written down on scrap paper and then checked for any overlap or anomalies before being transferred over to a 'Difficulties Form'. When all the group members' difficulties had been recorded, they were then asked about the number of members in the group who shared the problem. Difficulties were then listed in order of the number of group members who shared the difficulty.

The group then analysed each of the difficulties recorded and proposed activities to resolve each of the difficulties raised. The group was permitted to suggest several activities for each difficulty but in practice they usually suggested just one activity for each corresponding difficulty.

6. Compilation of group results

After the groups had finished discussing they came together once again in a plenary session to compile each group's proposed activities into three lists of proposed activities for the whole meeting.

At the conclusion of the village planning meetings, each group facilitator read out the list of activities proposed by the group during a plenary session. The proposed activities, along with the number of groups proposing each activity, were recorded on three sheets of A0 paper, one sheet for each of the activity sectors: income generation, livelihoods and infrastructure. The proposed activities recorded on the A0 sheet were then read out as the final results of the meeting.

⁴ See Section 5

⁵ See Section 6 for Steps 4, 5 and 6

7. Commune Plan Preparation Meetings (May 15 – May 25)⁶

Prior to the meetings taking place, the DDOs recorded the difficulties raised into the program database and compiled detailed and summarised ‘activity tables’ by adding up the activities proposed by groups in the village planning meetings. The completed tables included a list of proposed activities for each sector, the number of groups proposing the activity in each village and the total number of groups proposing the activity in the commune.

District, commune and village officials then met over a full day to review the data from the village planning meetings and combine this with their own knowledge and experience to come up with three priority lists of activities for the commune. They then used these lists, together with other available data and information, to prepare a plan and allocate budget for RUDEP activities during 2004 – 2005.

The Commune Plan Preparation Meeting participants used scoring matrices to rank the proposed activities into priority order for each of the three sectors. They then filled in a planning table allocating budget to the Village Savings and Credit Facilities (VSCFs), as well as income generation, livelihood and infrastructure activities and identifying the villages in which the various activities would take place.

8. District Agreement for Commune Plan (May 26 – June 11)

Each commune then sent copies of their plans to RUDEP and the District Contact Group in their respective districts. The plans submitted typically consisted simply of the final planning table and a cover letter requesting acceptance of the plan. The District Contact Groups then sent a one page letter to the program stating their acceptance of the commune plan.⁷

9. Submission of RUDEP Annual Plan

Once it had received the commune plans, written district agreements and confirmation on the infrastructure projects to be carried out, RUDEP submitted its annual plan to the Quang Ngai Province People’s Committee for approval.

10. PPC Approval of RUDEP Annual Plan

The Quang Ngai Province People’s Committee approves RUDEP’s annual plan, thereby also approving the commune plans.

11. PMU Confirmation of Annual Plan

The PMU confirms RUDEP’s annual plan and holds planning workshop with provincial stakeholders.

⁶ See Section 7

⁷ See Section 9 for more details on Steps 8 to 15

12. RUDEP Commune Plan Confirmation Meetings

RUDEP officers, principally the Participatory Development Advisors and District Development Officers, meet with the CCG and village leaders to confirm the RUDEP Commune Plans and discuss the roles and responsibilities of each party involved in their implementation.

13. Village Plan Announcement Meetings

Based on the approved RUDEP Commune Plans, the village leaders and DDOs hold village meetings to announce the program's activities and budget allocation for the village for the 2004 – 2005 period. Households are likely to be asked to register their interest in taking part in one of the announced activities as activity group members.

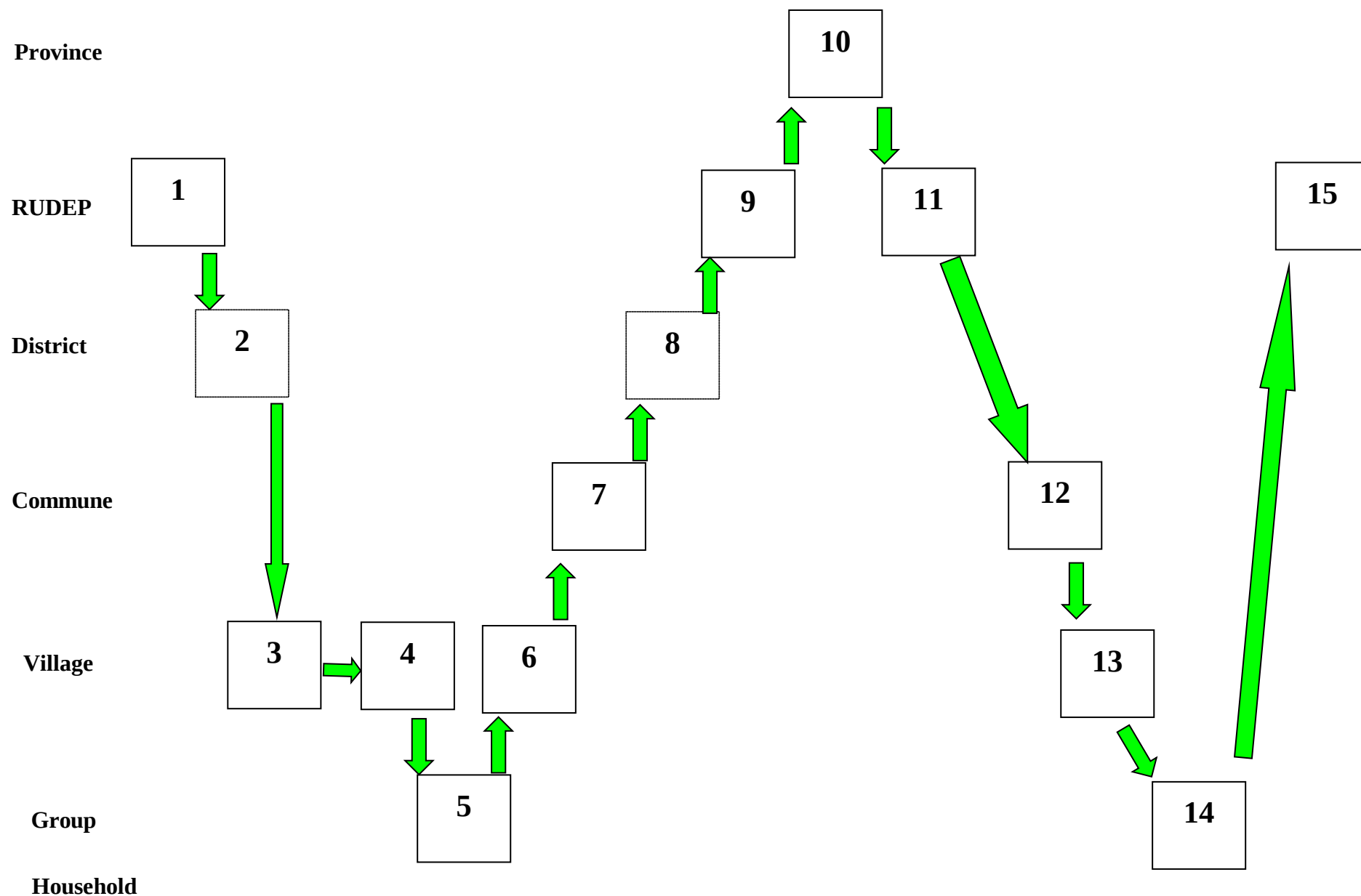
14. Activity Group/VSCF plans

Existing and newly formed groups will draw up their own plans to guide implementation of the activities in which they are involved.

15. RUDEP Consideration of Activity Group/VSCF plans

Once they have completed their plans, the activity or VSCF groups will send the plans to RUDEP for consideration, approval and action. The implementation of RUDEP funded activities will primarily be guided by the information provided in these plans..

Figure 1: Diagram of 2004-2005 Participatory Planning Process



3 Background

3.1 PPP in Cycle 1 Communes

Below is summary of the participatory planning process employed in December 2001 – January 2002 for the first three communes to participate in the program: Duc Phong, Son Hai and Tinh Tho communes. They are known as cycle one communes because they were part of RUDEP's first annual plan and round of activities.

Village level Problem Census Meetings were held at which the participants split into groups. The groups discussed their difficulties and listed them on the forms provided. They then recorded the number of people in the group who shared the problem, disaggregated by gender. Finally the groups prioritised the difficulties recorded in order of perceived importance. RUDEP staff recorded the results into a database, coded them⁸ and translated the results into Vietnamese. The coded results could be turned into graphs or tables to easily view the results.

Problem Solving Meetings followed shortly afterwards. Program staff presented the results of the Problem Census Meetings and the participants were then asked to split into groups according to the activity “that they felt would be the best place to start solving their problems” (PDD, Volume 3, Part B, page 2). The groups were then given forms containing a series of questions to assist them to form an activity proposal.⁹

Differences to the current process included:

- o Two separate village planning meetings per village
- o Program staff as facilitators
- o PRA activities were not used as part of the process
- o People formed into groups according to the activity they preferred rather than proposing activities for each individual difficulty. The activities were not categorised into sectors
- o Difficulties were prioritised by group preference rather than by the number of people who shared the difficulty
- o There were no Commune Plan Preparation Meetings, Commune Plan Confirmation Meetings, Village Plan Announcement Meetings or Activity/VSCF group plans. Instead, the data from the village planning meetings was used almost exclusively by RUDEP advisors to assist in the preparation of program activities.

3.2 PPP in Cycle 2 Communes

Below is summary of the participatory planning process employed in March – April 2003 for the second cycle of three communes to participate in the program: Pho Chau, Nghia Tho and Hanh Phuoc. They are known as cycle two communes because they began with the program during its second planning year.

⁸ See Annex 8.01 for the Difficulties Codes

⁹ See Annex 3.1 for Diagram of Cycle 1 PPP

In this cycle, the problem solving aspect of the process was not included as part of the community meetings. Instead just one meeting was held in each locality, consisting of problem census and problem analysis components. RUDEP determined that no more than one hundred household representatives would be invited to any one meeting. Given that all households in the commune were invited to meetings, in many cases several meetings were organised per village.

Similar to cycle one, the meetings split into groups which worked with RUDEP facilitators to list and prioritise all their problems (i.e. problem census). The top five priority problems from that group were then recorded on a separate A4 sheet for the next stage of the PC/PA/PS meeting.¹⁰

The groups then reassembled in a plenary session and the five priority problems of each of the groups were displayed simultaneously on a board, wall or line in front of all households attending the meeting. The meeting facilitators then made a unique list of all priority problems from the individual group lists and the combined gathering of households voted to prioritise the five priority problems affecting households who attended the meeting.

At the conclusion of the plenary session, the participants were asked to form groups based on which of the five priority problems they were most interested. These groups then analysed the root causes of the problems.

Some differences to both the current and cycle one processes included:

- o Prioritisation of problems at a plenary session
- o Greater analysis of the priority problems
- o Activities proposed as part of the problem analysis were not able to be coded

3.3 Evaluation of first two cycles

No formal evaluation was conducted of either of the first two planning cycles. However, RUDEP obtained some idea of local thoughts on the meetings through interviews with commune and district officials, government feedback at the completion of meetings and focus group discussions conducted by DDOs with activity groups in their communes.

3.3.1 Government Comments

Many of the government and district officials said that the process was reasonable or, in one case, very good. A common theme was that the meetings were conducted thoroughly and in more detail than government held meetings. Others commented on its democratic nature and the fact that it encouraged people to think for themselves to find solutions to their problems.

Several officials responded that the problem census – problem solving meetings were conducted ‘very carefully’ which sometimes implied criticism that the program had spent too much time and effort on the meetings. A concern shared by respondents from four of the six communes and one of the districts, was that participants at the meetings did not understand RUDEP and therefore felt that there was an opportunity to

¹⁰ See Annex 3.2 for Explanation of Cycle 2 PPP

receive either a grant or a ‘soft’ loan from the Program. They felt that this misapprehension biased people’s responses towards income generating, credit related activities rather than community activities.

Some noted that breaking into groups is not something that had been done before so neither the government nor the people were accustomed to it.

The preparations and format for the meetings varied slightly between cycle one and cycle 2 districts so comments on the meetings will be categorised accordingly.

Cycle One Districts

All contact group members in all three cycle one communes, as well as one DCG member, raised the issue of people not understanding the program clearly and therefore believing that they would receive loans. This was considered to have affected the meeting results. One official remarked, “to begin with neither the commune officials nor the commune people themselves understood about the program. That meant that when the program asked them to list all their problems they thought that the program was going to give them money to solve each and every one of their problems.” A related concern was with unrealistic expectations and the number of problems for which the program could not possibly expect to cater.

Four of the six cycle one officials mentioned the need for the program to speak further with commune residents on an individual basis. Two said that the program should learn the thoughts of people in their communes through a further “survey” or “investigation”. Two others did not feel that community meetings were necessary or desirable at all. They believed the best process to follow was to speak with farmers individually rather than through community meetings. “It wouldn’t need to talk to a lot of farmers because a lot of them would have the same problems or say similar things.” The program could then use this information to work out range of options to present to people to consider. “If they agree with what is presented fine, if not then the activity would need to be reconsidered.”

Regarding the scale of meetings, there was a suggestion that future meetings be held at a hamlet level because village level meetings were too large.

Cycle Two Districts

One CCG official and one DCG official, from the same district, had a number of positive comments on the process followed during the last round of pc/pa/ps meetings. The DCG member said the meetings were ‘worth learning from’ while the CCG member said the people were given the opportunity to express their opinion and that program activities since then had shown that the program’s activities were as the people requested. He added that the meeting structure promoted initiative and ‘democratic thinking’.

Other comments were less complimentary. Another two respondents, also DCG and CCG officials from the same district, believed that the meetings wasted too much time.

Similar to the cycle one districts, a major concern was the issue of raised expectations which it was felt the program could not hope to satisfy. One DCG official felt that RUDEP should let people know the list of activities it could support to avoid the raising expectations and the ‘problem’ (in his opinion) of people

requesting program support for a senior-secondary school when such a high level school was impossible in that village. He was supported by a CCG member's opinion that the program should differentiate between "what is the program's and what is the government's so that when people state their wishes they will be within the scope of the program to support". Another district official did not believe that there needed to be any restrictions placed on the problems mentioned to people "as long as it is made clear to them the areas which the program can't support."

Similar to a suggestion from one of the cycle one districts, it was suggested that the best way to deal with this issue would be to pre-select a range of options from which to choose. A district official stated that the meetings could be 'abbreviated' by 'orienting' people beforehand. He was supported by his colleague's statement that the program should work out what is necessary and propose it to people and by a CCG official, who said that the CPC should explain to people about the meetings beforehand so they would "have the right idea".

Although praising the meetings in general, one district official questioned the reliability of the results. He suggested that when he attended the meetings there were a lot of instances of people just following others' suggestions. When either the facilitator or another group member mentioned a problem others just said 'me too'. He suggested that a way of overcoming this would be to distribute some kind of note with the questions for them to consider written on it so they would have a chance to think about the problems and solutions before they came to the meeting.

3.3.2 Community Comments

The community's comments come from focus group discussions held by the DDOs with one activity group in each of the communes. Like the above report on government opinions presented in 3.3.1, no claim is made that the focus group discussions were a perfectly scientific method or that the opinions expressed represent the whole community in each commune. The discussions were simply held to provide some ideas of community understanding and perceptions about the process.¹¹ The findings are summarised below under the headings in which they laid out in the discussion guidelines.

Pre-meeting Perceptions

In general the level of awareness and understanding about the program and the meetings appeared to be significantly higher for the cycle two process than for the cycle one process. Before the cycle one communes had either virtually no information about the meetings, in Son Hai, or erroneous information, in Duc Phong and Tinh Tho. In Duc Phong some people thought that the purpose of the meeting was to provide them with loans and technical support while in Tinh Tho people heard that RUDEP would pay people in the commune amounts of up to a few hundred thousand per person.

For the cycle two communes, although people still not have a clear idea of the meeting format, they at least understood something about the purpose of the meeting and did not seem to have too many ideas which would lead to unrealistic expectations.

¹¹ See Annex 3.3 for PPP Focus Group Guidelines and Results

Understanding of meeting purpose and format

For the cycle one communes, the participants in Duc Phong and Tinh Tho had some memory of splitting into groups and being asked to list out their problems. Some of the respondents from Tinh Tho said they were told they could establish groups of 4 to 5 people for plant or animal production.

The cycle two meetings were held more recently and the respondents from these communes had a more complete and accurate picture about what happened at the meetings.

Respondents in virtually all of the communes said that the meetings were not what they expected. Some said that they expected RUDEP would give them money, others said that they thought they would just listen to how the program could help them.

Level of Participation

Most respondents said that everyone in the group had a chance to express their opinion during the group discussion. However, some said that males and the more elderly among the group spoke more and that women were sometimes hesitant to speak. Some respondents from one commune said that they did not dare to speak up for fear of being discriminated against.

Awareness of Post-meeting

Many of the respondents in both cycle one and cycle two communes expected RUDEP to provide loans and technical support after the PC/PA/PS meetings. Some said their expectations had been satisfied. Others said they thought that more people would be provided loans. Interestingly, in Son Hai most people in the group interviewed said that once the meetings had finished they expected the Australians to go home and never return.

Opinions on the PC/PA/PS meetings

In four of the six communes the respondents said they were happy with how splitting the meetings into groups allowed them, and everyone else in the meeting, to have their say.

3.4 Lead up Discussion and Preparation

Soon after the completion of the cycle two participatory planning process, the PMU leadership agreed that the process should be reviewed before the next process began in 2004. The Communications and Promotions Officer was assigned the task of writing a discussion paper to initiate the review and discussions within the PMU and possibly the district and commune contact groups.¹²

The discussion paper was completed in September 2003 and made a number of recommendations which differed significantly from the processes applied during the previous two cycles. The main recommendations included:

¹² See Annex 3.4 for Planning Discussion Paper

- A joint planning process through which RUDEP funds would be seen as one of several funding sources contributing to implementing the commune plan
- Involvement of village officials in facilitation at the meetings
- Changing the village planning meeting format to one in which the people expressed their aims and then spoke about the conditions they needed to fulfill those aims
- Abandoning prioritisation in favour of an approach in which the opinions expressed in each group were simply counted and then combined to obtain results at a village and commune level

Unfortunately, for a variety of reasons, agreement could not be reached on the first and most far-reaching of the recommendations outlined above, that of adjusting RUDEP's process to fit in with the commune's existing planning process in order to develop a commune plan incorporating RUDEP funding. Discussions then stalled for an extended period.

When talks on the 2004 – 2005 PPP resumed in December 2003 they focused around two main issues: the number of community meetings held as part of the process and the period between each planning cycle.

On the first issue the provincial PMU leadership strongly believed that the number of meetings should be reduced to cause less inconvenience to local governments and people. Although the AMC had some concerns about the manageability of very large meetings, eventually agreement was reached that one meeting would be held per village for villages with less than 600 households.

On the second issue there at first appeared to be agreement on continuing to conduct PPP on an annual basis. However, after witnessing PLAN International's planning process the provincial side of the program raised some concerns about RUDEP's ability to continue to go through annual planning processes and suggested instead that they be conducted once every three years or when RUDEP first entered a commune. The Australian side of the program believed that any program resource difficulties could best be resolved by increasing local government involvement in the process and ultimately agreement was reached to continue to conduct the process annually for the time being.

In early February the Australian PMU Co-Director drafted a one page document on the participatory planning process whose principal features included:

- the incorporation of PRA into the process
- the introduction of commune plans based on the results of the village planning meetings
- the introduction of funding allocation and activity distribution per village
- the introduction of activity/VSCF group plans

The document was readily accepted by both the Vietnamese and AMC sides, allowing work to commence on identifying more detailed aspects of the process.

In late February – early March the AMC leadership agreed on the details of the village planning meetings and preparations commenced.

3.5 Study tours

RUDEP visited two other projects in February 2004 in order to learn about their planning processes.

3.5.1 PLAN International

On January 14 and 15 a District Development Officer and Vietnamese Participatory Development Advisor attended village planning meetings held by PLAN International. The meetings were held in Tinh Hiep Commune, Son Tinh District and consisted of discussions six groups of 10 people focussing around the theme of improving the lives of children in the commune.

On January 16, RUDEP's Communications and Promotions Officer attended a commune planning meeting for Tinh Hiep and Tinh Tra communes held at the Central Hotel in Quang Ngai Town. A representative from each group presented the group's findings then met with the commune leadership to draw up a commune plan. This part of the process was of particular interest to RUDEP because commune planning meetings had not been part of the participatory planning process up until that time.¹³

3.5.2 Social Forestry Development Project

In February the PMU Vice-Director attended a meeting of provincial departments of planning and investment concerning the planning process adopted by the Social Forestry Development Project. This planning process has been widely adopted in Son La Province.¹⁴

3.6 Quarterly Meeting

An outline of the 2004-2005 process was presented to DCG and CCG officials at a quarterly meeting held on March 6, 2004. The meeting participants were also given a printout of the PowerPoint presentation and a two-page schedule of the steps in the process.¹⁵

None of the contact group members raised any objections to the process, with the exception of the Tinh Tho CCG leader who commented that he thought RUDEP raised the public's expectations and this led to disappointment in and mistrust of the program when those expectations were not met.

Unfortunately, very little time was made available for discussion so none of the other contact group members had any comments.

¹³ See Annex 3.5 for Report on PLAN International's Planning Process

¹⁴ See Annex 3.6 for an Introduction to the Song Da Planning Process

¹⁵ This schedule is available in English and Vietnamese from the 'Back-ups'/USB folder in D drive of the CPO's old computer. The PowerPoint presentation was similar to the one given to the DDOs. See Annex 4.5.

4 DDO Training

4.1 Previous Training

The commencement of the 2004 – 2005 planning year means the commencement of three new communes to work with and receive funding from RUDEP, bringing the total number of participating communes to nine. Consequently by the time PPP began in March there were nine District Development Officers: six ‘old’ DDOs working in the cycle one and cycle two communes and three new DDOs about to commence work in the three new communes.

Two of the cycle one DDOs had been working at RUDEP since its inception. They had therefore already had experience with the two previous PPPs and the training which preceded each of them. Three other DDOs had facilitation experience during the cycle two process while the four remaining DDOs, including one who was relatively new to the position in Duc Phong commune, had no previous experience.

To compensate for some DDOs’ lack of facilitation experience, one of the Australian Participatory Development Advisors held a half-day seminar on PPP and facilitation skills in December 2003.¹⁶ The course did not go into detail about the process or meeting format to be followed in 2004-2005 but focused on teaching DDOs some key facilitation techniques and reminding them of shortcomings during the previous process which needed to be corrected for the upcoming PPP.

4.2 Objectives

A two-day DDO training course on the 2004 – 2005 PPP was held on March 15 and 16 2004. The course had several objectives:

- o Thoroughly explain the new process, particularly the new village planning meeting format
- o Refresh DDOs skills and knowledge on facilitation techniques
- o Clarify the difference between difficulties and activities and identify techniques to elicit difficulties and then guide group discussion towards proposing activities for each difficulty
- o Workshop the format and content of the facilitator training to be conducted by the DDOs

4.3 Content

Details of the content are available in the course outline.¹⁷ However, the course outlined was not followed fully and in practice the course consisted of PowerPoint Presentations on:

- o Reasons for PPP¹⁸
- o Analysing and reporting on PRA activities¹⁹

¹⁶ See Annex 4.1 for presentation on Improving Outputs from PC.PA.PS

¹⁷ See Annex 4.2 for the DDO PPP Training Course Outline

¹⁸ See Annex 4.3

- o Overview of PPP in 2004 – 2005²⁰
- o Detailed presentation and instruction on the village planning meetings²¹
- o Guidance on facilitation skills²²

In addition, the training included a group exercise on identifying difficulties and facilitating analysis of difficulties at the village planning meetings. Finally, the course workshopped the content and training techniques to be used for the village facilitator course. Some considerable time was also spent on the logistics and schedules for the facilitator training and village planning meetings.

The training course was immediately followed by a three-day train-of-trainers course, which included extensive training on presentation and training skills.²³

4.4 Successes and Difficulties

4.4.1 Successes

The course achieved its prime objective of providing the DDOs with a clear understanding of the process, and particularly the format and facilitator roles during the village planning meetings. It also provided them with a course framework for the village facilitator training courses.

From the brief written DDO evaluations of the course (see DDO PPP Training Evaluation Form Annex) the DDOs found the instruction on the village planning meetings and general process to be the most useful part of the course. Some also wrote that they found the presentations on facilitation skills useful.

4.4.2 Difficulties

By far the biggest difficulty was in time management. Although the main content of the course was covered, it did not proceed according to schedule. As a consequence some important aspects of the course, such as a briefing on the commune planning meetings, were either missed out or not given adequate time.

The most difficult part of the course content was the exercise on identifying and analysing difficulties.²⁴ Before the course began, the trainers (Participatory Development Advisors and Communications and Promotions Officer) had agreed on three guiding principles for facilitators to use when identifying a difficulty

¹⁹ See Annex 4.4

²⁰ See Annex 4.5

²¹ See Annex 4.6

²² See Annexes 4.7 and 4.8

²³ Annex 4.11 is a PowerPoint presentation prepared by the Capacity Building Officer outlining some key TOT techniques. The CBO did not have time to give this presentation during the two day course on PPP.

²⁴ See Annex 4.9 for Difficulty – Activity Exercises Table

to be recorded on the difficulties form: remove ambiguity, prevent any overlap in the difficulties raised and ensure that the difficulties were sensible. Despite this, at times it was still unclear which of the statements used in the exercises could be accepted as difficulties and which needed further clarification or refinement. The DDOs also had difficulty in facilitating the analysis of difficulties to identify an appropriate activity. This exercise was identified as being the most difficult part of the course in virtually all of the DDO's course evaluations.²⁵

4.5 Recommendations

1. *Greater Time Discipline.*

Trainers and DDOs need to be more aware of the course agenda and make a conscious effort to not stray too far from that agenda except in exceptional circumstances. In particular, they need to avoid needless delays in the starting times of training sessions and interruptions to training sessions. A better balance needs to be kept in the time allocated for various components of the course to ensure that all the intended content of the training is fully covered.

2. *More Interaction*

The majority of training sessions consisted of PowerPoint Presentations and were principally a one-way dialogue from presenter to DDOs. To some extent this was an appropriate method because for some of the content there was little other option than for the presenter to simply explain the process. However, more time could have been allowed for DDO input into the presented process and meeting format, or for more senior DDOs to recount their experiences as facilitators.

3. *DDO Training techniques*

The DDOs and CPO workshopped the content of the facilitator training courses but more emphasis should have been placed on workshopping training techniques appropriate to local officials and farmers which could be applied to the facilitator training.

²⁵ See Annex 4.10 for DDO PPP Training Evaluation Form

5 Village Facilitator Training

From March 22 to April 5 the DDOs conducted one-day village facilitator training in their respective communes.²⁶ The majority of courses took place between Monday March 22nd and Monday March 29th. However, in Duc Phong and Tinh Tho communes it was felt that a second training course was required. These were held on March 30th and April 5th respectively.

The courses were held at the commune people's committee headquarters. Invited participants included the commune contact groups and 5 to 10 prospective facilitators from each village, depending on the size of the village.²⁷ RUDEP left it up to the communes to nominate who they felt would be the most suitable people facilitators, regardless of their occupation or official position in the village. However, most of those who attended the training were village or hamlet officials or community association representatives.

5.1 Objectives

The course's prime objective was to equip the participants with the necessary skills and knowledge to be effective facilitators at the village planning meetings. In order to achieve the prime objective the course had several secondary objectives. They were for the course participants to:

- o Understand RUDEP activities and approaches;
- o Understand the participatory planning process adopted in 2004 – 2005;
- o Have a thorough understanding of the village planning meeting format, especially their role in the meetings
- o Learn about effective facilitation techniques.

5.2 Preparation

Preparation for the training courses included further instruction and reminders on the course content and methods, announcements on some slight alterations to the village planning meetings and therefore on the content of the training courses, and the logistical arrangements necessary for the courses to be carried out.

Beyond the course framework agreed to at the DDO training course, the DDOs were purposely left to present the course in the way they felt most comfortable. As the DDOs had the benefit of attending a three-day training course on train-of-trainers and presentation techniques it was felt they would be well enough equipped to make their own individual refinements to the courses they conducted and would not welcome any more outside direction.

²⁶ See Annex 5.1 for PPP Village Facilitator Training Schedule

²⁷ With the exception of Tan Phuoc Village in Binh Minh Commune, where the DDO decided to invite approximately 14 facilitators to training because of the large number of households in the village. See Annex 5.11 for the Number of Households per Village in RUDEP communes together with approximate guidelines on the number of facilitators to be invited. The guidelines were based on a ratio of one 1 facilitator for approximately 30 households. This in turn was based on the assumption that one facilitator could facilitate for two groups of 15 households. See Section 6.3, Step 6 for more details.

However, when it was requested, a lot of individual support and advice was given on the content of presentations to assist each DDO prepare for their course. Extra instructions and advice on minor adjustments to PPP were also sent out by email prior to the commencement of the courses.

Materials were purchased jointly by the PMU and distributed to each DDO, including markers, A0 paper, photocopies and other stationary supplies. Money was advanced to the DDOs to pay the communes for lunch for the participants and hire of the meeting room. When lunch and snacks are included in the cost the training meetings cost just over 17 million dong, an average of approximately 1.9 million dong per commune. However, when only stationary and materials are calculated the courses cost approximately 5 million dong, an average of approximately 550,000 dong per course²⁸.

Arrangements were made to borrow digital projectors to be used for the PowerPoint presentations and the training schedule was arranged so that each DDO conducting village facilitator training was accompanied by at least one other DDO acting as assistant.

DDO in the H're speaking communes were instructed to go through the course content in advance with a bilingual H're – Kinh Vietnamese speaker and arrange for that person to interpret during the course, when necessary.

5.3 Content²⁹

The morning session of the course consisted mainly of presentations on RUDEP³⁰, PPP³¹, village planning meetings³² and facilitation skills³³. These presentations were developed by each DDO based on presentation frameworks workshopped during the DDO training course or, in the case of the Facilitator Roles Training Framework, developed afterwards and emailed to the DDOs. The afternoon session consisted of a mock village planning meeting.

Presentations on RUDEP as a whole and on the 2004 – 2005 PPP were relatively brief. The DDOs chose to focus attention on a quite detailed explanation of the steps involved during the village planning meetings, particularly the steps during group discussion in which the facilitators were most directly involved. For this section the DDOs referred to the participant, household and activity forms photocopied for each of the participants. Earlier DDOs also found A0 copies of these forms to be very effective training tools and these were increasingly used for later training courses. Especially in the later courses, plenty of time was also allowed for the DDOs to 'model' the forms and facilitation process used during the meetings. When doing this the DDOs asked the course participants to state their difficulties and then played the role of facilitator to help

²⁸ See Annex 5.3 for Payment Submission for PPP Village Facilitator Training

²⁹ See Annex 5.4 for Village Facilitator Training Course Framework

³⁰ See Annex 5.5 for RUDEP Overview Presentation Framework

³¹ See Annex 5.6 for the PPP Overview Framework

³² See Annex 5.7 for the Village Planning Meetings Training Framework

³³ See Annex 5.8 for the Facilitator Roles Training Framework.

course participants analyse the question and come up with one or more activities to address the stated difficulty.

Facilitation skills training placed emphasis on the facilitator's role of encouraging group participants to speak rather than speaking themselves or guiding the participants on what to say.

In the mock village planning meeting, the DDOs asked the participants to split into small groups. They then asked one member of each group to be the facilitator and others to play the role of regular participants in the planning meetings. The participants were usually told that the difficulties they raised would be recorded so that this was their opportunity to raise any of their own or their families' difficulties. At the end of each group discussion, the groups recorded their final results on a sheet of A0 paper, which they hung at the front of the room. Finally, the results of each group were combined and transcribed on to three sheets of A0 paper, one sheet for each activity sector.

At the conclusion of the course, the DDO confirmed the meetings schedule and venues with the participants and asked the commune to confirm how it would inform residents of the meetings. In many cases, the DDOs showed the CCG a PPP flyer for them to comment on and adjust if necessary. Most CCGs chose to write the head of households name and the time and date of the meeting at the top of the flyers so they could double as commune invitation slips.³⁴

5.4 Difficulties and Successes

5.4.1 Successes

Overall, the facilitator training was of a very high standard. The DDOs explained the content of the meeting clearly, encouraged group discussion and interaction and often applied some of the techniques which they had learnt in the recent Train-of-trainer course. Thanks to the high quality training, the participants were generally attentive and actively involved in the course.

Working in pairs was also very effective. The assistant DDO was very useful in helping prepare materials and stepping in when a point needed further elaboration or clarification. Attending other courses also gave the DDOs the opportunity to learn from each other and apply what they had learnt in their own courses. As a result, as a general rule the later training courses were a significant improvement on the earlier ones.

In terms of equipping the facilitators with the necessary skills and knowledge for the village planning meetings, the DDO's modelling of the process using A0 photocopies of the difficulty and activity forms was very successful. The use of specific examples and the tracking of those examples from the difficulty sheet through to the activity sheet showed the participants how the process worked in practice.

The afternoon mock village planning meetings were invaluable in giving participants the chance to consolidate and practice what they had learnt during the morning. In many cases the groups began hesitantly but discussion soon picked up as the groups began to grasp how the process worked in practice.

³⁴ See Annex 5.9 for the PPP Flyer

The course had additional benefits beyond training the participants as facilitators. The training was very useful as a communications event in promoting awareness and understanding of RUDEP as a whole. Although many participants responded that they felt the most useful part of the course was learning about facilitation, an equal number commented that it was useful to learn more about the program as a whole. As many of the participants were community leaders, this will have a flow on effect of raising the program's profile in the communes.

The participants also heard about the process as a whole and how it could be used as an effective means of planning, thereby taking a step towards local understanding and engagement in the process. Some asked questions or raised concerns about PPP and the DDO had a chance to address some of the concerns and clarify some misapprehensions.

Many of the DDOs were very successful in promoting a lively, happy atmosphere during the course. The participants really enjoyed the sing-along sessions and games suggested mixed in with the course content during the day. The game of forming pieces of papers into a square was particularly popular and was quite effective as an instructional tool.

Unfortunately, course evaluations were only handed in from one commune, Tinh Tho.³⁵ The participants at this course were extremely complimentary about the training content and particularly the DDO's training methods. Although some said that they had had some initial difficulty, the great majority said that by the end of the day they felt they understood the course content well thanks to the excellent training. None of them felt that anything extra needed to be added to the course.

Many of their comments about PPP were complimentary but quite vague. A typical comment was something along the lines of 'PPP helps to eradicate hunger and reduce poverty'. However, a significant number of respondents wrote that PPP helped to 'broaden democracy', learn about community opinion and combine the ideas of local communities with those of government at all levels.

Finally, several respondents expressed their gratitude at being invited to the course and said they felt happy and proud to be involved.

5.4.2 Difficulties

Attendance at the training was lower than expected and ³⁶ some of those who attended in the morning failed to attend for the afternoon session, making it very difficult for them to have a good grasp of how the meetings were to be conducted.

RUDEP did not want to specify the positions held by the facilitators because it believed that the commune should choose the most competent people, regardless of their position. However, some of the people selected were not suitable for the role of facilitator while other potentially more suitable people were not selected.

³⁵ See Annex 5.10 for the Village Facilitator Training Form

³⁶ The MEGO and/or DDOs should have access to attendance lists at the training courses.

Some DDOs, particularly in the first few courses, overused PowerPoint presentations but did not put enough time or preparation into going through concrete examples of the process, either using A0 paper or using the A4 forms which the participants received. One of the most effective presentations, as shown by the subsequent success of the village planning meetings³⁷, used just A0 paper and cut-outs of coloured paper to get the message across effectively. More role play could have been used with the DDO acting as a meeting facilitator and students acting as participants.

Similar to the DDO training, or perhaps partly as a consequence of it, the DDOs had lot of trouble in explaining what could be classed as a difficulty to be recorded on the Difficulties Form. This was partly because the village facilitators had trouble dealing with the fairly subtle distinctions being made as to whether or not a stated difficulty fulfilled the three set criteria described in the previous section. Unfortunately it was also partly caused by some of the DDOs themselves not being completely clear on the distinction. The problem was exacerbated by the quite limited number and range of difficulties being raised at the mock meetings, prompting some discussion within the PMU on how best to encourage participants to raise a greater quantity and range of difficulties.

Some facilitators at the Tinh Tho training course felt that one day was not sufficient and asked for further training. A few said they thought the task would be difficult and that they were too shy.

Despite the quality of the training, some village facilitators still maintained the genuine belief that their job was to 'guide' or 'prompt' households when they were stating their difficulties and particularly when they were proposing activities. Some facilitators felt that households would not be capable of analysing the difficulties and coming up with appropriate corresponding activities on their own. This is only to be expected when people have never before worked as facilitators or even been involved in organised small group discussion.

5.5 Recommendations

The most significant, but also probably the most obvious, recommendation to come from the training courses is that discussion and training on PPP needs to be a regular part of the program throughout the year rather than being restricted to just once a year. It is unrealistic to expect people who have never before acted as facilitators, or even attended meetings such as the village planning meetings, to suddenly become competent facilitators. The commune government and DDOs therefore need to identify the most competent facilitators to continue to be invited to facilitate in next year's process and provide with them plenty of training, discussion and support prior to and during the village planning meetings.³⁸

In terms of informing the community about the meetings it would be useful for all village and hamlet leaders to have a good understanding of PPP, particularly the village planning meetings, even if they are not village facilitators.

Experience at the meetings showed that women were usually better facilitators than men and this should be taken into account when considering facilitators for 2005 - 2006.

³⁷ In Nghia Tho Commune

³⁸ See Section 11.2 for recommendations on preparatory work for future PPPs

The commune people's committees, particularly the commune contact groups, should be more actively involved in the training. The commune contact group members were invited to the training and to the village planning meetings but not enough attention was paid to encouraging them to attend. As a result, many of them were absent from both the training and the meetings themselves. The transfer of information at the training would be more effective in some communes if the DDO first explains the process in detail to the CCG and then asks the key CCG members to help with the training. The village facilitators are likely to listen to and respect the opinion of the CCG members more than that of the DDOs and the CCG members also often speak in a way more suited to local officials, making the message easier to understand. More active CCG involvement in the training would also help to make preparation and organisation of the meetings run more smoothly.

6 Village Planning Meetings

6.1 Objectives

Similar to the PC/PA/PS meetings held in previous years, the village planning meetings aimed to take a census of community difficulties and proposed activities to inform program activities during the 2004 – 2005 financial year.

6.2 Preparation

The village planning meetings were held from April 5 through to April 21. Prior to the meetings the DDOs were told that the meetings should be given top priority for the period from April 5 through to April 16 and all nine DDOs were involved in the meetings for much of these two weeks. The DDOs worked in pairs, except for in Son Ha District where the three Son Ha DDOs worked as a team.³⁹

Materials and equipment for the meetings included A0 paper, masking tape, tarpaulins, logo and banner, clipboards, markers, pens and photocopies of the participants, difficulties and activities forms.⁴⁰ The total cost of VND 9,125,000 works out to an average of 1,014,000 dong per commune and VND 166,000 per meeting. If some unessential items (meeting banner, RUDEP logo and tarpaulins) are excluded then the total cost is reduced to VND 6,725,000 and respective average costs are VND 747,000 and VND 122,000. Some of the materials were used for two or even three communes. Nevertheless, the quite low costs are encouraging because they are likely to be at an affordable level for the communes.

6.3 Content

The village planning meetings followed the following format:

1. Opening

A government official, usually either a commune contract group member or the village leader, made a short opening speech summarising the purpose of the meeting.

2. Introduction

The District Development Officer introduced the purpose of the meeting in more detail as well as going through the meeting agenda and format.

3. Program Review

The District Development Officer reviewed RUDEP activities in the commune, and particularly in the village hosting the meeting, during the previous 12 months. Time was then reserved for households' questions or comments.

³⁹ See Annex 6.1 for the Village Planning Meetings Schedule

⁴⁰ See Annex 6.2 for Village Planning Meetings Costs Submission

4. PRA Report

The DDO presented the types of PRA activities conducted in the commune, the reasons for conducting them and the final results.

5. Budget Announcement

The DDO announced RUDEP's 2004 – 2005 budget for the income generation, livelihoods and infrastructure sectors.

6. Difficulty census

The meeting split into groups of 10 to 15, often consisting of people belonging to the same hamlet. Facilitators were assigned to each group and issued with clipboards containing scrap paper and participant, difficulties and activities forms. Although RUDEP had made provision for each facilitator to be responsible for two groups, in practice facilitators were only able to look after one group each. Each group went through the following process:

- a. The facilitator recorded the names of each household representative on the Participants Form;⁴¹
- b. The facilitator asked each group member to state their difficulties in turn and recorded the responses on scrap paper;
- c. Once every member had registered their difficulties the facilitator clarified any ambiguities or inconsistencies in the difficulties raised then transcribed them on to the Difficulties Form.⁴²

7. Difficulty Prioritisation

- a. The facilitator read out the difficulties listed and asked how many of the group shared each difficulty. S/he recorded the number of males and females who shared the difficulty in the columns provided on the Difficulties Form;
- b. The facilitator prioritised the difficulties according to the number of people in the group who had the difficulty. For those difficulties shared by an equal number of people, the facilitator asked the group to vote on which difficulties they felt should be a higher priority.

8. Activity Proposals

- a. The facilitator transcribed the prioritised difficulties on to the left hand column of the Activities Form;⁴³
- b. The group analysed the root causes of each of the difficulties raised and agreed on suitable activities to resolve each difficulty. The facilitator wrote the activities corresponding to each difficulty in the middle column of the Activities Form. Groups were permitted to propose more than one activity per difficulty but in practice invariably chose just one activity corresponding to each difficulty.

⁴¹ See Annex 6.3. Although they were mentioned in training, recorders were rarely used during the meetings. Usually the facilitator also doubled as a recorder.

⁴² See Annex 6.4

⁴³ See Annex 6.5

9. Categorisation by Sector

If they had enough time the group and facilitators categorised the proposed activities into one of the three sectors of income generation, livelihoods or infrastructure.

10. Compilation of results

The groups gathered together again in a plenary session.

- a. Before the commencement of the session the District Development Officer and village leader prepared three sheets of blank A0 paper for display at the head of the meeting location;
- b. Group representatives, most commonly the facilitators, read out the list of activities proposed by the group. The District Development Officer wrote down the proposed activities on one of the three sheets of A0 paper depending on the sector to which the activity belonged. When more than one group proposed the same activity, the DDO simply made a mark on the paper to register the number of groups proposing the activity;
- c. The District Development Officer read out the final compiled results from the A0 paper and copied the results into his/her notebook.⁴⁴ The A0 copies were kept by the village leader.

11. Close

The DDO explained the next steps in the process and a CCG member or village leader closed the meeting.

6.4 Minor Adjustments

The process described above is slightly different from the one originally proposed before the commencement of the village facilitator training courses as the courses revealed a few issues which needed to be adjusted before the meetings commenced.

1. It was originally intended for each group to write their proposed activities on A0 paper and display them at the front of the meeting. This was changed to the process described above because using so much A0 paper was considered to be too wasteful and expensive, too time consuming and too difficult for the DDOs and village leaders to quickly compile the results of each A0 paper onto a final village list.
2. It was originally intended for the groups not to rank difficulties and only propose activities for those difficulties shared by the whole group. However, experience from the training courses showed that very few difficulties were shared by everyone in the whole group. It was therefore decided that the groups would rank activities according to the number of people who shared the difficulty.

⁴⁴ See Annex 6.6 for example of a Village Proposed Activity List

6.5 Successes and Difficulties

6.5.1 Successes

In the great majority of cases:

1. The information flyers were adopted as being useful to the communes. Allowing the CCGs to adjust the flyers made the final result more appropriate to local needs and helped to increase local ownership of the process.
2. Meetings were held on schedule and without any major organisational or logistical problems.
3. Materials provided and venues allocated were adequate for the meetings.
4. The DDOs prepared well, both in terms of materials and facilitation methods, and did an excellent job of running the meetings.
5. The program reviews helped to increase program awareness and gave people the chance to ask questions and raise concerns.
6. The PRA reports helped to increase community awareness of the importance of PRA. Their preparation forced the DDOs to think more about how the results could be analysed and used to contribute to program activities.
7. The announcement of the commune budget, explanation of the budget's limitations and promise to return to announce program activities for the 2004 – 2005 period was all done clearly. This helped to prevent any unrealistic expectations, particularly in the three new communes, and contributed to allaying some concerns that the Program had lost faith with some communities.
8. Splitting activities into three sectors, each with its own distinct budget, made it easy for households to understand the types of activities that RUDEP would be conducting in the coming 12 months.
9. Working as facilitators raised the capacities of local officials and greatly increased their knowledge of and engagement in the program.
10. The village facilitators demonstrated that it was possible to successfully conduct a village planning meeting using local facilitators. The majority of meeting participants were given the opportunity to raise their difficulties and express their opinions during the group discussions and the facilitators rarely showed signs of pushing any agenda or purposefully biasing the meeting results.
11. The decision to specify that at least 40% of the women should be facilitators was correct as women generally proved to be better facilitators than men.
12. Listing corresponding activities for each of the difficulties resulted in a relatively clear and simple list of activities for consideration in the commune and RUDEP plans.

13. The final compilation of results by the facilitators or group representatives reading out the group results proved to be a quick, efficient and transparent way of compiling the group results into a list of proposed village activities. When it worked at its best the compilation of results attracted quite a deal of interest from the meeting participants.
14. A survey of facilitators at the end of each meeting indicated that most facilitators had a basic understanding of PPP as a process combining the ideas and opinions of all stakeholders.⁴⁵
15. Many facilitators understood the purpose of the village planning meetings as being to hear about the community's difficulties and opinions. Many others spoke in vague terms about the meeting's purpose being to reduce poverty.
16. Most facilitators understood their role as assisting the group members to list their difficulties (unfortunately few facilitators mentioned the listing of proposed activities). Only a minority of facilitators wrote that their role was to suggest answers to the group.

6.5.2 Difficulties

1. Although the information flyers were simplified compared to before the 2003 – 2004 process, some comments at the village meetings showed that many people may not have read them fully and that they were still too detailed.
2. Some commune contact groups did not co-ordinate well with village and hamlet officials to advise people in the commune of the date, time and place of the meetings.
3. Attendance at the meetings was much lower than in previous years.⁴⁶ This can be attributed partly to the problems described in point 2 and partly to other factors discussed further in Section 8.
4. DDOs and CCG officials did not always co-ordinate well for the opening introductions to the meeting, resulting in some overlap in their introductions and occasionally some confusion on what needed to be said.
5. After the DDOs had completed their review of program activities and invited participant feedback, many participants took this invitation as an opportunity to relate their difficulties and make proposals for future program activities. This occurred despite the DDO's emphasis that feedback should relate to past or current activities and that the participants would have plenty of opportunity to list their difficulties during the group sessions.

⁴⁵ See Annex 6.7 for Facilitator Evaluation Forms for Village Planning Meetings

⁴⁶ More information on attendance provided in Section 8.

6. Although the PRA reports provided plenty of information on the findings of PRA activities, the DDOs often failed to adequately analyse the findings or demonstrate how the findings could assist the program and local communities to work more effectively.
7. RUDEP did not adequately explain the types of activities and projects it could not or would not support.
8. Some of the people attending the facilitator training course did not attend the village planning meetings as they had promised. In at least one case, the DDO then had to give other local people on-the-spot training in order for the meeting to proceed.
9. There was a noticeable bias towards participants over 35 years of age. Very few people attending were in their 20s.
10. Participation in the group discussion was sometimes uneven. Typically, a small group of middle-aged or elderly men would sit close to the facilitator and speak much more than others in the group, particularly women. Women's reluctance to speak in front of men was particularly noticeable in highland communes.
11. Some groups were not seated in a tight circle so it was difficult for people at the edges of the group to hear what was being discussed or make their opinions heard. The combination of these two factors meant that some members drifted away from the groups before the meetings had finished.
12. The facilitators sometimes influenced the group's results by voicing their own opinion or asking rhetorical questions in a way where virtually the only possible response was to agree with the facilitator. This appeared to be done due to a lack of facilitation experience and a genuine desire to contribute to the discussion rather than any wilful biasing of the results.
13. Analysis of difficulties was extremely poor to the point of being virtually non-existent in some cases. Often the difficulty was phrased in terms of a 'lack of' something, making it very difficult for the facilitators and group participants to imagine any other activity than simply to provide whatever was lacking. For example, when the difficulty of 'lack of capital for pig production' was raised, as it was in virtually every meeting, the 'activity' automatically arising from that difficulty was 'provide loans for pig production.'

In other cases, the difficulty could have been analysed in far more depth but the facilitators' and participants' analytical skills were quite weak and their suggestions are likely to have been biased by a lack of direct concern in the cost-effectiveness of the activity. For example, if a group said that a road was in disrepair then the most obvious activity to propose was for the road to be concreted, regardless of whether concreting was actually necessary.

14. It was originally envisaged that the groups would only have time to analyse the most important of all the difficulties raised. However, the lack of detailed analysis meant that the groups proposed corresponding activities for every difficulty, regardless of whether the difficulty was shared by all members of the group or whether it was raised by only a single member. The result was that when the results were compiled into

village lists, an activity arising from a single person's difficulty was given the same weight as one arising from a difficulty shared by the whole group.

15. The lack of analysis meant that many of the proposed livelihoods 'activities' could better be classified as welfare requests.
16. There was occasionally some confusion on which sector some activities should be placed. Water pumps, for example, were sometimes placed under livelihoods but at other times placed under infrastructure while technical support for vegetable production sometimes went under livelihoods and sometimes under income generation.
17. On some occasions the DDOs did not make enough effort to involve the CCG, village leaders and village facilitators in running the meeting, thereby reducing local ownership of the process and the meetings' effectiveness in raising local capacity. This was particularly noticeable in the final stage of compiling the group lists into village activity lists. Most of this work was done by the DDOs and there was scope for more involvement from village leaders, facilitators and households.
18. Written feedback taken from a random sample of a few people at each meeting showed that many people still believed that the purpose of the meetings was to talk about loans or tell them about the program. A high number of people wrote that the provision of loans was the main outcome of the village planning meetings.⁴⁷
19. The written feedback also indicated that some respondents did not state all their difficulties during group discussion. They wrote that said they were unable to do so because of lack of time, there were too many problems to raise or, in one case, because they weren't permitted to state all their problems.
20. A survey of facilitators involved in the village planning meetings indicated that many of them had trouble differentiating a difficulty from a request. When asked whether or not 'I request capital for production' was a difficulty which could be recorded on the Difficulties Form, at least half responded that this statement could be accepted as a difficulty.

6.6 Recommendations

Some recommendations for the meetings were made in Section 5.5 or covered in Section 6.5.2 and recommendations on the meeting format will be presented in Section 11. Therefore this section will be restricted to organisational matters.

1. Although RUDEP took steps towards greater local involvement in PPP for the 2004 – 2005 process, even greater local involvement should be encouraged in future years. The program could promote local involvement by:

⁴⁷ See Annex 6.8 for Household Evaluation Forms for Village Planning Meetings

- a. Working more actively to encourage commune contact group involvement in the meetings. Ideally, if the commune contact groups attended the village facilitator training courses and fully understood the PRA activities then they would then be in a position to carry out all first five steps of the meeting process described above with minimal input needed from the DDOs.
 - b. Stepping aside to allow the commune or village officials to take charge of writing up the final village lists on A0 paper while encouraging group representatives, rather than the facilitators, to read out their group's results
 - c. Promoting more commune involvement in data entry by working on data entry together with the relevant commune officials using the computer supplied by RUDEP to each CPC.
2. The 'Program Review' section of the meetings should be changed to a more general review of community successes and difficulties during the past 12 months. This would avoid the problem of the session being misunderstood, would help to institutionalise the meetings, and would better set the scene for subsequent discussion on future activities.
3. Splitting village meetings into groups according to hamlet should be abandoned in favour of splitting groups by gender, when possible. This would help to avoid group discussion being dominated by a small number of men and encourage greater participation from women. This recommendation is especially applicable to highland communes. In most cases groups in these communes naturally split along gender lines but women were very hesitant to speak on the few occasions when there were mixed groups. RUDEP should ensure that women facilitators are used for groups made up entirely or predominantly of women.
4. RUDEP should set a minimum for the number or percentage of group members sharing a particular difficulty before that difficulty is analysed as an activity. For example, the program could stipulate that only those difficulties shared by half the group members or over could be analysed into an activity. This would help the group results to more accurately reflect community opinion.
5. Group prioritisation of difficulties should be abandoned as no analysis is done of the prioritisation and in any case during the 2004 – 2005 process the difficulties were mainly prioritised according to the number of people who shared the difficulty. The group would save on time by not needing to discuss which of two difficulties shared by the same number of people was the higher priority.
6. Along with announcing the budget, RUDEP should clearly state what types of activities it cannot or will not support and the reasons for its decision. However, if it is agreed at a later date that the village planning meetings can be a useful source of data for commune governments then the meeting participants can still be encouraged to mention all their difficulties in order to provide accurate information to both RUDEP and local government.
7. Although it might not be practical to include the results in the formal planning process, one youth and one children's meeting should be held in each commune in order to gain a greater understanding of the issues concerning these groups, compare them with the results of the village planning meetings and consider ways that youth and children's suggestions could be incorporated into RUDEP initiatives. These 'meetings' may only need to involve discussions within a relatively small group. PLAN International's children's meetings

appeared to be quite successful and RUDEP could seek further advice from PLAN on organising effective group discussion with children.

8. RUDEP should allow a wider time frame for the village planning meetings to take place and allow the DDOs and communes some flexibility in the dates they choose to hold the meetings. For example, RUDEP could ask that the meetings be conducted at any time over a six week period then allow the PDAs, DDOs and CCGs to arrange their plans to find the most suitable time. Time constraints made this impractical for the present round of meetings but more flexibility should be possible in future years.

7 Commune Plan Preparation Meetings

Commune Plan Preparation Meetings (CPPM) were held between May 15 and May 25⁴⁸ at the CPC Offices.⁴⁹ Invited participants included:

- o All District Contact Group members
- o All Commune Contact Group members, including non-core members
- o Commune Health Centre representative
- o District Extension Centre representative
- o Village leaders
- o DDO
- o PDA
- o VPDA
- o CPO

Technical specialists, the Australian PMU Co-Director and the PMU Vice-Director also attended some meetings.

7.1 Objectives

1. To identify the types of activities to receive program support before the start of the 2004 – 2005 financial year;
2. To increase the amount of local ownership of program activities;
3. To raise the analytical capacities of everyone involved in the meeting;
4. To take the first steps towards the integration of PPP into the local planning process.

7.2 Preparation

7.2.1 Data entry

Once the village planning meetings had been completed, the DDOs were instructed to enter the difficulties raised, the number of people having the difficulty and the difficulty's code number into the RUDEP database. The MEGO used the coded data to present the most frequently mentioned problems of each commune in table and chart form.⁵⁰ Each group's proposed activities were also entered into the database but these were not coded.

⁴⁸ See Annex 7.1 for the Schedules for Preparatory Meetings and Commune Plan Preparation Meetings

⁴⁹ Except for in Duc Phong Commune, where the meeting was held in Van Ha Village Primary School because the CPC offices were under construction.

⁵⁰ See the results summary in Section 8 plus results for each commune in the Section 8 annexes

After that the DDOs were asked to prepare six ‘activity tables’; a detailed table and a summary table for proposed activities in each of the three sectors.⁵¹ They did this by copying the final activity lists from the village planning meetings⁵² into an Excel table and adding up the village lists to obtain the total number of groups in the commune proposing each activity. They then grouped the activities into activity types and added together the number of groups proposing each activity type. For example, all activities concerning rice production, whether they were requests for loans, technical support or rice seed, were grouped under the heading of ‘rice’. The activity types together with the individual activities under each type formed the Detailed Activity Tables. A list of just the activity types alone formed the Summary Activity Tables.⁵³

7.2.2 AMC discussions

During this time the AMC leadership held discussions to finalise the format of the commune planning meetings. It was decided that scoring matrices would be used to prioritise activities and that RUDEP funding would be allocated for the higher priority activities using a planning table.⁵⁴

7.2.3 Preliminary Meetings

Once the meeting format was finalised the DDOs, PDAs and CPO held preparatory meetings with the CCGs, DCGs representatives, and in some cases the commune health centre representative, district extension centre representative and village leaders. The purpose of these meetings was to:

- o Present and explain the data (i.e. the difficulty and activity tables) to the participants and show how the data could be analysed;
- o Explain how the matrices would be used in the Commune Plan Preparation Meetings and explain the matrix criteria;
- o Provide the meeting participants with the opportunity to practice scoring activities and projects using the matrix so they would be quicker and more proficient at scoring during the Commune Plan Preparation Meetings;
- o Remind the CCGs to prepare information on the government’s commune plans and any suggestions on potential RUDEP activities not proposed during the village planning meetings but which would contribute to resolving difficulties raised during the meetings;
- o Explain the basic conditions of the Village Savings and Credit Facilities;
- o Present RUDEP’s annual commune budget;
- o Explain RUDEP’s funding policies, particularly the types of activities which the program was not able or willing to fund.

⁵¹ See the results summary in Section 8 plus results for each commune in the Section 8 annexes

⁵² See Annex 6.6

⁵³ See Annex 7.2 for directions to the DDOs on preparation of activity tables and Annex 7.3 for examples on the steps in preparing activity tables.

⁵⁴ See the matrices and final planning tables for each commune in the Section 8 annexes

7.2.4 Pre-screening of activities

Before the meetings commenced the PDAs discussed the difficulty and activity tables with each of their DDOs and told them of the activities and projects which RUDEP could not fund. For example, in the income generation sector the PDAs explained to the DDOs the Program's policy of not providing VSCF loans on breeding cows. The DDOs were then in a position to explain this clearly at the planning meetings, or in some cases, at the preliminary meetings. The PDAs also helped the DDOs to group activities into activity types.

Careful pre-screening was particularly important for the livelihoods and infrastructure sectors. As mentioned in a Section 6.5.2, many of the proposed 'activities' in the livelihoods section were in fact welfare requests and were therefore not in line with the program's self-help development approach. Once the unsuitable 'activities' had been taken out and others had been combined into activity types, the meetings were left with quite a limited number of livelihoods activities from which to choose.

A short-list of infrastructure projects were pre-selected before the meeting based on the number of groups proposing the project. The DDOs and PDAs started with the projects proposed by the highest number of groups and progressively moved to projects proposed by fewer and fewer groups until they arrived at a short-list of approximately 10 projects. However, when doing this they also sometimes excluded those projects which matched the program's exclusion criteria: projects benefiting individuals, without an immediate benefit for income generation (such as schools or meeting halls) or outside the program's infrastructure budget.

7.2.5 Materials and Equipment

Few materials were necessary for the Commune Plan Preparation Meetings. The biggest expense was in the photocopying costs to provide each meeting participants with sets of difficulty and activity tables. The matrices and final planning tables were also photocopied onto A0 paper to save time for the DDOs. These could have been hand-drawn to cut costs, if necessary. Not including lunch costs, the meetings cost a total of 1,541,000 dong at an average of 171,000 dong per commune.⁵⁵

7.3 Content

The Commune Plan Preparation Meetings followed the following format⁵⁶:

1. District Contract Group representative opened the meeting

In most cases the DCG representative spoke briefly about the purpose of the meeting and reminded the participants to concentrate on the task at hand.

2. DDO Summarised Data from Village Planning Meetings

As they had already gone through the data during the preliminary meetings, the DDOs just briefly reviewed the data and distributed data sets to participants who had either not attended the preliminary meeting or who had lost the data sheets provided to them.

⁵⁵ See Annex 7.4 for the Commune Plan Preparation Meetings Costs Submission

⁵⁶ See Annex 7.5 for Commune Plan Preparation Meetings Framework Agenda

3. CCG leader introduced relevant aspects of the official commune plan

The main purpose of this introduction was for the meeting participants to be aware of income generation, livelihood and infrastructure activities currently or soon to be invested in by the government or outside funding sources. This knowledge would assist the co-ordination of activities with existing programs and prevent RUDEP from funding of infrastructure projects currently or about to receive funding from other sources.

4. DDO introduced program budget per sector for the 2004 – 2005 year

Although the DDOs had presented the annual RUDEP commune budget at the preliminary meetings they needed to re-present it at the commune plan preparation meetings due to expected cuts to the Program budget for 2004 – 2005.⁵⁷

5. Matrix Scoring

- a. The DDO displayed the matrix for the first of the three sectors⁵⁸ (usually the income generation sector) on A0 paper at the front of the meeting room and briefly reviewed the matrix's purpose and the criteria used.⁵⁹
- b. The DDO explained any activity in the sector for which RUDEP was not willing to provide funding or VSCF loans.
- c. The nominated recorder wrote the activity types in the left hand column of the matrix.
- d. The DDO explained the definition used for the 'community demand' criteria.
- e. The meeting participants read out the numbers to be recorded alongside each activity type based on the number of groups proposing the activity in the summary activity table. The recorder wrote the number in the square corresponding to each activity in the 'community demand' column.
- f. The facilitator explained the definition for the next criteria (long-term effectiveness) and invited the meeting participants to discuss and agree on a score for each activity type using that criterion. Usually at this stage the DCG chairman or other DCG representative chaired the discussion and, based on the opinions expressed, made the conclusive decision on the number of points to be awarded. When doing this some meetings chose to begin with the activity at the top of the table and work down. Others elected to choose the activity which should receive maximum points and then award progressively less points for other activities. This helped some of the meetings to compare one activity type against another.
- g. The same process was followed for the remaining criteria in the matrix.

⁵⁷ See Annex 7.6 for the Reduced 2004-2005 RUDEP Commune Budget and Annex 7.7 for the Actual 2004-2005 RUDEP Commune Budget

⁵⁸ See the matrices for all three sectors in the Section 8 annexes on results for each commune

⁵⁹ See Annex 7.8 on Matrix Scoring Criteria

- h. Once all the scoring criteria were completed the scores were added up and the activities prioritised from the highest to the lowest score.
- i. Steps a through to h were then repeated for the remaining two sectors. However, unlike the income generation and livelihoods sectors, which were grouped into activity types, the infrastructure matrix was used to score individual infrastructure projects.

6. Final Planning

- a. The DDOs displayed the commune planning table on two A0 sheets of paper: the first for income generation and livelihoods activities and the second for income generation activities.⁶⁰
- b. The DDO reviewed RUDEP's 2004 – 2005 budget for the commune, re-stated the minimum and maximum amount of funding permitted to be allocated for the Village Savings and Credit Facilities, and invited the meeting participants to decide on the amount of funds they would like to be disbursed as VSCF seed capital.
- c. The meeting decided on the number of VSCFs to be established with the available seed capital and the villages in which they were to be established. This decision was recorded using crosses or numbers in the VSCF row of the table under the columns for the selected villages.
- d. A time schedule for establishing the VSCFs, conducting training and disbursing seed funds was recorded in the appropriate section of the planning table.
- e. The amount of money to be provided in seed capital determined the amount for technical support activities. If the meeting decided to spend the maximum amount in seed capital, as was usually the case, then the amount for technical support was 125 million. This figure was recorded in the space provided next to the 'income generation' heading.
- f. The recorder transcribed the top five priority income generation activities from the income generation matrix into the left hand column of the planning table under the 'income generation' heading.
- g. The meeting allocated budget to income generation activities across villages according to the following principles:
 - Budget could be allocated to from three to five income generation activities;
 - Budget should be allocated to 10 activity groups, signified by marking crosses or numbers in the spaces provided;
 - The number of groups being allocated budget for lower priority activities should be no greater than the number allocated for higher priority activities. For example, if three groups are allocated budget for the top priority activity then no more than three groups can be allocated budget for the activity given second priority;

⁶⁰ See the final commune plans in the Section 8 annexes

- Data from the activity tables showing the relative demand for activities in each village should be taken into account when deciding on which village to establish activity groups (or allocate funding to existing groups).
- h. A time schedule for carrying out the technical support activities was recorded in the appropriate section of the planning table.
- i. The recorder transcribed the top four livelihoods activities from the livelihoods matrix into the left hand column of the planning table under the 'livelihoods' heading.
- j. The meeting allocated budget to livelihoods activities across villages according to the following principles:
 - Budget could be allocated to from two to four livelihoods activities;
 - Budget should be allocated to a pre-determined number of activity groups, depending on the number of villages in the commune. Budget allocation to groups was signified by marking crosses in the spaces provided.
 - The number of groups being allocated budget for lower priority activities should be no greater than the number allocated for higher priority activities. For example, if three groups are allocated budget for the top priority activity then no more than three groups can be allocated to the activity given second priority.
 - Data from the activity tables showing the relative demand for activities in each village should be taken into account when deciding on which village to establish activity groups (or allocate funding to existing groups).
- k. A time schedule for carrying out the livelihoods activities was recorded in the appropriate section of the planning table.
- l. The recorder transcribed the top five infrastructure projects from the infrastructure matrix into the left hand column of the planning table under the 'infrastructure' heading. Although five projects were listed on the plan, it was made clear to the meeting participants that this did not necessarily mean that all five projects would be funded but that RUDEP funding would first be allocated to the top priority project. If that project was not possible or there were funds remaining then funding would then move on to the next project and so on. No funding was allocated for infrastructure activities at this meeting as technical input was needed from the IEO, VIEO and district infrastructure specialists to determine whether the projects listed were feasible, environmentally acceptable and within the program's infrastructure budget.
- m. The recorder marked the villages in which the projects would take place.
- n. The meeting participants agreed on a time schedule for implementing the infrastructure projects and recorded their decision in the section provided on the planning table. Usually the time schedule included the preparatory and construction stages.

7. DDO presented the next steps in the participatory planning process

8. District Contact Group representative closed the meeting

7.4 Adjustments

The process described above is slightly different from the original process implemented in the first three meetings at Son Hai, Nghia Tho and Pho Chau. After these three meetings were held it was felt that some adjustments needed to be made to:

1. Shorten the length of the meetings;
2. Make the use the matrices simpler and less abstract, especially for the infrastructure sector;
3. Provide more guidance and assistance to the meeting participants in allocating budget to activities in the final commune plan.

The following changes were made as a result⁶¹:

Matrix Scoring

Income Generation

Community demand criteria: Activities were originally scored under this criterion by first working out the total number of groups participating in the village meetings then rounding down the number so it was divisible by 4. Activities were then given a score of between 30 and 0 depending on the percentage of groups which proposed the activity, with a score of 30 given to those activities proposed by 75% of the groups and over, score of 20 for 50 to 74%, 10 for 25 to 49% and 0 for less than 25% of the groups proposing the activity.

Experience at the first few meetings showed that although the activities were scored quite easily using this method, the commune participants did not properly understand the basis for calculating the points in this way. Scoring under this criterion was therefore changed to the one described in Annex 7.8.

Livelihoods

Community demand criteria. Activities were originally scored in the way described above for the income generation sector. However, the criterion was virtually meaningless under this method as very few livelihood activities were proposed by more than 25% of groups in the commune. This meant that the great majority of activities received no points. Scoring under this criterion was therefore changed to the one described in Annex 7.8.

⁶¹ See Annex 7.9 for more details on the adjustments made

Infrastructure

In the first three meetings the participants used the matrix to score types of infrastructure such as irrigation, kindergarten, electricity etc. This was found to be unsuitable for a number of reasons:

1. It was often difficult to compare one infrastructure type against another because it was often felt that the effectiveness, number of beneficiaries etc. depended on the specific project. Participants felt that scoring infrastructure types was too abstract and difficult, which made the process time consuming and the final results unreliable.
2. If the meeting only prioritised project types, it still needed to discuss specific project types at the end of the meeting. Even though the individual selected at the end of the process were among the top priority project type, there was no guarantee that the project itself was a suitable one or that there was a high level of community demand for it.

It was therefore decided that RUDEP would pre-screen projects according to community demand⁶² and then use the matrix to prioritise specific projects. After the first three meetings a lot more time was spent pre-screening activities to be scored under the matrices in all three sectors, thereby cutting down on the amount of time spent taking out activities during the meetings themselves.

Scoring Method

At the preliminary meetings the matrices were usually scored *horizontally*, i.e. scoring *one* activity against *all* of the criteria before moving on to the next criteria. Experience at these meetings showed that it was preferable to do the scoring *vertically*, i.e. score *all* of the activities for *one* criteria before moving on to the next criteria, because it allowed the participants to focus on one criteria at a time and more easily make comparisons between activities.

Budget allocation

In the first three meetings RUDEP left it up to the commune and district officials at the meeting to decide for themselves on how to allocate the budget, providing they took the results of the matrix scoring into account when prioritising the budget allocation. The meeting participants found it very difficult to draw up the final plan without any guidelines or framework to work within. It was therefore decided to set some principles⁶³ in order to make it quicker and easier for the meeting participants to arrive at a final commune plan.

7.5 Successes and Difficulties

7.5.1 Successes

1. The meetings were completed as scheduled and without any major organisational difficulties.
2. Attendance at the meetings was quite good.

⁶² See Section 7.2.4 on Pre-screening of Activities

⁶³ As described in Section 7.3, Steps 6g and 6j

3. For the most part the participants understood the purpose and content of the meeting and actively took part in discussion.
4. Distributing and explaining data compiled from the village planning meetings promoted greater local understanding and ownership of the process.
5. The data provided the CPCs with information on community opinion which they will hopefully find useful for other commune work.
6. Most DDOs facilitated the meetings well.
7. In many cases the District Contact Group leaders did an excellent job of chairing group discussion, particularly during the matrix scoring activities. Their involvement helped to focus discussion on the topic at hand and helped the meetings to progress smoothly by encouraging all members to have their say, discouraging participants from speaking for too long, and assisting the meeting in coming to a final decision when there was disagreement on the score for a particular activity and criteria. Although they sometimes expressed their own opinion, as was their right, they usually did not unduly dominate group discussion or impose their will on the group's final decision.
8. The uses of matrices was very successful in a number of ways:
 - They encouraged everyone present at the meetings to think carefully about the proposed activities and thus think carefully about appropriate activities and projects for RUDEP funding;
 - They resulted in clear and unequivocal priority list of activities;
 - They gave everyone at the meeting, including village leaders and community association representatives, an opportunity to contribute their ideas;
 - They placed highest importance on key aspects of the program, namely participation, income generation and poverty reduction.
9. The use of final planning tables was successful in a number of ways:
 - They provided all stakeholders with a clear indication of the types of activities to receive RUDEP funding, the villages to receive the funding and the time frame in which the activities will be implemented;
 - They allowed enough flexibility for activity and VSCF groups to be able to draw up their own plans on how the funding should be used. This will encourage more community participation in the design and implementation of activities;
 - Considering that the meeting participants were being called on to decide on funding allocation for approximately 1 billion dong's worth of activities, the planning tables were a relatively quick and simple way of drawing up a RUDEP commune plan;
 - They encouraged meeting participants to take the activity tables, and therefore community opinion, into account when deciding on which villages activities should be allocated.

7.5.2 Difficulties

This section refers to difficulties remaining in the final six commune plan preparation meetings after adjustments had been made to the meeting process. Difficulties specific to the first three meetings are mentioned in Section 7.4. However, the fact that the changes were made at a late stage caused some difficulties in itself as it made it difficult for the DDOs to prepare adequately at short notice and meant that the meeting participants were not adequately prepared, despite the preparatory meetings. More specific difficulties and shortcomings include:

1. The process for drawing up the final commune tables was not explained fully enough to the DDOs and consequently not explained in enough detail during the preparatory meetings. As a result the meeting participants were not as well prepared for this final section of the meeting as they could have been.
2. In some communes only the district and commune leaders were invited to the preparatory meetings, with the intention being that they would then explain the content of the meeting to the village leaders and others involved. Although this may seem reasonable in theory, it was naïve to expect this would be done properly in practice. Consequently, in some communes the village leaders were less prepared than others at the meeting.
3. Many of the CCG reports on commune plans and priorities were too brief and vague to be of significant use to RUDEP in understanding the local situation and co-ordinating activities.
4. RUDEP did not explain the types of activities outside the scope of the program early or fully enough, resulting in discussions on the eligibility of some activities and projects which should have been clarified at earlier meetings.
5. At times the DDOs did not explain the matrix criteria clearly or fully enough, sometimes causing some confusion and misunderstanding of the criteria.
6. There was overlap in some of the matrix criteria. For example, when participants considered the long-term effectiveness of an income generation activity they often took the risk levels associated with that activity into account, even though risk levels were considered as a separate criteria.
7. Some of the matrix criteria were not suitable for the activities being assessed. For example, the criteria of 'is the activity suitable to people with poor health' was not suitable to assess livelihood activities as most of the livelihood activities were health related.
8. The meeting participants found it difficult to assess the scores for some of the criteria, particularly the criteria used to assess the activity's suitability for poor households.
9. Some participants found it difficult to separate the criteria when assessing activities. For example, if they felt that rice production was a necessary and desirable activity in general then they found it difficult to give rice a low score for a particular criterion, such as the criteria assessing a rice activity's suitability for people lacking land.

10. Although it was unavoidable under the 2004-2005 PPP, it was regrettable that the meetings were not able to finalise the infrastructure projects to be funded in the coming year so that the projects could be written into the RUDEP commune plan.

7.6 Recommendations

1. Similar to the preparation for the village planning meetings, the District Contact Groups should be more involved in the preliminary training and instruction for the commune plan preparation meeting.
2. Now that all communes have electricity and a computer, they should play a greater role in data entry and presentation in readiness for the meetings.
3. Everyone involved in the planning meeting should also be invited to any preliminary meetings so that all participants have a similar level of understanding of the process.
4. Some of the matrices need to be modified and perhaps combined in order to remove some anomalies and shorten the matrix scoring process.
5. The criteria for categorising activities into activity types needs to be better defined.
6. More input from other sources, such as commune profiles, PRA results, data on loan demand and current VSCFs, is needed for the meeting participants' to make more informed decisions.
7. All activities and projects proposed at the village planning meetings should be included in the scoring matrices regardless of whether or not they can receive RUDEP funding. The data can potentially be used by local government to gauge community opinion and guide planning for government funded activities.

8 Results

8.1 Duration of meetings

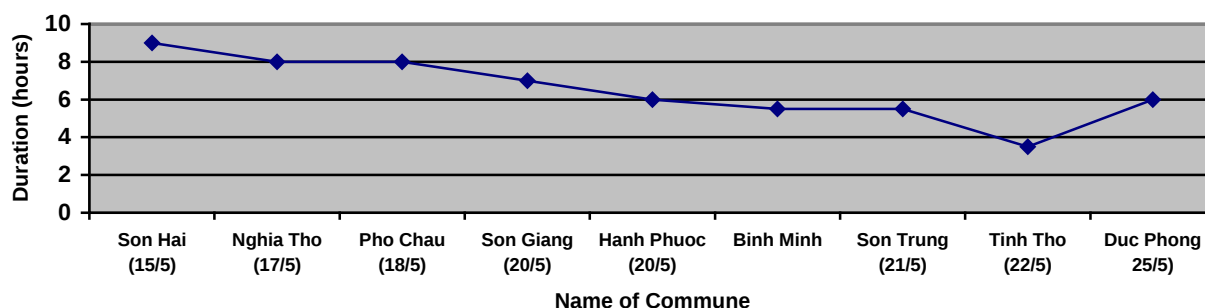
8.1.1 Village Planning Meetings

The village planning meetings usually lasted for approximately three hours. The initial plenary session, including presentation of budget, program activities review and PRA presentation, usually lasted for approximately 45 minutes, the group discussions went for 60 to 90 minutes and the compilation of group activities into village lists took a further 45 minutes.

8.1.2 Commune Plan Preparation Meetings

The duration of the Commune Plan Preparation Meetings varied considerably, ranging from 9 hours down to 3.5 hours. The meeting duration depended on a number of factors, including the meeting format, the DDO's facilitation ability, the DCG leader's ability to chair discussion and the ability of participants to discuss and come to a conclusion. In general, the duration of the meetings shortened as time went on and the Program gained experience in preparing for and facilitating the meetings. The graph below shows the downward trend in meeting durations.

Figure 2: Duration of Commune Plan Preparation Meetings



8.2 Attendance

Attendance at village planning meetings during this planning cycle was down considerably on previous cycles. Of a total of 15,115 households in the nine communes, 4,467 participated in the meetings. This was approximately 30% of total households in the participating communes and compares with approximately 47% in Cycle 1 and 45% in Cycle 2. There was an average attendance of 81 participants per meeting.

Figure 3: Attendance at Village Planning Meetings as % of Total Households in Commune

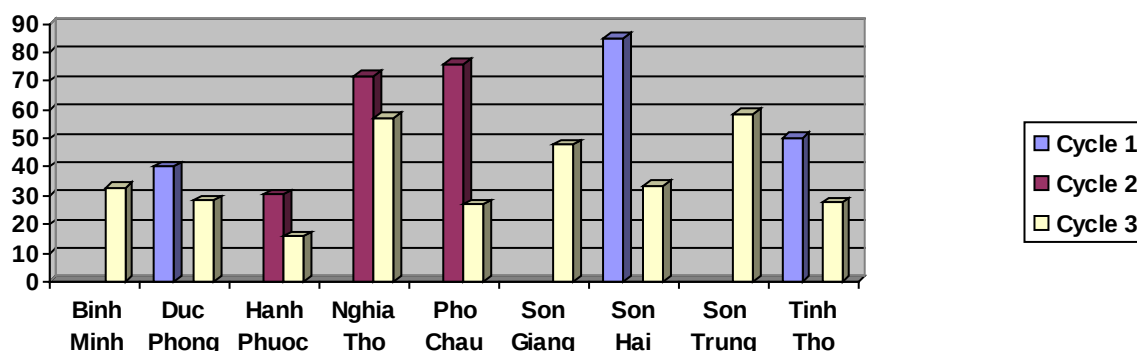


Figure 3 shows that in the 2004 – 2005 planning cycle Son Trung had the highest attendance percentage (58.6%) and Hanh Phuoc had the lowest percentage (15.9%).

The drop in attendance can be explained to some extent by the fact that six of the nine communes had already been involved in village planning meetings and RUDEP had been working in them for at least one year. Attendance at this year's meetings was lower than in previous years in all Cycle 1 and 2 communes and, at 25.7%, was considerably lower than the 41% attendance in Cycle 3 communes. The novelty of a foreign project working in their commune had worn off in the Cycle 1 and 2 communes. As some people had unrealistically high expectations of the Program before it started work in the commune, their expectations of receiving a direct personal benefit from attending the meetings were naturally lower for the second cycle of meetings.

The harvest season may also have had some effect on attendance. Duc Phong and Hanh Phuoc communes were the most heavily affected by the harvest and both had relatively low attendance (28.2% and 15.9% respectively). However, it's likely that many other factors also affected attendance. The attendance rate in Duc Phong was in fact slightly higher than in Tinh Tho commune (27.6%) even though the great majority of people in Tinh Tho had finished harvesting before the village planning meetings began while in Duc Phong the meetings occurred during the middle of the harvest.

Attendance was higher in the predominantly H're communes of Nghia Tho, Son Hai, Son Giang and Son Trung. Average attendance in these communes as a proportion of total households was 48.3, compared to an average of 26.1%. This can partly be attributed to two of the four H're communes being new communes.

In the cycle one and cycle two communes, the sharpest drop in attendance compared to the previous round of village planning meetings occurred in Pho Chau, where the number of people attending reached only approximately 35% of the 2003 attendance. The smallest drop in percentage terms occurred in Nghia Tho and Duc Phong, where attendance compared to previous planning cycles was 79.6% and 70.4% respectively. On average, attendance at meetings in cycle one and two communes was approximately 55% of attendance at planning meetings in previous years.

8.3 Difficulty/participant ratio

The proportion of difficulties raised per household was comparable to the previous two years. The ratio of 0.8 difficulties raised per participant (3,557/4,467) was lower than the ratio of 1.12 (2,049/1,832) for the 2003 meetings but higher than 0.71 (2,420/3,401) for the first round of planning meetings held in late 2001. The following table shows this ratio for each of the nine participating communes.

Table 1: Difficulty/participant ratio during past three planning cycles

	Cycle 1			Cycle 2			Cycle 3		
	<i>No. of Parts.</i>	<i>No. of Diffs.</i>	<i>Ratio</i>	<i>No. of Parts.</i>	<i>No. of Diffs.</i>	<i>Ratio</i>	<i>No. of Parts.</i>	<i>No. of Diffs.</i>	<i>Ratio</i>
B. Minh							732	611	0.83
D. Phong	1,593	927	0.58				1,122	668	0.60
H. Phuoc				858	1,027	1.20	451	474	1.05
N. Tho				162	204	1.26	129	179	1.39
P. Chau				787	786	1.00	279	231	0.83
S. Giang							460	455	0.99
Son Hai	465	701	1.51				182	177	0.97
S. Trung							377	377	1.00
T. Tho	1,343	792	0.59				735	385	0.52
Total/Av.	3,401	2,420	0.71	1,832	2,049	1.12	4,467	3,557	0.80

Table 1 shows that the only significant drop in the difficulty/participant ratio occurred in Son Hai commune but even here the ratio in the 2004 round of meetings was still higher than average. There was again a significant difference in the ratio between lowland and highland communes, with highland households⁶⁴ raising a considerably higher proportion of difficulties per household than lowland communes. The average difficulty/participant ratios in the lowland and highland communes were 0.71 and 1.03 respectively.

8.4 Overview of Results

Activities

The overall results reveal little variation between communes in the sector ratio of the activities proposed. Table 2 shows that there was a slightly higher demand for income generation activities and lower demand for infrastructure activities than in the highlands. There was no significant variation between communes in the community demand for livelihoods activities. Individual results for each commune are provided in the results annexes.

⁶⁴ Including Nghia Tho

Table 2: Proposed Activities by Sector

	Income generation		Livelihoods		Infrastructure		Total groups
	<i>No. of groups</i>	<i>% of total</i>	<i>No. of groups</i>	<i>% of total</i>	<i>No. of groups</i>	<i>% of total</i>	
Binh Minh	285	53%	98	18%	157	29%	540
Duc Phong	378	58%	100	15%	173	27%	651
Hanh Phuoc	188	51%	81	22%	99	27%	368
Nghia Tho	88	59%	25	17%	37	25%	150
Pho Chau	128	52%	43	17%	76	31%	247
Son Giang	148	40%	68	19%	151	41%	367
Son Hai	67	47%	25	17%	51	36%	143
Son Trung	179	51%	66	19%	108	31%	353
Tinh Tho	188	46%	75	18%	146	36%	409
Total	1649	51%	581	18%	998	31%	3228

Difficulties

Figure 4 shows the total number of people for whom difficulties were recorded under each difficulty code. It indicates a very high number of meeting participants stated difficulties with funds for livestock production, agricultural technology, irrigation, drainage and transport. A surprisingly high number of people recorded difficulties with sanitation and support services.

Table 3 illustrates the number of people for whom difficulties were recorded each commune disaggregated by gender and difficulty code. It shows that a slightly higher number of males recorded difficulties than females but in most communes the gender difference in number of difficulties raised was insignificant. The exceptions were in Duc Phong, Tinh Tho and Binh Minh, where far more males recorded difficulties than females, and in Son Giang, which was notable for far more females recording difficulties than males.

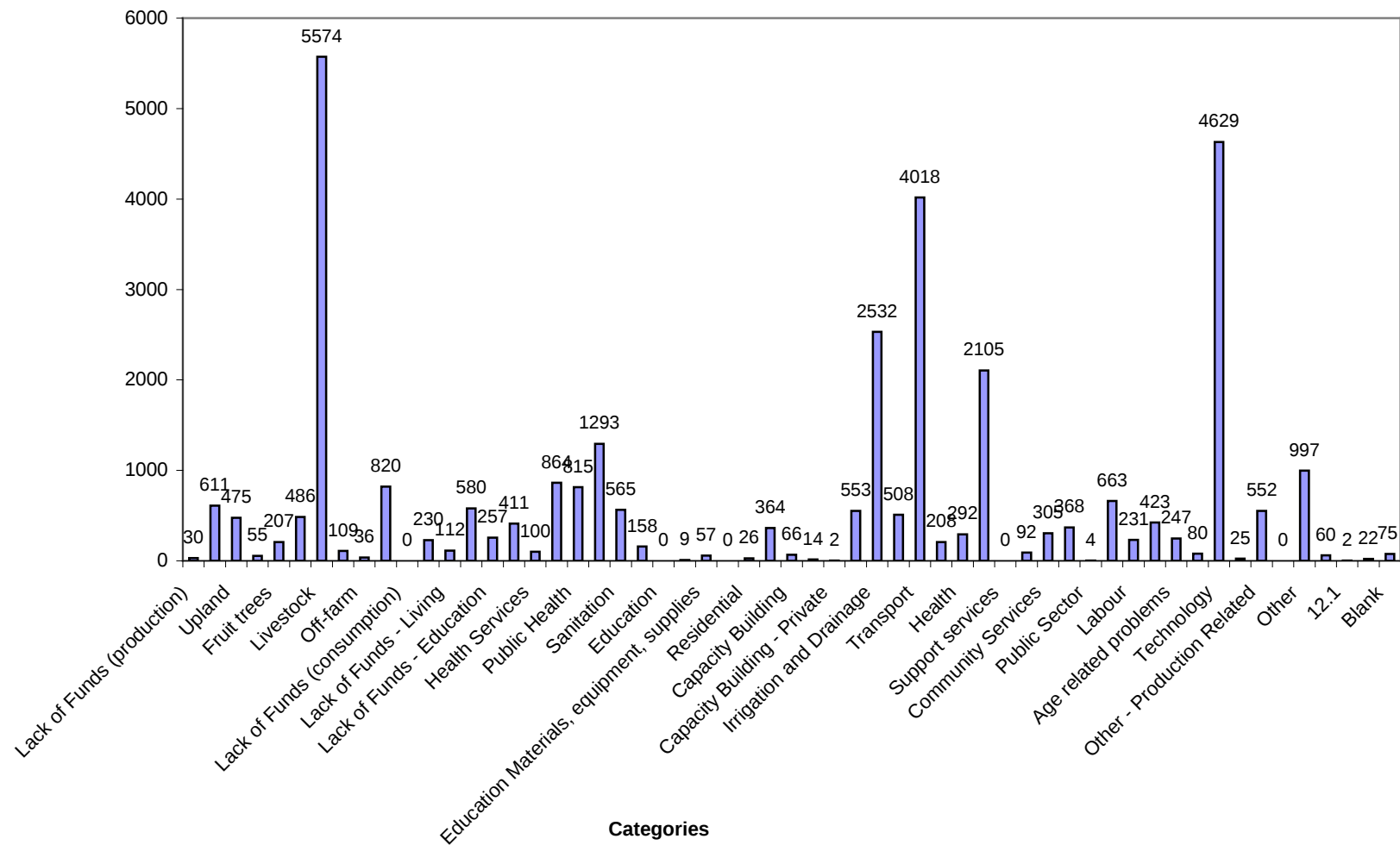
There was no significant gender difference in demand for loans, technology or infrastructure. The number of difficulties recorded by males under these three categories was slightly higher than for females, in line with the overall male/female ratio. The number of females recording difficulties for some codes concerning livelihood activities, such as health and education, was slightly higher than the number of males.

Some other points to note from Table 3 include:

- As well as having a different gender/difficulty ratio to other communes, Son Giang had the highest ratio of people recording difficulties against number of difficulties raised. Table 1 shows that 455 difficulties were raised and Table 3 shows that difficulties were recorded 5,848 times. This means that in Son Giang commune each difficulty raised was shared by an average of 12.85 people;
- Lack of funds for rice and upland crops was raised many more times in Son Giang commune than other communes;

- Agricultural tenure was raised as a significant issue in Duc Phong Commune;
- A significantly higher number of irrigation and drainage difficulties were recorded in Duc Phong than in other participating communes;
- A significantly higher number of electricity and transportation difficulties were raised in Binh Minh and Tinh Tho than in other participating communes.

Figure 4: Total difficulties by code – 2004-2005 Village Planning Meetings⁶⁵



⁶⁵ See Annex 8.01 for Difficulties Codes

Table 3: Total Difficulties by Code – 2004-2005 Village Planning Meetings

		Commune									
Difficulties	Total	Tinh Tho	Duc Phong	Son Hai	Nghia Tho	Pho Chau	Hanh Phuoc	Son Trung	Son Giang	Binh Minh	Total
Lack of funds (prod.)	females					16		0			16
	males					11		3			14
Paddy	females	26	38	10	2	9	23	21	137	21	287
	males	49	87	7	8		16	34	106	17	324
Upland	females	4		57	0	1		63	100	15	240
	males	14	5	33	1			75	101	6	235
Tree crops	females						2		22		24
	males						2		29		31
Fruit trees	females			0	0			7	16	56	79
	males		3	7	3			5	10	100	128
Forestry	females	30		16		29	6	17	66	58	222
	males	57		9		16	1	21	58	102	264
Livestock	females	267	579	71	93	146	285	166	406	456	2469
	males	373	979	50	105	120	337	174	315	652	3105
Fisheries	females					20		7		19	46
	males					6		3		54	63
Off-farm	females		2		0	3	4	1		4	14
	males		11		1	7	3	0			22
Agricultural inputs	females	10	47	2	27	58	119	2	55	39	359
	males	9	52	11	21	64	203	5	45	51	461
Lack of funds (cons.)	females										0
	males										0

Lack of funds- Food	females	3		24	15	8	52	1	13		116
	males	2		34	5	2	58	0	13		114
Lack of funds - Living	females	29	2		6		14				51
	males	35	3		6		16			1	61
Lack of funds - Health	females	41	46		36	42	81		92	19	357
	males	26	33		15	10	62		48	29	223
Lack of funds - Education	females	20	8	20	26	6	24		4	17	125
	males	44	10	14	2	10	13		2	37	132
Health	females	194			5	6	4	5	1		215
	males	185			1		7	3	0		196
Health Services	females					19	3	20	7		49
	males					13	11	20	7		51
Health Supplies	females	40		4	17	28	27	70	184	29	399
	males	76		25	29	22	48	79	125	61	465
Public Health	females		8			4	91	14	297	54	468
	males		7			4	66	17	184	69	347
Clean Water	females	61	54	25	37		44	117	199	140	677
	males	77	59	9	33		33	153	105	147	616
Sanitation	females	8	97	4		51	51	27	38	12	288
	males	19	122	1		36	45	19	25	10	277
Communicable Diseases	females		57				6	7	9		79
	males		55				9	3	12		79

Education	females										0
	males										0
Education Services	females					4					4
	males		1			4					5
Education supplies	females		5					15			20
	males		24					13			37
Tenure and related issues	females										0
	males										0
Tenure - residential	females								14		14
	males		1						11		12
Tenure - agricultural	females		81	2	5			3	52		143
	males		178	17	0			2	24		221
Capacity Building	females								11	20	31
	males								13	22	35
Capacity Building - Public	females							6			6
	males							8			8
Capacity Building - Private	females			0							0
	males			2							2
Infrastructure	females					11	34	5	163	67	280
	males					2	21	6	115	129	273
Irrigation and Drainage	females	132	141	69	21	76	86	154	240	176	1095
	males	186	362	71	22	42	164	142	191	257	1437

Electricity	females	72	8	28		6	7	14	28	49	212
	males	126	4	26		2	2	20	29	87	296
Transport	females	308	225	64	27	138	170	131	269	385	1717
	males	529	394	86	34	97	273	178	199	511	2301
Markets	females	3	70	10	7				2		92
	males	10	97	1	7				1		116
Health	females	36	18						51	24	129
	males	36	6						42	79	163
Education	females	151	163	60	31	99	71	116	184	84	959
	males	206	297	37	13	61	115	137	162	118	1146
Support Services	females										0
	males										0
Government Services	females		3		14	29					46
	males		13		10	23					46
Community Services	females		1	12	13	23		82		23	154
	males		3	7	2	19		80		40	151
Private Services	females	20	57	34	13			13		13	150
	males	58	82	22	2			15		39	218
Public Sector - Social Serv.	females								2		2
	males								2		2
Disabilities Support	females	53	33	32	9	13	59	35	37	85	356
	males	48	33	13	4	10	80	37	10	72	307
Labour	females	6	16	1	1	27	8	1	32	8	100
	males	22	38	1	2	11	26	0	22	9	131
Disaster Relief	females	13		13	48		93	14	23	20	224

	males	21		12	31		67	9	9	50	199
Age Related Problems	females	60	63		1				15	2	141
	males	37	48		6				8	7	106
Family Social Issues	females		9					12			21
	males		49					10			59
Technology	females	187	159	75	104	172	329	274	452	323	2075
	males	339	257	89	72	176	406	334	373	508	2554
Other	females						4				4
	males						21				21
Other - Production	females	15	8	12		7		103	47	51	243
	males	23	11	30		11	1	159	20	54	309
Other - Consumption	females										0
	males										0
Other - Other	females	24	24	18	41			136	94	175	512
	males	38	30	18	16		5	165	57	156	485
Lack of Land	females		1		1	2	9	8		11	32
	males				0	1	9	15		3	28
12.1					2						2
12.2					22						22
Blank	females							3		20	23
	males							1		51	52
Total female		1813	2023	663	602	1053	1706	1670	3374	2410	15314
Total male		2645	3354	632	458	780	2120	1945	2475	3494	17903

8.5 VSCFs

8.5.1 Village Planning Meetings

By adding the number of difficulties for all ‘Lack of Funds for Production’ codes it was possible to gain an indication of the number of funding difficulties recorded as a proportion of total difficulties. The results are displayed in Table 4. Approximately one quarter of all recorded difficulties concerned funds for production. Duc Phong had the highest figure (33.5%) and Son Trung had the lowest (16.7%).

Table 4: Funds for Production difficulties as % of total difficulties

	Credit difficulties	Total difficulties	% credit/total
Binh Minh	1637	6003	27.2
Duc Phong	1803	5377	33.5
Hanh Phuoc	1001	3826	26.2
Nghia Tho	261	1060	24.6
Pho Chau	506	1833	27.6
Son Giang	1466	5848	25.1
Son Hai	273	1295	21.1
Son Trung	604	3615	16.7
Tinh Tho	839	4458	18.8
Total/Average	8390	33316	25.2

This is higher than the proportion of credit difficulties in the first and second planning years, when on average only 18% of recorded difficulties raised concerned lack of capital.⁶⁶

8.5.2 Commune Plan Preparation Meetings

Budget has been allocated for seven new VSCFs of 25 members each to be established in each commune. This equates to total disbursement for VSCFs of 525 million dong per commune. Communes have the choice of transferring some of this amount to technical support activities but are yet to decide on the amount to be transferred (if any) due to changes in the program budget.

During the Commune Plan Preparation Meetings, most communes chose to use the maximum amount of funding available for VSCFs under the reduced budget. Only Hanh Phuoc and Nghia Tho communes chose to transfer some of the available VSCF funding. With nine villages, the participants at the Hanh Phuoc meeting felt that more funds needed to be allocated to technical support to enable each village to receive some technical support. In Nghia Tho many of the residents already had access to loans either through VSCFs or other forms of credit so the meeting decided that the commune could only support three new VSCFs of 20 members each.

⁶⁶ Table calculated by dividing code one difficulties by the total number of difficulties

8.6 Technical Support

8.6.1 Village Planning Meetings

Unsurprisingly, cattle and pig production are by far the most preferred activities, comprising close to half of all income generation activities proposed. 8.4 percent of groups proposed rice production activities, indicating far more interest in rice than there appeared to be in the previous two cycles. Some of the groups mentioning cultivation in general (1.5%) are likely to have been including rice in their thinking. Farmer demand for involvement in chicken production was low. Only 3.8 percent of proposed income generation activities were for chicken production.

Table 5 shows some differences between communes in the proposed activities including:

- A strong demand for tree production in Binh Minh Commune but virtually no demand in any of the other communes;
- A relatively large number of groups proposed fish production in Binh Minh and Duc Phong communes;
- Cassava production was one of the most requested activities in Son Hai and Son Giang communes;
- Goat production was popular in Hanh Phuoc and Pho Chau communes;
- Veterinary activities were proposed by more groups in Son Trung than in any other participating commune;
- Pest control was proposed by six groups in Hanh Phuoc but was virtually unmentioned elsewhere;
- Coconut production was raised only in Pho Chau;
- Ducks were mentioned almost exclusively in Duc Phong;
- Sugar cane production was only raised by a significant number of groups in Son Giang and Son Trung communes.

Table 5: Total list of Activities Proposed at Village Planning Meetings

Activity type	B. Minh	D. Phong	H. Phuoc	N. Tho	P. Chau	S. Giang	S. Hai	S. Trung	T. Tho	TOTAL	%
Cattle	109	140	42	23	26	31	10	33	60	474	28.7%
Pigs	37	106	31	14	25	55	12	23	35	338	20.5%
Rice	24	15	28	6	12	21	5	16	11	138	8.4%
Perennial trees	25		4		12	15	6	10	7	79	4.8%
Chickens	6	15	5	13	5	2	1	8	8	63	3.8%
Paravet		3	13	6	9		2	19		52	3.2%
Fish	16	15	3	2	1			2		39	2.4%
Goats	1	6	16		14				1	38	2.3%
Cassava	1			2		13	14	6		36	2.2%
Buffaloes	3			5			3	9	8	28	1.7%
Fertilizer			12					12	2	26	1.6%
Industrial trees	25									25	1.5%
Fruit trees	14		1	3	2			5		25	1.5%
Cultivation			2					7	16	25	1.5%
Cash crops	8	9	6	1						24	1.5%
Study tours									24	24	1.5%
Cattle inputs			10	2				2	9	23	1.4%
Loans		11		6			4			21	1.3%
Sugar cane	1					8	2	8		19	1.2%
Fodder	5	12								17	1.0%
Ducks	2	8	1			2			1	14	0.8%
Other Support		7					7			14	0.8%

Small business/voc.	1	7	2	1	1					12	0.7%
Ploughs		10	1						1	12	0.7%
Coconuts					11					11	0.7%
Vegetables								11		11	0.7%
Prevent pest/disease			6		2			1		9	0.5%
Gardens	3	4	1							8	0.5%
Maize	3				1			2	1	7	0.4%
Tortoises		5	1							6	0.4%
Fishing					6					6	0.4%
Information				4					1	5	0.3%
Shrimp		4								4	0.2%
Feed processing			2							2	0.1%
Melons					1				1	2	0.1%
Peanuts							1	1		2	0.1%
Train for cattle staffs								2		2	0.1%
Cashews									2	2	0.1%
Nurseries	1									1	0.1%
Mushroom		1								1	0.1%
Silkworms			1							1	0.1%
Worms						1				1	0.1%
Training ag. Officers								1		1	0.1%
Brick								1		1	0.1%
Sector subtotal:	285	378	188	88	128	148	67	179	188	1649	100.0%

8.6.2 Commune Plan Preparation Meetings

Each commune's priority ranking for all proposed income generation activities is presented in Table 6. The overall priority score was calculated by adding together all the commune priorities and dividing by nine. Those activities which were not proposed in some communes were scored at one priority ranking lower than the commune's lowest ranked priority on the matrix scoring tables. For example, sugar cane was not proposed as an activity in Nghia Tho commune but nine other activities were proposed and ranked using the matrix... Sugar cane was therefore ranked 10, one ranking below the lowest ranked activity on the table.

The Commune Plan Preparation Meetings prioritised most activities in a similar order to the village planning meetings. However, a couple of notable exceptions show that the criteria applied in the scoring matrices had some affect on the final prioritisation of activities. Although there was a greater household demand for cattle, pigs still received a higher priority ranking than cattle. Perennial trees were ranked fourth in terms of community demand but slipped down to seventh priority in the Commune Plan Preparation Meetings. Both of these differences may have been due to the pro-poor criteria applied in the scoring matrices. Pigs usually scored higher than cattle under this group of criteria, especially for the level of inputs, and trees usually received a low score because of the high level of risk and investment involved.

There were also some notable differences between communes in the level of priority given to activities:

- Rice production was given second priority in Hanh Phuoc but only eighth priority in Tinh Tho;
- Small business was given high priority in Duc Phong but a relatively low priority in all other communes;
- Veterinary matters were given a far higher priority in Pho Chau and Hanh Phuoc than in the seven other communes;
- Poultry was given third priority in Nghia Tho and Tinh Tho but low priority elsewhere.

Table 7 sets out the activity types for which activity groups will be receiving RUDEP funding during 2004 – 2005. Most groups will receive an average of 12.5 million.

Table 6: Summary of Activities Prioritised during Commune Plan Preparation Meetings

Activity type	B. Minh	D. Phong	H. Phuoc	N. Tho	P. Chau	S. Giang	S. Hai	S. Trung	T. Tho	Priority score
Income Generation										
Pigs	2	1	1	2	1	2	2	1	2	1.6
Cattle	1	2	3	1	2	1	3	2	1	1.8
Rice	3	3	2	5	5	3	4	4	8	4.1
Chickens	8	6	8	3	11	5	8	5	3	6.3
Cash crops	7	7	5	8	9	8	5	3	9	6.8
Cassava	7	7	18	7	14	4	1	3	9	7.8
Perennial Trees	4	12	15	10	4	6	6	9	5	7.9
Goats	12	8	6	10	7	8	10	9	7	8.6
Small business	11	4	9	10	10	8	10	9	9	8.9
Veterinary	15	12	4	10	3	8	10	9	9	8.9
Ducks	8	9	11	10	14	8	10	9	3	9.1
Fresh water fish	5	5	14	10	14	8	10	8	9	9.2
Home gardens	9	10	7	10	14	8	10	6	9	9.2
Fruit trees	6	12	12	9	12	8	10	7	9	9.4
Sugar cane	7	12	18	10	14	7	9	3	9	9.9
Buffaloes	13	12	18	4	14	8	7	9	6	10.1
Ploughs	15	12	10	10	14	8	10	9	9	10.8
Rat control	15	12	18	10	6	8	10	9	9	10.8
Coconut trees	15	12	18	10	8	8	10	9	9	11.0
Fertilizer	10	12	18	10	14	8	10	9	9	11.1
Animal products processing	15	12	13	10	14	8	10	9	9	11.1
Markets	15	12	18	10	14	8	10	9	4	11.1

Information	15	12	18	6	14	8	10	9	9	11.2
Silkworms	15	12	16	10	14	8	10	9	9	11.4
Nurseries	14	12	18	10	14	8	10	9	9	11.6
Mushrooms	15	11	18	10	14	8	10	9	9	11.6
Water melons	15	12	18	10	13	8	10	9	9	11.6

Table 7: Summary of income generation activities funded in 2004 - 2005 RUDEP commune plans*

Activity type	Binh Minh	Duc Phong	H. Phuoc	Nghia Tho	Pho Chau	Son Giang	Son Hai	Son Trung	Tinh Tho	TOTAL
Technical Support Funding	125	125	200	125	125	125	125	125	125	
Cattle	4	3	3	4	4	3	2	2	4	29
Pigs	3	3	2	4	2	3	3	4	4	28
Rice	1	2	5	4	2	2	1	1		18
Cassava						1	4	1		6
Chickens				2		1		1	2	6
Cash crops			3	2						5
Maize and Legumes				3				1		4
Paravets			2		1					3
Perennial trees	1				1		1			3
Information				2						2
Fish	1	1								2
Peanuts							1			1
Small business		1								1
Buffaloes									1	1
Sector Sub total:	10	10	15	19	10	10	12	10	11	107

* Numbers indicate number of activity groups receiving funding for the activity at an average of 12.5 million dong per group.

8.7 Livelihoods

As shown by Table 8, unfortunately a great many proposed livelihoods ‘activities’ were actually welfare requests and were not eligible for RUDEP funding. Communities in all nine communes most frequently requested free medicine. Although RUDEP cannot provide funding simply for free medicine, the very large number of groups mentioning the need for conveniently available, affordable medicine indicates the importance of the issue and is something which might require more thought from RUDEP, local government and the groups themselves. Binh Minh, Hanh Phuoc and Son Trung were notable as the three communes where free medicines and/or treatment were most requested.

Apart from welfare related proposals, a significant number of groups suggested women’s health, nutrition and vocational training programs. From tables 9 and 10 it can be seen that most communes ranked and funded these three activities. Tinh Tho had the highest demand for gynaecological related activities and Duc Phong the highest demand for nutrition related activities. A relatively large number of groups in Binh Minh and Son Trung also proposed that RUDEP provide funding for boats. The people of Nghia Tho commune were the only ones to suggest an activity concerning health workers in the commune.

Table 8: Summary of Livelihood Activities Proposed during Village Planning Meetings

Activity type	B. Minh	D. Phong	H. Phuoc	N. Tho	P. Chau	S. Giang	S. Hai	S. Trung	T. Tho	TOTAL	% of sector
Medicinal provision	2	4	14	5	13	45	13	20	19	135	23.2%
Free treatment	43	18	41	1						103	17.7%
Other welfare	19	24			9			2	15	69	11.9%
Gynaecological prevention/cure	5	12			6			9	16	48	8.3%
Child nutrition	1	23				5			17	46	7.9%
Vocational Training	1	15	6	1		4		1	2	30	5.2%
Boat provision	10		7				2	10		29	5.0%
Sanitation	7				9					16	2.8%
Community Health					3	12				15	2.6%
Communication							7	6		13	2.2%
Health centre equipment		4	1		1			1	5	12	2.1%
Welfare house	10									10	1.7%
Health staff				7						7	1.2%
Support for disabled								6		6	1.0%
Relocate brick kiln			5							5	0.9%
Health awareness								5		5	0.9%
Literacy class				4						4	0.7%
Vegetables				4						4	0.7%
Water purification			3							3	0.5%
Bamboo planting			1			2				3	0.5%
Children's book provision					2			1		3	0.5%
Rubbish treatment			2							2	0.3%

Childcare techniques				2						2	0.3%
Health training								2		2	0.3%
Electricity			1							1	0.2%
Well maintenance training				1						1	0.2%
Capacity building							1			1	0.2%
Education							1			1	0.2%
Vocational training							1			1	0.2%
Telephone provision								1		1	0.2%
Blankets provision								1		1	0.2%
Kindergarten equipment								1		1	0.2%
Minimise pollution									1	1	0.2%
Sector subtotal:	98	100	81	25	43	68	25	66	75	581	100.0%

Table 9: Livelihood Activities Prioritised during the Commune Plan Preparation Meetings

Activity type	B. Minh	D. Phong	H. Phuoc	N. Tho	P. Chau	S. Giang	S. Hai	S. Trung	T. Tho	Priority score
Livelihoods										-
Child nutrition	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	4	1	1.7
Prevention/cure of gynaecological disease	2	2	2	2	1	1	3	2	2	1.9
Boat provision	3	4	4	5	5	7	1	1	4	3.8
Vocational training	4	3	5	4	5	4	4	5	3	4.1
Health awareness	5	4	5	3	5	7	5	3	4	4.6
Planting bamboo	5	4	3	5	5	5	5	6	4	4.7
Home gardens	5	4	5	5	5	3	5	6	4	4.7
Biogas techniques	5	4	5	5	3	7	5	6	4	4.9
Land improvement	5	4	5	5	4	7	5	6	4	5.0
Fruit trees	5	4	5	5	5	6	5	6	4	5.0

Table 10: Livelihood Activities Allocated Budget in RUDEP Commune Plans

Activity type	Binh Minh	Duc Phong	H. Phuoc	Nghia Tho	Pho Chau	Son Giang	Son Hai	Son Trung	Tinh Tho	TOTAL
LIVELIHOOD										
Malnourished	4	5	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	17
Gynaecology	4	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	14
Boat provision	3		2				2	2		9
Vocational Training		2		1		1	1			5
Planting Bamboo			4							4
Growing Vegetables						3				3
Health awareness				1				1		2
Technique Biogas					1					1
Land improvement					1					1
Total:	11	10	9	4	4	6	5	5	2	56

8.8 Infrastructure

Tables 11, 12 and 13 show the infrastructure projects proposed, prioritised and planned during the 2004 – 2005 PPP.

Transport and irrigation were the infrastructure types most frequently mentioned by households during the village planning meetings but the level of demand varied from commune to commune. Roads were the top priority in most of the lowland communes but were a lower priority than irrigation and drainage in Duc Phong and three of the four highland communes.

A large number of groups also proposed clean water activities, even in Son Giang and Nghia Tho where RUDEP has already funded the construction of many wells. Only Hanh Phuoc considered clean water to be a relatively minor issue.

A total of 104 groups also proposed projects to build kindergartens, compared to just 14 groups asking for primary schools and 12 groups requesting RUDEP fund junior secondary schools. A surprisingly high number of groups requested the construction of meeting halls, especially in Son Giang commune, where meeting halls were mentioned by 19 groups.

Duc Phong was notable for the relatively high number of groups suggesting sanitation projects (17) and market construction. The sanitation projects suggested were actually requests for RUDEP to construct bathrooms and toilets for poor women could be the result of the Program's women's health campaign conducted in Van Ha village, which included the provision of bathrooms and toilets. Of the 12 groups mentioning markets, 10 came from a single village, Lam Thuong, and this market was selected to receive RUDEP funding at the Commune Plan Preparation Meeting.

Due to adjustments in the short-listing and matrix scoring process for infrastructure activities (see Section 7.4), some Commune Plan Preparation Meetings ranked project types and others ranked specific projects. In Table 12, for those communes which ranked specific projects the ranking for the project type was calculated by taking the highest ranked project for each project type listed in the scoring matrix as the priority ranking for that project type. For example, in Binh Minh Commune, two irrigation projects were scored in the scoring matrix. One was given top priority and another was given sixth priority. In this case, irrigation was ranked as top priority in Table 12 and the sixth ranked project was not considered.

The prioritisation of infrastructure projects at the commune plan preparation meetings (Table 12) basically corresponded to community demand; with roads, irrigation and clean water projects ranked 1st, 2nd and 3rd respectively. Markets were ranked higher than the community demand principally due to a market being proposed and given a high ranking at the Son Giang Commune Plan Preparation Meeting.

Table 13 shows the final list of projects selected to receive funding during the 2004 – 2005 financial year, together with the estimated costs for each project. In summary, RUDEP is funding four road upgrade projects, four well supply projects, four kindergarten projects, three road construction projects, two gabions, two irrigation canals, and single projects on water reticulation, well upgrades and a market. Considering the very high community demand for irrigation, quite a low number of irrigation projects were selected to receive RUDEP funding. This could reflect the high cost of irrigation and the difficulty in finding feasible and effective projects within RUDEP's infrastructure budget.

Table 11: Types of Infrastructure Projects Proposed during Village Planning Meetings

Activity type	B. Minh	D. Phong	H. Phuoc	N. Tho	P. Chau	S. Giang	S. Hai	S. Trung	T. Tho	TOTAL	% Sector
Roads	37	31	37	3	20	31	13	19	37	228	23.3%
Irrigation	27	38	24	12	17	30	15	26	21	210	21.5%
Clean water	31	35	6	8	11	20	8	23	15	157	16.1%
Kindergartens	10	22	11		3	23	2	15	18	104	10.6%
Meeting rooms	13		5		2	19	7	8		54	5.5%
Electricity	13	11	1		6	4	5	3	8	51	5.2%
Bridges	13	5	3	1	6	1	1	3	10	43	4.4%
Health centres	7	2	3		2	11		5	6	36	3.7%
Sanitation	4	17	6		2	3				32	3.3%
Markets	2	12		2					2	18	1.8%
Primary schools			2		3	4		5		14	1.4%
Junior-sec. schools				4		1			7	12	1.2%
Reservoirs				5						5	0.5%
Land improvement					3					3	0.3%
Playing fields						2		1		3	0.3%
Ground levelling				2						2	0.2%
Senior-sec. Schools						2				2	0.2%
Nurseries			1							1	0.1%
Pumps					1					1	0.1%
Transmitter station									1	1	0.1%
Sector subtotal:	157	173	99	37	76	151	51	108	125	977	100.0%

Table 12: Infrastructure Project Types Prioritised during Commune Plan Preparation Meetings

Activity type	B. Minh	D. Phong	H. Phuoc	N. Tho	P. Chau	S. Giang	S. Hai	S. Trung	T. Tho	Priority score
Infrastructure										
Road	2	4	2	3	1	4	1	3	1	2.3
Irrigation	1	4	1	1	2	6	2	4	3	2.7
Well	3	4	5	2	4	1	3	1	3	2.9
Kindergarten	4	2	3	5	7	5	5	2	2	3.9
Market	5	1	5	4	8	2	7	5	3	4.4
Electricity	5	4	5	5	5	7	4	5	3	4.8
Bridge	5	4	5	5	3	7	7	5	3	4.9
Meeting hall	5	4	4	5	6	7	6	5	3	5.0
Health centre	5	4	5	5	8	3	7	5	3	5.0
Drainage system	5	3	5	5	8	7	7	5	3	5.3

Table 13: Summary of Infrastructure Projects to be Funded by RUDEP in 2004 - 2005

DUC PHONG	
Lam Thuong Market: construct a new market at new location, about 1,000 m2.	350 m
Total	350 m
TINH THO	
Tho Tay Road: upgrade the existing dirt road, about 3.0km, a spillway and 5 culverts	450 m
Total	450 m
SON HAI	
Ta Gan - Ba Reo Road: construct a new dirt road, 2.0km and 10 spillways	300 m
Lang Lanh and Mang Hien Roads: improve the existing roads	150 m
Total	450 m
PHO CHAU	
Vinh Tuy - Truong Xuan Road: 1.0km, big quantity of rock excavation	450 m
Total	450 m
NGHIA THO	
Ta Mang stone wall: 40m long and 1.0m high of gabion and stone wall	150 m
Hoc Xoai stone wall: 25m long and 1.0m high of gabion and stone wall	100 m
Water Supply: 2 wells, 2 pumps, 2 water tanks, pipelines from well to tank	50 m
Upgrade existing wells	150 m
Total	450 m
HANH PHUOC	
De An Irrigation Canal: concrete channel 0.6x0.8mx120m	60 m
An Chi Tay Road: dirt road, 700m long, 5.0m wide and 3 culverts	150 m
Hoa Son Kindergarten: 1 classroom, playground, toilet and fence and equipment	120 m
Vinh Tho Kindergarten: 1 classroom, playground, toilet and fence and equipment	120 m
Total	450 m

SON GIANG

Go Ngoai Road: 800m long, 5.0m wide, river-stone surface and a spillway	100 m
Wells: 17 wells and bathrooms in commune	170
Làng Rí Kindergarten: a classroom and equipment	80 m
Total	350 m

SON TRUNG

Wells: 15 wells and bathrooms in Lang Rin, Lang Na, and Lang Deo	150 m
Water tanks: 2 water tanks taking water from streams to central of village of Gia Ri and Lang Roc	120 m
Lang Trum Kindergarten; a classroom and equipment	80 m
Total	350 m

BINH MINH

Da Giang Irrigation Canal: upgrade the road beside the canal at damaged section: 500m long, 5,0m wide, 2 culverts	150 m
Duc An Road: upgrade the existing dirt road, 700m long, 5,0m wide, 1 culverts 2 pipes 1.0m	150
Wells in Duc An village	50 m
Total	350 m

9 Next Steps in 2004-2005 Process

This report was written in mid to late June, 2004. At the time of writing the RUDEP commune plans had all been completed and submitted and the program was awaiting PPC approval of its annual plan. However, the Commune Plan Confirmation Meetings and Village Plan Announcement Meetings had not yet been held and the VSCF Group Activity Plans had not been completed. This section outlines Steps 8 to 15 of the 2004 – 2005 PPP as outlined in Section 2.

9.1 Approval Procedures

9.1.1 CCGs submit RUDEP Commune Plans

At the conclusion of the Commune Plan Preparation Meetings the secretaries at the meetings were asked to submit the final commune plan, together with a cover letter, to RUDEP and the District Contact Group. RUDEP requested that the plans be sent in to the program by June 4. Seven of the nine communes complied with this request and the remaining two sent their plans by June 11.

9.1.2 DCGs send written agreements

RUDEP requested the District Contact Groups to send the program a one page official letter signed by the DCG leader indicating the district's agreement with the RUDEP commune plan. RUDEP asked that these written agreements be sent to the program by June 11. Four of the seven districts complied with this request and RUDEP received agreements from the remaining three districts by June 25.

9.1.3 RUDEP confirms infrastructure projects for 2004 – 2005

While the commune and district procedures were taking place, the IEO and VIEO worked together with the DCG technical officers to inspect the infrastructure projects given priority listing and confirm the projects to receive RUDEP funding during 2004 – 2005. This list is provided above in Table 13, Section 8.8.

9.1.4 Provincial People's Committee approves the RUDEP annual plan

The RUDEP annual plan was submitted in late June and is expected to be approved by the Quang Ngai Province People's Committee by mid to late July.

9.2 Commune Plan Confirmation Meetings

These meetings are expected to take place in late July, as soon as the Quang Ngai Province People's Committee has approved RUDEP's annual plan. They are expected to last for no longer than half a day. Although the final agenda for these meetings has not been finalised, a draft of the participants and content is provided below.

Participants: The same participants who were invited to the commune plan preparation meetings, namely the DCG, CCG, village leaders, district extension centre representative and commune health centre representative. The commune's culture and information officer should also attend.

Content:

- a. RUDEP employee (PMU Co-Director, Participatory Development Advisor or District Development Officer) announces RUDEP's annual plan, especially the RUDEP plan for that commune and any other aspects of the overall program plan relevant to the commune.
- b. The CCG advises the village leaders of the specific activities and funding allocation in their respective villages. Village leaders give feedback or ask questions if necessary.
- c. The District Development Officer explains the activity groups' role and reaffirms that each activity group/VSCF group needs to prepare its own plan. The DDO summarises the purpose and content of the activity/VSCF group plans.
- d. The meeting confirms the dates, venues and agenda for the village plan announcement meetings.
- e. The meeting discusses the roles and duties of each party in carrying out the 2004 – 2005 plan. The CCG leader delegates specific duties to each of the CCG members, village leaders and other relevant people in the commune.

9.3 Village Plan Announcement Meetings

These meetings are expected to take place in early August, soon after the Commune Plan Confirmation Meetings. The meetings are to be organised by the commune and village but the DDO will also attend. The framework agenda for the meetings has not been finalised but is expected to include the following items:

- a. The CCG/village leader announced the RUDEP commune plan, paying particular attention to RUDEP funded activities which will take place in that village;
- b. The CCG explains the basis for identifying these activities and allocating funding to them;
- c. The DDO explains the roles and duties of activity/VSCF groups and the purpose and processes to establish these groups;
- d. The CCG/village leader invites the meeting participants to register their interest in the activities announced and confirms the dates and venues of separate meetings to establish groups for each activity.

9.4 VSCF/Activity Group Plans

Each group will prepare its own plan outlining how it would like to spend the money allocated to it. The plans will include details from the group on how the income generation or livelihood activity should be conducted (or if the group is related to infrastructure, the group's ideas on the project's design) and any accompanying

capacity building required to enable the group to work effectively. The group plans are expected to be prepared in August, with the exception of pilot VSCF plans being prepared during June and July.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ See Annex 9.1 for VSCF Planning – Draft Meeting Format and Outline

10 Evaluation Process

10.1 Village Planning Meeting Surveys

The assistant DDOs⁶⁸ were asked to survey two facilitators and two participants at the completion of each meeting. Although many of the forms have not been collated, the limited data available revealed some interesting results as described in Section 6 of this report.⁶⁹

10.2 Village Planning Meeting Study Tours

Study tours were organised to one village planning meeting in each participating district.

10.2.1 Participants

A district contact group member was asked to lead the tour and senior representatives from each non-participating commune and district capital were invited to attend. The study tours were well attended.⁷⁰

10.2.2 Objectives

The study tours were primarily aimed at taking a step towards the institutionalisation of PPP in districts and non-participating communes by:

- o Increasing understanding of the village planning meetings among the DCG and non-participating communes;
- o Providing delegates with enough background understanding for them to comment on the meetings and the process in general at the District PPP Workshops.

The meetings also achieved a secondary aim of increasing awareness of RUDEP in the non-participating communes.

10.2.3 Preparation

RUDEP sent an official letter to the districts explaining the purpose of the study tour and asking them to invite commune delegates to attend.⁷¹ It gave the districts a 70% advance to pay for petrol costs for the delegates to get to the district capital, bus hire from the district capital to the study tour site and lunch for the delegates at the meeting's conclusion.

⁶⁸ As mentioned in Section 6.2, the DDOs worked in pairs with the DDO for that commune leading the meeting and a second DDO assisting.

⁶⁹ See Annex 6.7 and 6.8 for the Facilitator and Household Evaluation Forms for the Village Planning Meetings

⁷⁰ See Annex 10.1 for Village Planning Meeting Study Tour Attendance Table

⁷¹ See Annex 10.2 for a translation of the Village Planning Meeting Study Tour Invitation

10.2.4 Content

When they arrived at the study tour site the participants received a RUDEP brochure, one-page document summarising PPP⁷² and a time-schedule for each step in the process.⁷³ They attended the first part of the meeting and were then invited to visit the various groups as they listed their problems and suggested activities. On some occasions the delegates were also given copies of the difficulty and activity sheets to help them understand the process more easily. They then attended the final plenary session.

10.2.5 Successes

- o Most delegates read the program brochure and one-page introductory document, thereby increasing awareness of the program and of PPP among non-participating communes;
- o Delegates learned about program activities in the participating commune through the DDOs' presentation;
- o Most delegates visited groups and learnt something about how community difficulties and suggestions were raised and recorded.

10.2.6 Difficulties

- o Some delegates from non-participating communes, and even some District Contact Group members, took the attitude that there was nothing useful for them to learn from the study tour unless their commune was targeted as participating in the program. Therefore, some of them did not make an active effort to visit the groups or ask about PPP.
- o RUDEP staff were all extremely busy assisting the facilitators and ensuring the meeting ran smoothly so they rarely had enough time to chat with the study tour participants, encourage them to visit the groups or answer any questions they had on the meetings or process.

10.2.7 Suggestions

- o Non-DDO RUDEP employees attending the meetings, such as the Vietnamese Participatory Development Advisors, should be given the clear task of receiving the guests, guiding them to group discussions, explaining the process and answering any questions they might have.
- o The participant, difficulty and activity forms used during the village planning meetings should be included in the introductory materials given to each delegate. This would help them to better understand the process.

⁷² See Annexes 10.3A and 10.3B for English and Vietnamese versions of this introductory letter.

⁷³ This is the same schedule as was handed out to contact group members at the quarterly meeting on March 6. See Section 3.6.

10.3 District Workshops

Workshops on the participatory planning process were held in all seven participating districts in mid to late June.

10.3.1 Participants

Participants invited to the workshop consisted of:

- o All District Contact Group members;
- o All Commune Contact Group members;
- o Selected village leaders and other key facilitators at the village planning meetings;
- o A leading delegate from each non-participating commune, preferably those people who had attended the village planning meeting study tours.

10.3.2 Objectives

Along with the village planning meeting study tours, the workshops were aimed at moving towards the institutionalisation of PPP by:

- o Broadening the participants' understanding of PPP;
- o Workshopping adjustments to the process with the aim of moving towards a process which can easily be adopted and which is acceptable to all parties;
- o Workshopping ways to achieve greater integration between the RUDEP commune plan and existing commune plans and structures.

The workshops had the additional important communications benefit of continuing to increase non-participating communes' awareness of RUDEP and understanding of its activities and processes.

10.3.3 Preparation

RUDEP sent official letters to the District Contact Groups⁷⁴ and asked them to invite the same commune delegates who had attended the village planning meeting study tours.

The DDOs arranged lunch and payment of expenses to participants, prepared A0 examples of activity tables, matrices and final planning tables, and assisted the local presenters at the workshop to prepare their presentations.

10.3.4 Content

The workshops were held over half a day. They were divided into two parts: presentations about RUDEP and PPP, and break-out group discussions on plusses, minuses and improvements for the 2004-2005 process.⁷⁵ The workshops were generally well attended.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ See Annex 10.4 for translation of the District PPP Workshop Invitation

⁷⁵ See Annex 10.5 for District PPP Workshop Framework Agenda

The success of the workshops naturally varied from district to district. However, verbal reports from most DDOs indicated that the workshops ran smoothly and that the participants listened attentively during the pre-break session and contributed to the post-break group discussions. In the two workshops that the CPO attended, the local presenters tended to focus too much on the results and not enough on a description of the process. However, the DDOs helped to fill any information gaps in the local presentations.

The initial agenda presented in Annex 10.5 lacked a section providing an overview of PPP. Without this background it was likely to be difficult for the participants to fully understand the detailed presentations on the village and commune planning processes. For subsequent workshops the DDOs were instructed to provide a thorough overview of PPP before introducing the facilitators to present the village planning meetings.

The presentations effectively used A0 photocopies of sample activity tables, matrices and final planning tables. An A0 sample of a compiled village activity list was missing from the presentations and should be added to the list of photocopies used at future workshops. Without this sample sheet and an accompanying explanation it was slightly difficult for participants to understand the link between the village planning meeting results and the data presented in the activity tables.

In the group discussion, there were some instances of difficulties being raised without any corresponding suggestions for improvements and participants should be encouraged to make more constructive suggestions in future workshops.

10.3.5 Summary of Results

At the time this report was written, DDO reports had been completed for five of the seven District PPP workshops.⁷⁷ Feedback on the process was generally very positive and is cause for some optimism about the eventual adoption of PPP as the basis for local government planning. Below is a summary of some notable responses regarding the village planning meetings. Naturally, the points below are a simplification of the opinions expressed at the workshops. The reports in annexes 10.6 provide a fuller understanding of the diversity of opinions expressed.

Village Planning Meetings

Plusses

- o Democratic and in line with government policy on grassroots democracy;
- o Gave local people the opportunity to express their opinions and enabled local government to find out about community opinion;
- o Provided an accurate picture of community opinion;
- o At one workshop it was suggested that the meetings saved time.

Minuses

⁷⁶ The DDO reports indicated an average attendance of 33 participants in the four workshops for which attendance was recorded.

⁷⁷ See annexes in folder 10.6 for District PPP Workshop Reports

- Households sometimes raised difficulties or expressed opinions with only their own interests in mind so that at times the opinions expressed were inaccurate or contrary to the government's policy direction;
- Low attendance at meetings, difficult to get households to attend.

Improvements

- Provide further training to the facilitators;
- Hold meetings at a hamlet level;
- Provide further information to households at the start of the meetings so they won't raise difficulties which can't be resolved;
- Hold meetings with representatives from a range of social groups.

Commune Plan Preparation Meetings

Plusses

- Village leaders and community association representatives participated in decision making;
- Matrix scoring was generally objective and appropriate.

Minuses

- It took too long to complete the matrix scoring;
- The criteria in the matrices was sometimes unclear or the scoring was sometimes inaccurate;
- Many of the chosen activities couldn't be implemented.

Improvements

- Simplify the matrix criteria;
- Delete activities with low points before scoring them;
- The CPC should have the power to adjust the prioritized activity (with the agreement of village leaders and the commune people's council);
- Participants should be paid an allowance to attend the meeting.

Institutionalisation

Many participants said that RUDEP activities should be included in the commune plan because they are based on community opinion and are appropriate to the commune's development goals. However, some said that including RUDEP activities in the commune's plan would be difficult because of differences between the Program's planning year and the local planning year.

It was generally agreed that data from the village planning meetings should be used to inform commune and district plans.

Opinion varied on whether or not local government could adopt PPP for its own planning processes. Some people said that PPP could be adopted by local government. Others said that it should not be adopted due to a lack of available human and financial resources for carrying out the process.

10.4 Provincial Workshop

Having recently agreed on a list of 14 contact people representing provincial level government agencies, RUDEP invited the contact people to attend a one-day workshop on June 29.

The workshop had two parts: an overview of RUDEP in the morning session and a presentation and discussion on the participatory planning process in the afternoon session.

Only two of the fourteen representatives attended the afternoon session. They heard RUDEP staff give presentations about the reasons for PPP, an overview of the process and more detailed explanations of the village planning meetings and commune plan preparation meetings.⁷⁸ Group discussion on the process was cancelled due to the low attendance and the two remaining representatives did not have any significant comments.

⁷⁸ See Annex 10.7.1 and 10.7.2 for two of the presentations. The presentation on village planning meetings did not use PowerPoint.

11 Recommendations

This section includes some suggestions on PPP design and preparatory work to improve future implementation of PPP.

11.1 Amendments to 2004-2005 Participatory Planning Process

The workshops and other events conducted before the next planning cycle are all expected to result in many ideas and suggestions for improving on the design and implementation of the present process. The recommendations below are intended to contribute to this ongoing discussion.

11.1.1 Overall Process

An analysis of the process described in Section 2 reveals scope for improvement in a number of areas:

- o More local government involvement, particularly at the district and provincial levels;
- o Greater integration between activity/VSCF group and commune plans;
- o Greater use of PRA data, commune profiles and other relevant information.

The following amendments are designed to improve on these areas of the process and build on the planning links established between RUDEP and local government during the 2004 – 2005 PPP. Figure 5 illustrates the greater role of the districts in the process and the closer links between activity/VSCF group and local government plans. Each step in the recommended process is described below, including many steps which are similar to the 2004-2005 process. Steps 1 to 8 are recommendations for increasing local government involvement in its design and implementation as well as introducing further flexibility for districts and communes to carry out the process within an agreed framework and timeframe. Steps 9 to 19 are recommendations on amendments to the 2004-2005 process.

1. Household and village facilitator questionnaires, exit surveys

In order to contribute to the process's continual improvement and evolution, RUDEP seeks the opinions of households and village facilitators on the village planning meetings through short questionnaires at the completion of the meetings and/or brief focus group discussions at the end of activity group or VSCF group meetings.

2. District Workshops

District and commune representatives, including representatives from non-participating communes, discuss the process, suggest improvements and exchange ideas on ways in which PPP and its results can assist local government. The results of household and village facilitator surveys could be reported at the workshops.

3. Provincial Workshops

Representatives from key provincial departments discuss the process and exchange ideas on ways that it can assist their departments and provincial government in general. Representatives from non-participating districts are invited to increase their awareness of RUDEP and PPP.

4. RUDEP compiles results

The first three steps are completed and the results compiled in a report such as this 2004-2005 report.

5. Province/RUDEP Agreement on framework

The aim of steps 2 and 3 is to begin discussions on a framework for the participatory planning process which the provincial people's committee and departments find acceptable and can support for RUDEP activities. Therefore, the workshops should be part of a series of discussions taking place between RUDEP and provincial level government during the second half of 2005 and after each future planning cycle.

6. Province/RUDEP presents framework to district

Once agreement on a process has been reached, RUDEP holds a workshop to present the agreed framework to all districts in the province and to give them an opportunity to workshop modifications within this framework. As the local implementing agency for the Program, the Department of Planning and Investment should play a leading role in presenting the agreed framework in order to assure the districts that the process has provincial government support. Each District Contact Group, together with the relevant PDAs and DDOs, should be allowed some flexibility to conduct the process as they would like provided they conform with the agreed provincial framework. Although they are not involved in the program, Quang Ngai Town and Ly Son District could still both be invited to the presentation to increase their awareness of RUDEP and PPP.

7. Districts present district framework to communes

Once the district framework has been agreed upon the DCG and DDO holds a workshop to present the agreed framework to all communes in the province and to give them an opportunity to workshop modifications within this framework. Each commune, together with the relevant PDA and DDO, should be allowed some flexibility on how they conduct the process as long as they conform with the agreed provincial and district frameworks. All the key commune members should be at this workshop, not just the CCGs, because RUDEP activities and processes should be linked with the commune as a whole, not just a select group. Although they are not involved in the program, representatives from non-participating communes could still be invited to this workshop to increase their awareness of RUDEP and PPP.

8. Communes present commune framework to villages and hamlets

Once the commune framework has been agreed upon, the CCG and DDO presents the agreed framework to the village leaders and facilitators who will be involved in the village planning meetings.

9. Training and implementation of PRA, commune profiles

The DDOs receive further training on the implementation and analysis of PRA activities with a view to them then training key contact people within the communes on PRA techniques and applications.

PRA data is explained to all potential Commune Plan Preparation Meeting participants. They are also provided with copies of the commune profiles and any relevant M&E data and receive help in understanding and analysing the data provided in order to contribute to more informed planning decisions.⁷⁹

10. 11. 12. Village planning meetings implemented

The DDOs, CCGs and village leaders carry out the village planning meetings. Regardless of any future amendments to the process, village planning meetings will almost certainly continue in some form or other and are likely to include an opening plenary session (10), group discussion (11) and final compilation of group results (12).⁸⁰

13. Commune Plan Preparation Meetings implemented

Commune and village leaders meet to plan RUDEP funded activities for the coming financial year using data from the village planning meetings, PRA activities and other relevant information. The result of the meeting is a list of funded activities, similar to the result in 2004 – 2005.⁸¹

14. Village Announcement Meetings

The meetings should serve three purposes:

- Announce the activities or ‘interests’ to be funded by RUDEP in the commune and village in the coming year;
- Explain VSCF conditions;
- Form VSCFs comprising members who fulfill the criteria and who want to be involved in the funded activities.

15. VSCF plans prepared

The newly formed and existing VSCFs prepare their own plans principally concerning the details on how they would like to spend the funding allocated to them. Each VSCF is allocated a technical support budget calculated by the number of interests funded in that village divided by the number of VSCFs in the village.

VSCF members elect 1 person for each activity to become members of a Village Development Board⁸² and sub-committee members for their respective activities.

Each VSCF sends its plan to a village development board, along with budget allocation and proposals for spending the budget on each of the activities.

⁷⁹ See Section 11.2 for recommendations on preliminary work for the 2005 – 2006 PPP

⁸⁰ Modifications to the format of the village planning meetings are recommended in Section 11.1.2 and Annex 11.2

⁸¹ Modifications to the format are recommended in Section 11.1.3.

⁸² See Annex 11.1 for Recommendations on Links between Commune Plans and VSCFs

16. Village development board plans prepared

Village development boards are formed comprising village leaders and vice-leaders plus elected members for each interest in each VSCF.

The village development boards draw up a village development plan. The plan consists of the total technical support budget for each activity (by pooling the amounts allocated by each VSCF), plus any savings and other contributions from the group itself. It also consists of plans on how the money should be spent, support needed etc. based on the VSCF plans.

17. Final Commune Plan Prepared

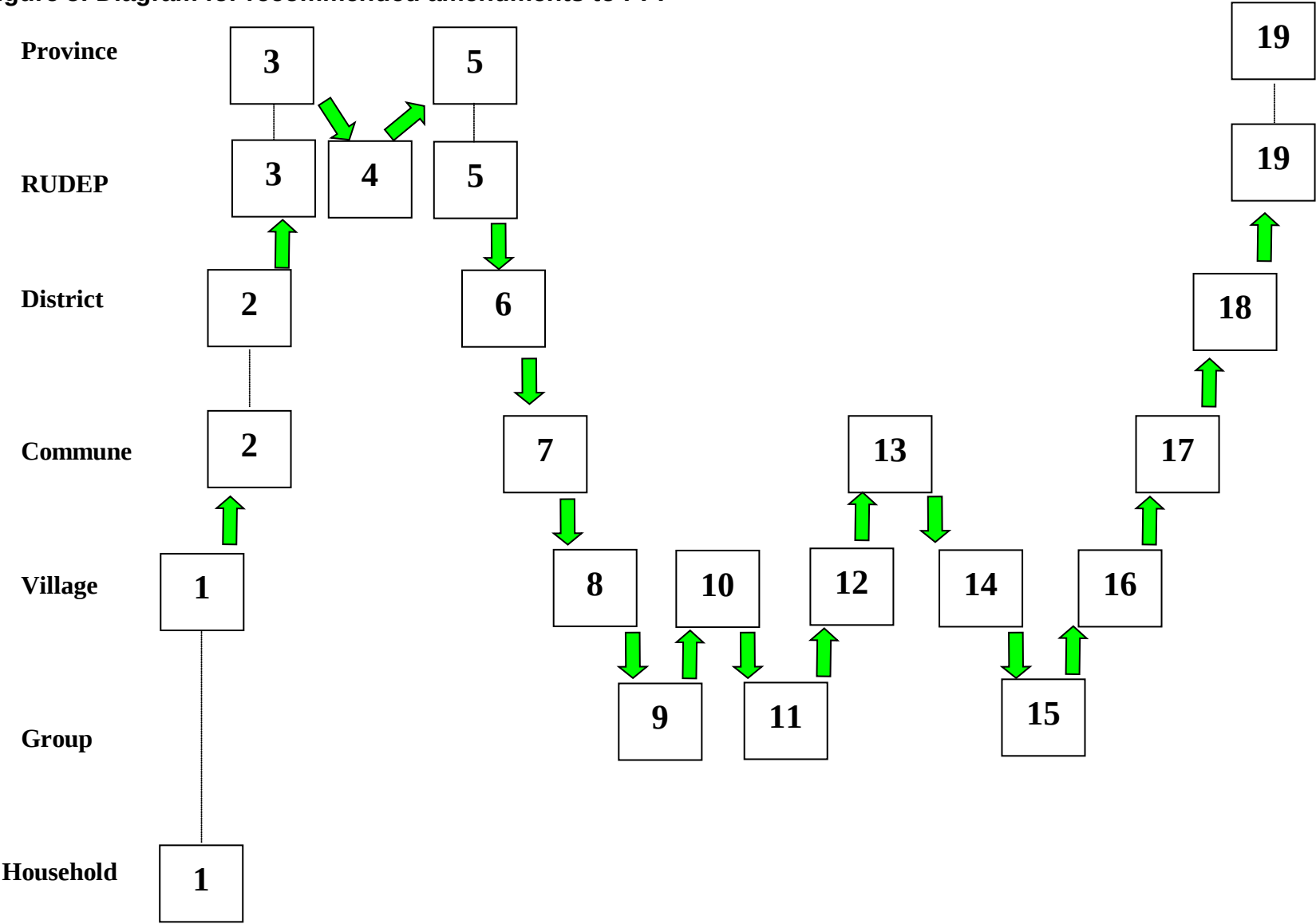
A final commune plan would comprise details of activities to be conducted, existing budget available and requests for the financial and technical support from higher levels of government and any other non-program funding sources.

18. RUDEP – District funding allocation meeting.

District approves the commune plan and sends RUDEP its expected funding allocation for the commune. For example it could advise the Program if it expects to provide any additional funding to activities receiving RUDEP funding, such as combating child malnutrition or technical support to increase rice productivity.

19. Province approves RUDEP annual plan and also indicates expected provincial funding for the communes.

Figure 5: Diagram for recommended amendments to PPP



11.1.2 Village Planning Meetings

An effort needs to be made to increase the amount of analysis in future village planning meetings. Once participants have identified an issue concerning them they need to be able to think through the variety of ways they might be able to address it.

As mentioned in Section 6.5.2, the lack of analysis was partly due to the way that participants stated their difficulties. Often they stated the difficulty in terms of a 'lack of' something, such as capital, technical knowledge, medicines and so on. The natural consequence of 'difficulties' stated in such terms was corresponding activities aimed at providing whatever was 'lacking', often leaving the participants with the belief that no further analysis was necessary. On occasions, when supposedly raising their difficulties some group participants even skipped the intermediate step of describing what they were lacking and spoke directly about what they needed or desired.

More analysis could be encouraged by accepting this as the way in which people express their opinion and asking about their 'needs' rather than their difficulties. In fact, this already occurred on some occasions when supervisors, who, like the households, equated 'difficulty' with 'need', ignored the instructions on the difficulty form and simply asked the group 'What do you need?'.

For future village planning meetings the facilitators should firstly ask households about their needs and then ask them what their objectives are in meeting those needs. When listing out their needs the households, with the help of the facilitators, group their needs under common objectives.⁸³ Under this format, the activities and objectives could be written on just one form.⁸⁴

The coding system applied to the past three PPPs has also been changed to fit in with the recommended format. There are two complementary coding systems, one for needs and one for objectives.⁸⁵

Objectives in the village planning meetings and corresponding coding system are categorised into one of just two groups: income generation or livelihoods. As a consequence, groups form to work together to meet either income generation or livelihoods objectives, potentially through a wide variety of activities.

The importance of infrastructure as one of RUDEP's four components remains unchanged. However, under this format infrastructure activities are taken from the 'needs' column of the village planning form and groups are not formed solely for infrastructure projects. For example, a group may form with the objective of increasing profits from pig production. One of their 'needs' to increase profitably may be an improved road to facilitate buying and selling of pigs and pig inputs. In that case, the road would be listed as a 'need' in the left hand column of the form along with a range of other needs, such as loans and technical support, to meet the income generation

⁸³ See Annex 11.2 for more details on recommended modifications to the village planning meeting format.

⁸⁴ See Annex 11.3 for the Village Planning Meetings Form

⁸⁵ See Annex 11.2 for further explanation of the coding system and Annex 11.4 for the coding system itself.

objective of increased profits from pigs. If the road was selected for RUDEP funding, this ‘pig’ group would be involved in the road project, together with other groups with the same need.

The rationale for this new approach is simple: infrastructure contributes to achieving income generation and livelihoods objectives but infrastructure itself is not an objective. In other words, when households raise an infrastructure project as a need, they do so because the infrastructure’s provision will help them either to increase their income or improve non-financial aspects of their lives.

There are some dangers with this approach. It could be argued that income generation itself is not a final objective as people earn income in order to spend the money on food, education, recreation etc. In some cases it could also be argued that infrastructure is a final objective because, regardless of its practical merits, its provision increases the community’s status. A trial of the format demonstrated that there was a danger of differing perspectives on ‘needs’ and ‘objectives’ causing confusion during group discussion at the village planning meetings. Therefore, for the format to be implemented successfully all stakeholders need to agree on clear, unambiguous definitions of ‘need’ and ‘objective’ before the 2005 – 2006 process commences and then ensure that they are well understood by the village facilitators. Even the terminology used needs to be discussed and agreed upon.

11.1.3 Commune Plan Preparation Meetings

No major changes are recommended for the commune plan preparation meetings. However, the meetings could be improved by:

- Workshopping the matrix criteria so that all parties are happy with the criteria used;
- Refining the criteria for allocating funding in the final planning tables;
- Clarifying which objectives are acceptable for consideration by the meeting participants and therefore for potential funding allocation. For example, should general objectives such as ‘improved animal health’ or ‘better pest control’ be acceptable as objectives around which activity groups can form.

11.2 Preliminary work for future participatory planning processes

The 2004-2005 PPP suffered to some extent by insufficient training for and consultation with those involved in the process. Below are some suggestions on activities that can be undertaken during the next 12 months to increase local ownership of the process and better prepare the people involved in its implementation. RUDEP should work with or through higher levels of government when conducting training to lower levels. The activities are listed in approximate chronological order.

1. Identify those directly involved

Village facilitators

Together with the CPCs, review the list of facilitators involved in the village planning meetings. Determine who of this list should be invited to act as facilitators in future processes and confirm their availability and willingness to be involved. Identify other potential village facilitators and check their availability and willingness.

Commune and district level participants

Review the list of commune and district participants in the main steps of PPP such as the village planning meetings, commune plan preparation meetings, and commune and village plan announcement meetings. Confirm who will be involved in the 2004 – 2006 process.

2. Clarify allowances paid (if any)

An allowances regime is in place for district and commune contact group members but no formal arrangements have been made for anyone contributing to RUDEP from outside the contact groups. A temporary arrangement was made to pay facilitators at the recent village planning meetings at the same rate as non-core commune contact group members, i.e. a rate of 10,000 dong per day. The level of compensation, if any, needs to be determined in advance of any work or training undertaken by non-contact group members.

3. PRA training

Assuming that PRA activities are intended to be an integral part of an institutionalised participatory planning process, it is important that key commune and village officials involved in the process are trained in PRA techniques.

4. Grassroots democracy (now known as democracy in communes) training

PLAN International is working with the provincial people's committee to conduct commune and district training on the National Democracy in Communes Regulation. Given that aspects of the participatory planning process and other RUDEP approaches fit well with these regulations, the program should consider sponsoring the province to conduct similar training.

5. Data analysis training

The DDOs and Commune Plan Preparation Meeting participants should be trained in data analysis techniques and then analyse some of the data collected, particularly some of the difficulties raised, during the 2004 – 2005 PPP. The aim of such training should be to demonstrate that there are often a range of solutions which can be explored to solve a particular problem. The training session(s) could also analyse the results of PRA activities.

6. Facilitation training

The facilitators should receive some general training on facilitation techniques prior to the commencement of the 2005 – 2006 PPP.

7. Presentation of Monitoring and Evaluation and Commune Profile Data

The monitoring and evaluation data will increasingly be shared with local government, community associations and households. Sessions could be held where the data is presented and discussions held on the data's implications for future activities.

The statistics in the commune profiles come from a variety of government sources but it is doubtful that the contact groups have a good grasp of the data presented in the profiles. This data can be presented and its significance for commune plans discussed.

8. Village Planning Meeting Format training

Village leaders and facilitators should be present at the commune's initial presentation and workshopping of the participatory planning process.⁸⁶ They should then attend further training on the format of the village planning meetings and their role as facilitators at the meetings.

9. Data entry training

With some training and assistance from the DDOs, a nominated commune contact group or CPC member should be responsible for entering much of the data from the village planning meetings. Although this might be difficult initially, there are a number of reasons why local data entry should be possible:

- The results of the village planning meetings are kept by the village leaders;
- RUDEP has provided all CPCs with a computer and basic computer training;
- Core CCG members are paid half their regular wage for being involved in the program so they would be compensated for entering the data;
- Data entry for the 2004 – 2005 process was reasonably straight forward and within the capabilities of commune officials provided they receive adequate training.

10. Preparatory Sessions for Commune Planning

As in the 2004 – 2005 process, preparatory sessions should be held prior to the Commune Plan Preparation Meetings. After attending the initial presentation⁸⁷ most participants should already be aware of the basic format of the meeting. However, the preparatory sessions could be used to review the matrix criteria, distribute and analyse data from the village planning meetings and so on. Everyone involved with Commune Plan Preparation Meetings should attend these sessions, including village leaders.

⁸⁶ See Section 11.1.1, Step 8

⁸⁷ See Section 11.1.1, Step 8

12 Conclusion

The 2004 – 2005 participatory planning process left lots of room for improvement. The difficulties and suggested improvements have been recorded in this report.

The process also had many successes. From the point of view of RUDEP's contribution to governance in Quang Ngai, the Program's biggest achievement was in significantly increasing the level of local engagement in PPP and initiating dialogue between RUDEP and local government debate about participatory planning.

From an operational point of view, the process succeeded in giving households, local government and RUDEP a clear list of activities to be implemented in 2004 – 2005.

Annexes

Section 3

3.1



3.2



3.3



3.4



3.5



3.6



Section 4

4.1



4.2



4.3



4.4



4.5



4.6



4.7



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4.10.



4.11



Section 5

5.1



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Section 6

6.1



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6.8



Section 7

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7.8



7.9



Section 8

8.1



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8.3



8.4



8.5



8.6



8.7



8.8



8.9



Annex 8.01: Difficulties codes



Section 9

9.1



Section 10

10.1



10.2



10.3A



10.3B



10.4



10.5



10.6



10.7



Section 11

11.1



11.2



11.3



11.4

