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Learning for sustainable action

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The Social Forestry Support Programme (SFSP) 1994 to 2002 in Vietnam: Effective learning through institutional incorporation of Participatory Curriculum Development (PCD) and Learner Centered Teaching Methodology (LCTM) – formal and informal implications, a few years after termination of the programme

General introduction on SFSP

The Social Forestry Support Program (SFSP) had two phases: from 1994–1997 and 1997-2002. The programme had its beginning in 1991, when the Government of Vietnam recognized the need to change forestry education and training in Vietnam. It approached the Swiss Federal Government to sponsor the creation of a training institution similar to the Regional Community Forestry Training Centre (RECOFTC) in Bangkok, Thailand. Both phases of SFSP were financed by SDC, Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation and implemented by Helvetas, Swiss Association for International Cooperation. In Vietnam, the former Ministry of Forestry, now merged into the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD), was the responsible partner institution.

SFSP1

The SFSP began officially in July 1994, with the following overall goal for the first phase:

To contribute to a sustainable and equitable management of forest and tree resources by equipping people with the required professional skills and knowledge.

This goal gave SFSP its character as an educational support programme within the forestry sector, rather than a forestry support project. The main development objectives of SFSP 1 were to:

- Broaden the knowledge bases of social forestry through research and faculty development.
- Integrate permanently the new knowledge into education and training through support to ongoing refresher training and curriculum development.
- Support the development of appropriate organizational arrangements enabling and supporting the achievement of the first two objectives.

Starting up in November 1994, the project was located at the Forestry University of Vietnam (Xuan Mai district, Ha Tay province), the main provider of forestry education and training under the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (in Vietnam, education and training institutions fall under a number of different ministries, depending on the sector which they serve). By July 1995, MARDC created a new institution for the project to work with at the Forestry College; the Social Forestry Training Centre.

SFSP 1 was conceived with an action-research basis, and a relatively open framework. This allowed the project to explore possibilities and develop key areas of focus along the way. The framework that emerged was based around the classic three-way linkage of training - extension - research.

A “working group” for each of these areas was established at the Social Forestry Training Centre. Members of these groups were drawn from faculties across the entire Forestry College. A very wide range of activities were carried out.

By 1997, the demand for a second phase was clear, as was the recognition that this should build on the growing relationships between universities offering forestry.

SFSP 2

SFSP 2 began in 1997, which involved a significant expansion of the scope and scale of its activities. The new phase involved seven Working Partner Institutions (WPIs). Five of these were the tertiary level educational institutions offering degree courses in forestry that had collaborated in the formation of the Social Forestry Training Network during SFSP 1:

- Forestry University of Vietnam.
- Thai Nguyen Agriculture and Forestry University which is located in the North-east of Vietnam.
- Hue Agriculture and Forestry University which is located in the Central of Vietnam.
- Tay Nguyen University which is located in the Central Highland of Vietnam.
- University of Agriculture and Forestry of Ho Chi Minh City, which is located in the South of Vietnam.

In addition, and to ensure that the new education system would take into account the field reality, one national research centre, the National Institute for Soil and Fertilizer (NISF) and the provincial extension centre of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development in Hoa Binh province (located in North-west Vietnam) were also supported. The intention was to create the necessary synergies between extension, research and training which had not been fully achieved during SFSP 1.

With the inclusion of four new university partners, all of which fall under the

administration of the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) the coordination structure was different to that in SFSP1.

The development objective (derived from government policy) of SFSP 2 was:

To establish social forestry, in order to have a more effective management of forest lands and renewable natural resources to upgrade the living standards of rural people.

The SFSP 2 objective (1997-2002) was:

To develop an effective forestry training capacity which is responsive to the demands of implementing sustainable and participatory forest land management.

The programme supports in 3 main components: Human Resource Development, Generation of Knowledge, and Information Exchange.

Under the component of Human Resource Development, many activities on Participatory Curriculum Development (PCD) and Learner-centered Teaching method, innovative approach and method in education have been organized and conducted. Those new approaches and methods were introduced in order to increase the learning effectiveness in forestry education in Vietnam.

A bridging phase

SFSP led to significant improvements in forestry education in Vietnam, but also faced many major challenges. Some expected results were not fully achieved, and some approaches still needed more time to really bear fruit. Consequently, a one-year "bridging phase" (January-December 2002) was added to SFSP2, which would incorporate some outstanding SFSP activities and also the planning of a new project which would build on the outcomes and lessons learned from SFSP. In 2002, the Social Forestry Training Network (SFTN) was launched, which included mainly seven Working Partner Institutions of SFSP. The formation of SFTN is to make sure the sustainability of SFSP outputs.

Establishment of new project

The success of SFSP has led to the initiation of a new project, the Extension and Training Support Project for Forestry and Agriculture in the Uplands (ETSP), a further cooperation between MARD and SDC, also implemented by Helvetas. This new project, started in January 2003, builds upon the achievements of SFSP. It shall ensure that the capacities built in forestry education and training can be further used to serve the emerging needs of people in rural areas for extension and training in agriculture and forestry. The objective of ETSP is to address more directly poverty alleviation in remote and disadvantaged areas of Vietnam.

Increase the learning effectiveness through Participatory Curriculum Development (PCD) and Learner-Centered Teaching Method (LCTM):

What is Participatory curriculum development (PCD)?

PCD is a cycle which consists of 5 steps: i) Context analysis and training need assessment; ii) identification of learning goal, objectives and development of curriculum outlines; iii) plan and develop detail curricula, iv) Delivery and use of new curricula; and v) Monitoring and assessment.

There are two considerable points in this approach. Firstly, PCD is a continuous cycle, and needs to be adjusted and updated on a regular basis to adapt to the changing context. Secondly, PCD involves the stakeholders that have training-relevant mandates into each step of the cycle. Figure 1 below describes the interrelation among the PCD steps.

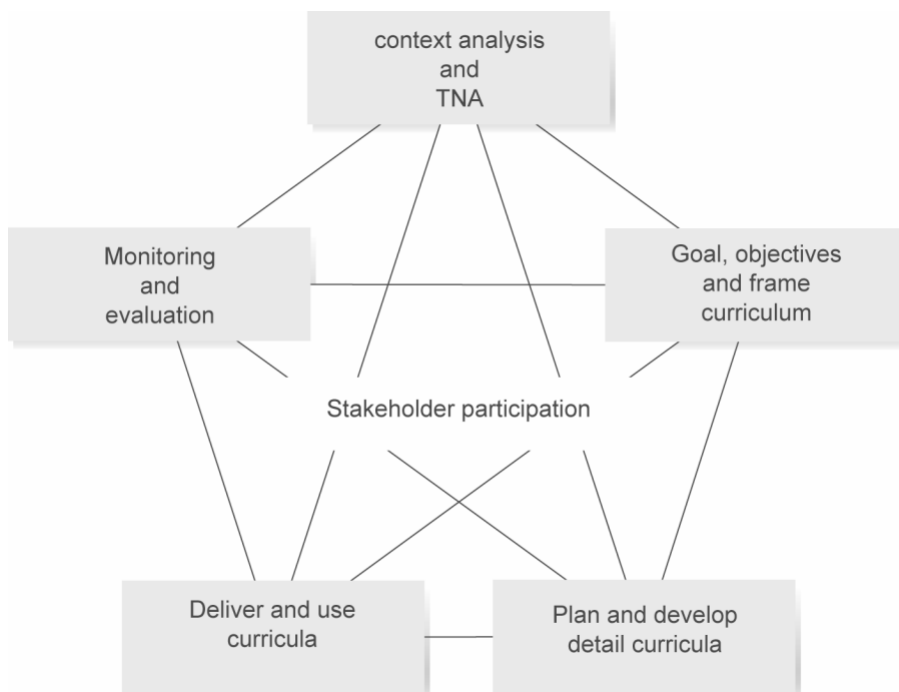


Figure 1: Interrelation among PCD steps

Why PCD contributes to learning effectiveness?

Curriculum development using participatory approach responds to the stakeholders' needs which were changing according to the social development trends. Before developing curriculum, the curriculum producers had analyzed the context and assessed the learning needs of the target groups (community, organizations/institutions/individuals). Learning needs were later on reflected in the training curriculum. For example, within SFSP, many workshops were organised in order to analyze the effects of socio-economic changes to the forestry sector. As a result of the analysis, it was found that there was a need for a new training major. As such, Social Forestry appeared and refreshment training for foresters on social forestry was required. Those needs were later on reflected in the training curriculum of the forestry education faculties of five universities in Vietnam.

PCD attracts the active participation of teachers and students. In the past, all training institutions used the traditional approach, only some experts sat together and wrote the curriculum without the involvement of the teachers and students, who would use that curriculum in future. In PCD approach, the main actors in the education (teachers and students) are involved in many steps of curriculum development. Therefore, they can express their needs, propose effective teaching and learning methods, and contribute a lot of experience to the contents of the workbook.

The curriculum development cycle ensures the continuous learning and renovation of the teaching contents, teaching and learning methods and reflects the reality into the classroom.

The assessment of training needs helps the curriculum to respond to the needs of students/learners, not only in terms of learning contents but also the organization of the training so that it can fit to conditions of the learners.

How is PCD introduced and applied in SFSP?

PCD was initially introduced and applied in Social Forestry Training Centre, Forestry University of Vietnam (under the management of Forestry Ministry). As this is a new approach to Vietnamese context, the actors, who were involved in the curriculum development process of Social Forestry major, learnt the new approach and became the core force for curriculum development in SFSP2. PCD output of SFSP 1 was curriculum of Social Forestry major, which was approved by MARD, and applied in one Forestry University of Vietnam.

In SFSP2, PCD was expanded to four universities under Ministry of Education and Training (MoET), one extension centre and one research institute (under MARD). This expansion ensured that the innovative approach was broadly applied in the forestry education and training institutions, not only for formal training/education but also informal ones, such as extension short training course.

In both phases, Learner-Centered Teaching Method, an innovative method, was also introduced and applied by all Working Partner Institutions (WPIs). This method triggered the transition from pouring the knowledge to the head of student/learner to facilitating the learners/students to actively participate in the learning process. It was highly appreciated by training institutions and teachers, and they were willing to apply it in their teaching.

Main outputs of SFSP2 are:

- Firstly, thanks to support of SFSP, a core team, having adequate competencies in participatory curriculum development, existed in each forestry education university of Vietnam;
- Secondly, a group of teachers have applied LCTM professionally. At the moment, they are the core team providing training on LCTM for other teachers/trainers within training/education institutions not only in the forestry sector but also in other sectors; and
- Last but not least, some workbooks for social forestry relevant subjects were developed and applied in the five forestry education universities of Vietnam.

Implication of PCD and LCTM to education and training in Vietnam

By participating in the curriculum development process, core members of WPIs and other stakeholders (training managers, leaders of education institutions, policy makers and teachers in non-SFSP supported training institutions) have been aware of the need to innovate their current approach in curriculum development.

The dissemination of this innovative PCD approach can be clearly recognized. Many universities and faculties under university management, and training institutions (such as vocational schools, technical schools) conducted many training courses on PCD and LCTM for the teachers, using their own budget (no project support).

In 2004 and 2005, many training courses on PCD and LCTM were delivered to 39 vocational schools under MARD. Facilitators in those training courses are core members who were involved actively in adapting and applying PCD/LCTM in SFSP.

Due to effective collaboration between education and extension, PCD and LCTM were not only applied successfully in formal and in-service education/training but also in short training courses provided by extension institutions. The training courses applying LCTM were highly appreciated and satisfied by farmers and other target groups in the provinces of Hoa Binh, Thua Thien Hue, Dak Nong and Dak Lak.

Lesson learnt and recommendations

Remain flexible while applying the PCD cycle and its principles so that it can fit to the specific conditions (human resource, timeframe, finance, etc.) of each country and training institution.

The institutional framework plays a very important role in facilitating the application and dissemination of those innovative approaches and methods (institutional framework implies the legal documents and laws on education and training). Fast or immediate changes in these frameworks are not feasible. It is important to make policy makers recognize the need in changing the way of thinking about the teaching and learning process, using learner-centered and participatory approaches (changing attitudes).

The effective application of this approach requires the commitment and enthusiasm of all stakeholders. Therefore, each stakeholder should know clearly what benefits and roles he/she should play in this PCD cycle.

A core trainer group consists of competent persons in PCD, LCTM and facilitation should be formed in each training and extension institution. This group will provide training and coaching for their colleagues to ensure the scaling up and dissemination of PCD and LCTM.

It is assumed that PCD/LCTM will have great impact to students and learners. Therefore, to better convince the policy makers to formally bring this new approach into education and training, an ex-post study on the impact of SFSP with its PCD/LCTM to students and learners at national level would be a helpful instrument for other educational programs. This has not been done yet.

One critical point needs to be addressed to the decision makers of such a program: Whenever involving in educational programs it is essential to keep continuity and do not too early strategic changes which influence in a negative way the dissemination of the achieved outputs via various levels of education. The logic next step, namely to introduce the very same approaches and tools at the next lower (vocational) level was actually missed in 2002 when MARD and SDC decided to change its intervention strategies.

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Social forestry
Forest certification
Participatory and Action research
Curriculum development in Agriculture
Learner-Centered Teaching Methods
Training quality