



A 533	<i>Structure of the Final Report (at the end of the funding phase)</i>	Practical guide
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Final Report

A. General Data

Social Policy Ecology Research Institute (SPERI)

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Phone: +84-37717367
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Project title: Scholarship for Advanced Eco-Farm training Course
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B. Assessment of the Project

1. Assessment of the whole project period

Quality and relevance of the project planning

The planning of this project was of sufficient quality to effectively carry out activities and achieve the objectives of the project proposal. This is demonstrated by the learning outcomes, achievements and personal statements of individuals within the target group. Evidence of the successful implementation of the project is also given in an external assessment of the project made by the independent consultant Mr Cory W. Whitney, MSc (Annex 1).

In the context of this Farmer Field School where the undertaking of activities is clearly organised but also flexible to take advantage of new developments as they arise, the planning of this project has been at times adapted to allow the students to benefit from opportunities made available through unexpected and emerging activities of HEPA and its network partners. For example, with short notice, scholarship holders coordinated visits by the media department of the Communist Party of Vietnam and farmers groups from Lang Son district; lecturing on Eco-farming and leading farm tours with the visitors, as well as giving interviews to be aired on the government's website: http://dangcongsan.vn/cpv/Modules/Media/Media.aspx?cm_id=1783&type=1&co_id=0

The project was implemented according to the schedule to attain high efficiency, aside from some alterations to planning such as those mentioned above. All of the students have achieved good results and are satisfied with their achievements in the program. They did notice that some subjects were set in the curriculum but not implemented as scheduled, or as they expected. For example, the Farm Management subject was implemented by scholarship holders independently planning, practising their own management plan and reporting at regular intervals. Coaching and feedback was provided at each of these stages and students were assessed on their performance, but the practical learning was not followed by a workshop to reinforce the theory and lessons learned. However, this has since been done with the students.

Each of the scholarship holders considered the study subjects to be sound and the delivery to be consistent with their capacity and level of understanding. The educational methodology was firstly based on practical lessons and then reviewed in workshops to understand the theory more deeply. This methodology is very suitable for training youth who have limited academic experience or backgrounds, as do these students. On the duration of subjects studied, 50% of the students said that the delivery and their learning was fast and efficient because it matched their capacity to learn and understand. The remaining students reported their learning of the courses was at a 'normal' rate and level of effectiveness.

Implementation of the project

The activities of the FFS-HEPA Advanced Eco-Farm training Course commenced immediately after students received the scholarship. Training was provided to students to advance their knowledge of ecological farming and the associated supporting skills in English, computer literacy, training of trainer (TOT), and coordination. The program especially focused on intensive training of leadership skills for students in the final year of the program.

Most of the educational contents described in the scholarship program have been implemented by FFS-HEPA according to the schedule and have achieved

satisfactory or better results (refer to first year Annual Report). The second year of the scholarship was focused on developing leadership through real experience managing the Farmer Field School, with mentoring from appropriate individuals. The students also consolidated their learning from previous topics through practice, feedback and writing of major reports.

On the duration of the project, 100% of the students deemed it appropriate, because each of them had already completed 2 years of basic training in Eco-farming, environment and customary law at FFS-HEPA and FFS-Simacai of SPERI. This scholarship program supported them to build upon their foundational studies with 2 years of advanced training to help them become more confident in their prior skills, and to develop new knowledge and skills in community development, coordination and leadership.

The implementation of the project is always through integration of ecological and sustainable farming practices, indigenous knowledge and belief systems. This ensures harmony between human-human, human-nature relationships, and the spiritual well-being of students. In the two-year study, students have been exposed to a diversity of experiences and professional development opportunities. Knowledge was attained from the FFS-HEPA training, from the trip back to practice in their villages; from the study tours to such SPERI project areas as Quang Binh, Lao Cai, Nghe An, as well as sharing experiences in other countries of the Mekong River Basin - the following are a few examples:

- Giang A Su visited Cambodia on a study tour of building savings, a credit fund and market for ecological products.
- Loc Van Vin, Ly Seo Vu, Giang A Su travelled to Lao PDR for participatory rural appraisal (PRA) in the two villages of Densavang and Phonhsavat.
- Giang Thi Chung, Ly Seo Vu, Giang A Su went to visit and study traditional farming methods of the Hmong people in Long Lan village (Lao PDR) in April 2011.

Overall the implementation of the project was appropriate and effective for the last 2 years. Through the implementing process, however, some difficulties did emerge. For instance, the training program aimed to involve village elders providing a lot of study content to students, but HEPA could not complete according to the plan. The reason was that many of the village elders were unable to travel due to poor health, or did not feel comfortable to travel in small groups. That caused delays in the training program from schedule, although some large group trips were made possible after further consultation and organisation by SPERI. Base on the practical learning environment, The remaining training contents that could not be covered by visits by elders, were replaced by research activities, workshops and practice of the skills and knowledge at the students' pilot models.

The following is an extract from the external evaluation showing the improved level of skills of the four scholarship holders.

Scholarship holders	Eco-farming knowledge and practice	Integrated local knowledge into research trial	Independent farm management	Facilitation	TOT	Leadership	English	Computer
Loc Van Vin	H	M	M	H	H	H	H	H
Giang Seo Su	H	H	H	H	H	H	M+	H-
Giang Thi Chung	H	H	M-	M	M+	H	M	M
Ly Seo Vu	H	H	H	H	H	H	M-	M-
	H: High	M: Medium	L: Low					
	H-: Below High	M+: Above Medium						
		M-: Below Medium						

Through the above table we see that all four scholarship holders have reached high levels in ecological farming knowledge, practice and leadership. Three students have a deep understanding of local and indigenous knowledge and its application in the pilot models. One student reached an average level in this field. 50% of students achieved excellent ecological farming management skills, 25% at a medium level and 25% achieved satisfactorily. In facilitation skills 75% gained excellent and 25% of students received a medium result. Training of trainer (TOT) skills were expressed very clearly and effectively by the students. Specifically, they had practical experience in the training of students of class KLao-1 and KLao-2; two separate groups of 4th-year students from the Hanoi University of Agriculture; domestic and foreign visiting delegations, and various interns and volunteers from 2010 to 2012. The results showed that three of the four students gained self-confidence and excellent marks in this area, while the remaining student was at an above average level. Additionally supporting skills such as computer literacy and English are prioritised by the training program. Rapid assessment result shows that Loc Van Vin can speak, listen, write, read English at a high level. Vin can facilitate, translate and work with foreign partners in English language. He recently became a bridge between international volunteers, students and staff at HEPA. Giang A Su can listen and speak English fairly well. He can also work in English with volunteers (especially with Mr. Robert Gray) specifically on ecological farming. The remaining students have sufficient English skills for daily communication with the foreign volunteers and interns.

Regarding computer skills, all students have basic and enhanced computer skills to serve their work in creating documents, presentations and managing their own files. Computer skills of Loc Van Vin have improved significantly. He is able to type with 10 fingers, which he learned through minute keeping at HEPA meetings, writing regular reports, and keeping a digital diary. Through self-learning he is now also able to install operating systems and other software in a variety of computer systems and is very capable of using the internet for research using search engines, as well as email and Skype communications.

Participation of the target group/beneficiaries

There has been a high level of participation from the beneficiaries throughout the project. Indeed, student participation is mandatory in all areas of the scholarship program and participation of students has can be commented on in a number of areas:

- ***Attitude and Behaviour:*** Each of the students have displayed a high level of integrity, personal responsibility and a professional approach to their work and interactions with other people. The three older students (Su, Vin and Vu) who have been given a leadership role within HEPA management have shown dedication and much patience as they have embarked on a particularly challenging endeavour. Chung has also displayed self-reliance in her high quality work, and is always willing to assist others.
- ***Training:*** The beneficiaries have been involved in all classes, workshops and practical activities. They have gained facilitation skills themselves and are now supporting younger students to gain experience in running workshops on foundation Eco-farming topics.
- ***Facilitation:*** Members of the target group are acting as teachers and mentors for new students and are managing the FFS education program. Their success in Eco-farm practise means they have a lot of experience and can clearly demonstrate and explain concepts. The students have extended these facilitation skills by hosting and coordinating short visits by important guests, media teams and government delegations. This includes guiding farm tours on Eco-farming technique and philosophy as well as the methodology of the FFS. In this way they are proving their skills and networking at the regional level.
- ***Practice:*** Independent learning and practice of knowledge and skills gained is an important part of the 'learning by doing, teaching by learning' educational approach. All of the scholarship holders have had creative control and management responsibility of a farm or area of land to develop as they chose. Short to mid-term planning, implementation and regular reporting was completed by students in relation to their farm and activities.
- ***Gender equality:*** Despite cultural norms and practices, both male and female students are given equal opportunities, responsibilities, access to resources and materials during the courses. The beneficiaries lead by

example in following this ideal and treating members of the opposite sex with respect, dignity and equality at all times.

- **Motivation:** Each of the beneficiaries have proposed new projects and initiated these and their own innovations during the course, as well as leading other students. Being responsible for the leadership of pilot model farms and for supervising other students, they have inspired and maintained the motivation of others in challenging times, as well as engaged in resolving conflict.

2. Assessment of project management and financial management

The scholarship program was implemented effectively and completed within the time allowed in the project proposal. Almost all contents of the proposal were completed successfully and some unexpected training opportunities were also included. Finances of the project were managed appropriately and a financial summary will be sent with this report. Therefore SPERI believes that the program has been implemented correctly and according to the original commitment made with the donor.

During the project, staff coordinating the program followed normal SPERI policy by planning and reporting in six-monthly intervals on both the education program and the overall activities of HEPA. Students followed the same procedures and also completed monthly farm plans and reports for the pilot model that they were responsible for, and following the seasonal calendar. All plans and reports are submitted to the SPERI Board which reviews and approves them. At the end of each reporting period students were evaluated according to their prior planning, their performance in workshops/classes as well as practice, and their behaviour.

In SPERI's management of the project, a supervisor was always assigned to coordinate the program and follow students progress in learning activities and daily life. In order to incorporate other benefits to the scholarship holders and other ethnic minority students at HEPA, the supervisor was also engaged in coordinating FFS activities through other programs often shared with SPERI network partners or collaborating individuals. Examples of these include scientific and academic partners (Prof. Nguyen Ngoc, Prof. Khong Dien, Prof Le Van Khoa, Mr Nguyen Trung) and elders such as Mr Lo Khanh Xuyen (customary law in Thai community natural resource management) and Mr Hoang Seo Cau (herbal medicine and customary law forest protection in Hmong ethnic minority). In addition to networking activities with key farmers the program supervisor also coordinates with Mekong organisations promoting youth leadership, sending and receiving interns through exchange programs. Due to these activities that add great benefit to all students' learning at HEPA, it could occasionally be seen by scholarship beneficiaries that the program supervisor was absent. However, HEPA was always aware

of this issue and presented it as an opportunity for students to learn self management and reliance (to a small extent). Unfortunately, illness caused interruption to the coordination of the program when the role of supervisor had to be changed.

Lastly, a very important part of the project management was gender balancing to ensure equal opportunity for all students. As women often hold few or no positions of power or responsibility in ethnic culture, the policy of HEPA is to encourage female students to participate in leadership/management roles and organise their own independent activities. Giang Thi Chung has focused on her facilitation skills and Action Research projects. She has facilitated several workshops by herself and collaborated with Hanoi University of Agriculture on research about organic waste processing by worms. She also worked with Professor Tiem on soil assessment and measuring nitrogen concentrations. Chung's final project in the scholarship program however, was solely her own research study on a comparison of peanut varieties and cultivation methods. She is now concluding her final report to finish her educational program with SPERI, including the results and recommendations of this successful research project.

3. Assessment of project goals & objectives

In an external assessment of the scholarship project, conducted by independent consultant Cory W. Whitney, it was found that the training program has made significant impacts and helped the beneficiaries to gain skills in Eco-farming practices. It has also helped to further the students toward reaching their personal goals as actors in the advancement of Eco-farming practices and community development. All the students have improved TOT skills, facilitation skills and leadership skills.

The survey also found that there still remains room for improvement in the education program and model. Some work needs to be done in maintaining the consistency of the educational and training support as well as the extension of the training.

To what extent have the project goals been achieved?

Four indigenous students shall become key trainers (TOT competent), Eco-farming practitioners, and also pioneers in Eco-farm development.

Scholarship holders have exceeded expectations in their competence and confidence to train other students, farmers and even representatives from government and the media. They are successful Eco-farming practitioners, demonstrated by both the physical evidence the integrated and diverse Eco-

farms they have produced and their ability to explain the theory and principles behind the design and processes involved. Finally, the students have in many ways become pioneers of Eco-farming development through their own Action Research and lessons learned by designing solutions that combine traditional and indigenous knowledge and practices with techniques of contemporary sustainable agriculture. The training that the scholarship holders have received, such as practical learning topics, Eco-farm operation and management experience, classes in English and computer skills and advanced workshop topics, have contributed to meeting the above project goal.

- **Training of trainers:** This is indicated through positive community participation and student-mentor roles with younger students, on farm practical assessments, and written student reports. The scholarship holders have taken on facilitator roles in the FFS education program and are extending their TOT skills to deliver training in new and emerging practical topics. Students have proven proficient in practical subjects as well as supporting skills such as English and computing, which are essential for creating presentations, and facilitating groups from diverse backgrounds and sometimes with speakers of other languages.



Figure1. Ly Seo Vu training Laos students to improve the soil.

- **Practitioners:** During the first year of the project students developed practical skills in Eco-farm development and systems thinking, problem solving, critical thinking capacity and design. These skills have allowed them to research, design, implement, maintain and manage their own Eco-farms. In the second year all skills were developed to an advanced level. The final year also focused on building leadership skills, community development skills,

decision-making processes and taking responsibility for problems solving during daily management of the FFS.



Figure 2: Official signing-in of indigenous students to FFS-HEPA leadership.

- **Pioneers in Eco-farm development:** Through more systemic project or specific Action Research such as: the Holistic Management of Thuong Uyen, Cay Khe or Poov Zoov Eco-farm demonstration sites, Permaculture Chicken management, Worm farming or innovative techniques to feed the soil, in this moment the beneficiaries are at the cutting-edge of the Eco-farm development. All students have passed the course and are continuing to lead the way for both their peers and for the broader Eco-farming community by designing new sustainable solutions.

Positive changes:

The scholarship holders now have an understanding of the concepts of participation and appropriate leadership, through the experience gained in different experiences managing the FFS. Since graduating, three out of four of the past students are now HEPA staff and are continuing their management and facilitating roles in the FFS. The fourth graduate is completing her final report of more than four years cumulative experience in HEPA and FFS-Simacai, before also becoming a staff member of SPERI. There is always more to learn and improve, but the foundation and advanced skills in communication, conflict resolution and decision-making have put these young men and woman in a great position to drive the Farmer Field School in new and exciting directions.

Pilot farms as demonstration sites:

The beneficiaries are now able to demonstrate a thorough understanding of Eco-farming knowledge, Holistic Management and the principles and process

of design, on the Eco-farms that they have managed. These farms are now living and learning sites ready to multiply Eco-farming lessons. The scholarship graduates are now using these demonstration sites to widen the exposure of Eco-farming philosophy and practices in Vietnam; sharing with visitors, media representatives educational organisations and youth networks in the Mekong region.

To what extent has the project contributed to the overall objective?

To progress towards a group of young indigenous professionals committed to promoting an Eco-oriented agriculture.

Scholarship holders have built upon foundation skills from their previous scholarship and now have advanced Eco-farming and support skills as well as considerable experience in Training of Trainer, facilitation, leadership, management and coordination skills. These skills and experience were introduced in the first year of the training program and were put into practice and enhanced by their leadership roles in the daily management of the Farmer Field School and through HEPA's 'learning by doing' approach. All four students were assessed as achieving good results in those mentioned skills and each of them have specific strengths and interests. They admit that they still have much to learn in this area, as it takes many years to master the skills of management and coordination, let alone in a multicultural and multilingual context. However, they are now key actors in promoting Eco-farming, participation in the FFS educational projects and community development.

The four students who have benefited from this scholarship and training program, are all now staff members or in the process of becoming staff of SPERI and its Farmer Field Schools. They are grateful for the assistance afforded to them by SPERI and BfdW, dedicated to the ideals of Eco-farming and realising the sustainable benefits that it holds for farmers, communities and the region alike.



Figure 3: Student designed Thuong Uyen model (landscaping in front of the house and terraces)



Figure 4: FFS-HEPA Action Research trialling black chicken and musk ducks, breeds from Simacai, Lao Cai province

Ly Seo Vu:

Through studying and practicing Eco-farming at HEPA, Vu has become confident in TOT for students, staff and farmers. He is glad to have received the training and for the opportunity to teach as he feels satisfaction in sharing what he has learned with others.

He has a highly-functional Eco-farm, a good knowledge of all the farming systems and an understanding of local knowledge. However, he could work on his interpersonal communication skills and improve his openness to negotiation to embrace diversity and allow more collaboration, consensus and flexibility within the education. He could also offer more orientation and give more positive feedback, balancing firm with flexible.

Ly Seo Vu can share practicing lessons for the visitors on his model in a very effective way. HEPA received a delegation of government officials from Huu Lung district, Lang Son province in 2011. The district party leader expressed that he “could not believe his eyes and ears because a Hmong ethnic student could share such very practical and strategic presentations.” In May 2012 HEPA also held an exchange with officials and farmers from Thai Nguyen province. Mr. Vu shared his lessons on pilot model management, human resource management and system design, etc. The Thai Nguyen delegation were impressed and learned many lessons from the pilot model of Ly Seo Vu. Also in 2012 SPERI cooperated with journalists and cameramen from the Communist Party website to HEPA. After 4 years training at HEPA (2-years foundation and 2-years advanced training) Ly Seo Vu has been leading all content schedule and work with the delegation for the whole duration. As a result the journalist team were extremely impressed and created successful a documentary on the teaching environment and forests of HEPA.

http://dangcongsan.vn/cpv/Modules/Media/Media.aspx?cm_id=1783&type=1&co_id=0



Figure 5. Mr. Ly Seo Vu is introducing the journalist team to HEPA

Loc Van Vin

Vin has learned a lot during the last two years. In particular he has advanced his facilitation and TOT skills by being able to share and to teach topics that he feels confident in. He is also quite computer literate and able to use computer software to produce documents, presentations and other teaching aids.

Vin feels that his technical and methodological skills have increased significantly and that his skills and experiences are satisfactory. He feels that his personality gives him a strong basis for work in Eco-farming. He feels that his role in helping the community is more-or-less satisfactory. His role in promoting the network development and furthering Eco-farming as well as his role in TOT is considerably improved. He makes some use of the technical learning he received during the advanced training and considerable use of the methodological, social and personal learning. Vin has proved his coordination ability clearly over the last 2 years. He did led the TOA (Toward Organic Asia) delegation during their study tour to HEPA in March 2012. He cooperated with other classmates to build a schedule and share the lessons learned of the pilot models to the TOA delegation. The results of the TOA study tour at HEPA opened up new trend of cooperation in the future. Recently Loc Van Vin gained an internship of a ten-month training course in Thailand so as to improve his leadership, training and coordination skills. On the other hand FFS-HEPA has the opportunity to receive two interns from similar organisations to SPERI (in Myanmar and India).



Figure 6. Loc Van Vin introducing the TOA delegation to HEPA in March 2012

Giang A Su

Through the advanced training course, Su has gained many additional, complimentary skills and experiences. His facilitation skills on Eco-farming and his TOT skills have improved markedly. Su believes this educational method is useful in the current context with degradation of both culture and environment and he says that it helps him spread his vision about society and values in agriculture. He aims to help other students to study and understand lessons as well as he had done. In the last advanced training year HEPA created opportunities for each student so that they could spend 70-80% of their time to coordinate and provide training to the new students. In 2012, Su took over the whole training schedule of FFS-HEPA with advice and support from Mr. Duong Quang Chau. HEPA has also received seven new students from Laos in March 2012. Su has set up one-year training plan for the new Lao students and has also been coordinating the third-year training programme for the old Lao students. He has done this training operation for FFS-HEPA in a smooth way recently. This demonstrates that Su's coordination and facilitation skills have been strengthened. His skills will be further improved as his practise continues and he is mentored by senior staff.



Figure 7. Giang A Su in discussion to set up first six month plan of 2012

Giang Thi Chung

Chung said that she has improved her skills and understanding of the Eco-farming Design Principles and the core values and steps of the HEPA Design Process. Recently she has advanced her ability in practical Eco-farming skills and facilitation skills, especially in the process for integrated processing pig feeding systems as well as creating and applying bio-pesticide. She said that she has come to better understand the importance of forest resources: “it feeds our life”. After the advanced training course Giang Thi Chung is able to apply her strength in independent small experiments with various criteria so as to obtain useful results on which to base her facilitation of lessons and workshops for the newer students. This level of Action Research can also provide advice to farmers to improve their cultivation efficiency. Although her experiment was small in scale, expected results and recommendations will likely be implemented in production in HEPA farms next season. Additionally Chung shows her ability to manage the website database, collect information from the pilot models and publish a weekly newsletter on the FFS website (ffs.speri.org) to share with those who are interested in Eco-farming and the management of HEPA as a whole. She also shares this information internally within the SPERI email network.



Figure 8. Giang Thi Chung reading maps in Eco-farming training

4. Assessment of the sustainable impact of the project

What are the sustainable impacts with reference to the target group/beneficiaries?

By their nature, the impacts of the project on the beneficiaries will be sustained over the long term. These benefits integrate with the Young Indigenous and Ethnic Leadership Development Strategy (YIELDS) of SPERI. Among these benefits are:

- Confidence in their abilities, knowledge, skills and cultural identity - a strong sense of self-worth from their achievements - unlike many other youth of their minority groups,
- Ability to plan, design, implement manage and improve small Eco-farms,
- Facilitation and teaching skills to train others in Eco-farming knowledge and skills,
- Ability to coordinate and manage an Eco-farming organisation and/or educational program.
- Inspiration and motivation to continue the work of SPERI by becoming facilitators, coordinators and managers of Farmer Field Schools, as well as sharing their knowledge, design and Eco-farming skills with their home communities.

What are the sustainable impacts with reference to gender, domestic violence, HIV/AIDS?

The target group represents two disadvantaged and poor ethnic minorities in Vietnam. As a component of Eco-farming study; students have learned about ethics, moral behaviour and community development. Good Eco-farming practice is developed from an ethical attitude that respects the rights of others and encourages practical solutions to build up community resources / harmony, livelihood strategies, confidence in identity and resilience. In addressing gender, female students were given the opportunity to take on leadership roles, this included being involved in a rotating system of farm manager or participating in a youths' forum. Students were given the opportunity to develop rules for daily conduct in a participatory way, and they developed the skills to have a role in community management and take into account the needs and rights of others when creating community order. When problems arise in the FFS this was taken as an opportunity to develop solutions. It is an interactive learning environment where it is recognised that the problem is part of the solution.

What are the sustainable impacts with reference to the the broader project environment / project area / country?

The following are impacts on HEPA and SPERI (as the project environment) that have resulted from the scholarship program and the efforts of the four beneficiaries supported by the program:

- During the past 2 years of the project, two separate study groups of fourth year undergraduate students from Hanoi Agricultural University (HUA) stayed at HEPA for 2-3 weeks to learn Eco-farming, design, practice and experience a different form of education. In both 2010 and 2011 the university and students were very impressed and four of them have even returned to undertake their final research project and thesis with HEPA. Through the program design, coordination and facilitation of the scholarship holders, almost all HUA students gained sufficient understanding of many Eco-farming topics. Scholarship students gained valuable experience facilitating a target group who spoke their own language though were of Kinh culture (Vietnamese ethnic majority). A strong and continuing relationship between the university and HEPA has been forged and study groups are visiting in October 2012 and beyond.
- In March of 2012, FFS-HEPA welcomed a study tour from the Towards Organic Asia (TOA) movement; a network of like-minded organisations working in organic agriculture, organic product markets, education and associated social and environmental issues. They are interested in Eco-farming and the methodology of SPERI's Farmer Field Schools. The scholarship holders facilitated the study tour, gave introductory lectures and presentations of Eco-farming theory during practical farm tours. The visiting delegation experienced the capability and professionalism of the scholarship holders and the potential of

HEPA, as an indigenous managed school. As a result, TOA is returning in 2013 to discuss whether FFS-HEPA may become a central training centre for youth connected to the TOA network across the Mekong region.

- Also through the connection with TOA, further training opportunities have been realised for the beneficiaries and other students of HEPA. An example of this is Loc Van Vin's participation in the Fredskorpset Exchange Programme, in which he is currently embarking on a 10 month internship with the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) in Thailand. There are more international internships with INEB and other organisations planned in the coming rounds of the programme.

- In the past four years SPERI and HEPA have hosted a number of volunteers from the Australian Youth Ambassadors for Development program. With many mutual benefits and positive overall experiences between scholarships holders and volunteers, this collaboration with Australian Government volunteer programs has continued. As a result HEPA now has a longer-term volunteer under the Australian Volunteers for International Development program, working specifically with the beneficiaries of the BfdW scholarship to help develop their skills further.

- Through the website of SPERI, HEPA received three interns from Cambodia, Thailand and Myanmar for three months in 2011. They came to learn Eco-farming and how HEPA protects the environment and conserves biodiversity. Again, their internships were coordinated and educational experience facilitated by the scholarship holders at a very busy period when HUA students were also visiting HEPA. The interns taught FFS students about Peace-Building in the Mekong region and of the activities of their home-organisations. They also had a positive experience, gave some valuable feedback, and the same exchange program is continuing in 2012 with three more interns.

5. Lessons learned

Lessons learned for the beneficiaries

After a two-year foundation course and now the completion of the 2-year advanced training course through BfdW ecumenical scholarship program, the four beneficiaries have gained a large range of knowledge, skills and experiences. Despite their limited academic backgrounds becoming involved with SPERI and BfdW, they are now prepared to engage in work activities and to continue improving both their own lives and the well-being and health of communities and their environment. As a result of their understanding and

valuable experience already working within SPERI Farmer Field Schools, the students are now becoming staff of this organisation and are giving back to other students and communities to multiply the lessons learned.

The following table is a summary of some of the skills and competencies that the four students have gained.

<u>Giang A Su</u>	<u>Loc Van Vin</u>	<u>Ly Seo Vu</u>	<u>Giang Thi Chung</u>
Ability to coordinate and manage a small model of the household (with full components), Ability to respond to a changing environment, Self-confidence, Motivate other people, Capacity to design, build and manage an eco-chicken system, Computer skills, Verbal and written communication, Team building.	Systematic thinking, Planing and organizing skills, Ability to respond to a changing environment, Computer skills, English, Research skills and interviewing, Interpersonal and networking abilities, Ability to manage multiple priorities, Logistical thinking, Communication skills, Photographic skills.	Self-confidence, Capacity to design and build a eco-farm model at home, Confident enough to write a feasibility study for a loan, a farm building for sharing and training, Farm management and human resource management skills, Confidence to share and teach about design and Eco-farm model components, Logistical thinking, Planning and organisational skills.	Capacity to design and build a eco-farm model at home, Practical skills, Ability to design different eco-farm model components especially garden and worm farm systems, Communication skills, Teamwork, Self-confidence, Design and carry out simple experiments, Write reports of research activities with clear results.

Almost all learning topics were achieved and practical learning experiences given to students as planned, including advanced training topics and field trips to Laos and Cambodia. Some extra topics were included in addition to the planned schedule, such as workshops on Peace Building. Scholarship holders trialed innovative Eco-farming solutions, became facilitators and trainers, led the FFS in management and coordination, and represented SPERI as successful young ethnic Eco-farmers and teachers. The selected students demonstrated a high degree of enthusiasm and motivation for course topics

and practical units and are now inspired to help other youth through all the lessons they have learned.

Lessons learned for HEPA, the training course and scholarship program
Supervision / coordination of the scholarship and educational program (before Giang A Su started in this role).

During the scholarship program HEPA was at times challenged with human resources, to achieve all the objectives identified in its ambitious planning. Absence of key staff members due to illness and family commitments, was the main cause of these difficulties. The scholarship and education program is the first priority however, and the role of the program supervisor was reappointed when the original staff member was unavailable. The handover to the new supervisor was not ideal due to the sudden nature of the reappointment. With more reserves in human resource capacity, HEPA might have been able to make the changeover more smooth. Unfortunately those extra human resources are rarely available in the development context. What *could* have been improved was the communication to all students of the change of role and familiarisation with the appointee.

Regularity and consistency of feedback...

Provision of feedback is recognised as essential in the practical educational framework and 'learning by doing' approach. Comments from some students reflect that the feedback provided was at times not regular enough or timed to follow each step of the students' progress in prescribed topics as well as Eco-farming practice. The feedback given was sometimes inconsistent depending on the provider. This problem is acknowledged as a result of some gaps in feedback may have occurred between the facilitator of specific learning/workshop topics and the overall supervisor of the scholarship and education program. The methodology of facilitating workshops (the main teaching format employed at HEPA) was reviewed and significantly improved during the first year of the advanced scholarship program and this did affect mechanisms of feedback. Finally, the fact that all HEPA community members are encouraged to comment on students' work and practice, is likely to cause inconsistency in the feedback provided to students. However, Eco-farming philosophy promotes the benefit of receiving input from a *diversity* of sources, and educational staff believe that this outweighs the disadvantage of inconsistent feedback. In facilitation training, students were taught to present criticism in a constructive/positive manner and this is encouraged for all members of the HEPA community and visitors.

This type of feedback occurs regularly during both workshops and sharing meetings about Eco-farm design, student practise on the farms, facilitation and the education program. Ideally, the scope of this feedback should be extended to the management and coordination of activities at HEPA.

Reporting - monthly, six monthly & final reports, plus diaries.

Reporting requirements of students *and* staff at HEPA could be made more efficient and perhaps reduced to just monthly reports and yearly reports. Student diaries (hardcopy) are also mandatory and must be submitted to HEPA when they are full. The format for these diaries is currently being revised and explained to new students. Diaries may be useful for the student or supervisors to review, although it is very inefficient to find useful information in such a linear recording format. If the diaries were in an electronic format that could be more easily stored, accessed by others and searched for keywords, then the diaries would be of greater use. A document management system for efficient storage and access of such documents and files is one of HEPA's current objectives, but it needs someone with the time and skill to set up and customise. Electronic diaries would only be possible after students have begun computer literacy classes in their second year.

Multicultural educational community

FFS-HEPA has many lessons learned through the parallel management of a multicultural and multilingual educational and working environment as well as a sustainable living community. The leadership and management style must be particularly sensitive and flexible to allow mixed values, cultural norms and ways of communication to co-exist.

The scholarship and training program can still be improved in many ways and the staff and supporters of SPERI and HEPA are committed to nurturing the evolution of such programs for the benefit of current and future students. In fact, many of the scholarship beneficiaries are now involved in the coordination and delivery of the educational program. They have the benefit of personal experience as students and they are already putting into practice their own feedback and lessons learned for the program.

Annex 1 - External Evaluation of the Scholarship Program

**EVALUATION OF THE ADVANCED TRAINING PROGRAM ON ECOLOGICAL FARMING SYSTEMS SUPPORTED BY THE BREAD FOR THE WORLD (BftW) ECUMENICAL SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM (ESP)
AT THE FARMERS FIELD SCHOOL - HUMAN ECOLOGY PRACTICE AREA (HEPA), SON KIM 1 COMMUNE, HUONG SON DISTRICT, HA TINH PROVINCE
UNDER THE SOCIAL POLICY ECOLOGY RESEARCH INSTITUTE (SPERI)**



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Introduction

The Social Policy Ecology Research Institute (SPERI) is an Independent Scientific Organization (ISO) in Vietnam dedicated to the betterment of indigenous peoples in the Mekong region by both influencing government policy and providing (alternative) education in Permaculture and Eco-farming through Farmer Field School (FFS) approach.

SPERI works in conjunction with CODE (Consultancy on Development Institute) and CIRUM (Culture Identity and Resources Use Management) towards a society where indigenous people and ethnic minorities have equal access to social justice, gender equity, natural resources and fair social economic systems in the Mekong region. One of the major strategic themes of this work is through FFS (acting as demonstration sites for policy makers and concerned stakeholders) that young indigenous farmers have a capability to do well as any other individuals.

The Human Ecology Practice Area (HEPA) is one of the regional FFS within the SPERI network, it is a 420-hectare area of protected forest and experimental eco-farms used for training young minority farmers from a number of indigenous groups in Vietnam and Laos. FFS-HEPA is grounded in Human Ecology applied theory with connections to Permaculture design principles and knowledge, integrated with the local environment. Through the support of their experiences at HEPA young indigenous farmers can influence the uptake of ecologically sustainable methods in the wider indigenous communities and ultimately throughout the Mekong region and other parts of Asia.

The broad aim of SPERI is that practical changes, through ecological farming, may be carried out by these young indigenous farmers and SPERI may use these examples to lobby the Vietnam Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) and the Vietnam Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA) to make changes to policies for the promotion of Eco-farming as a practical alternative for Vietnam and ultimately for the Mekong region. In addition, SPERI advocates for a change in education approach and method, for instance, vocational training for particularly upland young indigenous farmers that should focus on aspects that are rooted from local culture while promoting local strengths such as situated knowledge, practices, and rules/norms of resources use and management which have been adapted for years. SPERI sees that MARD and MOLISA should be looking to the young indigenous farmers, hard working energetic small-scale farmers, for the sustainable future of upland agriculture development in Vietnam.

The primary objective of FFS-HEPA is to empower indigenous minority youths. The idea being that after the training course, they could become professional farmers, mobile teachers or local authorities in order to strengthen local governance. The training works toward civil society empowerment for farmers groups and youth groups in the Mekong. Since 2006 there have been 151 youth group members throughout the Mekong region who have participated in training at the FFS programs in Eco-farming¹. After successful completion in the 'Foundation', 'Intermediate' and 'Advanced' levels of training, students are assisted to apply for their Permaculture Diploma, despite the FFS training program is not yet recognized officially in Vietnam. The Diploma Certificate is co-signed by Founders of two Institutes: (SPERI and the Permaculture Institute of Australia)². So far, SPERI & PRI have provided 5 certificates for the 5 students of Term 2005-2007.

¹ See: <http://ffs.speri.org/5/HOC-SINH/Tong-quan-cac-lop-352.html>

² The first four are in process of being applied for Permaculture Diplomas (with the help from one of the Australian Young Ambassador for Development, Mr. David Bauer). The Permaculture Diploma is independent of the FFS program; and it would require some time until SPERI sets up a formal arrangement with the Permaculture Institute (who is administering Permaculture Diplomas). Mrs. Dang To Kien (Head of FFS) is currently in Australia and exploring the connection.

The 4 selected indigenous youth farmers, supported under BftW Ecumenical Scholarship Program (ESP), achieve a higher level of training with the aim to enhance Eco-farming skills, independent farm management, and build leadership skills.

Each of them has been allocated a farm and given the chance to design, based on Permaculture principles, and run the farms independently as a practical farm and as a training platform. They have also been part of Training of Trainers (TOT) and are responsible for teaching the skills to other young farmers. They do agricultural and ecological knowledge research in their home communities in order to integrate more knowledge and practices on their allocated farms about Eco-farming practices. They also work toward guiding visitors to the FFS-HEPA introducing the spiritual base of the area and practical activities that FFS runs as well as offering chances for visitors to interact with students and to work-on the farms. Students also learn to be the leading pioneers in the Mekong region and Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in terms of leading the Mekong youth networks towards Eco-farming and Permaculture design³.

Objectives of the Evaluation

Through interviews with four BftW/ESP scholarship holders: Mr. Ly Seo Vu, Mr. Giang A Su, Mr. Loc Van Vin, Ms. Giang Thi Chung, and educational staff at SPERI and HEPA, this evaluation seeks to examine the outcome and impact of the advanced training program on Eco-farming⁴ to the students.

The evaluation will attempt to find to what degree, skills and capacities have been improved and advanced⁵. It will examine the 4 selected students' improvements in TOT skills, facilitation skills and leadership skills. It will also attempt to determine the impacts beyond HEPA, in other communities and within the larger Permaculture and Eco-farming movements.

The evaluation is taking place as the scholarship has just ended and there are a number of stakeholders who are interested in knowing about the training for possible duplication and expansion. SPERI and FFS-HEPA stand to learn a lot from an external review and hope to see some critical and useful feedback.

Description of HEPA

HEPA has 400-hectares of naturally regenerating forest and 20 hectares of small-scale agricultural land. It is located in Ha Tinh province, near the center of Son Kim 1 commune⁶, along the Rao An river. The closest town is Trung Tam (Tay Sơn). It is about 15km from the Laos border and is near a major road to the C au Treo (Nam Phao) border crossing (the major route between Vinh city, Vietnam and Vientiane, Laos).

SPERI has only recently realized that it will be of great benefits for students to complete by obtaining an Internationally Recognized Permaculture Diplomas. While SPERI wasn't aware that the Permaculture Research Institute (PRI) is despite being SPERI's official partner organization since 2009, but does not administer Permaculture Diplomas.

From the students, two students Ly Seo Vu and Giang Seo Su who have almost finished their reports and have forwarded to Mr. Robert Gray and Mr. David Bauer (the 2 current AYADs at HEPA) for help editing English and formatting. They expect to get them done by end of Quarter 3rd. Ms. Giang Thi Chung is writing up her findings on a research trial 'Comparing the growth of 2 local peanut varieties' for graduation thesis and expect to finish also by end of Quarter 3rd. Mr. Loc Van Vin decided not to apply for the Diploma, and will be taking a 10-months internship offer in Thailand to practically transferring knowledge of ecofarming for International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) and School for Wellbeing (SfW).

³ One of the scholarship holders Mr. Loc Van Vin (see below) has already been provided with a scholarship to do 10-months intern at the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) and School for Wellbeing (SfW) (Thailand) to extend Eco-farming and Permaculture practice.

⁴ Running from August 2010 to May 2012.

⁵ Baseline: BftW form, personal impressions, impressions of staff.

⁶ Lat. 18.421677°; Long. 105.220867°



Figure 1. Google Maps Image of HEPA Location

There are five experimental farms: Khe Soong, Cay Khe, Linh Moc, Poov Zoov and Thuong Uyen. Two of the farms (Cay Khe and Thuong Uyen) are currently run by scholarship-holders and all are managed and run by students in a learning-by-doing experiential hands-on environment.

HEPA is supported by the SPERI office staff and has three administrative staff, six education staff (including one intern and two volunteers from Australia). HEPA also has four staff and three contract workers working directly on the

land, including two interns dedicated to working in an on site nursery.

Definitions

Several very specific terms are used throughout the text and throughout the literature on HEPA and SPERI. In part these definitions are provided to offer a more structured view of the philosophical and scientific underpinnings of the training course in clarifying the rest of the text and the work of HEPA. There also may need to be a re-visiting of these definitions for a clearer understanding of the terms and the implications of use of these terms in the vision of HEPA and the education being offered there.



Figure 2. HEPA students and Eco-farming principles

Eco-farming is a term with a special meaning in the context of HEPA and within the vision for SPERI. It recognizes and honors the spiritual connection of people to nature and makes that the (most important) integral part of all farming practices. It is strongly connected with applied Human Ecology theory (founded by Mrs. Tran Thi Lanh after the original version of Dr. Terry Rambo) for farm management; an extension of indigenous culture, which places the human in a conscious and active role in nature. It is also generally linked to Permaculture principles. In all FFS farming

demonstrate sites, farming system is a harmonious balance of belief knowledge and local practice with a basis of respect and care for Natural Spirits.

Farmer Field School (FFS) is a group-based learning & hands-on practicing process, which brings together ideas/concepts and methods from eco-farming, experiential education and community development. The idea is to bring the education to the farmers and thus it generally happens on farmer's fields, through training and development within the agricultural context⁷. According to SPERI, FFS have three levels: regional, community and household. The birth of FFS at SPERI was founded by Mrs. Tran Thi Lanh during the 2005. FFS acted as a strategy in which young indigenous

⁷ See: 'Farmers Field Schools (FFS): A Group Extension Process Based on Adult Non-Formal Education Methods' by K. D. Gallagher, Global IPM Facility (1999)

farmers can enjoy learning what they wish to learn. It also serves as a 'socio-political' space where senior indigenous farmers can give teaching and pass on their local wisdom and customs to the young. Students are normally selected by key farmers from community to travel to regional centers for hands-on learning. Community based FFS are centered in the community and household FFS are in the individual household level represented by SPERI's key farmers. These three levels are strongly connected. Once students finish their studies at regional centers, they deliver applications at community and household levels. If there are topic(s) of interests from household FFS, we provide opportunities for students to visit and stay-learning at household FFS of key farmers.

Organic farming is the form of agriculture that combines (selective) tradition, innovation and scientific techniques such as crop rotation, green manure, compost and biological pest control. It sustains the health of soils, ecosystems and people and relies on ecological processes, biodiversity and cycles adapted to local conditions. It seeks to benefit the natural environment, promote health, fair relationships and a good quality of life. In the context of HEPA, it is considered to be a multi-level interaction both in and out with the natural system on the base of multi-disciplinary thinking. It is also connected to a spiritual practice in farming. Farming practices in HEPA are fully avoiding the chemical pesticides, insecticides, herbicides. HEPA set strict rules and fines applied to any actions intended to bring-in non-organic materials/compound.

Permaculture creates sustainable household and agriculture systems, modeled after natural ecosystems, that minimize waste, human labor, and energy input through synergistic design and engineering. It emphasizes patterns of natural landscapes functions and species and organizes the various elements of farm and household systems to mimic them. It does this by looking closely at the relationships created among these elements.



Figure 2. Students learning-by-doing at HEPA

Scholarship Holders

All the students covered by the scholarship are from ethnic minority groups in Vietnam. Mr. Ly Seo Vu, Mr. Giang A Su, and Ms. Giang Thi Chung come from the Hmong community. Mr. Loc Van Vin comes from the San Diu community. Ly Seo Vu, Giang A Su, and Loc Van Vin have been at HEPA for a number of years and were a part of the K1A (The first class of HEPA which started in 2007). Ms. Giang Thi Chung joined HEPA from another SPERI FFS site (FFS-Simacai, located in Simacai district, Lao Cai province) at the start of the scholarship period in 2010. The common aims and skills of the students are in line with the SPERI and HEPA vision for their alumni.

Ly Seo Vu, Giang A Su, and Loc Van Vin were part of a progress evaluation in 2011⁸, which showed that the primary opportunities for improvement as Eco-farming teachers were in delegation, team and individual time management, timing of activities, defining activities planning and preparation. Findings from this evaluation have been summarized in the individual sections for each scholarship holder. This evaluation will go on to further describe the skills and competencies as well as the impressions and critiques of these three students and Ms. Giang Thi Chung.

The Selection Process

Candidates for the scholarship were selected by SPERI from the HEPA and SIMACAI student body based on their skills and competencies. All scholarship holders said that they felt that the selection process was open, fair and went well and that they knew what was happening. Vin said:

“After finishing the course from 2008 to 2010, we were chosen to get this scholarship, with the aim to advance Eco-farming skills for each member. In that process, we met together and chose the topic that we expect to study.”

All the students felt that the process was gender balanced. They said that the selection process attempted to ensure a balanced gender. Chung, the female scholarship holder, says she was chosen as a candidate for the scholarship by SPERI because of the requirement gender balance, and was aided by SPERI for the application process.

Mr. Loc Van Vin

Loc Van Vin comes from the San Diu community of the Na Peo village, Bac Lang commune, Dinh Lap district, Lang Son province, Vietnam. Before starting the advanced training he was a student-participant in the training course on Eco-farming systems at HEPA. He felt that his technical and methodological skills and experiences in Eco-farming were lacking extremely. He also felt that his personality did not give him a strong basis for being an active change-maker. However, having spent some time at HEPA, he was able to offer a little help with the network development and construction of Eco-farming by the time he started the advanced training.

Through the training he hoped to advance his English and computer skills. He hoped to gain more knowledge, experience and skills in Eco-farming, to advance his education skills, TOT skills, to be better able to teach students and communities. He hoped to learn local knowledge (in e.g. agricultural cultivation, herbal medicine) from elders of different regions of the Mekong. He also hoped to learn more about ways to keep the surrounding environment clean.

He said he was most impressed by the training on traditional cultures, specifically the traditional customs on natural resource protection and the management of the community through customary law. He was also very impressed with the training on the use of herbal medicine. He said that in the training on the traditional uses of medicinal herbs by Thai minority herbalists from Que Phong, Nghe An, Vietnam:

“In my option, these are significant lesson for youth. These are not only herb knowledge but also valuable culture; those knowledge are priceless that were conserved and practiced by the previous generation. To maintain these knowledge, our generation need learn and practice to conservation for generation in the future.”

He said that since the training he and his classmates have been practicing by collecting and planting herbs for daily use.

He has learned a lot on the last two years. Notably: He has advanced his TOT skills by being able to share and to teach topics that he feels confident in.

⁸ A self-evaluation and teaching evaluation from September to November 2011 undertaken by Eva Saldana Buenache

He feels that his technical and methodological skills have increased significantly and that his skills and experiences are satisfactory. He feels that his personality gives him a strong basis for work in Eco-farming. He feels that his role in helping the community is more-or-less satisfactory. His role in promoting the network development and furthering Eco-farming as well as his role in TOT is considerably improved. He makes some use of the technical learning he received during the advanced training and considerable use of the methodological, social and personal learning.

He has increased his conversation-English through daily life interactions with foreign volunteers. His formal English has also improved through self-learning and through translating topics that volunteers come to HEPA to share with students.

His computer skills have improved. He is able to type with 10 fingers, which he learned through minute keeping at HEPA meetings, writing regular reports, and keeping a digital diary. He is also able to install windows and other software in a computer and is able to use the Internet easily (i.e. email, skype, search engines).

His practical skills have also improved. He has a better understanding of the Eco-farming theory and is able to apply it, through workshops, meetings, and community activities etc.

He liked the education program, he said he enjoyed it and it worked for him. He feels that his teachers were efficient, very good in teaching the methods of Eco-farming and able to teach specific topics well. He was assessed throughout his studies and got plenty of feedback from his teachers. He felt that SPERI always supported him in his studies.



Figure 3: Student Loc Van Vin is sharing about HEPA forest conservation and spiritual practice to international visitors

As a teacher Vin inspires people, has good interpersonal communication skills, works well in a team and is very hard working. He makes sure his students are rested and enjoying themselves and keeps a diversity of activities. Pedagogically he is good at encouraging ideas and connections, good at working in consensus and he has a good conceptual understanding of the topics he is teaching. However, he could learn to better understand the needs and expectations of the education (i.e. more about specific Eco-farming techniques). He could gain more confidence in designing activities and preparing for what is going to happen and in explaining what is going on and why. He could be firmer in his approach and utilize the resources around him to help in the education.

Vin's Next Step

He says that he would like to continue the advance study on Eco-farming. He hopes to be able to share his knowledge through TOT. He thinks this training will help him get there.

He now works in Eco-farming in an administrative position and as a farmer at HEPA and is on his way to a temporary internship in Thailand. *He* would like to facilitate the growth of HEPA as a good demonstration site to facilitate teaching of Eco-farming. He wants to work on community leadership for Eco-farming and to help in his home bioregion with networks and contacts.

Suggestions: Vin said:

“Continue provide opportunities for new students, in order to advance their knowledge and skills. Help them confident enough and keep go on spreading Eco-farming to their home communities and other communities in home and abroad.”

Criticisms: Vin said that during the advanced training program there were some operational problems. For example: he was hoping to learn how to drive and this training was not made available.

Mr. Ly Seo Vu

Ly Seo Vu comes from the Hmong community of Ngai Phan village, San Chai commune, Simacai district, Lào Cai province, Vietnam. Before starting the Advanced Training he had a high-school diploma and had spent 2008-2010 at HEPA practicing Eco-farming where he gained a certificate in training of trainers (TOT) for growing Organic tomato. His goals were to find a lifestyle that would ‘feed the soil, so that the soil feeds the plants’, an environment that was ‘green, clear and beautiful’ and an employer with trust in him, working in the philosophy of nurturing nature.

What most impressed him during his time at HEPA was his experience in the cooperative designing of the farms and the village, and learning about the damage to the natural environment through the exploitation of natural resources. He was most impressed by the visit to Nasai village, ‘designed’ by Thai minority in Hanh Dich commune, Que Phong district, Nghe An province. The village is located under a large forest and above a terrace field system. He was deeply impressed to see that the people understand the natural system and use nature effectively. He said that life there is not separated from the forest; the forest provides for peoples needs and both the forest and the village provide nutrients for the cultivation system.

He expected to do a lot with the community surrounding HEPA and in his home community but has not had time to implement his ideas. He plans to implement them in the future when his farming skills have improved and he can demonstrate a farming system with good yields that protects the environment with practices that can be applied in many communities. He did have a chance to take his family to visit FFS-SIMACAI. His older brother was very impressed with what he saw and even said that he intended to apply some of what he saw there on his home farm.



Figure 4: Student Ly Seo Vu is guiding a group of agricultural extension officers and local authorities from Thai Nguyen province

He enjoys the training and feels that it works for him. He said that the student lead, student centered training method allows for deeply instilled learning. Students understand what they have learned very deeply. He feels that the hands on training helped him understand clearly and remember longer; He feels confident in his TOT

abilities especially in working in hands-on-training.

Through studying and practicing Eco-farming at HEPA he has become confident in TOT for students, staff and farmers. He is glad for the training and for the opportunity to teach as he feels satisfaction in sharing what he has learned with others.

He says that the primary support-staff were efficient and timely. He received enough support from SPERI and says that he was also strongly supported by his father.

After finishing the study he feels confident in planning and designing Eco-farming and in teaching Eco-farming management. He feels that his technical skills and experiences and personality give him a strong basis for this. His role in promoting network development and construction for Eco-farming, as well as his role in TOT has grown considerably. He feels that his methodological skills and experiences and his social skills and experiences have improved more or less.

As a teacher he is confident and inspiring (a farmer with integrity) he is comfortable planning creative educational activities and exercises with clear objectives and a well-defined process. He has a high-functioning eco-farm, a good knowledge of all the farming systems and an understanding of local knowledge. However, he could work on his interpersonal communication skills and improve his openness to negotiation to embrace diversity and allow more collaboration, consensus and flexibility within the education. He could also offer more orientation and give more positive feedback, balancing firm with flexible.



Figure 4. Students Ly Seo Vu (sit and in black) and Giang A Su (stand and in black) interviewing farmers in Luang Prabang, Laos

Vu's Next Step

He would now like to help in the Development of Eco-farming and TOT for the broader community. This training will help him get there because he understands and feels confident about the techniques and philosophy. He has become a full time employee of SPERI at HEPA and is living and working on Thuong Uyen farm. He makes considerable use of what he has learned during the training. He says:

'I would like to find a minority student, directly teach him/her on Thuong Uyen farm during 3 – 5 years. After that, let him/her manage Thuong Uyen farm and also TOT for other people.'

Suggestions: Offer TOT and support for students who are poor. Offer an education to help them grow and have more opportunities to learn about Eco-farming.

Criticisms: He has no critical feedback for the course because he feels it has been done so very well.

Mr. Giang A Su

Giang A Su comes from the Hmong community in Can Chu Su village, Can Cau commune, Simacai district, Lào Cai province. Before participating in the advanced training course in HEPA he achieved a high school education and was a member of the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union. He also joined for some studies at HEPA before starting in the advanced training. Through the training he hoped to improve practicing Eco-farming skills, computer skills, English and TOT skills for the protection of the forest, soil and water resources; to 'keep them beautiful'.

Before starting the training he felt that he was not helping to promote the kinds of changes he wanted to see in his community. He had no role in TOT in his community.

He felt that his social skills and experiences are were lacking extremely. He also felt that his technical and methodological skills and experiences were not very good and that his personality did not give him a strong basis for promoting and teaching Eco-farming. However, since by the time he started the advanced training he had spent some time at HEPA, he was more or less helpful with the network development and construction of Eco-farming.

"I think that the program is relevant and useful with me, because the method was 'learning by doing' so after finishing the program, I confident enough to share my knowledge for other people: other Students, student groups from Hanoi University of Agriculture and visitors from home and abroad."

He found the following trainings most impressive over the last two years:

1. Technical raising black chicken of the Khmer in Cambodia
2. Technical production green vegetable (eco-vegetable) at Cay Khe farm
3. Plan and design Eco-farming system in HEPA
4. Efficient management and use water skills at Cay Khe farm

These training programs worked well for him because they all involved intellectual investigation. Deep thinking is required in an Eco-farming system, so it is very intellectual but at the same time, very personal and close to the farming life. For example: The efficient management and use water at Cay Khe farm is based on design made through through observation and study of the farm, it uses many many different solutions to exploit, use and manage water in the best way by learning from nature.

"Ecological principles are expressed by this system. It ensures connect, diversity, use resource available in nature; this system was designed with many different forms of gathering, storing water: sink, swale, pond, terrace field, plants... They connect together and connect with other systems: house, bathroom, terrace field, vegetable garden, fruit tree and other plants, to create a close system. This method is convenience for domestic use, irrigation, and also for treatment."

He feels that his technical skills methodological skills and experiences and his role in the community have improved considerably. He feels that his current social skills and experiences are more or less satisfactory and that his personality gives him a strong basis for satisfactory work. He says that the concept of 'student lead' education has meant that when students have problems, they can discuss freely to get solutions. Through this education method he has been in a free environment and has had space to practice.

"Therefore, after finishing the course I feel that my autonomy, assertiveness are good and completely can own a eco-farm."

He also feels that his role in TOT and in promoting the network development for Eco-farming have improved very much. He has gained Management farm skills TOT skills especially in the process for integrated processing of pig feed.

Su says that he is a farmer, and that his practice skills are strong. Through the advanced training course, he has received many more, complimentary, skills and experiences. His education skills on Eco-farming and his TOT skills have improved.

He likes the training because the method for teaching and learning are close to nature and to the landscape. He thinks this educational method is useful in the current context with degradation of both culture and environment and says that it helps him spread his vision about society and agricultural values.

He feels that he was supported strongly by SPERI, who always tried to find opportunities for him to join study trips, and aid him in developing his Eco-farming skills. As a teacher he has an organic management style and creates a positive participatory environment full of collaboration. His interpersonal relationships are good: he understands peoples needs, he is patient and good at listening, he is culturally

sensitive, flexible and even asks students about any needs for changes to the plan. He also asks staff for opinions and advice when needed. However, he could use more work in his communication and facilitation methods and he could work on making plans that include more details with clear outcomes and uses for the tasks.

Su's Next Step

He makes use of what he learned during the training. Since finishing the course he has gained a profession in Eco-farming as a permanent full-time employee at HEPA⁹. He is a leader of construction and development, and works to demonstrate Eco-farming through building up curriculum and managing the educational program.

"I want to construct a Eco-farming, network and education for youth in villages in home and abroad."

He wants to have a well-run eco-farm with a good business plan for teaching Eco-farming at HEPA. He is working on gaining more self-confidence, on evaluation and participatory techniques and designing and maintaining a good demonstration site. He wants to help create systems to organize the community and create a healthy effective and comfortable sharing environment in his bioregion for networks in Eco-farming.

Suggestions: Su said that there are a number of issues that need to be worked out in the program. He hopes that the new students can learn from the experiences of his class.

"New student should define what is field you really expect to study in the education program. Find a teacher, who is knowledgeable about that field, to regular support you during studying."

Criticisms: Su says that there are still mistakes in the program that lead to loss of time and energy. He feels that these are slowly being worked out and he is looking forward to sharing and working on them.

Ms. Giang Thi Chung

Giang Thi Chung comes from the Hmong community of Hồ Sáo Chải village, Thào Chư Phìn commune, Simacai district, Lào Cai province. Before starting the training she had a high school diploma and intermediate vocational training in Lao Cai agro-forestry. She also had a certification of TOT on Eco-farming and she was the Union Secretary of her branch the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union.

She felt more-or-less confident in her technical skills and experiences and in her role in promoting the development of Eco-farming in her community. She felt that her social and methodological skills and experiences were not satisfactory.

Through the training she hoped to learn more about the importance of clean food and about her relationship to the environment. She wanted to find ways help mitigate environmental pollution, especially the harmful effects of plastic bags. She also came to HEPA to learn how to use a computer and to speak English.

After the training she is still a student of Eco-farming systems at HEPA. She feels that, through this training she has made significant personal improvements, her personality now gives her a strong basis for satisfactory work. She feels that her technical skills, methodological skills, social skills, and her role in promoting the network development and construction of Eco-farming have improved more-or-less.

"The advanced training was relevant/useful for my needs because I can combine learning and practicing the lessons, organized on the field."

She was most impressed by:

⁹ Su is now acting as SPERI's coordinator for participation in the FK Exchange Program through INEB (where international interns come for a 10 month stay).

1. The lesson about designing an Eco-farming system at Centre for Community Capacity Development (CCCD) in Dong Le commune, Tuyen Hoa district, Quang Binh province;
2. The visit to Mr. Hoang Huu Phuoc's demonstration farm in Lam Trach commune, Xuan Trach district, Quang Binh province;
3. The lesson about management and protection natural resources based on traditional custom laws in Long Lan village, Luangprabang province, Laos;
4. The lesson on running Mini pot experiments on rice organized in collaboration with CIRUM at Bac Lang district, Lang Son province;
5. The Forum of Youth and Sustainable Development organized every year by Live and Learn organization to make youth aware of Climate change, and ways to limit environmental pollution, organized in Cuc Phuong National Park.

She said she has improved her skills and understanding of the principles on Eco-farming design and the core values and steps to design Eco-farming system. She now has an advanced ability in the practical Eco-farming skills and TOT skills, especially in the process for integrated processing pig feeding systems. She said she has come to better understand the importance of forest resources: "it feeds our life".

She said that she likes the training model and that she was always supported by SPERI for her studies.

Chung's Next Step

Now she wants set up a farm to share the Eco-farming practices and principles in her home community. She says she would like to design a demonstrate Eco-farming at her home, to share the Eco-farming knowledge with her family and neighbors. She says this training will help get her there, but that there are challenges:

"I believe that I enough Eco-farming knowledge and experience, but farmers have been abuse chemical substances and chemical fertilizer therefore very difficult to change their behavior."

She wants to help farmers overcome the negative effects of conventional farming practices but is not sure how to challenge the ideas of farmers and change their habits. She has not had much opportunities as other students for practicing and training in general so she is not 100% confident in her teaching skills.

However she has been involved in preparing/running a series of mini workshops. Chung has delivered TOT training on producing organic tofu (her organic tofu production was documented into curriculum and posted on <http://ffs.speri.org/info3/389/FFS-HEPA-Quy-trinh-lam-dau-phu-853.html>), producing organic mix of food for pig, producing biological pest control for peanut plants. She also gave one teaching on Hmong local dishes to new students. She is very confident in her Eco-farming practices and is comfortable in making small experiments with cropping practices. She is very good at transmitting knowledge to students so that they can follow through to practice. However, Chung has not had creative control over a farm to design, manage and practice as she sees fit.



Figure 5: Student Giang Thi Chung is preparing for liquid biological pest control for her peanut growing field



Suggestions: She hopes that the attention and energy of the training course will go on to support other people. She wants more young farmers to have opportunities to gain skills in Eco-farming and other fields.

Criticisms: She said that the supplemental advanced subjects, such as English and computer skills, need significant improvement.

To sum up, an evaluation table is provided to examine the level at which 4 scholarship holders have improved in skills.

	Scholarship holders	<i>Eco-farming knowledge and practice</i>	<i>Integrated local knowledge into research trial</i>	<i>Independent farm management</i>	<i>Facilitation</i>	<i>TO T</i>	<i>Leadership</i>	<i>English</i>	<i>Computer</i>
1	Loc Van Vin	H	M	M	H	H	H	H	H
2	Giang Seo Su	H	H	H	H	H	H	M+	H-
3	Giang Thi Chung	H	H	M-	M	M+	H	M	M

4	Ly Seo Vu	H	H	H	H	H	H	M-	M-
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- H: High
- H-: Below High
- M: Medium
- M+: Above Medium
- M-: Below Medium
- L: Low

Education Program

HEPA follows a hands-on experiential education methodology with a strong emphasis on learning by doing and in cementing that learning through teaching. In farming practices, students are given room for exploring approaches based on their traditional, or other, environmentally and socially sound practices.

The rule system for HEPA is based on the Permaculture ethic of ‘people care’, students relate these rules to their own community and discuss any beliefs or ideas in relation to their traditional ethics. Through this process they become familiar with self-regulation and accepting feedback two important aspects of learning at HEPA.

They are encouraged to be confident in addressing any personal or community issues and are encouraged to practice expressing ideas. They are invited to access community decision-makers at various levels to build up confidence in voicing issues, organizing meetings and dialogues.

Students are strongly encouraged to draw links between their experiences (thoughts, ideas, innovations and actions) at HEPA and the identity and cultural values of their home community. Drawing these connections maximizes their potential to expand traditional knowledge and action.

Training

Training of the scholarship holder students has happened through visiting professionals to HEPA and through trips to centers outside of HEPA. In the end this training has promoted the scholarship holders to the position of trainers for visiting student farmers to HEPA.

Scholarship holders had varying impressions of what the structure of the training program was about. They said that the structure of the advanced training program is based on learning by doing on the field and some supplemental advanced subjects such as English and computer. Su felt that the hands-on-training is primarily about practicing and sharing skills. Mainly practicing on farms and in addition participating in TOT.

Chung said that the typical aspects of the training are about ‘learning by doing’. She said that the students express their passions and learn through work and study. She said that during hands-on training she practiced Eco-farming lessons, primarily at Cay Khe farm, and participated in study trips at home and abroad.

English

It seems that the scholarship holders all agree that the English language program has some room for improvement. If English was ever a prescribed part of the training course then there has rarely been an English teacher at HEPA to provide classes. SPERI recruited 4 English teachers for FFS-HEPA and for FFS-Simacai for 3 months last year. Other than that, it seems to be assumed that Robert and Dave will give English training which they admit they are neither qualified or effective in doing.

Benefitting Eco-farming

All the scholarship holders said that the activities in HEPA always directly benefit Eco-farming. Vin said it was because HEPA follows the Eco-farming philosophy of SPERI based on three core values: belief, customs and ethics; local knowledge; pattern and natural principles. Su said it was because the philosophy of HEPA is nurturing nature and following the beliefs and customs of the ethnic minorities. Thereby, the attitude and daily behavior at HEPA always leads to the protection of nature.

Vu said that the activities at HEPA always directly benefit Eco-farming and more. He feels that the HEPA practices go beyond Eco-farming to 'nurturing nature'.

Learning from the Outside

Outside learning happens through internships, studies, field visits and exchange among FFS networks such as FFS Si Ma Cai in Lao Cai, FFS Dong Le in Quang Binh and FFS Long Lan. It also happens through other farming models in the Mekong Community Network for Ecological Trade (MECO-ECOTRA) among others.

Many of the trips to outside institutions have made significant impacts on the farming practices employed at HEPA. For instance, the Agriculture Development Denmark Asia (ADDA) organic tomato training of trainers (TOT) has made tomato-growing commonplace at HEPA and the visit to CEDAC training (Cambodia) on poultry systems has created a number of changes to the ways chickens are raised at HEPA.

The presence and participation of international volunteers at HEPA have also helped a lot in knowledge sharing for the students. Eva (a volunteer from Greenpeace International – picture below) has empowered the students in team building skill, facilitation role, and time management.



Loc Van Vin said that through study trips to various communities he has obtained knowledge about cultivation methods, customary law in natural resource protection and herbal medicine. Vin conducted a study on traditional knowledge in rice cultivation in Ho Son commune, near Tam Dao national park together with other students (Ly Seo Vu, Hoang Ngoc Thang, Nguyen Hoai Thu, and supervised by Ying Shan Lau (Oxford Uni, Master of Environmental Science).



Figure 6: Vin (white shirt) was learning about transplanting rice with Ying Shan Lau (in red shirt) with other farmers from the commune

Chung said that she learned a lot during her excursions. Especially during the study trip to learn about forest management in Long Lan, Laos, she got to know a community with an excellent ecological balance. Chung is now able to conduct her own mini-research on trialling the two peanut varieties after attending a field study on Mini-lab (organized by CIRUM, instructed by Prof. Le Van Tiem).

Knowledge to the Outside

All the students are eager and interested in sharing their knowledge with the outside communities and with their home communities and are encouraged to do so.

The very most important achievement of sharing knowledge to the outside is through an indicator of continuous visitors groups from a variety of actors in the society interested in HEPA and learning from students' sharing throughout the year. For example, HEPA has received groups ranged from students in Hanoi Agriculture University (every October, 3 weeks intership with 30 students); students from HAS Dens Bosch university, Australian National University; small groups of academics, development practitioners, and local officials working in agriculture extension office, and policy makers and so forth.

Chung says she has been connecting with the surrounding community and her home community. She has also been connecting with the Đội 9 village in the neighborhood of HEPA. She shared some basic knowledge about Eco-farming with a local farmer in Doi 9 village who is now working toward Eco-farming with practices such as: composting manure before application, and non-use of chemical fertilizer.

Vin says that he has been connecting with his home community but only through some small activities. However, Vin is able to share more knowledge through visitors groups visiting and or interning at HEPA including international friends, Hanoi Agricultural University students, local officials, agricultural extension officers and most recently, the representatives of Communist Party's Newsagency. At his home community, he shared with 1 local household, to help them understand the Eco-farming cultivation system and he shared a bit about the waste classification with his family. He said that working outside has been difficult:

"Studying and practicing at HEPA took almost of time, so activities were carried out in the home community has been not much."

Su said that he has been connecting with Doi 9 village, and Hanoi and that he is making good contacts there for sharing ideas about Eco-farming.

Feedback and Assessment

An education program should ideally have a built in feedback system to offer students an opportunity to learn from successes and failures from their own and from an outside perspective. This is especially true of a hands-on education where students spend more time working on their own and get more chances to experiment. Ideally, training should be followed with the learning-by-doing and then feedback, a chance to talk about how it went and to hear what the impressions of others were and where the strengths and weaknesses are for the work. However, feedback about the education program and the student progress and learning is not formalized and does not happen regularly. HEPA is working on making a system for this but at the moment the students are learning from doing, making mistakes is a part of the process but there is little function of the system to offer feedback about successes and failures. Students *do* receive feedback on their own work; presentations/reports/workshops and, at times, their practice on the farm (though this feedback is sometimes inconsistent depending on who is providing it).

Workshops about certain farm topics, have had this function; where the students share what they have done on the farm and what they want to do and we work on the solution together, and there are farm sharing sessions as well (these are regular activities but often interrupted by other planning). This is a more informal way to offer feedback, through a group process rather than through an individual teacher. But this element still could definitely be improved and made more systematic; it is probably too flexible at the moment.

One strength of this program is that students are highly encouraged to develop critical thinking, and learning through comments and feedback from each other. This kind of feedback happens in two meetings a week (Wednesday¹⁰ and Saturday¹¹), wherein students and staff share points about the functioning of the farming practices / eco-farm design (sometimes about the education program) and the farming practices.

Students report to SPERI support staff once per month, and minutes are shared from each meeting. They keep a diary on all farming activities, course-work, any issues, or other HEPA related activities, and deliver this diary to SPERI when it is full (SPERI now has 30 or more of these). Reading through these and offering feedback could be an easy way to support students learning.

Vu says he was assessed by his teachers, who, he says, made sure that he was *'implementing what he intended and what he wanted'*.

Su said that he received some feedback from teachers but chose his own way through the studies. In the first study year, he focused on farming practices and got positive feedback. In the second study year he focused on English and TOT skills and decreased the practice time on the farm and he received some negative feedback for this choice.

Su also complained that at least for some periods of time there was not someone consistently following the program at HEPA (both the scholarship program and the broader educational program for all students). He found it difficult to study by himself. He said that there was no one to ask when he had questions and this impeded his improvement.

¹⁰ Normal Wednesday activity is a group workshop run by one or a couple of students together on one of the farms, and usually focused on a topic relevant to the current activities or stage of the farm's development.

¹¹ In the past, Saturday morning was a 'Sharing' session where students would meet to discuss lessons learned, problems, positives/negatives and give each other feedback. Over the last 18 months this evolved to one farm hosting the meeting on a Friday morning (rotational basis) and including review & feedback of the farm's systems and challenges at the time. This is followed in the afternoon with Community Work on that farm, connected with content shared/discussed that morning.

Regarding the diploma, sufficient time has not been given to the students to work with volunteers on improving their report for submission; they have simply had too many tasks such as TOT, farm management, HEPA management. Chung said she was assessed by fellow students and by staff. She said that practicing on the farm and learning TOT has a kind of built in feedback.

Opportunities for Growth

Farmer Field School (FFS)

As mentioned in the Definitions section Farmer Field School (FFS) is a group-based learning process, which brings together concepts and methods from eco-farming, experiential education and community development. The idea is to bring the education to the farmers and thus it generally happens on farmer's fields, through training and development within the agricultural context¹².

The HEPA education model differs from the FFS model in that trainings happen more on a training center. HEPA could do more to get the trainings to happen at the community levels among the indigenous villages in order to extend the lessons to villages. By doing that, students can effect small socio-economic changes to make the practice of eco-farming viable back in their villages.

Networking

The SPERI contribution to HEPA could do more to facilitate connections with land rights, community forest, and organic farming networks (among others) allowing students access to the practical resources and experiences of the larger activist community. Students are encouraged to study the examples of the practices of these networks for a comparison with their own communities, but could be better networked for connections and support. The variety of sources and actors in the SPERI network can provide students more tools in shaping their own ideas¹³. Students could also be invited, where possible, to participate with SPERI in lobbying activities.

Conclusions

This evaluation sought to examine the effectiveness of the hands-on-learning approach of the HEPA-FFS and to find the outcome and impact of the advanced training program on Eco-farming for four scholarship holders. It attempted to find to what degree, TOT skills, facilitation skills and leadership skills and capacities have been improved and advanced. It also attempted to provide some comments on the training model.

Based on interviews with the four selected students it was found that the training has made significant impacts and helped them to gain skills in Eco-farming practices. It has also helped to further the students toward reaching their personal goals as actors in the advancement of farming practices. All the students have improved TOT skills, facilitation skills and leadership skills.

The survey also found that there is significant room for improvement in the education program and model. Some work needs to be done in maintaining the consistency of the educational and training support as well as the extension of the training.

Annex 1. Questionnaire

Was the advanced training (from August 2010 to May 2012) relevant/useful for your needs? Why or why not?

Was the selection process for students open, fair, and did it go well¹⁴?

Did you know what was going on?

Was it gender balanced?

¹² See: 'Farmers Field Schools (FFS): A Group Extension Process Based on Adult Non-Formal Education Methods' by K. D. Gallagher, Global IPM Facility (1999)

¹³ Landless Networking in Son kim, Mr Tran Quoc Viet (chairmen of 7 communities in Tuyen Hoa, Minh hoa, Bo trach who face a lack of land rights and are now facing livelihood insecurity).

¹⁴ Not to worry too much about if it was efficient.

List at least three to five lessons and units (field trips and internships), which were most impressive over the last two years? Why these?

Please expand on one of these experiences by telling more of the story and your impressions.

List one to three or three to five things that were not good in the training program. Why?

Please expand on a specific example of what was not good.

Impacts

Have you been connecting with the surrounding community and your home community (others)?

Where have you been?

Skills

What skills have you gained, or improved, in these past two years? Please explain (e.g. TOT skill, farm practice, field trip to community).

Any comments on this?

Advanced Training Program Structure:

What is the structure of the Advanced Training program (do you know what you were supposed to have learned in the last two years)?

Were your primary support people effective (not effective)? How did they support you?

Have you always been supported for your studies through SPERI?

How were you assessed and where did feedback come from?

Assessing the relevance and usefulness of the training:

How do you feel about the hands on training (like don't like)?

Did you enjoy it?

Did it work for you?

What are the typical aspects of the hands on training (i.e what does it mean?).

What are you doing during hands on training?

Can you get something out of it?

Does it benefit your learning?

Other Questions:

Do the activities at HEPA always directly benefit Eco-farming? Why or why not?

What would you like to do now?

Do you feel like this training will help you get there?

Will this assist you in the next step?

Suggestions:

Any lessons learned through the student lead student centered training?

What are the major take-away things and what is the feedback for the program for new students?

Any other comments? Even confidential?