



## **Satisfaction with Public Service Delivery in the Agriculture and Rural Development Sector, local planning and financial management at commune level 2007 & 2009**

*A survey conducted in Cao Bang and Hoa Binh Provinces*

November 2010

**The Public Service Provision Improvement Programme in Agriculture and Rural Development  
(PS-ARD 2008-2010)**

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Two surveys have been conducted in the two Provinces Hoa Binh and Cao Bang in 2008 and 2010 to assess farmers' access to and their satisfaction with four key public service providers in the ARD sector (Extension, Veterinary, Plant Protection and Irrigation Service) in the preceding year, as well as their participation and satisfaction with commune level planning and use of finances. The results are used to evaluate the PS-ARD and to assess to which degree the expected results and programme objectives have been achieved. In addition level of income, income composition and food security have been assessed. For planning of future interventions farmers' main problems, access to and demand for credit and means of communication and information were also contents of the 2010 survey.



### **The program's impact on public services as part of rural livelihood systems**

**Access to and use of quality services** in ARD are important aspects of the rural livelihood system which could be improved with support of the program. In general over the last two years the satisfaction of farmers with the service delivery in the four key ARD service agencies has increased in the program districts of both Provinces. In most cases the share of satisfied or very satisfied households had doubled or even more than doubled and as such most targets set in 2008 by the key service providers could be reached or even exceeded. 70-80% of the interviewed Households in Hoa Binh saw improvements, while in Cao Bang at least 50 – 55% rated services better than two years ago. Main changes observed in *Extension services* were more support in terms of new seed varieties, fertilizer, new animal breed and timely delivery of those inputs; in addition extension staff had a better attitude, provided better technical guidance and training according to farmers' demand, including handing out good technical documents. Professionally better skilled staff, a larger variety of high quality drugs closer to the villages and vaccination service and treatment provided in time, were mentioned as the main reasons for improved *Veterinary service*; staff also gave better guidance on general animal husbandry and animal care. Main reasons for improved *Plant Protection Service* were a better attitude of staff and pesticides vendors, readiness to visit the farms and providing better and easier to follow guidance on the use of pesticides. Also the availability of better quality pesticides and the forecast of pests and crop

diseases were of high value to farmers. Admittedly, some of these observed changes cannot be attributed to PS-ARD, since the program did not directly address those, such as quality of veterinary drugs or pesticides. Main improvement regarding *Irrigation Services* related to the upgrading or building of new schemes, making better use of existing water resources; but also better information on the irrigation schedule was mentioned as a sign of improved management. Most of the irrigation management seems to be at village level; however public servants should facilitate coordination between villages.

With respect to **local governance** the effective participation of the local people in the *Commune SEDP* process increased from less than 10% to more than 50% in both Provinces. The majority of the people saw the SEDP plans implemented. Regarding *Commune Financial Management* the general agreement with the fund allocation in communes in Hoa Binh Province remains with 14% low compared to 28% in Cao Bang Province. It has to be acknowledged that in both Provinces only few households do know about the Commune Budget, of which the majority agrees with it.

Household **income**, another key indicator for changes in livelihood systems, so far has only been assessed for 2007. The average monthly income in Cao Bang Province in 2007 was 421'579 VND per capita and in Hoa Binh Province 533'894 VND. The GoV official statistics suggest a steady increase of the monthly per capita income by 25 to 32% since 2007. This is consistent with reduction in poverty rates, a proxy-indicator, which however, could not be observed in the survey sample with stable or even increased share of poor HH. Also the number of households lacking food for one to four months increased in the period from 2007 to 2009. This would indicate that the currently applied mainstream services may not be suitable to target the most marginalized groups. For this group of households it may require a more analytical approach to develop technically and financially feasible solutions to lift them out of poverty.

The income survey shall be repeated towards the end of a second programme phase when the improvement in service delivery and grassroots democracy had sufficient time to have a measurable effect on the economic situation. Of particular interest will be how much the economic development affected the poor in comparison to the non-poor and if there was a shift from subsistence to market oriented agriculture.

### **Specific aspects of service delivery in ARD and grassroots democracy**

**Despite more or less equal access to most ARD services participation in specific activities is sometimes lower for the poor, specific ethnic minority groups and women:** It has to be acknowledged that against the general assumption the group of the poor seemed to have the same access as non-poor households to extension, veterinary and plant protection services in general. Their access to irrigation services was less, due to the fact that poor households often have only limited area suitable for irrigation. The same observation was made comparing the lowland dwelling Tay-Nung ethnic groups with the predominantly upland dwelling Dao-Hmong groups in Cao Bang Province.

Regarding their direct participation in extension activities such as training courses and demonstration sites there was no difference between the poor and non-poor in Hoa Binh Province in 2007, but poor households benefited to a lesser extend than non-poor households from the increase in activities in 2009. In Cao Bang Province the number of farmers benefiting directly from extension activities was more or less equal for non-poor and poor HH. However upland dwelling Dao and Hmong households participated to a lesser extend than lowland Tay and Nung farmers in most extension activities. Women account for at least half of the participants in the various extension activities in Cao Bang, but for less than a third in Hoa Binh Province.

**Recommendations:** Adopt a more focused strategy for upland farmers in Cao Bang and for the poor and women in Hoa Binh. Reasons for limited female participation in Hoa Binh need to be further assessed. Annual reports of service providers should include information about the

participants with respect to gender, poverty status and ethnicity. For better communication and understanding extension staff should have due representation of respective local ethnic groups and women.

**The demand orientation of activities has largely improved mainly due to increased participation in planning meetings:** The demand-orientation of extension activities in general has increased considerably from a mere 10% of the households in Hoa Binh Province and some 44% in Cao Bang in 2007, to 60% and 70% in 2009, respectively. Also since 2007 the overall satisfaction of poor and ethnic groups of the upland has grown stronger than that of the non-poor or lowland farmers. Despite this general positive rating less poor than non-poor HH find their demands included in the extension plans, which is in line with the observation regarding participation in specific activities. It appears that the stronger participation of non poor HH in 2009 compared to 2007 has had a negative effect on meeting particularly the demand of the poor. It is not sure if this is due to responses by extension service becoming more mainstream (one-size-fits-all approach) or if demands of the poor mainly refer to subsidized or free inputs, which the services can and should not respond to. .

**Recommendation:** Extension workers need to increase their efforts to identify real constraints and to tailor solutions to the specific needs of the farmers, particularly the poor and specific ethnic groups living in the uplands.

**The contents of training courses are relevant for the farmers and easy to grasp; mostly new technologies are applicable:** In both Provinces training courses were provided in time, their contents were suitable and easy to grasp; but even with a high rating already in 2007, the quality of training, technical guidance as well as staff attitude had reportedly improved. This indicates the limitations when asking farmers to rate services they have nothing to compare with. Regarding new technologies the potential to adopt them was above 90% in Hoa Binh in both years, and increased by 10% in Cao Bang to 85% in 2009.

**Recommendation:** New methods, such as FFS and capacity building of staff may have contributed to the improved teaching capacity of extension workers and should be further promoted and supported. To raise the potential for adoption particularly in the difficult upland areas of Cao Bang Province efforts need to be increased to identify more suitable technologies which are technically and financially feasible..

**Inputs are provided according to request and timely:** According to the farmer survey inputs, such as fertilizer, seeds and to a lesser extend livestock breeds are being provided in time and at the requested amount. In general registration for input supply reduced from 2007 to 2009, it was higher for poor households than for non-poor HH, indicating pro-poor support. The availability of more effective veterinary drugs, in closer proximity of the villages contributed a lot to improve the quality of Veterinary Service. The same was true for Plant Protection Service, which reportedly supplied better quality and more effective pesticides than before.

**Irrigation services** are being provided by a variety of actors, whereby village leaders seem to play a key role, particularly in Hoa Binh. In Cao Bang the local WUG are even more important. The locally organized management of the irrigation schemes seems to operate quite well and most farmers stated that the supply of water to their fields was in time for the planting of the crop and sufficient; however water for a second crop was only sufficient for less than 50% of farmers in Hoa Binh and less than a third in Cao Bang Province, which may depend on the water source. Also maintenance of schemes seems is still problematic with frequent damages reported by around 60% of the farmers and repairs not done in time. The biggest change in irrigation seemed to have occurred through the upgrading and building of irrigation schemes under the full responsibility of the people which was most likely due to the PS-ARD introduced CDF.

**Recommendations:** The agencies responsible for irrigation management should conduct surveys to find the real causes for the lack of water in individual schemes and identify the most appropriate



technical or management solution to it. In Hoa Binh Province a proactive information strategy by the responsible agencies at district and province level should clarify roles regarding irrigation management and responsibilities of the formal and informal institutions. Hence the decentralization of funds along with the responsibility for upgrading and maintenance will be key for improvement of this service sector.

**Technical guidance, transfer of knowledge and information and responsiveness:** More than 90% of the interviewed households stated that they can follow the technical guidance of veterinarians. The proportion of successful treatments increased by an estimated 60% in Hoa Binh Province and 90% in Cao Bang Province. An increase in the vaccination against diseases outside of the GoV vaccination programs also indicated more confidence in the veterinary service. Plant Protection Service's pest & disease forecasts reach less than a third of farmers in Hoa Binh Province, and some 50% of the households in Cao Bang Province.

**Recommendation:** With an ever expanding livestock population the potential to exploit the human resources of the wide network of public and private service providers (drug vendor, informal & formal commune/village paravet, district veterinary staff) need to be further explored in order to systematically increase the service outreach to remote areas. The useful forecasts and recommendations by the Plant Protection Service should be wider disseminated using different information channels and media.

**Representation of marginalized groups in local planning, and inclusion of villagers' ideas in commune SEDP and actual implementation:** In 2009 70% or more of the villagers who participated in planning meetings at village level found that their ideas were integrated in the Commune SEDP, with no significant difference between poor and non-poor HH. Those plans were mostly implemented. Participation of upland dwelling ethnic groups, such as Dao and Hmong was lower than that of the lowland dwelling Tay-Nung, and their proposals were less reflected in the Commune SEDP. Women were with 40% well represented in Cao Bang planning meetings, but accounted for only 20% in Hoa Binh Province.

**Transparency of commune budgets and general agreement with the fund allocation:** In 2009 people knowing about the commune budget was 28% in Cao Bang and 17% in Hoa Binh province and has increased considerably since 2007. In Cao Bang Province the differences between poor and non-poor households receiving budget information also disappeared, however upland farming ethnic groups were less informed than ethnic groups in the lowland. In general those informed agree with the fund allocation.

**Recommendation:** The question of female and ethnicity quota in decision making bodies during local planning should be discussed among stakeholders. This maybe difficult, since participation should be voluntary and setting of targets increases the risk of pressurizing people, which would be counterproductive for genuine participation. While the majority of the interviewed households prefers to be informed on budget issues by the village leader and during village meetings, publicizing commune investment budgets on notice boards should be continued for full transparency and to spread the information more widely.

## **General Conclusion**

Key-issues currently encountered by farmers in Hoa Binh and Cao Bang Provinces are weak infrastructure, remoteness and difficult road to the next market or town, followed by lack of capital for investment and limited technical knowledge or/and information on pest, diseases and epidemics. To address the lack of capital the majority of households in Hoa Binh would take a loan, in contrast to Cao Bang where a larger proportion of households are reluctant to take a credit mainly due to the fear not being able to pay back or lacking ideas what to invest in. All these areas, infrastructure, access to capital as well as provision of technical know-how could be addressed with the Commune Development Fund.

The allocation of CDF linked to participatory planning in the new SEDP process in combination with PS-ARD's support in capacity building of the service providing agencies has positively affected service delivery in the PS-ARD districts. The decentralization of GoV funds to commune level and hence the separation of the financial means from the public services in ARD not only provided an opportunity for increased interaction with farmers, but also allowed the farmers to set the agenda for the development interventions. This is an excellent example that a key-strategy for improving service delivery requires to change the financial flow from service provider to service user. With mechanisms in place, clear responsibilities and transparent fund management at the lowest possible level adoption of this approach by the GoV could result in a wide scale impact in the agricultural and rural development sector.

Regarding the use of satisfaction surveys for evaluation of programs it should be noted that citizen's satisfaction is a very subjective indicator influenced by many different aspects that can hardly be taken into the equation. In particular in a country where people so far had little experience to express their opinion freely the results need to be analyzed very carefully. Citizens' satisfaction surveys are necessary tools to assess public services in the course of time, however it has to be acknowledged that for the evaluation of projects and programs it needs to be considered that narrowing the attribution gap will be a big challenge.

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## ACRONYMS

ARD	Agriculture and Rural Development
CB-GEM	Cao Bang – Governance Extension Marketing Project
ha	Hectare
HH	Household
IPM	Integrated Pest Management
IRR	Irrigation
MARD	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development
M&E	Monitoring & Evaluation
FFS	Farmers' Field School
OPS	Output Based Payment Systems
PAR	Public Administrative Reform
PMSU	Programme Management and Support Unit
PP	Plant Protection
PRSC	Poverty Reduction Support Credit
PS-ARD	Public Service Provision Improvement Programme in Agriculture and Rural
PSO	Provincial Statistical Office
PTD	Participatory Technology Development
SEDP	Socio-Economic Development Planning
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SPAR-CB	Support to administrative Reform Project in Cao Bang
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
Vet	Veterinary
VND	Vietnam Dong
VHLSS	Vietnam Household Living Standard Survey
WUG	Water User Group

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## 1. Background

The SDC funded Public Service Provision Improvement Programme in Agriculture and Rural Development (PS-ARD) started in January 2008 and ends in 2010. During its three years implementation period PS-ARD supported government organizations in the agriculture and rural development (ARD) sector in Cao Bang and Hoa Binh Provinces in providing better services according to the demand of the farmers. Apart from enhancing the effectiveness of public service providers in ARD through changing the organizational structure, the programme supported capacity building measures and the introduction of new methodologies and tools (Farmers' Field Schools, Participatory Technology development - PTD, Output Based Payment System - OPS, marketing extension). Changing from the provision of top down diffusion messages by government staff required civil servants to perceive farmers' as clients not as beneficiaries. Hence PS-ARD supported the GoV's efforts to improve governance at local level based on the Ordinance 34/2007-PLUBTVQH11 on the Implementation of Grassroots Democracy approved in 2007, the State Budget Law of 2002, and the Directive 33/2004/CT-TTg on the formulation of the SEDP 2006 – 2010. To contribute to more public participation, transparency and accountability PS-ARD specifically assisted the two Provinces in the development and testing of the new participatory SEDP procedures in 5 districts and 103 communes. In addition the programme helped to streamline commune financial management and to build local capacities to manage commune finances better. As means for practice these financial management guidelines and implementation of SEDP activities/projects PS-ARD also allocated CDF – Commune Development Funds directly for the communes to manage.

Provision of public services or commune governance should ensure the compliance with good governance principles such as effectiveness, efficiency, participation, equity and transparency. While the first two can be assessed on an organizational level, the latter require the feed-back from service users or the general population. This survey addresses only the client or people's perspective, but its findings need to be seen as complementary to other performance assessments of public service providers<sup>1</sup> or aspects of governance<sup>2</sup>, in particular at commune level.

Conducting user feedback surveys has been perceived as a crucial method to assess changes in the quality of public service delivery in general and as a tool for monitoring and evaluating the Public Administrative Reform (PAR) progress. So far these methodologies are not yet well known and hardly used in the Government System. Therefore PS-ARD created an example for a client survey conducted in rural areas, which in the future can be used by the GoV.

The current survey serves predominantly as a tool to evaluate the achievements of the PS-ARD as stipulated by the program's Logframe indicators. Those indicators are largely in line with indicators of the GoV's M&E Framework of the SEDS 2006- 2010. They include people's satisfaction with public service provision and the progress in implementing the Grassroots Democracy Decree. The latter includes the assessment of people's perception regarding practiced grassroots democracy and address the aspect of local planning (SEDP) in terms of

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<sup>1</sup> Assessment of 8 agencies in the ARD sector in Cao Bang and Hoa Binh Provinces providing services to the public, PS-ARD 2009

<sup>2</sup> Impact assessment of 3 years Commune Development Funds, PS-ARD 2010

participation and equity and the transparency of public finances (CDF) as the foundation for accountability.

The survey was conducted in 2008 (collecting data retrospectively for 2007) to create a baseline, and was repeated in 2010 (collecting data retrospectively for 2009) to monitor changes and evaluate the program's achievements. According to the program's impact hypothesis improvement of services in ARD would have a direct or indirect impact on individual households' livelihoods leading to increased income, contributing to food security and ultimately poverty reduction. Income has been assessed in the 2008 survey to provide a baseline; yet due to the short duration of the program and the expected lag period between service delivery improvement and the expected effect on household income, the income survey was not repeated in 2010. However official GoV data on income, poverty rates and food security are available for both survey years allowing some careful interpretation.

## **2. Research Methodology and Survey Structure**

### **2.1. Purpose and objective of the survey**

The main purpose of the survey is the evaluation of PS-ARD; but it also serves as an example for the GoV on how to conduct clients' surveys and collect user feed-back and how to use the information to assess the Public Administrative Reform progress with a view to improved public service delivery.

Hence the purpose of this survey was:

- To create a baseline for selected PS-ARD Logframe indicators (people's satisfaction) at the start of the program;
- To evaluate the degree of achievement of the PS-ARD objectives at the end of the program phase;
- To allow service providing agencies to apply results based management by monitoring the results of 2010 survey against the targets that had been set after the survey in 2008;
- To provide some specific information where ARD services need to pay more attention;
- To develop and test a methodology that could be applied by the GoV on a regular basis.

The survey area covered upland communities in Cao Bang and Hoa Binh Provinces that were supported by the PS-ARD.

#### **The objectives of this survey were to assess**

- ▶ Farmers' satisfaction with service provision of four sub-sectors in Agriculture and Rural Development with regard to access, availability and quality of service products for farmers;
- ▶ Farmers' participation in commune SEDP and perception on the transparency of commune finances;
- ▶ Households' economic situation & food security;

A note to the Impact-Hypothesis of PS-ARD: With the assessment of the household income the assumption that improved service provision in the ARD sector will ultimately contribute to increased incomes from agricultural and forestry production as a result of increased productivity and diversification towards a more market oriented production, should be verified (Impact Hypothesis). However the assessment of household income was not repeated in 2010 since the time span between improvement of services and the effect on household income was regarded as too short to show any significant results. It could however be repeated any time after the closure of the programme or the baseline could be compared with the income as assessed by the national VHLSS. Furthermore the survey provides data on poverty status of households and food security in both survey years, which also can serve to verify the impact hypothesis.

With a view to planning a second phase of the program the survey also collected basic information on the most eminent problems currently faced by farmers, their access to and demand for credit and the use of different media to obtain information to feed into the planning.

## **2.2. Content of the survey**

The survey was divided into three main parts:

### **Part I - Collecting citizens' feed back on public service delivery in ARD and elements of grassroots democracy**

#### **a. Satisfaction with service provision in the ARD Sector**

To assess the satisfaction of citizens with the service provision in the agricultural and rural development sector in Part I of the survey, of special interest are listed below including the key government line agency providing the respective services:

- Extension Service – Provincial Agricultural & Forestry Extension Centre
- Veterinary Service - Veterinary Subdepartment
- Plant Protection Service - Plant Protection Subdepartment
- Irrigation Management - Company for management of irrigation schemes in Hoa Binh and for Irrigation Subdepartment in Cao Bang, respectively

It should be noted that per definition of the GoV the majority of these agencies are not “service providing agencies” but state management agencies. Nevertheless it is acknowledged that these selected institutions are those who work most directly with the farmers through their staff in the district branches or staff at commune level; their activities are the ones that farmers benefit of most directly.

#### ***Aspects of Service Delivery in ARD in the two Provinces:***

The survey addressed specific aspects in the interview, such as access, demand orientation, quality and timeliness of ‘service products’ (training and inputs) and the perception regarding qualification or skills of staff.

ASPECT	KEY QUESTION
Access	Have all groups (poor households, women) the same access to the services?
Demand driven / needs based	Are activities / services according to the demand of the farmers? Do farmers participate effectively in the planning of extension?
Suitability /quality	Are the contents of trainings relevant for the farmer, are they easy to grasp and are they applicable?
Timeliness	Are inputs provided in accordance with the season and according to request?
Staff skills, responsiveness	How is the quality of the technical guidance? Is staff responding to specific requests in time?
General satisfaction	General satisfaction with the mentioned service provider and changes observed during the last three years?

**b. Satisfaction with local planning and commune financial management**

Since the programme supports the Vietnamese government in their efforts to increase participation in local planning and decentralization of budgets and financial management the survey also included collection of citizens' feed back on the participation in local SEDP, effectiveness of the involvement in the decision making process as well as knowledge about and consent with the commune budget and expenditures, respectively.

ASPECT	KEY QUESTION
Participation and representation	How were households (poor and non-poor) represented in local planning meetings for SEDP and who (men or women) participated?
Inclusion and consent	Do the commune plans reflect villagers (poor households, ethnic minority groups) ideas and are budgets allocated accordingly?
Information	In which way would people like to receive information on commune plans and budgets?
General	Are you satisfied with the new planning procedures with SEDP? What could be improved with regards to commune financial management?

○ **Part II (only in 2008) - Household economics: Income and income sources**

Part II comprised detailed information on household economic activities, with specific focus on income sources from different income generating or productive activities. The survey assessed the poverty status, months of food shortage and different sources of income of the households in the programme area. The data also provides information on the ratio of products that are marketed as an indicator if farmers move from predominantly subsistence farming to commodity production, which can be seen as a sign of economic growth.

○ **Part III (only in 2010) – Farmers' problems and access to credit & information**

In order to be able to prepare for a possible second phase of PS-ARD Part III of the questionnaire served to collect information on the most eminent problems farmers still face in managing their farm and improving their income.



Due to the experience made with PS-ARD's commune development funds - CDF, where farmers continued to request free or subsidized inputs, the survey tried to create a clearer picture on the accessibility and use of credit, and the demand thereof.

In addition it was perceived that modern ways of communication would have a good potential, particularly to reach farmers in very remote areas. Hence the questionnaire included questions about availability and use of different media to get information.

The assessment of the months of food shortage as in Part II was repeated in 2010.

### **2.3. The survey instrument or questionnaire**

In several steps a questionnaire was designed to cover the full scope of the survey addressing the different areas of interest, citizens' satisfaction with services in ARD and aspects of grassroots democracy, key problem areas and future demand. A useful resource document for the design of the survey / survey instrument was the ADB "*Improving Local Governance and Service Delivery – Citizens' Report Card Learning Toolkit*"<sup>3</sup>.

**Part I and Part III:** Before the initial design of the questionnaire the PS-ARD PMSU team met with the different stakeholders and discussed with leaders and staff of the selected service providers at province and district level about the scope of services provided. This helped to narrow the options and allowed to formulate more precise questions with multiple choice answers. Based on the given information and the institutional knowledge within the PS-ARD team the initial questionnaire was designed. Field tests were conducted in both Provinces; the questionnaires were revised and later jointly reviewed with the service providers. This feed back was very important to ensure that the information given by the interviewed households would be of use for the service providers and to make survey results more acceptable to them. In 2010 the questionnaire was amended by some questions which should highlight particularly changes in the services during the last two, three years as well as suggestions on how to improve the service from a farmer's perspective. A new section was added (part III) which included questions related to main problems that farmers face these days, the access to and use of credit as well as common means to obtain information.

To assess the general degree of satisfaction with the services four different grades were chosen. With three and five grades the risk would be that respondents would stick to the (non-committal) middle. Five grades also would require too much fine distinction without adding more clarity about farmers' perception. The four grades: Not satisfied, normal, satisfied, and very satisfied, allowed to distinguish a clearly positive response (satisfied/very satisfied) from a less positive or even negative response (normal/not satisfied). This was taking into account that farmers would be reluctant to express their dissatisfaction and that a 'normal' service delivery would be one that is 'not bad' but also 'not good', just within the well known 'norms'.

The questionnaire as used in 2010 can be seen in ANNEX I.

**Part II:** For the purpose of income assessment it was decided to use the format of the National Vietnam Household Living Standard Survey (VHLSS). Using the same format to calculate household income also allows comparing the results of this survey with the results from the National Survey. Apart from avoiding collecting data of a control group as comparison it saves

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<sup>3</sup> Print Version 2007, Asian Development Band (ADB) and Asian Development Bank Institute (ADBI)

time and costs for developing a new format and training of enumerators. To reduce unnecessary workload the format of the VHLSS was reduced to those parts that were required to calculate the household income. The reference period for the questions asked was the year 2007, which is the same as for the national VHLSS.

## 2.4. Organization and Implementation of the survey

The first survey was conducted in mid 2008, and collected data retrospectively for 2007, the year before the project start. In a best case scenario, this kind of survey however would be a crucial element during the project design phase. The survey was repeated in 2010 collecting information retrospectively for 2009. The results needed to be available for the evaluation of the programme before the program phase ends in December 2010, otherwise it would be more sensible to accommodate for this kind of survey after the program termination.

### 2.4.1. Population of interest and sampling

The population of interest is the farming community in the five mountainous target districts of PS-ARD in Cao Bang and Hoa Binh Provinces. The basic unit of the survey is the household (HH), which is considered to be the direct user of one or more of the four services described above. At the time of conducting the survey in 2008 the total number of HH in the two districts in Cao Bang was 16'896<sup>4</sup> and in the three districts in Hoa Binh was 54'631<sup>5</sup> (see ANNEX II).

With a confidence level of 90% and a margin of error of 5.8 % the statistically appropriate sample size for each Province was calculated to be 200 households.

In each Province six communes of the districts supported by the PS-ARD were selected according to their general features representing specific sociological (poverty rate, representative ethnic communities) and agro-ecological conditions (upland and lowland) within a district. The survey covers communes that benefit from the 135 programme, and those that are not in this category. The list of communes and the number of households interviewed in each commune is given in ANNEX II. The sample should largely reflect the key characteristics of the population in the districts covered by the survey (poverty and ethnic composition) however a bias towards remoter areas and more vulnerable groups was accepted. The households had been randomly selected across two to three villages per commune. Selected villages included those close to the commune centre and those remote to the commune centre.

*Table 1: Number of HH in each population category: Poor and non-poor*

HH Category	HB 2008		HB 2010		CB 2008		CB 2010	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Non-Poor	155	78	151	76	109	54	108	54
Poor	45	23	49	25	91	46	92	46

The share of poor households (applying the official poverty line of VND 200'000 per capita and months for rural areas) in the sample in Hoa Bing ranged between 22 and 25 % and in Cao

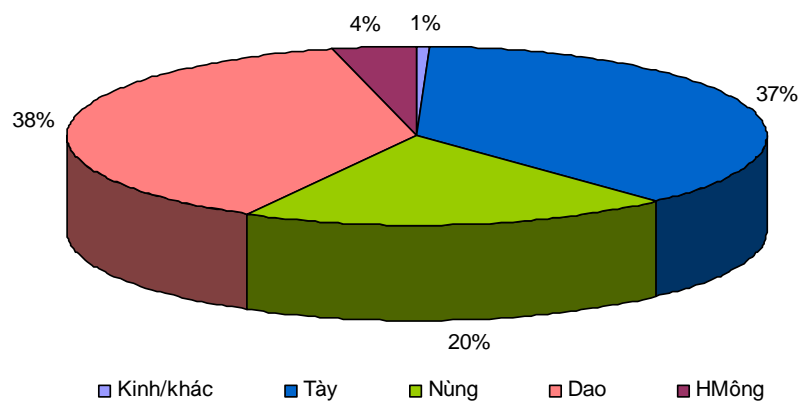
<sup>4</sup> Source: District People's Committee, 2008

<sup>5</sup> Source: Provincial Statistical Office Hoa Binh, 2008

Bang between 46 and 53%, respectively. Largely the same HH were interviewed in 2010 as in 2008. However due to migration and some other reasons some HH could not be included in 2010 and were replaced by other HH, which however did not exceed 5% of the sample.

**Sample composition with a view to ethnicity of the households**

While households had been selected on a random basis the exclusion of district towns and well off lowland communes resulted in less households of Kinh ethnicity in the sample. In Hoa Binh Province 100 % of the interviewed households were from the ethnic group of Muong, which was higher than the 85% average across the three districts. The representation of ethnic minorities in Cao Bang broadly reflected the ethnic composition of the targeted districts, but also had a bias to more upland living ethnic groups, particularly the Dao people (see **Figure 1**).



**Figure 1: Ethnic composition of the survey sample in Cao Bang Province (2009)**

The sample taken in 2008 and 2010 were nearly the same, including 37% Dao people (38% in 2010), 37 % Tay, 21 % Nung (20% in 2010) and 4 % Hmong. Representation by Dao People was higher than the average 22 % across the two districts, while Nung were less represented compared to the average of 37%.

**Sample size based on access**

It should be noted that the total number of HH in the survey was 200 HH per Province. However it has to be acknowledged that not all HH had equal access to all services which was also one aspect of this survey. Hence the number of households and the number of responses given in the more specific follow-on questions were less than 200. The number of households with access to the different services or commune planning, finances is given in **Table 2**.

**Table 2: Sample size per service, for local planning and commune financial management**

Service	Hoa Binh Province		Cao Bang Province	
	2007	2009	2007	2009
Extension Service	168	167	186	193
Veterinary Service	198	197	193	191
Plant Protection Service	38	98	187	199
Irrigation Management	128	162	47	60
Local Planning (SEDP)	16	126	50	150
Commune Finances	26	57	33	57

#### **2.4.2. Implementation of the field survey**

The programme made use of local resources and also ensured alignment with the existing government system, which will make it easy to repeat the survey even without program presence. For the data collection the Statistical Offices in the Provinces (PSO) had been contracted. The contracting of PSO had three main advantages. Firstly PSO already has basic information regarding population features of the communes which facilitates the process of sampling. Secondly PSO can mobilize a number of qualified enumerators from the districts familiar with the local conditions and often speaking the local language. Thirdly, those enumerators had already received training in interview techniques and have several years experience with the questionnaire of the VHLSS.

As basic rule citizens' feedback interviews should not last longer than 1 to 1 hour and a half and questions needed to be very short and precise. Nevertheless in conjunction with Part II and part III, respectively, the duration of one interview could last as long as 2 hours. In the case that interviews were held with Dao and Hmong ethnic minority interpreters were required, and an interview could stretch to 3 to 4 hours.

#### **2.4.3. Data processing and analysis**

For Part I, citizens' feed back on public service delivery in ARD and practiced grassroots democracy, the programme used was SPSS<sup>6</sup>, a programme that is very suitable for sociological data processing. Data had been entered and checked by each PSO. The data analysis was done by a project officer within the PMSU.

Processing and analysis of Part II, Household income, was outsourced to an external consultant who developed a program called "PS-ARD Survey" (version 1.0) using EXEL-STAT. The consultant produced required tabulations for analysis and report.

#### **2.4.4. Limitations of the survey**

As outlined in chapter 2.4.1 not all households had access to the different services or participated in planning etc. This resulted in a reduction of household answering the follow-on

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<sup>6</sup> SPSS: Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (Version 17, 2008)

questions. Naturally the smaller sample for any follow-on question ultimately resulted in a higher margin of error compared to the original sample of 200 HH, which makes the results less reliable. Also the comparison between the two groups of non-poor and poor HH or the groups of different ethnic minorities needs to acknowledge this limitation.

All in all the assessment of ‘satisfaction’ is a tricky one. The question if someone is satisfied or not, or to what degree this is the case, cannot expect to be answered objectively; it is by nature subjective. The answers may depend on recent personal experiences, the ability to compare, the general situation of the household (better-off, poor and marginalized), the current economic development of the area, the culture (politeness does not allow to be too critical), daily moods and the course of the interview. This is why the question about general satisfaction with ARD service providers was complemented with detailed questions to obtain more objective information, such as participation in activities and responsiveness and skills of staff. However also those depend on the memory of the farmers and their personal perception in the moment of the interview.

It was challenging to design a questionnaire that could cover four sub-sectors and aspects of practiced grassroots democracy while keeping the interview time below two hours. Many aspects would have deserved more attention, but could not be dealt with in such a short time. Furthermore some questions arising may not necessarily be answered through individual household interviews, yet require more specific assessments at institutional level.

The questionnaire focused mainly on the actual situation as perceived by farmers, not on hypothetical questions, i.e. if farmers would be ready to pay service fees or attend training courses without receiving any compensation in form of a meal or travel allowance. However in 2010 – to prepare better for a potential second phase of PS-ARD - the survey included questions if and how services had changed over the past three years and how they could be improved.

### **3. Results and Discussion**

Starting with the general access to the four key service providers, extension, plant protection, veterinary and irrigation, the results of the survey are presented by comparing data from 2007 with that of 2009.

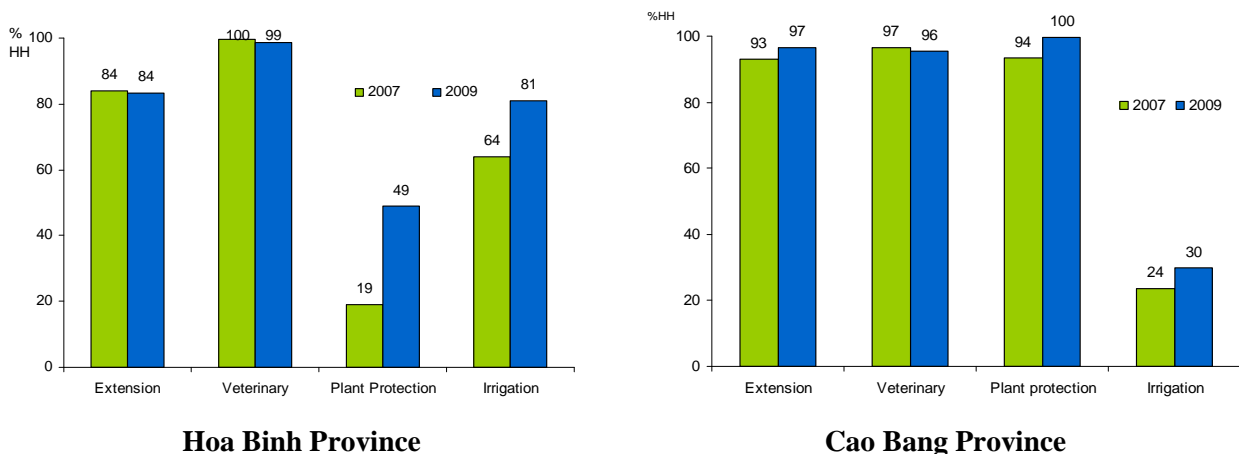
The citizens’ feed back is usually described for each Province regarding satisfaction with service provision, followed by perception on practiced grass roots democracy, with respect to local planning and financial management. Attention was paid to the question if services are equally addressing poor and non-poor HH and how they are perceived by those two household categories. In case there is no reference to the categories of the poor and non-poor households it can be assumed that there were no distinct differences between them.

A special chapter was dedicated to access and perception of service quality by different ethnic minorities in Cao Bang Province, as well as access and participation of women to specific service activities was assessed.

### 3.1. Access and satisfaction with public service provision under various aspects

#### GENERAL ACCESS TO DIFFERENT SERVICE PROVIDERS

The questionnaire started with a filter question, which asked if anyone in the family had received support from any of the four service providers: Extension Service, Veterinary Service, Plant Protection Service, Services related to Irrigation Management. The responses were used to define the access to those services. It needs to be acknowledged that the question can only account for the *current degree of access*; the answer cannot provide information about the general *accessibility* (conditions for getting access) nor if access to a specific service is desired. Hence not having access to a service can also mean that this service is not required, e.g. if farmers do not have land suitable for irrigation schemes irrigation management service is consequently not relevant to them. Detailed results of the access to the four services are shown in **Figure 2** below.



**Figure 2: Access to different service providers in the two Provinces in 2007 & 2009**

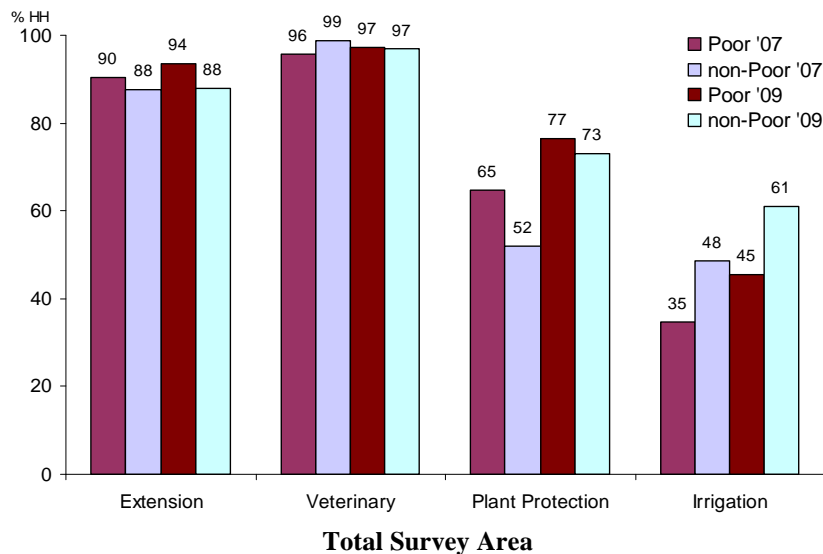
The general access to selected ARD services was fairly good. In Hoa Binh Province access to the Extension Service was good with 84% in both survey years, and even 100 % and 99% for Veterinary Service. There were no significant changes between the years. Only regarding Plant Protection Service just 19% of the HH stated to have access in 2007, which however increased to nearly 50% in 2009. Also use of services for irrigation management in Hoa Binh had increased from 64% to 81% within the last two years.

In Cao Bang Province, access to the three services Extension, Veterinary and Plant Protection ranged between 93 and 100%, with no significant changes between the two years. Access to Irrigation Management Service has increased from 24% to 30% of the HH in Cao Bang.

The apparently very limited access to the Plant Protection Service in Hoa Binh Province in 2007 was surprising (particularly in comparison with the data from Cao Bang). An explanation could be that farmers perceive the sales person for pesticides as the main resource person in terms of Plant Protection issues (see chapter 3.1.3), which in Cao Bang often is the staff or the head of the Plant Protection Station. Farmers in Hoa Binh may have distinguished more clearly between government staff and sales persons, which could explain the big difference in the



access figures between the two Provinces in 2007. It however cannot explain why in 2009 the percentage of HH having access to PP services more than doubled.



*Figure 3: Access poor and non-poor Households to different service providers*

Across both Provinces the access to Extension and Veterinary Services was about the same for poor and non-poor HH. Plant Protection services seemed to be used slightly more by poor HH, in 2007 with 65% poor HH and compared to only 52% non-poor HH. This difference was nearly leveled out in 2009. With regards to irrigation management poor HH used this service less than non-poor in both years which is in line with the fact that more of the poor HH farm in rain fed upland areas while better-off farming households live in lowland areas with more opportunities to irrigate land. But for both groups access increased from 2007 to 2009, by 10 percentage points for the poor and by 13 percentage points for non-poor HH.

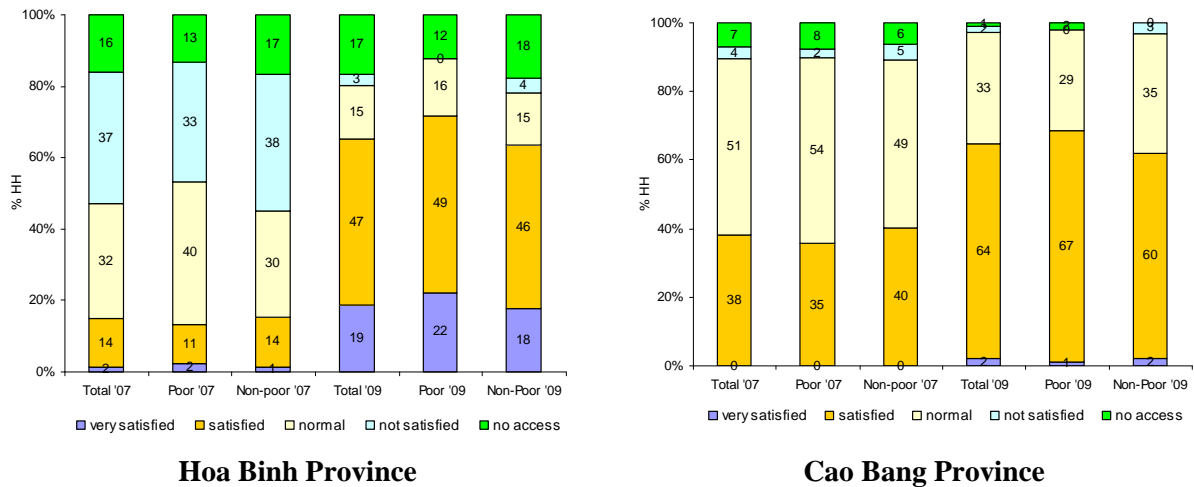
### **SATISFACTION WITH THE PROVISION OF SELECTED ARD SERVICES**

To get an overview over the general perception of ARD Service providers in the target area farmers were asked about their general satisfaction with the specific services they had access to. To avoid distortion of the results when access was low it was decided to generally present the data basing the answers on the total sample, hence including the 'access' aspect as first level, basically resulting in 5 general assessment levels for each service: (1) no access, (2) not satisfied, (3) normal, (4) satisfied, (5) very satisfied. However since the access has been already discussed at the beginning of this chapter it will not be discussed in detail in the following sections.

#### **3.1.1. Extension Service**

Figure 5 shows the access and degree of satisfaction with the extension service in the two Provinces, segregated by poor and non-poor HH; it also shows the change of perception regarding this service in the last two years.

In Hoa Binh the general satisfaction with the extension service increased from on average 16% of the HH satisfied and very satisfied in 2007 to 66% in 2009 of which even some 20% were very satisfied. The share of not satisfied HH decreased from 37% in 2007 to only 3 % in 2009. Also in Cao Bang Province the general satisfaction increased from on average 38% in 2007 to 66% of HH satisfied or very satisfied. Percentage of not satisfied HH was with 4 and 2 % on average small in both survey years. In both Provinces satisfaction of poor HH seemed to have increased even more than of non-poor HH.



**Figure 4: Satisfaction with the Extension Service in each province, 2007 and 2009 (% of HH)**

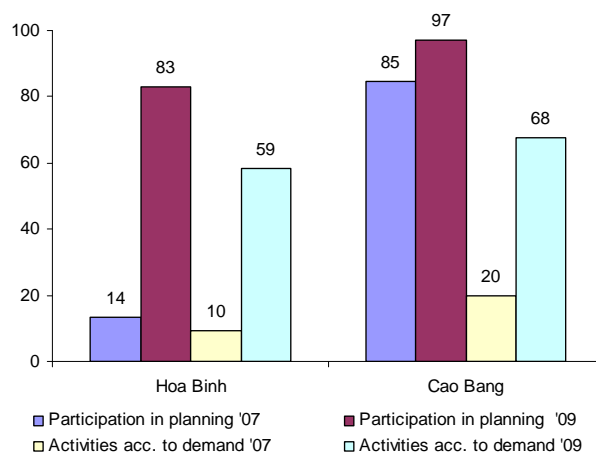
As main reasons for their dissatisfaction in 2007 farmers in Hoa Binh mentioned lacking opportunity to receive technical guidance and training and the limited support for seeds and fertilizer.

More specifically the different service aspects are analyzed below.

○ Services according to the needs of farmers

According to the information by the Provincial Extension Centres regular meetings are organized at grassroots level to plan extension activities. Over the last two years in both Provinces a positive development regarding participation in meetings to plan extension activities resulted in improved demand orientation (see *Figure 5*).

In Hoa Binh a distinct increase could be observed from 14 % in 2007 to 99% of the HH with access to extension service in 2009 having participated in a planning meeting. In Cao Bang the participation in such meetings also increased from an already high 88% to 100%. This ultimately resulted in the extension activities following more the demand and needs of the farmers. In Hoa Binh the majority of HH participating in the planning meetings find the activities according to their demand in contrast to only 70% in 2007. Based on the total sample of 200 HH in 2007 10% of the population found extension activities according to their demand, while it was nearly 60% in 2009. In Cao Bang demand orientation increased from 20% of HH of the total sample finding activities meeting their needs in 2007 to nearly 70% in 2009 (see *Figure 6*).



**Figure 5: Participation in planning and demand orientation of extension activities in each Province, 2007 and 2009 (% of the total no of HH in the sample)**

However it also seems that with more households participating in the planning meetings, the resulting activities are more responsive to non-poor than to poor households (see **Table 3**).

**Table 3: Participation of in planning meetings and demand orientation of extension activities thereafter**

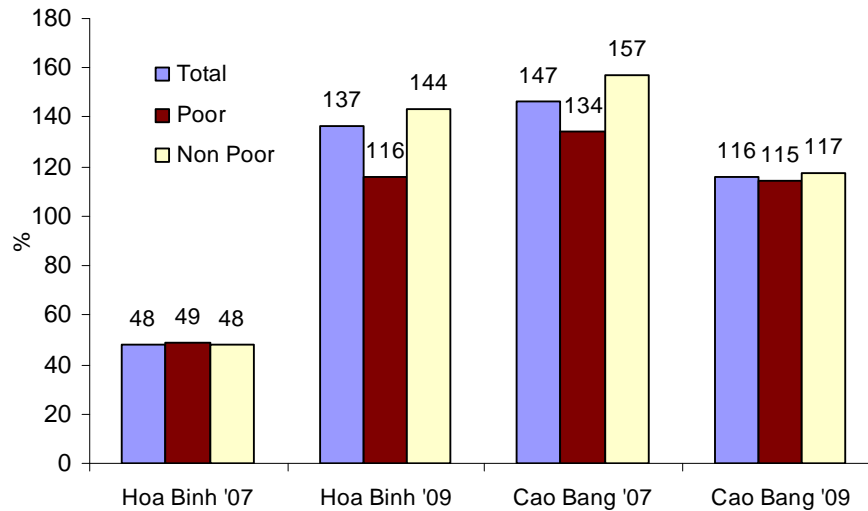
% of poor & non-poor households	Hoa Binh Province		Cao Bang Province	
	poor	non-poor	poor	non-poor
<i>Household Category</i>				
Participation in planning '07	13	14	92	19
Activities acc. to demand '07	67	71	85	28
Participation in planning '09	88	81	97	97
Activities acc. to demand '09	58	75	65	73

In Cao Bang the 2007 planning meetings for extension mainly addressed the poor (92% of the poor HH in contrast to 19% of the non-poor HH participated) and 85% of these poor HH found that the activities and support provided met their needs. Participation of non-poor households was low in 2007, but increased considerably to 97% in 2009. The higher participation of non-poor households came along with a reduced demand orientation for the poor from 85% in 2007 to 65% in 2009. Non-poor HH stating that activities met their demand increased from 28 to 73% of the HH participating in the planning meeting. In Hoa Binh, the demand orientation in 2007 was slightly lower for the group of poor households with 67% stating that activities met their demand in contrast to 71% of the non-poor HH; this difference was more pronounced in 2009 when the share of poor HH finding activities according to their needs fell to 58% in contrast to 75% of the non-poor HH.

A general conclusion could be that if fewer people and a more homogenous group are involved in the planning process they have a better chance that their ideas are being considered and activities are selected according to their demand. With more people, especially more non-poor households involved it appears that the voices of the poor are less heard.

○ Participation in various extension activities

As can be seen in **Figure 6** within the last three years the degree of participation in extension activities in Hoa Binh increased considerably with less than 50% participation in extension activities in 2007 compared to 137 % in 2009; this indicates that some HH participated in more than one activity.



**Figure 6: Degree of participation in main extension activities in each Province, 2007 & 2009 (%of HH)**

The increase was stronger for non-poor HH than for poor HH, which is consistent with the observation of less demand orientation towards the poor (see above). In Cao Bang Province the degree of participation over the last three years reduced from 140% to 116%. This reduction was more expressed for the non-poor group, contributing to greater equality among poor and non-poor HH. Considering the previous observation (see **Table 3**) that the share of non-poor HH finding their demands met was increased would then mean that fewer activities are acceptable as long as those activities meet the real demand of the people. .

Farming households were involved in six main extension activities. The degree to which households participated in these activities varied widely (see **Table 4**). Most frequently farmers mentioned crop training followed by training on animal husbandry, and demonstration sites. Farmers participated to a lesser extend in forestry and aquaculture training and PTD.

**Table 4: Degree of participation in different extension activities in each Province in 2007 and 2009 - % age of the total number of Households and of the poor Households (HH)**

Province/Year	Cao Bang 2007		Cao Bang 2009		Hoa Binh 2007		Hoa Binh 2009	
	Total HH	Poor HH	Total HH	Poor HH	Total HH	Poor HH	Total HH	Poor HH
Crop Training	61	65	51	56	18	18	49	47
Animal Husbandry training	38	29	42	43	17	18	46	42
Demonstration site	21	18	10	9	1	2	14	7
Forestry training	17	17	6	4	6	7	17	14
Aquaculture training	6	2	3	1	4	2	4	2
PTD	4	2	4	1	3	2	8	5

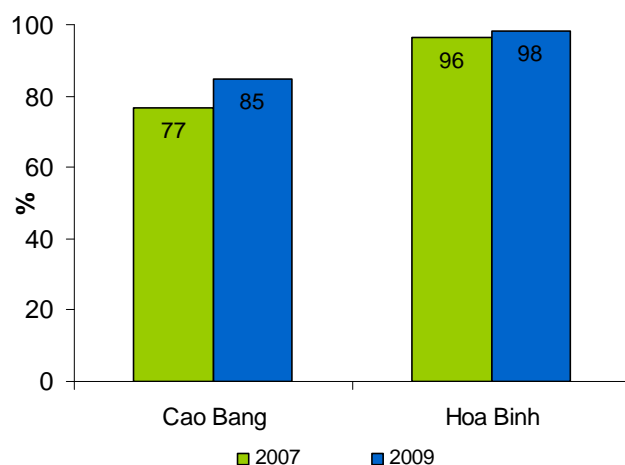
In 2007 in Hoa Binh 18 % of the respondents attended crop cultivation training, 17 % animal husbandry training, only 1 % participated in demonstration sites/models and 6 % in forestry training, respectively. The lack of involvement of farmers in extension activities gives a good explanation for the dissatisfaction with this service in Hoa Binh Province in 2007 (37 % not satisfied). Only 3 % and 4 % of the respondents participated in PTD and Aquaculture training, respectively. In 2009 in Hoa Binh amount of activities increased considerably with 49%, 46%, 17% and 14% of HH participating in crop, animal husbandry training, forestry training and demonstration sites, respectively.

In 2007 61 % of the respondents in the Cao Bang survey stated to have participated in crop cultivation training, 38 % in animal husbandry training, 21 % in demonstration sites/models and 17 % in forestry training. For PTD and Aquaculture training only 4 and 6 % of respondents in Cao Bang participated. In 2009 in Cao Bang amount of activities decreased, but with still considerably high with 51%, 42% and 10% and only 6% in forestry training of HH participating in crop, animal husbandry training and demonstration sites.

There was no significant difference regarding degree of participation between poor and non-poor HH in Hoa Binh in 2007. However in 2009 the share of HH participating in the various extension activities was smaller for the group of poor HH compared to the non-poor group; hence poor households benefited to a lesser degree from the increase in activities. In Cao Bang in 2007 slightly more poor households were involved in crop and forestry training courses, and slightly more non-poor HH participated in demonstration sites, animal husbandry and aquaculture training; in 2009 these differences diminished.

○ Quality of the extension activities

The quality of the extension activities was regarded as rather good in both Provinces, by both wealth groups, and did not change significantly over the years. Between 95 – 100 % of the households responded that the training contents and the timing were suitable and the new knowledge easy to grasp. There was an increase in the applicability of the new learnt technologies in Cao Bang from 77% to 85%. In Hoa Binh Province 96% of the respondents in 2007 and 98% in 2009, respectively, found the new technologies applicable (see **Figure 7**).



**Figure 7: Applicability of new technologies by households in each Province in 2007 and 2009 (% of HH)**

Distribution of training documents seemed to have increased in 2009 with 49% of HH in Cao Bang and 60% in Hoa Binh stating to have received simple training documents, such as leaflets or flyers compared to only 38% and 41%, respectively, in 2007.

○ Input Supply

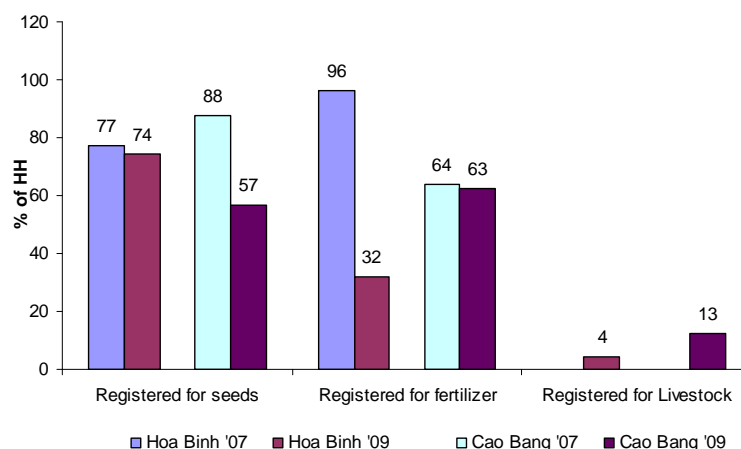
One important service not directly executed by the extension service, but often supported by extension staff (beneficiary lists, linking with the input supply companies, organization of transport and distribution) is the delivery of crucial inputs for agricultural production, such as seeds and fertilizer or livestock (breeds)<sup>7</sup>.

There was a distinct decrease in registration for free inputs with regards to seeds in Cao Bang with 88% of the HH registering for seeds in 2007 and only 57% in 2009 (see **Figure 8**). Similarly, in Hoa Binh province the registration for free fertilizer reduced from 96% in 2007 to only 32% in 2009. Registration for new livestock breeds was minimal with 4% in Hoa Binh and 13% in Cao Bang (only assessed for 2009). Most of the HH stated that supply of requested inputs was in time.

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<sup>7</sup> According to the information from provincial and district extension service this usually is only done for subsidized inputs.





**Figure 8: Registration and supply of free inputs in each Province in 2007 and 2009 (% of HH)**

While in 2007 poor households seemed to have less access to free inputs than non-poor households, this picture was reversed in 2009 (see Table 5).

**Table 5: Input Supply in each Province for poor and non-poor households, 2007 & 2009 (% of HH)**

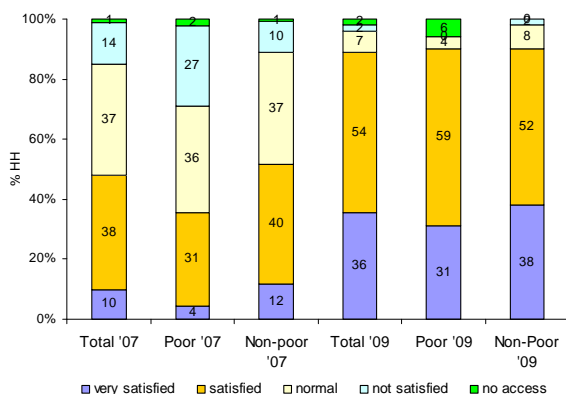
	2007		2009	
	Poor	Non-Poor	Poor	Non-Poor
<b>Cao Bang</b>				
Registered for seeds	83	91	66	48
Registered for fertilizer	57	70	73	54
Registered for livestock			21	6
<b>Hoa Binh</b>				
Registered for seeds	73	78	77	73
Registered for fertilizer	100	95	58	23
Registered for livestock			7	3

### 3.1.2. Veterinary Service

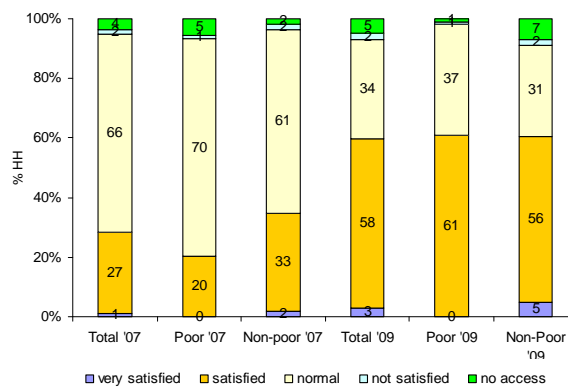
Figure 9 shows the access and degree of satisfaction with the veterinary services in the two Provinces, segregated by poor and non-poor HH and the change of perception regarding this service in the last two years. The trend in both Provinces was amazing with nearly a doubling of the share of HH giving a generally positive response.

In Hoa Binh Province households that were satisfied or very satisfied with the services increased from 48% in 2007 to a remarkable 90% in 2009. The difference in perception between poor and non-poor HH was somewhat leveled, but still more non-poor (38%) than poor HH (31%) were very satisfied. The share of not at all satisfied HH also decreased from on average 14% to a mere 2%. However access to the service for poor HH reduced slightly with 6% of poor HH stating not having used this service in 2009 as opposed to only 2% in 2007.

The main reasons for dissatisfaction of farmers in Hoa Binh Province in 2007 were insufficient technical skills of the veterinary staff (54 %), lack of enthusiasm (31 %) and geographical distance to the veterinary station.



### Hoa Binh Province



### Cao Bang Province

**Figure 9: Satisfaction with Veterinary Services in each Province in 2007 and 2009 (% of HH)**

In Cao Bang Province the level of satisfaction showed a similar trend with an increase of satisfied and very satisfied HH from 28% in 2007 to 61% in 2009. Also here the difference between non-poor and poor HH noticed in 2007 (35% of the non-poor HH very/satisfied compared to 20% poor HH) basically disappeared in 2009. Only 2% of the HH said they were not satisfied.

To provide a better analysis of the veterinary service farmers were asked more specifically about the vaccination service, responsiveness and skills of veterinary staff.

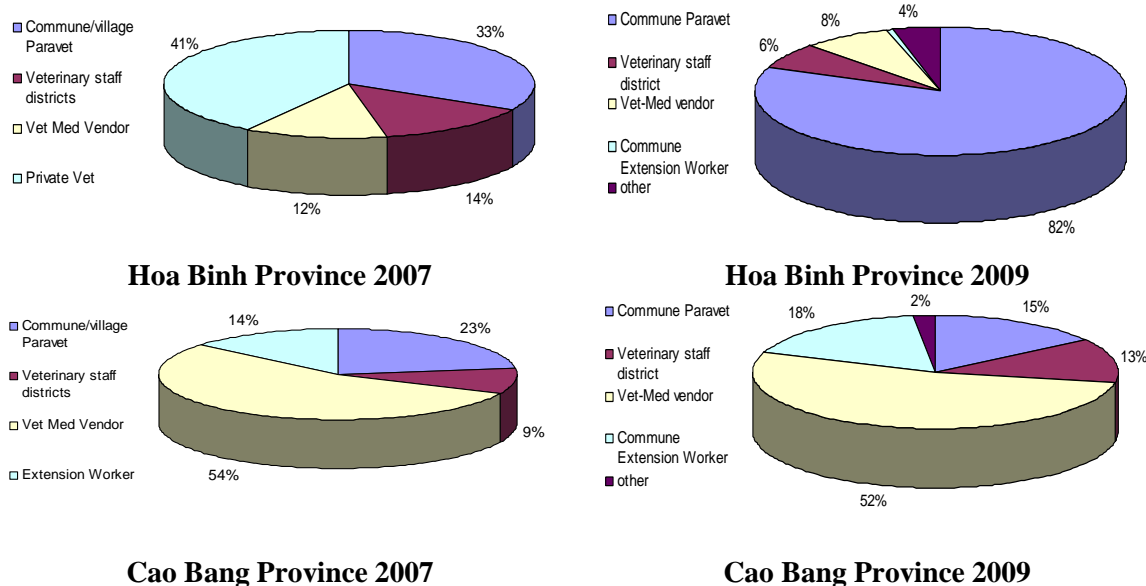
#### o Resource person for veterinary issues

The survey revealed that farmers do not only use government staff or agencies for getting advice related to their animals or veterinary services, but they use different actors. **Figure 10** shows to which extend the various service providers are used. The resource persons who were consulted in case an animal falls ill varied considerably between the two Provinces.

In Hoa Binh Province private veterinarians ranked as the main resource person in 2007 with 41 % of the responses, followed by commune staff with 33 %. District Veterinary staff was only mention in 14% of the cases, only little more than the person who sells veterinary medicine with 12 %. There was a tremendous shift in 2009 resulting in the Commune Paravet as the main resource person, with 82% of the responses.

It is important to know that in 2007 actually there was no veterinary staff established at commune level in either Province. But in selected districts of both Provinces village paravets had been trained and assigned for villages or village clusters through international support projects (JVC in Hoa Binh, EU-CBBKRD-Phase I); while those were not official commune veterinarian those were usually considered by farmers as commune or village Paravets. In 2008 a new policy came into place which allowed the Provinces to establish Commune Paravets. As the minimum qualification these veterinarians have to have graduated from a Secondary School. They receive training, are on the payroll of the Veterinary Sub-departments and entitled to an allowance according to GoV payment policies similar to the one of Commune

Extension Workers. The question in Hoa Binh Province is if the sudden rise in presence of the Commune Paravet in 2009 drew on the resource of private veterinarians in 2007.

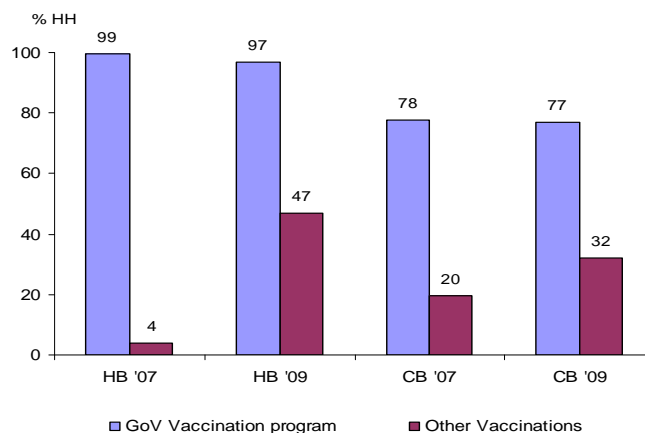


**Figure 10: Resource persons regarding veterinary issues in each Province, 2007 & 2009**

In Cao Bang Province, more than half of the responses, 54 % in 2007 and 52% in 2009, mentioned the person selling veterinary medicine as resource person, followed by the commune paravet with 23 % and 15%, respectively. It has to be understood that the commune paravet or the district veterinarian is the very person selling the vet drugs. The number of households consulting the extension worker increased from 14 % of the respondents in 2007 to 18% in 2009, and those calling the district staff from 9% to 13%, respectively. The establishment of commune paravets in Cao Bang is much slower and hence not the same shift to commune paravets as key resource person could be observed as in Hoa Binh. One reason is that there is a lack of choice for qualified veterinarians; another is the lack of funding, since the Province cannot contribute the 2/3 to the allowance payment as requested by the national government.

o Participation in Vaccination programs

As can be seen in **Figure 11** the participation in fully subsidized government vaccination campaigns (Foot-and Mouth Disease and Avian Influenza) in Cao Bang was with 78% in 2007 and 77% in 2009, respectively, lower than in Hoa Binh with 99% and 97% of the responding households.

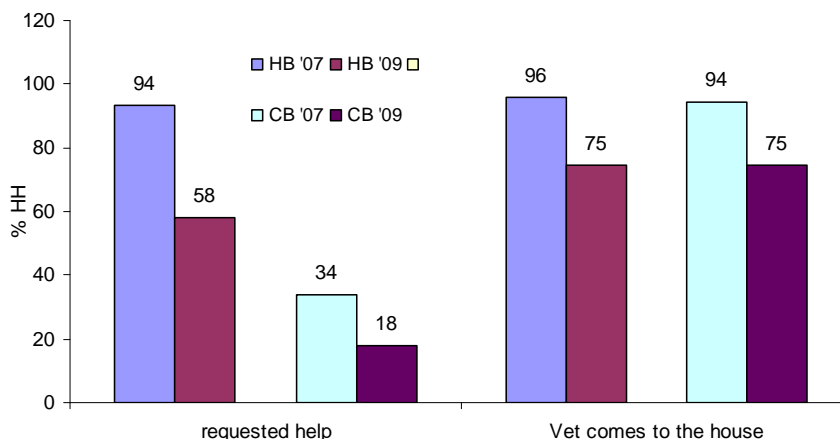


**Figure 11: Participation in vaccination in each Province, 2007 and 2009 (% of HH)**

However, in both Provinces a distinct increase could be observed for vaccinations against other diseases. In Hoa Binh Province in 2009 47% of HH stated to vaccinate against various diseases (outside the GoV funded programs) in contrast to only 4% in 2007. In Cao Bang Province the share of HH ready to pay for additional vaccination increased from 20% in 2007 to 32% in 2009. This indicates an increased awareness of the risks of animal diseases, a preparedness to pay for extra services, but also more trust in the quality of the vaccination provided.

o Responsiveness of Veterinary staff and success of treatment

The responsiveness of the veterinary service was measured through the preparedness by the veterinarian to visit the farm on request to attend sick animals. As can be seen in **Figure 12** in Hoa Binh the share of households requesting help from the veterinarian reduced from 94% in 2007 to 58% in 2009. Also in Cao Bang the farmers requested veterinarians less to come to their farms, with 34% in 2007 and only 18% in 2009.

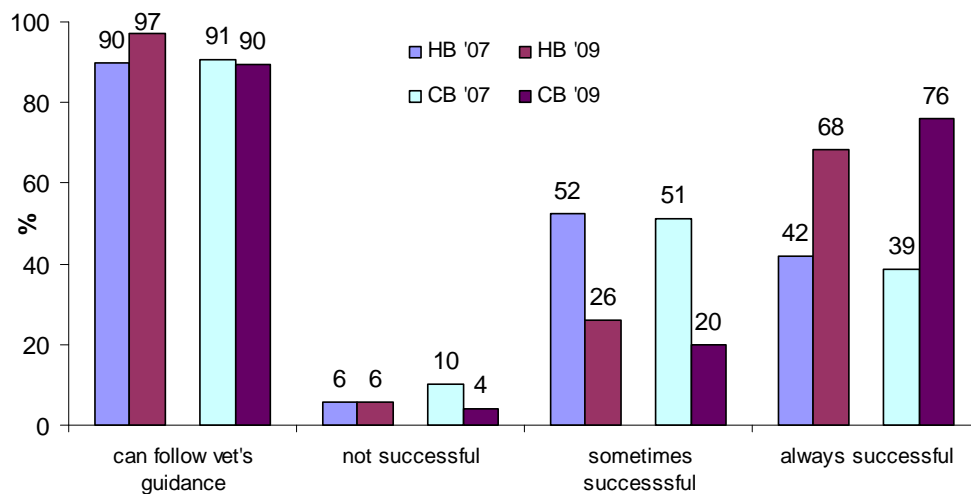


**Figure 12: Responsiveness of Veterinary staff in each Province, 2007 & 2009 (% of HH)**

The data in **Figure 12** suggest that the resource person were less responsive coming to the house to personally treat sick animals in only 75% of the cases in 2009 in contrast to more than 90% in 2007 (figures were the same for both Provinces). This data has to be taken with

caution. Since the majority of farmers mention a variety of people as resource person for livestock diseases, the percentage figures in the graph in **Figure 12** may reflect the actual person asked for assistance, which is not necessarily the government veterinary staff, hence not the public service provider.

According to the interviews, in both Provinces and survey years, the majority of households stated that they can follow the guidance given by the Veterinarian (see **Figure 13**). However in 2007 only 42 % of the respondents in HB and 39 % in CB stated that the treated animal always recovered and some 50 % of the respondents in both Provinces stated that the treatment of their animals was only sometimes successful; in 2009 the situation has improved with 68% of respondents in Hoa Binh and 76% in Cao Bang noticing that the treatment of their animals was always successful.

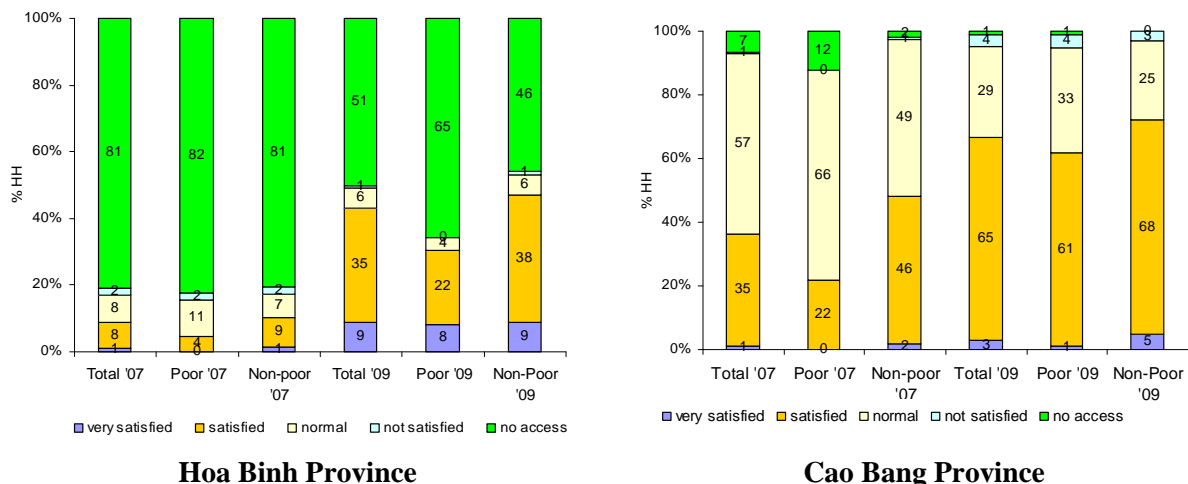


**Figure 13: Quality of Veterinary work in each Province, 2007 & 2009 (% of HH)**

The treatment of their animals was not successful according to 6% of the respondents in Hoa Binh in 2007 and 10% in Cao Bang, respectively. In 2009 this number was reduced to 4% at least for Cao Bang Province.

### 3.1.3. Plant Protection Service

The access to and general perception of the plant protection services, segregated by poor and non-poor HH, can be seen in **Figure 14**. As already mentioned above in Hoa Binh Province the percentage of households having used the Plant Protection Service in 2007 was with 20% extremely low and data on satisfaction is hence less representative. Within the last two years the share of HH using this service has increased to more than 50%. In 2009 44% of the total number of HH stated to be satisfied or very satisfied with the service, which accounts for 86% of the HH with access to PP services. While the general satisfaction of non-poor HH seemed higher than that of poor HH when based on the total sample of 200 HH, based on the number of HH with access the difference between poor and non-poor HH can be neglected.



**Figure 14: Satisfaction with Plant Protection Services in each Province, 2007 & 2009 (% of HH)**

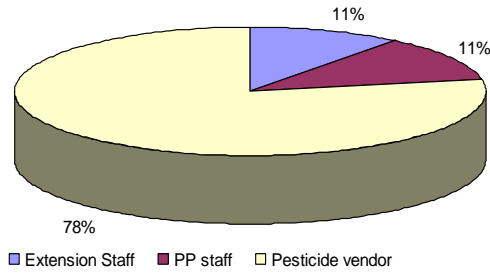
In Cao Bang Province 92% of the HH used PP services in 2007, and even 97% in 2009. The share of satisfied and very satisfied farmers nearly doubled from 36% in 2007 to 68% in 2009. While in 2007 with 20% generally less poor HH were very/satisfied with the service as compared to the non-poor HH with 48%, this difference was diminished in 2009 with 63% of the poor HH and 73% of the non-poor HH, respectively, satisfied or very satisfied.

Specific aspects of the Plant Protection Service regarding resource persons, responsiveness, activities, and their quality can be seen in the following paragraphs.

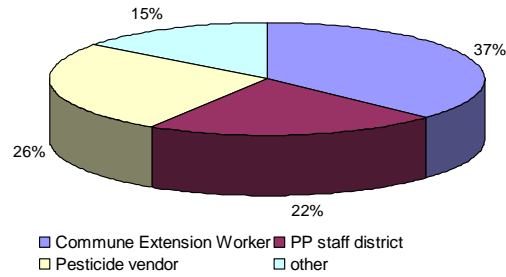
o Main resource person regarding plant protection

Main resource person regarding PP services for farmers in Hoa Binh Province was in 2007 with 78 % the sales person for Plant Protection medicine/pesticides (see **Figure 15**). Extension Workers and district PP staff were equally consulted by only 11% of the farmers. In 2009 the figures changed tremendously with the extension worker becoming the most important resource person for 37% of the HH, followed by the pesticide vendor with 26% and the PP staff with 22%. Some 15% of the HH mentioned other resource persons. Based on the available data it cannot be explained what caused this shift from private vendors to extension workers and PP staff at district level as main resource persons for farmers in Hoa Binh. Since pesticides are also often sold by PP or extension staff it is likely that farmers did not clearly distinguish between the two categories.

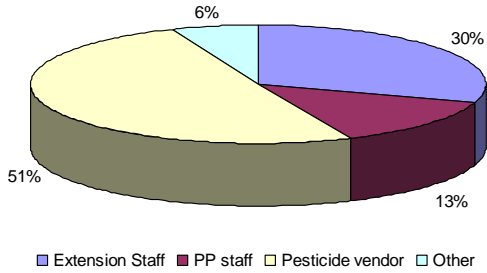
Also in Cao Bang Province the sales person for pesticides was with 51 % the most important resource person in 2007, followed by the extension staff with 30 % and the Plant Protection staff with only 13 %. The picture was still similar in 2009; however the pesticide vendor with 57% gained even more importance as the main resource person, while district PP staff was asked for advice in only 10% of the cases.



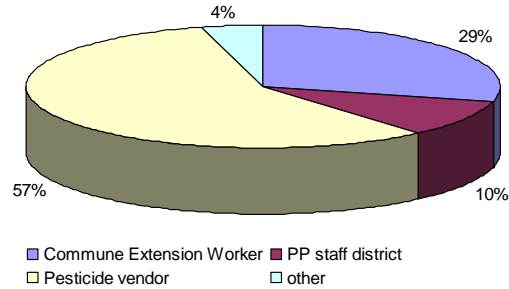
**Hoa Binh Province 2007**



**Hoa Binh Province 2009**



**Cao Bang Province 2007**

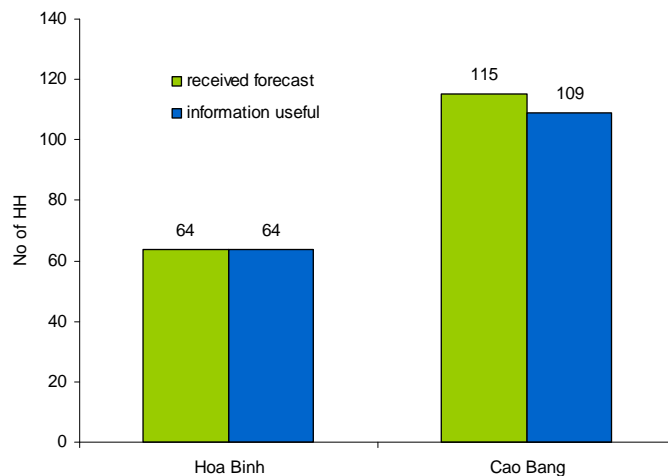


**Cao Bang Province 2009**

**Figure 15: Resource Persons for farmers regarding Plant Protection in each Province, 2007 & 2009**

o Pest and Disease forecast

One of the most important tasks of the Plant Protection service is to provide forecasts on the spread of pest and diseases in crops; surveys are done on a regular basis and the forecast information including recommendations to limit the damage is reportedly disseminated to communes. The question was if forecasts actually reach the farmers and if the information provided is useful.

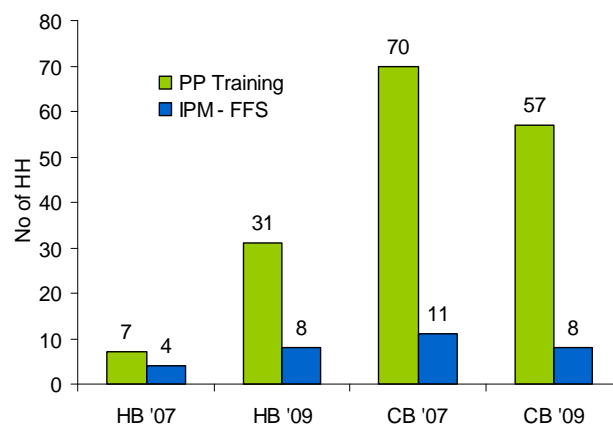


**Figure 16: Pest forecast and value of this information in each Province in 2009**

According to the data displayed in **Figure 16** in Hoa Binh only 64 out of the households interviewed stated that they had received the report of which all found the information useful. In Cao Bang the number of HH receiving pest forecast was with 115 much higher, accounting for more than half of the sample, with 95% of them finding the information useful.

o Participation in training courses and training quality

Other activities of the Plant Protection Service directly targeting farmers are technical training courses, such as one-day Plant Protection courses and Farmers' Field Schools (FFS) / Integrated Pest Management (IPM). **Figure 17** displays the number of households that stated to have participated in such training activities during the previous year. Since the reference base – the number of HH with access to this service – differed so much between the Provinces and the years, it was decided to use the number of HH rather than percentage.



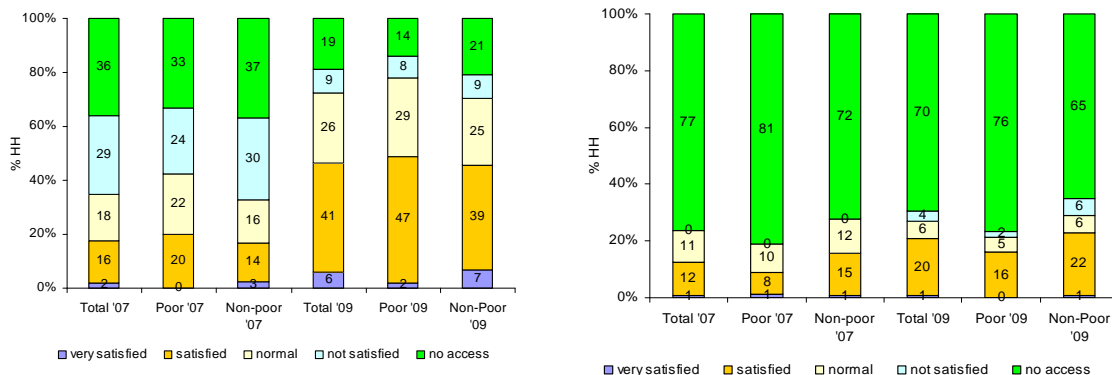
**Figure 17: Participation in Plant Protection training in each Province, 2007 & 2009 (no of HH)**

In 2007 only 7 and 4 HH participated in PP training or FFS/IPM in Hoa Binh Province. The number of participating HH in PP courses increased in 2009 at least to 31, that of FFS/IPM to 8. In Cao Bang the participation in PP training courses was with 70 HH in 2007 and 57 HH in 2009 much higher. Only 11 and 8 HH participated in FFS/IPM courses in 2007 and 2009, respectively. In 2009 some 87% of the participating HH in Hoa Binh Province stated that the topic of the training courses were suitable, the contents easy to grasp, that the training took place in the right season and the techniques were applicable on their farm. In Cao Bang Province this figure was with 92% even higher.

### 3.1.4. Irrigation Management

The access to and the general perception of irrigation management services in both Provinces, segregated by poor and non-poor HH, can be seen in **Figure 18**.





**Hoa Binh Province**

**Cao Bang Province**

**Figure 18: Satisfaction with Irrigation Management Service in each Province, 2007 & 2009 (% of HH)**

Access in Hoa Binh seemed to have improved with only 19% of the HH not having access in 2009 in contrast to 36% in 2007. In the last two years the satisfaction with this service has increased from a mere 18% to 47%. Share of HH not satisfied with the service has reduced from 29% to only 9%; the differences between poor and non poor HH can be neglected. The main reason for dissatisfaction with irrigation management in Hoa Binh Province in 2007 was the frequent damages of the irrigation schemes resulting in insufficient water supply.

In Cao Bang Province the access to irrigation management service was very limited with only 23% of the HH using irrigation management service in 2007, and only a slight increase to 30% in 2009. The share of HH who were satisfied and very satisfied with irrigation management service increased from 13% in 2007 to 21% in 2009; this accounts for 57% of the actual service users in 2007 and 68% in 2009. But also the share of not satisfied HH increased to 4%, accounting for 13% of all service users.

In the following the different aspects of the irrigation management as perceived by the farmers were analyzed.

o Irrigated land under government scheme and Water User Groups

The number of HH with access to the Irrigation Service is basically the number of HH owning land under an irrigation scheme built by the Government of Vietnam. The figures in **Table 6** displays the changes in the number of HH from 2007 to 2009 and the share of HH being a member of a Water User Group (WUG). While in 2007 in Hoa Binh nearly all HH stated to be member of a Water User Group (WUG), there seemed to be none in 2009; according to the interviews there were no WUG established at village level. So far there is no explanation for this sudden “disappearance” of WUG in Hoa Binh Province. There maybe different understanding of the term WUG, since informal village systems seem to be in place to manage irrigation locally (see also Responsibility for irrigation management below).

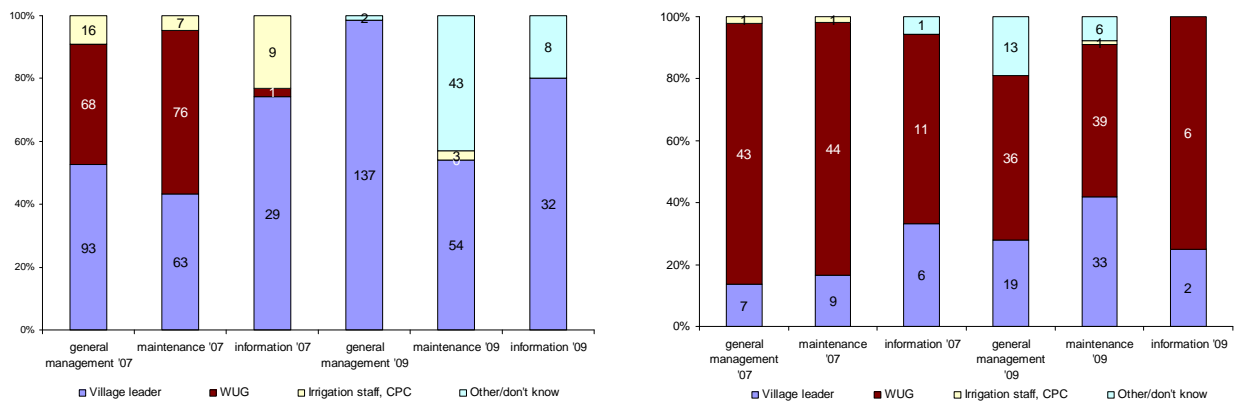
**Table 6: Households with land under GoV irrigation scheme and membership in Water User Groups (WUG) in each Province in 2007 & 2009**

Province	Hoa Binh		Cao Bang	
	2007	2009	2007	2009
Land under GoV irrigation scheme	128	162	47	60
Member of the WUG no of HH	127	0	38	34
Member of the WUG %	99	0	81	57

In Cao Bang Province the share of HH being member of a WUG also decreased from 81% to only 57%. There is also no explanation for this decrease.

o Responsibility for irrigation management

It was important to understand who farmers perceive as responsible for irrigation management. It could be noticed that there were distinct differences in the perception of responsibilities for irrigation management, depending on the specific tasks such as general management, maintenance & repair, information on irrigation schedule etc. The answers have been summarized in **Figure 19**.



**Hoa Binh Province**

**Cao Bang Province**

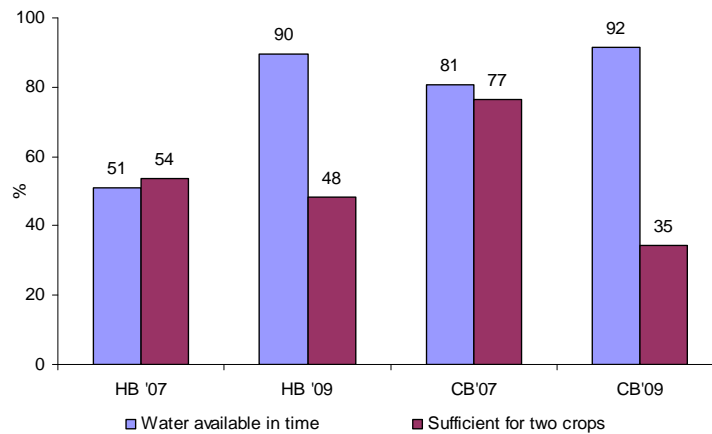
**Figure 19: Responsibilities for general irrigation management, scheme maintenance and information on irrigation schedule according to farmers in each Province, 2007 & 2009 (figure in columns: No of HH)**

In Hoa Binh the main person responsible for the general management and information on irrigation schedule was the village leader mentioned by more than 50% of the respondents; in 2007 also WUG played an important role (mentioned by about 40% of the HH) particularly regarding maintenance, but also in general management. In 2009 the role of the village leader became even more eminent, mentioned as main responsible for the general management by nearly all HH. With regards to maintenance ‘other’ actors comprised the villagers themselves, the village management board or the person selected by the village to be responsible for irrigation. This gives the impression that by 2009 villagers actually had to some extent established their own informal system of irrigation management.

In Cao Bang Province in 2007 according to more the majority of the respondents WUGs carried the main responsibility for general management (83%), maintenance (81%) and information dissemination (70%). In 2009 the role of the village leader gained importance (some 25% to nearly 40% of the responses). Surprisingly a larger proportion of households in 2009 was unaware of who was responsible for the general management. In Cao Bang only few households received information on the irrigation schedule. It is likely that in Cao Bang many irrigation schemes in the uplands are very simple, still mainly depending on seasonal rainfalls and without controlled influx of water by a pumping station. Hence there is not such a thing as an irrigation schedule.

○ Quality of schemes and irrigation management

In Hoa Binh Province the share of HH with land under irrigation scheme stating that water was provided in time increased from 50% in 2007 to 90% in 2009 (see **Figure 20**); however the share of those stating that water supply was sufficient for a second crop reduced from 54% in 2007 to less than 50% in 2009.

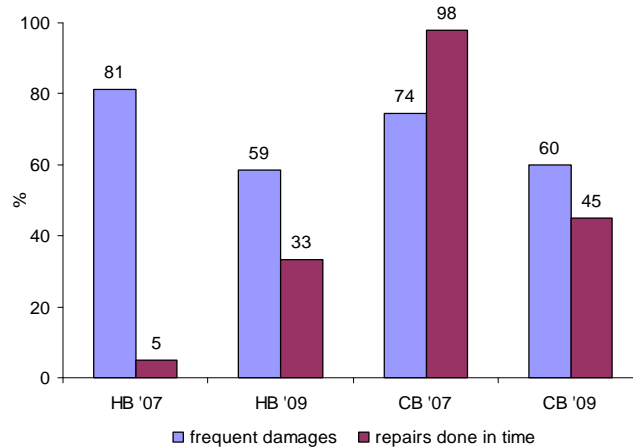


**Figure 20: Quality of the irrigation management (% of HH)**

In Cao Bang water supply is regarded as timely by 81 % and as sufficient by 77 % of the respondents in 2007; while in 2009 timeliness of water supply increased for even 92 % of the HH, only 35% stated that the water supply was sufficient for a second crop.

The amount of water available is depending on the quality of the scheme and the management, but also on the water source. It needs to be acknowledged that irrigation schemes in the upland villages of Cao Bang mainly serve to make better use of seasonal rainfalls by avoiding drainage through earthen canals and uncontrolled off-flow; there is hardly a permanent water source that would provide water beyond the rainy season to allow for a second crop.

A picture of the quality of schemes and scheme maintenance is given in **Figure 21**. Damages to the irrigation scheme seemed to have reduced from 81 % of households in Hoa Binh Province observing frequent damages in 2007 to 59% in 2009. While in 2007 repairs were only timely according to 5% of the farmers, this increased to 33%. Also in Cao Bang Province the percentage of farmers observing frequent damages of the scheme reduced from 74 % in 2007 to 60% in 2009. Unfortunately also the percentage of farmers stating that repairs were done in time reduced from nearly 100% in 2007 to only 45% in 2009.



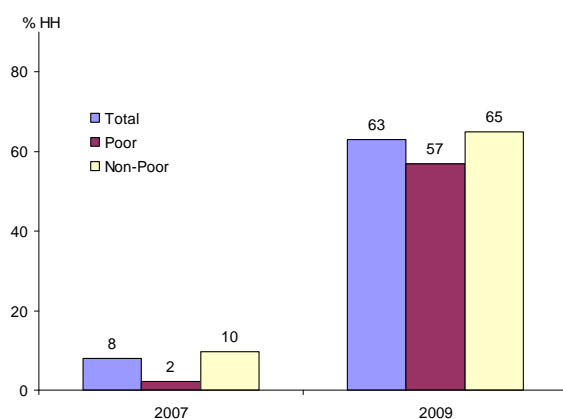
*Figure 21: Quality and maintenance of irrigation schemes as perceived by the farmers (% of HH)*

### **3.2. Satisfaction with Commune Planning and Budgeting**

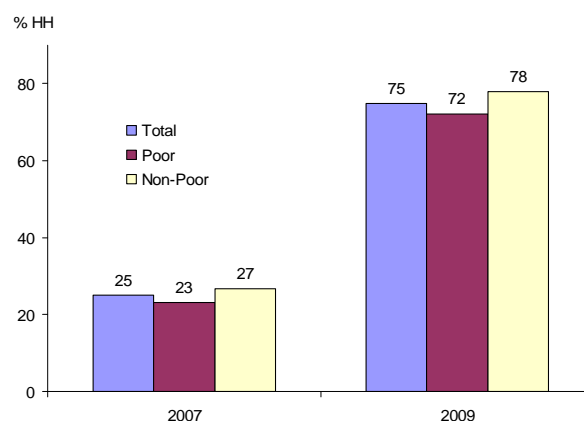
The newly introduced participatory Socio-economic Development Planning (SEDP) procedures should help assessing farmers' demand and provide information to service providers allowing them to be more responsive to citizens' needs. At the same time PS-ARD allocated Commune Development Funds (CDF) to each of the 103 communes in the program area for the implementation of prioritized projects in their SEDPs. This would also give Communes People's Committees the means to practice sound financial management and improve transparency through publicized commune budgets. In the following the effectiveness of this intervention with regards to participation and transparency was assessed.

#### o Participation in local planning

Public participation in commune SEDP has significantly increased over the last two years in both Provinces (see **Figure 22**). In 2009, in Hoa Binh Province 63% of the interviewed HH stated to have participated in meetings for the development of the commune SEDP, up from only 8% in 2007.



**Hoa Binh Province**



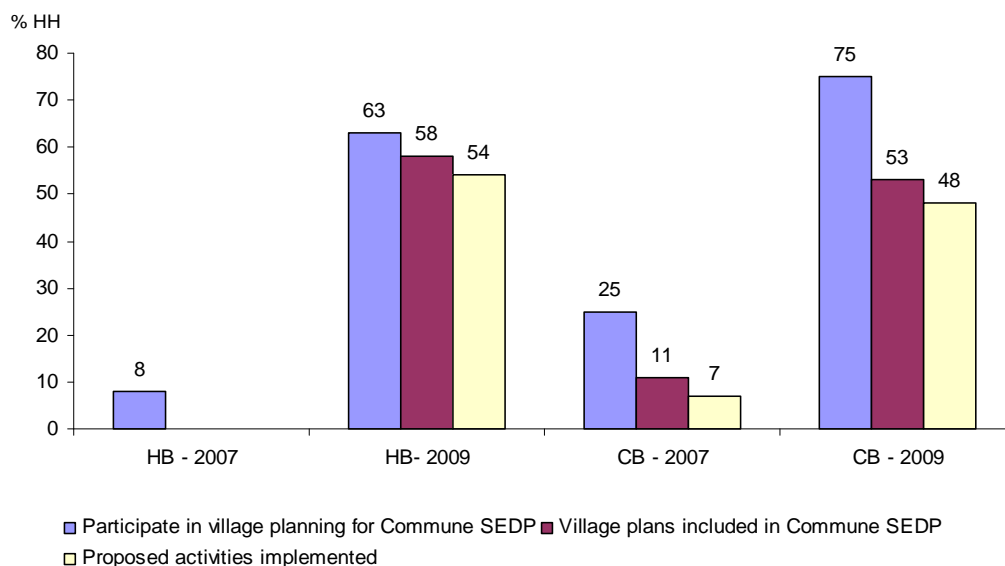
**Cao Bang Province**

**Figure 22: People's participation in local planning (commune SEDP) in 2007 & 2009**

In Cao Bang Province the share of HH participating in commune SEDP has tripled from 25% in 2007 to 75% in 2009. Participatory SEDP at commune level had only been introduced to the project communes in 2008. Since before that the commune level had no instruction to involve the public in the planning process<sup>8</sup>, the figures given for 2007 are somewhat questionable. It is likely that those households that stated participation in planning meetings in 2007, most probably confused the SED Planning with others, such as meetings to collect production data etc. which were mentioned as the main content of the planning meetings in 2007. Also two of the surveyed communes in Nguyen Binh already experienced the first pilot phase for the new SEDP procedure with the Helvetas supported CB-GEM project, which could also explain the seemingly higher participation in SEDP in Cao Bang in 2007. Only slightly less of the poor than of the non-poor HH participated in the planning in both Provinces across the survey years.

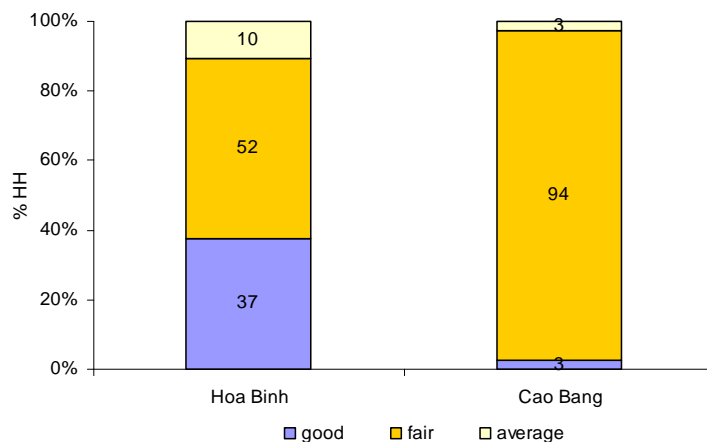
Mostly households participated in the village level meetings to assess farmers' needs. It was important to see if activities were actually integrated in the commune SEDP, and finally if they were implemented. The results of the household interviews can be seen in **Figure 23**.

<sup>8</sup> Nong Thi Ha, *Participation of Local People in Socio-Economic Development Planning at Communal Level*, The Graduate Institute Geneva, 2008



**Figure 23: Effectiveness of public participation in local SEDP**

In HB in 2009 the majority of HH participating in planning at village level find their village proposals integrated in the commune SEDP, and most of them saw them implemented, accounting for 54% of the interviewed HH. (2007 data was not available due to the low participation in planning meetings itself). The difference between poor and non-poor HH in these aspects was only marginal. In Cao Bang, with no significant difference between poor and non-poor HH, the share of HH finding that village plans are reflected in the commune SEDP increased from only 11% in 2007 to 53% in 2009; HH observing that their village proposals were implemented accounted for nearly half of the sample in 2009 in contrast to only 7% in 2007.



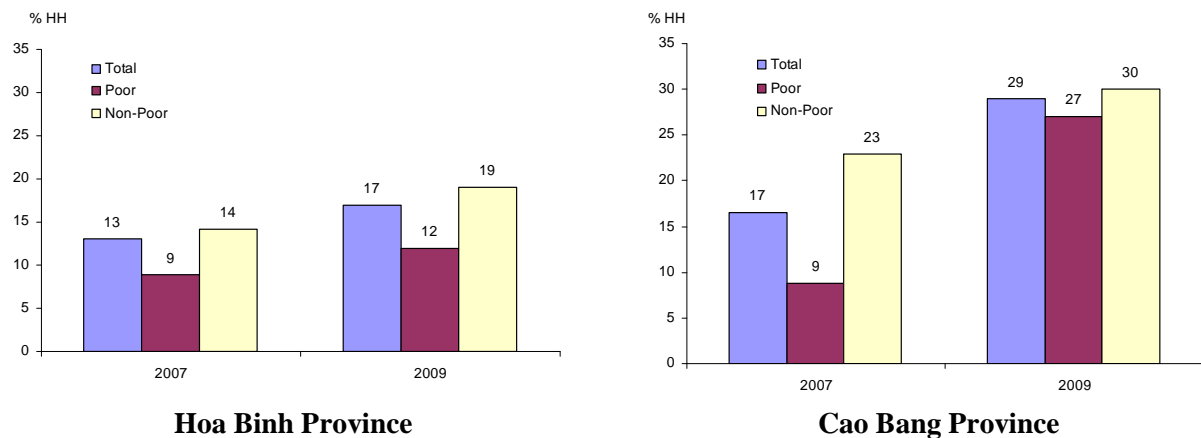
**Figure 24: General appreciation of the new SEDP procedures (2009)**

As a matter of fact the newly introduced SEDP procedures can be regarded as successful, ensuring participation and respecting the demand of the people; they were largely rated as good or as fair by 90% of the interviewed HH. In HB appreciation of the new local planning was

even higher with 37% of the respondents regarding the new procedures as good while CB most HH thought the procedures were at least fair (see **Figure 24**).

○ Transparency of commune finances

To ensure transparency the state budget law stipulates that commune budgets and expenditures have to be open to the public. This was confirmed in the Commune Financial Management Guidelines developed with programme support. In addition, transparency of the use of funds was an important condition for the disbursement of PS-ARD Commune Development Funds which may have contributed to a more transparent financial management. Share of households informed about commune budgets can be seen in **Figure 25**.



**Figure 25: Public Information of the commune budget in 2007 & 2009**

In Hoa Binh a slight improvement could be observed regarding the transparent use of commune funds with 13% of the HH informed in 2007 and 17% in 2009, respectively; the group of poor HH was in both survey years less informed than non-poor HH. In Cao Bang the share of informed HH increased from 17% in 2007 to at least 29% in 2009, whereby the difference between poor and non-poor HH was diminished. In general agreement with the use of funds of the HH who are informed about the budget was with 85% in Hoa Binh and 98% in Cao Bang quite high (2009 data only).

A valid question is if this increased transparency might be mainly the result of the programme’s CDF, since otherwise communes have – apart from operational or regular budget - little funding sources worthwhile publicizing, or they are managed by higher level authorities and not known in the communes.

### 3.3. Social inclusiveness regarding access, participation and satisfaction

It is commonly believed that service providers in the ARD sector are operating more successfully with lowland than with upland farmers. The following chapter gives particular attention to how the services are received by different ethnic groups, representing upland and lowland dwelling farmers. Furthermore the importance of women in agriculture and rural development has long been acknowledged and where appropriate the survey investigated the participation of women in specific activities.

#### 3.3.1. Service Provision depending on Ethnicity

While in Hoa Binh Province all households interviewed belonged to the Muong ethnic people the sample in Cao Bang was much more diverse reflecting the ethnic composition of the local population. It was of interest to find out if there were differences in the service provision between the ethnic groups predominantly farming in lowlands, the Tay and Nung (accounting for 116 HH in the sample), and the classic upland dwelling groups of the Dao and Hmong (accounting for 84 HH of the sample), which usually live remoter, are more difficult to access due to the geography, lacking infrastructure (roads), but also a language barrier. It needs to be acknowledged that this segregation is quite a generalization, since also many families of Tay ethnic group are living in remote upland villages. Also, while poverty rate in the Dao-Hmong group is with 50% higher, still a large share of HH (43%) in the Tay-Nung group is also poor.

As can be seen in **Table 7** the differences between the two main groups in terms of access to the four key services in both survey years were only marginal. The biggest difference could be found in the access to irrigation services, which is obvious a result of lack of irrigation schemes in the uplands. This service was even less accessed by the upland group in 2009 compared to 2007.

**Table 7: Access of "upland" and "lowland" ethnic groups to services in Cao Bang Province, 2007 and 2009 (% of HH with access for each group)**

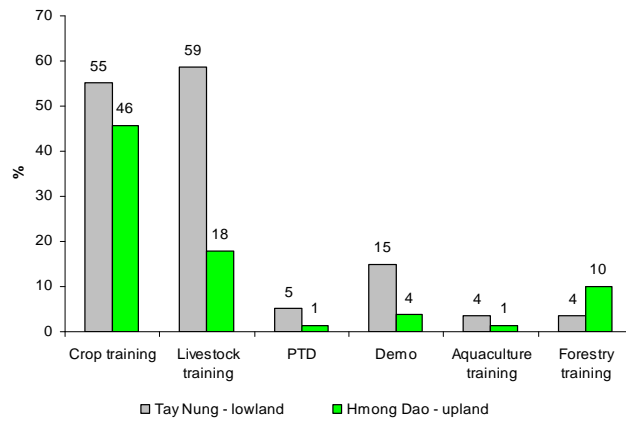
Service	Tày-Nùng		Dao-HMông	
	2007	2009	2007	2009
Extension Service	93	98	93	94
Veterinary Service	97	98	96	92
Plant Protection Service	95	100	92	99
Irrigation	22	42	25	13

The access to the specific extension activities in 2009 was further investigated. As can be seen in **Figure 26** the participation in different training activities or demonstration sites was not equal. In most activities lowland ethnic groups participated to a larger extend compared to the upland ethnic groups.

This was particularly expressed in livestock training, where some 60% of the households in the lowland farming ethnic groups participated but only 18% of the households of the ethnic group of upland farmers. Only in forestry training the share of farmers (10%) from the upland ethnic

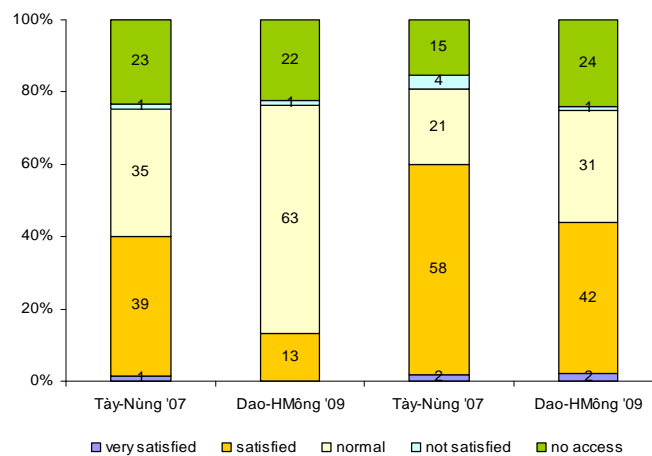


groups was higher than that of the lowland farming groups (4%). Considerable differences between the two groups could also be observed in terms of satisfaction with the key services and the changes in the perception of service delivery quality in the last two years.



**Figure 26: Participation in extension activities by farmers of different ethnic groups, Cao Bang Province 2009**

**Figure 27** summarizes the satisfaction levels across the four key service providers for each group and year. In 2007, about 40% of the Tay-Nung ethnic group stated that they were generally satisfied in contrast to only 13% of the upland groups Dao and Hmong. The satisfaction increased within the last two years in the group of the lowland farmers by a factor of 1.5 to more than 60% of the farmers stating that they were satisfied or very satisfied. While the share of satisfied farmers in the Dao-Hmong group even more than tripled over the last two years, the general satisfaction of upland dwelling ethnic minorities was with on average 44% in 2009 still lower than for the Tay-Nung farmers in the lowland.

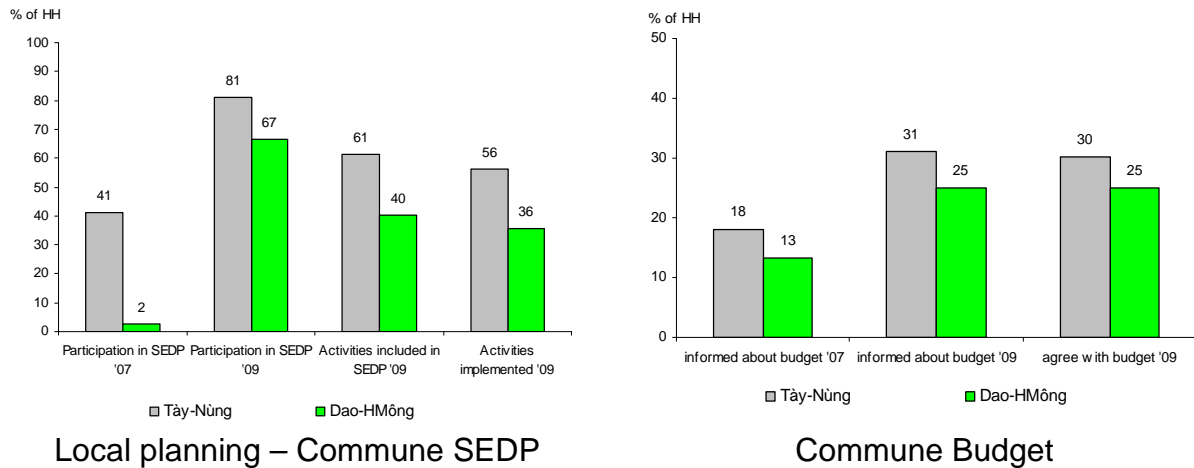


**Figure 27: General satisfaction of "upland" and "lowland" farming ethnic groups with different service providers in Cao Bang Province, 2007 & 2009**

It has to be acknowledged that the majority of public servants in the ARD sector are Tay and Nung people from lowland areas which can explain the different appreciation of service quality between the different ethnic groups. While significant improvement could be noticed over the

last two years the question remains to which extend the standard training and extension messages are adapted to the needs of upland ethnic minorities and take into account the specific requirements of their farming systems and the available resources.

It was also very important to ensure that the new planning procedures would provide equal opportunity in the SEDP process to raise demand and ensure accountability through transparent commune budgets.



**Figure 28: Involvement of "upland" and "lowland" ethnic groups in Cao Bang Province in commune SEDP and commune financial management**

Figure 28 shows that while participation in local planning has significantly increased for both groups the ethnic groups of Dao and Hmong were still not represented in an equal proportion, with 67% of the Dao-Hmong farmers stating that they participated in Commune SEDP, compared to 81% of the Tay-Nung farmers. Upland farmers finding village proposals reflected in the Commune SEDP account for only 40% in contrast to 61% of the lowland farmers. Consequently also the share of HH observing realization of the proposals was with only 36% considerably lower for the Dao-Hmong group compared to 56% of the Tay-Nung.

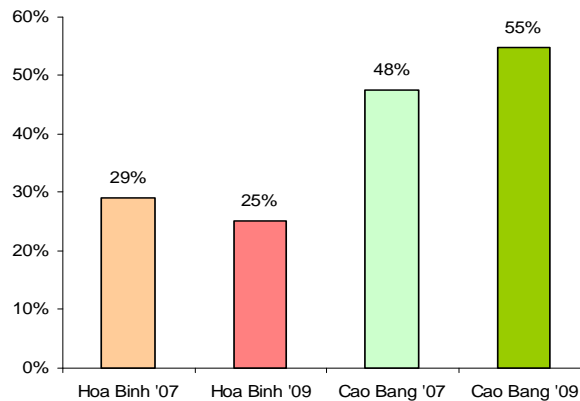
Regarding financial management at commune level it can be said that, while based on the total sample the informed households increased from 17% in 2007 to 30% in 2009 (see page 31), still only a small percentage of rural households are informed about the commune budget. Households belonging to the ethnic group of Tay and Nung are with 31% better informed than those of the Dao-Hmong group with only 25% knowing about the commune budget allocation. Usually most of those households informed about the commune budget agree with the use of funds, accounting for 30% of the Tay-Nung group and 25% of the Dao-Hmong farmer in the total sample.

These results are not surprising considering that according to a survey conducted in Cao Bang Province<sup>9</sup> the majority of commune level positions (87%) is held by Tay and Nung people while other ethnic groups, such as Hmong and Dao are largely underrepresented. It is obvious that overcoming the imbalance in key positions of the government at lowest level will be a fundamental step in promoting equal participation, equal access to information and services as well as influence in decision making process regarding the allocation of public resources.

<sup>9</sup> Report on Findings of the Commune Cadre Title Planning Survey, Department of Home Affairs Cao Bang, 2009

### 3.3.2. Participation of Women

Women constitute about 50% of the rural population and most of them are active farmers, which makes their participation crucial for the success of any development program, international or by the GoV. Across the survey years on average 15% of the interviewed HH in Cao Bang were women headed HH, in Hoa Binh the share of women headed HH was with on average 26% even higher. Women participation was assessed for extension activities, such as training courses and during village meetings to develop the commune SEDP.



*Figure 29: Participation of women in Extension Activities by Province and year*

In **Figure 29** we can see that women participation in extension activities in Hoa Binh seemed to have reduced from 29% in 2007 to only 25% in 2009, reflecting the share of women headed HH. In contrast in Cao Bang province participation in extension activities even increased over the last two years from 48% to 55%.

Equal participation of women during the meetings for local planning to develop the commune SEDP is also requirement of PS-ARD to ensure that their voices are heard, their suggestions taken into the SEDP allowing public service agencies to respond to their specific needs. The meetings for SEDP development take place at village level and usually only one household member is participating. In Hoa Binh Province only 20% of the households who participated stated that the wife attended the planning meeting (only 2009 data available), while in Cao Bang women participation in planning meetings was with 46% high in 2007, slightly reduced in 2009 but with 41% still high.

A considerable share of officials working in the Government of Vietnam at district and province level are women, however at commune level female cadres account for only 25%<sup>10</sup> (usually holding the position as accountants, chairwoman of the Women's Union and other professional positions). Despite this fact women in Cao Bang Province are more engaged in the local planning process (at least during village level meetings) than women in Hoa Binh.

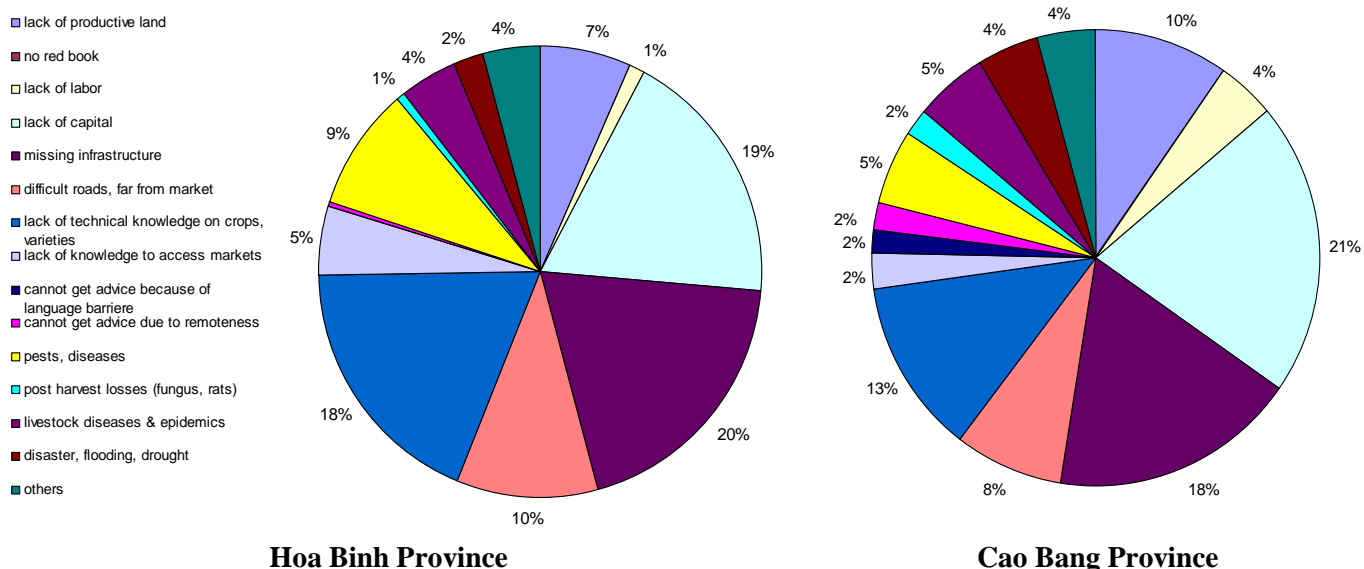
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<sup>10</sup> Report on Findings of the Commune Cadre Title Planning Survey, Department of Home Affairs Cao Bang, 2009

### 3.4. Farmers' constraints and opportunities

#### 3.4.1. Farmers assessment of their biggest constraints

In the survey conducted in 2010 farmers were asked about the five biggest problems they currently are facing. The results are given in Figure 30. It can be seen that the key problems were very similar in the Provinces. The majority of households mentioned missing infrastructure combined with difficult roads and remoteness from market as key problems (30% of responses in HB and 26% in CB), followed by lack of capital (19% of responses in HB and 22% in CB). Also mentioned was the lack of technical knowledge on crops and varieties (19% of responses in HB and 13% in CB).

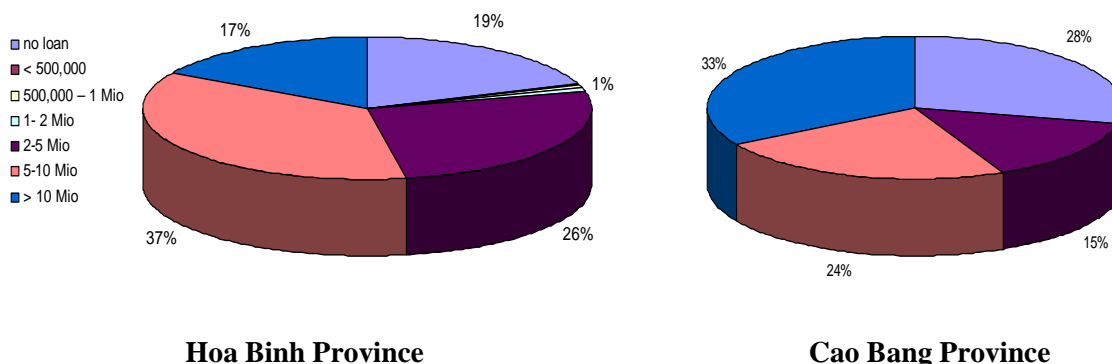


**Figure 30: Main problems according to farmers in each Province in 2009**  
(farmers mentioned the five most important problems)

In CB lack of land accounted for 10% of the problems, while in HB only for 7%, while pest and diseases seemed to cause more problems in HB with 9% compared to 5% in CB, respectively. Livestock diseases accounted for 6% of the problems in CB. Lack of knowledge to access markets, livestock diseases in HB, disasters and difficulty to get advice due to language barrier or remoteness and lack of labor each accounted for 5% or less.

#### 3.4.2. Access and use of credit in the past and credit demand in the future

Since lack of capital seems to be one of the biggest problems it was important to understand the access to credit in the past and the demand for credit in the future. In **Figure 31** shows the amount of credit taken by farmers in each Province. The majority, 37% took a loan of 5-10 Mio VND, followed by 26% of farmers taking 2-5 Mio VND. 17% of the farmers said they had taken more than 10 Mio VND as credit. The majority of farmers in CB, 33% took a loan of more than 10 Mio VND, followed by 24% taking a loan between 5 and 10 Mio VND and only 15% of the respondents took a credit of 2-5 Mio VND. The proportion of poor and of non-poor households obtaining loans was nearly the same in both Provinces.

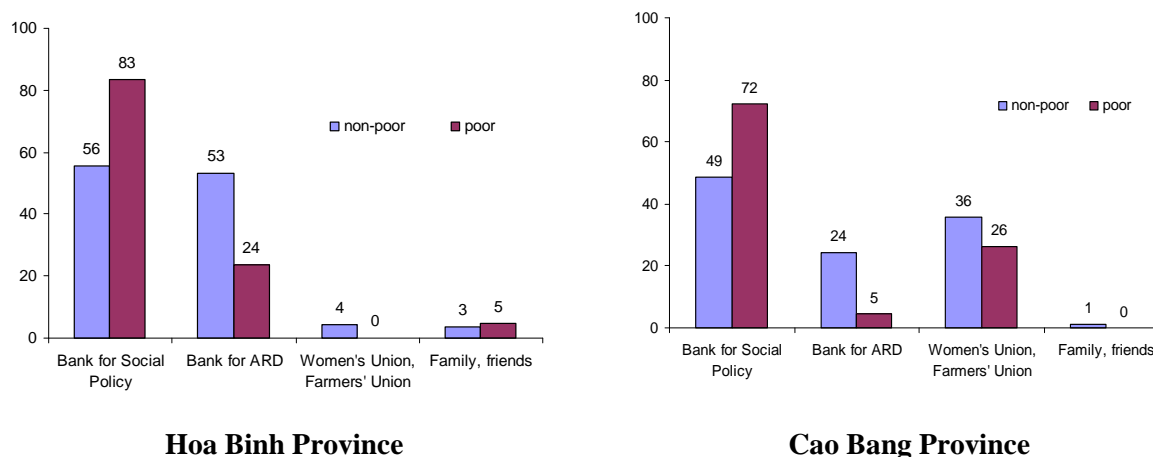


**Figure 31: Loan amount taken by farmers during the last three years**

In Hoa Binh 19% of the HH stated that they had not taken a loan in the last three years, while in Cao Bang this share was even higher with 28% of the interviewed households.

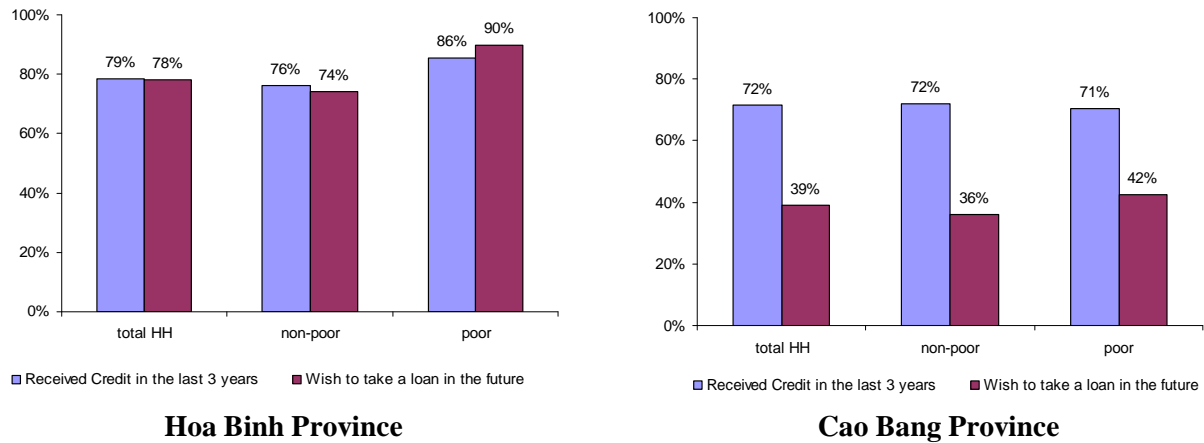
The loans were used for various purposes of which the most frequently mentioned by farmers in Hoa Binh were animal husbandry (> 50%), crop and agricultural production (30%) and agricultural machines (6%). Loans were also used to pay for children’s’ education (8%). In Cao Bang credits had been used to invest in livestock (more than 60%, of which 44% for buffaloes and cattle), to buy agricultural machines or land (each 10%), for house construction (8%) and also for children’s’ education.

Farmers got loans from different sources, among which was the Vietnam Bank for Social Policies - VBSP, the Vietnam Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development – VBARD, Mass organizations, and informal lenders. There was a distinct difference in the sources of loans for poor and non-poor households (see **Figure 32**). In both Provinces the BSP also catered for some 50% of the non-poor households. VB-ARD was also used by more than 50% of the non-poor and 24% of the poor households taking up loans, but in Cao Bang only 24% of the non-poor used their services, and only 5% of the poor. In contrast to Hoa Binh in Cao Bang Province Mass-organizations, like Women’s Union were more important credit purveyors contributing with 36% of the loans for the non-poor and 26% for the poor credit takers.



**Figure 32: Sources for credit in Hoa Binh and Cao Bang Province by poor and non-poor households**

As shown in **Figure 33** in the last three years 79% of the households in Hoa Binh received a loan, with slightly more poor households having accessed credit compared to non-poor HH. About the same amount of households would wish to take another loan in the future, mainly to invest in livestock (>60%), crop production (27%) and in agricultural machines or other (12%). In Cao Bang general access was with 72% slightly lower, with no difference between the poor and non-poor households. However in contrast to Hoa Binh not even 40% of the households would like to take a loan in the future. Those who still have demand for credit would also mainly invest in livestock and construction of stables (> 60%), agricultural production in general, including the purchase of land and agricultural machines (>20%) and the remaining in house construction and children's education.



**Figure 33: Share of farmers taking loan and continued demand for credit**

For the 22% of the surveyed households in Hoa Binh that are not interested in a loan in the future the main reason is no demand for it with 77%, which shows a certain degree of saturation in external capital (see **Table 8**).

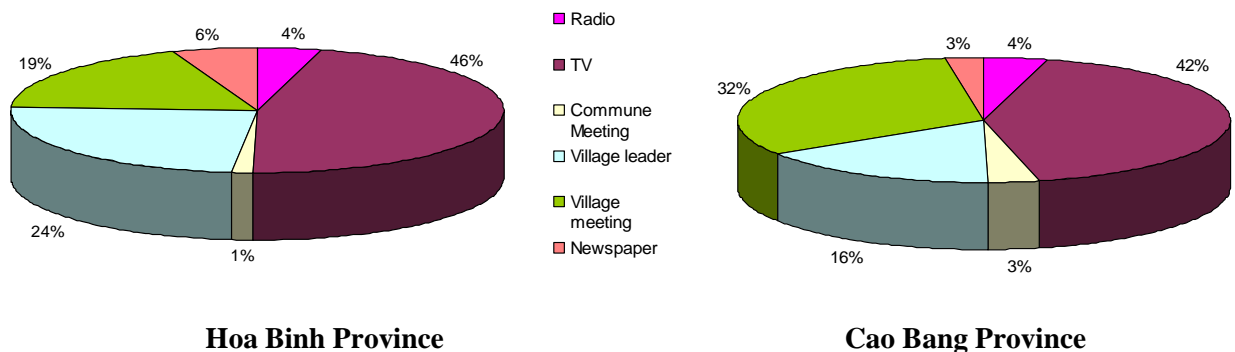
**Table 8: Different reasons for farmers in each Province not to take a loan in the future (%)**

Reasons given	Hoa Binh Province			Cao Bang Province		
	Total HH	non-poor	poor	total HH	non-poor	poor
no demand	77	78	75	20	32	6
afraid not being able to repay	7	8	0	54	42	70
Do not know what to invest in	2	3	0	15	12	19
Other reasons	14	13	25	11	14	6

In Cao Bang Province more than 60% of the households stated that they were not interested in (another) loan. The main reason for this was with 54% the fear of not being able to repay. This was particularly high for the group of the poor households, with 70%. No demand was given as reason by 20% of the households in Cao Bang, followed by the lack of idea what to invest in with 15%.

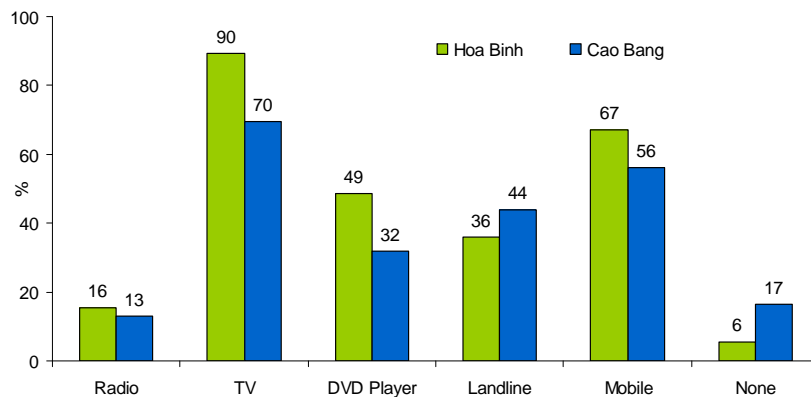
### 3.4.3. Access to information and means of communication

The opportunity to use mass communication in disseminating different kind of information is often neglected by state agencies and also projects. The rapid economic development in Vietnam over the last 10, 20 years may however have changed the accessibility of farmers, particularly the remote ones. Farmers' main ways to receive information and the use of communication equipment has been investigated and results are shown in **Figure 34**. Already more than 40% of the information sources accounts for television. In Hoa Binh this is followed by the village leader with 32% and by village meetings with 19%. Second important source of information for farmers in Cao Bang province are the village meetings with 32%, followed by the village leader. Newspapers and radio play a smaller role in both Provinces with less than with 6%.



**Figure 34: Main means of farmers in the Programme Provinces to get information (2009)**

For any planning of future programs the current availability of communication equipment should be taken into account. According to the survey (see **Figure 35**) 90% of households in Hoa Binh and 70% in Cao Bang own a functioning TV, and 30% (CB) to 50% (HB) a DVD player. This offers opportunities to broadcast technical programs and distribute DVDs with technical topics to be shared within a community. 76 % of households in HB and more than 80% in Cao Bang stated that the preferred time to watch the TV programs was the evening.



**Figure 35: Main communication equipment in households in the Programme Provinces (2009)**

Although telephone lines are not very frequent with only 36% of the HH in CB and 44% in HB stating to have a landline phone, nearly 79% of the HH in Hoa Binh own a mobile phone and 60% in Cao Bang Province, offering a tremendous potential with a view to market price information as already applied in many other developing countries. Radio seemed to be less used in both Provinces with only 13 and 16%. The share of HH not owning any of these items was much higher in Cao Bang with 17% compared to 6% in Hoa Binh Province.

For the future farmers in both Provinces are particularly interested to receive more and regular information, such as agricultural news, weather forecast for agriculture, and technical programs of new technologies, new varieties, animal husbandry and information on innovative successful agricultural models.

### 3.5. SHIFTED below Household Economic Information

#### 3.5.1. Income and sources of income of households in 2007

The information on household economics focuses on the income made by a family in 2007; to have a more comprehensive picture it includes the analysis of the different income sources. This will allow analyzing the reasons for change when the survey is repeated after the end of the programme. For example it will be possible to see, if crop cultivation is more diversified, how much of the crops will be marketed and if other income sectors have developed.

The average monthly per capita income had been calculated as the total annual gross income divided by 12 months and the number of HH members (see **Table 9**). The average monthly per capita income was 533'894 VND in Hoa Binh Province and 421'579 VND in Cao Bang Province. In comparison with the official statistics of the Province the average monthly per capita income in the three districts in Hoa Binh was VND 544'444 (source: PSO Hoa Binh). In Cao Bang official statistics were not available for the individual districts, only for the whole Province, which was at VND 620'687 much higher than for the programme districts.. The average HH income of the as poor registered HH was 260'785 VND in Cao Bang Province and even 347'034 VND in Hoa Binh Province; both figures are higher than the National Poverty line for the that year, which was only 200'000 VND per capita and month for rural areas.

**Table 9: Average income per capita and month**

VND/capita/month	Cao Bang	Hoa Binh
<b>Total</b>	<b>421'579</b>	<b>533'894</b>
Poor Households	260'785	347'034
Non-Poor Households	471'955	541'743

The average number of family members was with 5.0 slightly higher in Hoa Binh than in Cao Bang with 4.8 members per family. The average farm size in Hoa Binh having is with 1.83 ha considerably larger compared to Cao Bang with only 1.04 ha. The farm sizes of poor HH was considerably smaller with only 1.08 ha in Hoa Binh and 0.97 ha in Cao Bang, respectively (see **Table 10**).

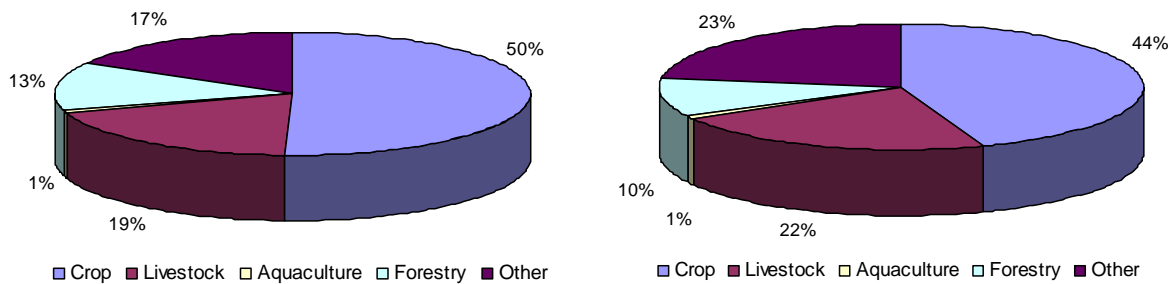


**Table 10: Family and farm sizes in both Provinces**

	No of HH per group	Average number of HH members <sup>*)</sup>	Average farm size (ha)
<b>Cao Bang</b>	<b>198</b>	<b>4.8</b>	<b>1.04</b>
poor	91	4.9	0.97
non-poor	107	4.8	1.09
<b>Hoa Binh</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>5.0</b>	<b>1.83</b>
poor	45	4.6	1.08
non-poor	155	5.0	2.05

\*) above the age of six

As can be seen in **Figure 36** quite as expected the main income for the interviewed households came from agriculture in Cao Bang Province with 50 % from crop cultivation, 20 % from livestock and aquaculture together, and 13 % from forestry, totaling 83 % and in Hoa Binh 44% from crop cultivation, 22% from livestock, 1% from aquaculture and 10% from forestry, totaling 77 %. Hence farmers in Hoa Binh had with 23 % slightly higher income from other income sources than Cao Bang with only 17 %. Other income sources usually comprise providing agricultural services, conducting business and trade, but also subsidies for schooling or health care.

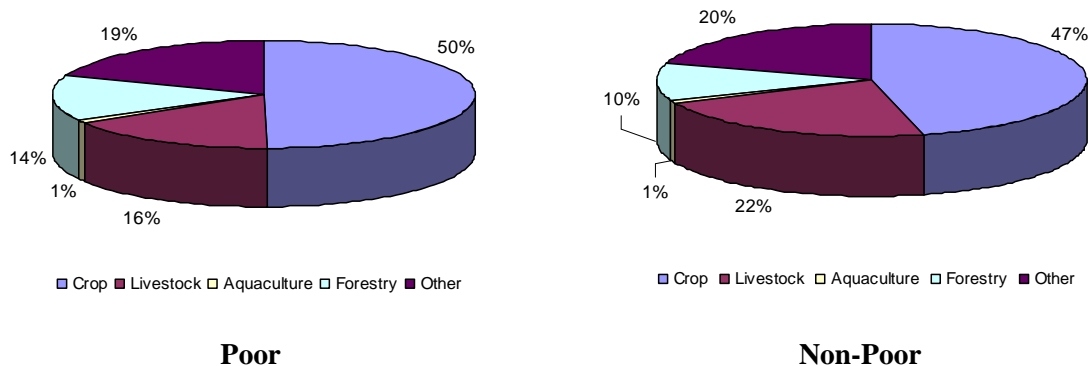


**Cao Bang Province**

**Hoa Binh Province**

**Figure 36: Composition of income according to the source**

The differences between poor and non-poor HH in income sources (on average across the two Provinces) were considerable (see **Figure 37**). A higher percentage, 50 %, of the income for poor HH came from crop production in contrast to 47 % for non-poor HH, whereas income share from the livestock sector was with 16 % considerably lower than in non-poor HH with 22 %. Also it could be seen that poor farmers are more dependant on forest resources, which contribute with 14 % more to their income than the 10 % in non-poor HH.



**Figure 37: Composition of income in poor and non-poor households**

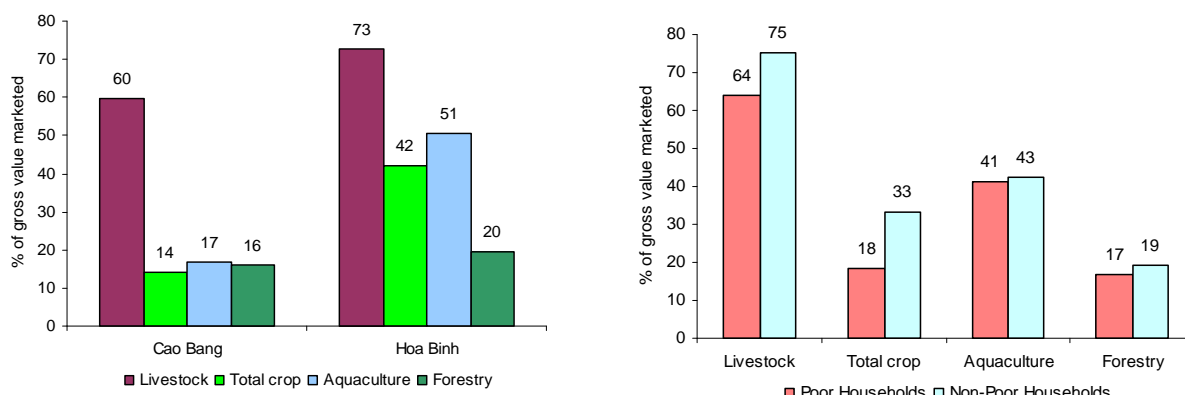
Crop production as main income sector was investigated in more detail and results are given in **Table 11**. Main difference between the two Provinces were the slightly higher gross income from rice/paddy in Cao Bang with 55 % compared to 48 % in Hoa Binh, as was the income from food crops (including maize) with 39 % in Cao Bang compared to Hoa Binh with 35 %. In Hoa Binh the contribution from commercial crops and fruit trees was with 11 % and 6 % higher than in Cao Bang with only 4 % and 2 %, respectively. Maize (as part of the food crops) contributed with 31 % considerably more to the income of farmers in Cao Bang compared to only 13 % in Hoa Binh. This is because in Cao Bang the category of food crops constitutes to 81 % of maize, while in Hoa Binh maize makes only 37 % of the food crops.

**Table 11: Composition of gross income from crop production (%)**

	% of gross income from crop production – various categories					
	<i>Rice / Paddy</i>	<i>Commer- cial crops</i>	<i>Fruit- trees</i>	<i>Food crops</i>	<i>of which maize</i>	<i>share of maize in food crops</i>
<b>Cao Bang total</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>81</b>
Poor	51	5	2	43	35	81
Non-Poor	58	4	2	36	30	82
<b>Hoa Binh total</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>37</b>
Poor	53	4	5	38	18	47
Non-Poor	47	13	6	35	12	35

Comparing the two household categories it can be observed that the composition of the calculated income from crops differs between poor and non poor HH mainly in crops; on average across the two Provinces commercial crops contribute more to the income of non-poor HH with 9 % compared to only 4 % for poor HH. However food crops and here mainly maize contribute with 29 % more to the crop income of poor HH, compared to only 19 % of the non-poor HH.

The current figures for income are not necessarily revenues that end up as cash in the farmer's pocket; so far income has been calculated as a product of the production figures and the market value. Actually only a certain percentage of the products are marketed, while the remainder is used for home consumption. In the following the share of the agricultural, aquaculture and forestry production that was marketed has been analyzed (see **Figure 38** and **Table 12**).



### Cao Bang & Hoa Binh Provinces

### Total Survey area

**Figure 38: Percentage of production that is marketed (% of gross value)**

The highest percentage for marketing happened in the livestock sector with on average 73 % marketed, followed by aquaculture with 42 %. Marketing of crops and even forest products was much lower with on average 30 % and 19 %, respectively. In all four production sectors poor households naturally took products less to the market than non-poor HH.

**Table 12: Marketing of different production sectors (% of the gross value of the production)**

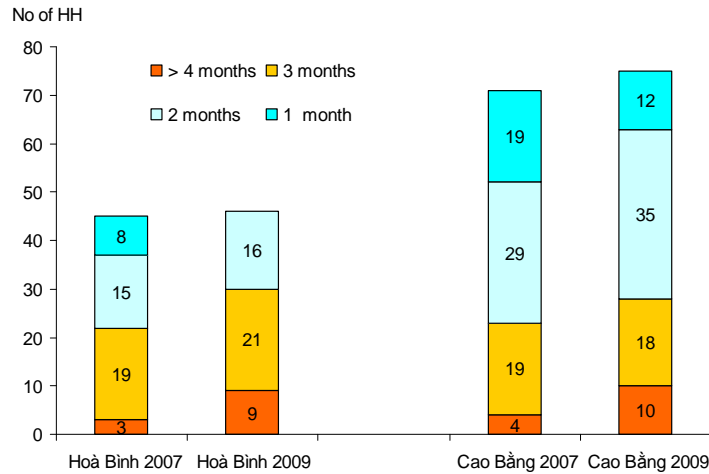
	Marketed share of production			
	Livestock	Aquaculture	Crops	Forestry
<b>Cao Bang total</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>17</b>
Poor	59	17	13	16
Non-Poor	78	37	15	18
<b>Hoa Binh total</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>20</b>
Poor	67	61	28	18
Non-Poor	74	47	45	20

Comparing the two Provinces also here clearly in Cao Bang products were marketed to a lesser extent compared to Hoa Binh Province. Notably this was the case for crops and aquaculture products where only 14 % and 32 %, respectively, of the production value was actually marketed, compared to 42 % and 51 %, respectively in Hoa Binh Province. So it can be concluded that degree of subsistence farming is higher in Cao Bang than in Hoa Binh. This is particularly reflected in the much lower percentage of marketing of crops which in Cao Bang accounted only for 14 % of the total gross value compared to 42 % in Hoa Binh Province.

### 3.5.2. Food Security

To have a proxy-indicator for the economic situation of households in the survey area and to assess the program's contribution to ensure food security, in 2007 and 2009 households had been asked how many months per year they lack food.

The results can be seen in **Figure 39**~~Error! Reference source not found.~~. Independent of the increased satisfaction the data show that the problem of food security has not been addressed sufficiently by the ARD services. In Hoa Binh a total of 45 and 46 HH in 2007 and 2009, respectively, stated that they lack one or more than 4 months food, with a strong increase of those HH with food shortage of 3 months and more. In Cao Bang the number of food insecure HH increased from 71 HH in 2007 to 77 in 2009, with an increase of those households that lack food for two months, or for 4 months and more, respectively.



**Figure 39: Food security at household level in Hoa Binh and Cao Bang Province (No of HH lacking food for 1 to >4 months), 2007 & 2009**

## 4. Conclusions and Recommendations

The results of this survey give a farmers perspective of the access to and quality of four key public service providers in the ARD sector, and the changes occurred during the last two years. They serve to assess if the targets set by each ARD agency regarding improved service delivery could be achieved. The survey findings are also used to evaluate PS-ARD against its expected results and if objectives of the programme regarding improved grassroots democracy, such as equal participation in local SEDP, transparency of commune budgets has been achieved.

### 4.1. Main achievements – ARD Service Provision

According to the perception of farmers in the two Provinces the service delivery in the four key ARD service agencies has increased over the last two years. Following the survey in 2008 the key service providers were asked to set targets for satisfaction of farmers with the services they provided. A comparison of the set targets with the current degree of satisfaction can be seen in **Table 13**.

**Table 13: Satisfaction levels in 2008, targets set by GoV agencies and satisfaction levels in 2010**  
(% of households that are satisfied or very satisfied with the services)

Service / Sector	Hoa Binh Province			Cao Bang Province		
	2007	target	2009	2007	target	2009
Extension Service	16%	30%	66%	38%	45%	66%
Veterinary Service	48%	55%	90%	28%	38%	61%
Plant Protection Service*)	9%	20%	44%	36%	60%	68%
Irrigation Management**)	18%	30%	47%	13% (50%)	70%	21% (68%)

\* Access to PP service in Hoa Binh Province changed considerably from only 19% in 2007 to 49% in 2009, which explains the strong increase of satisfied HH.

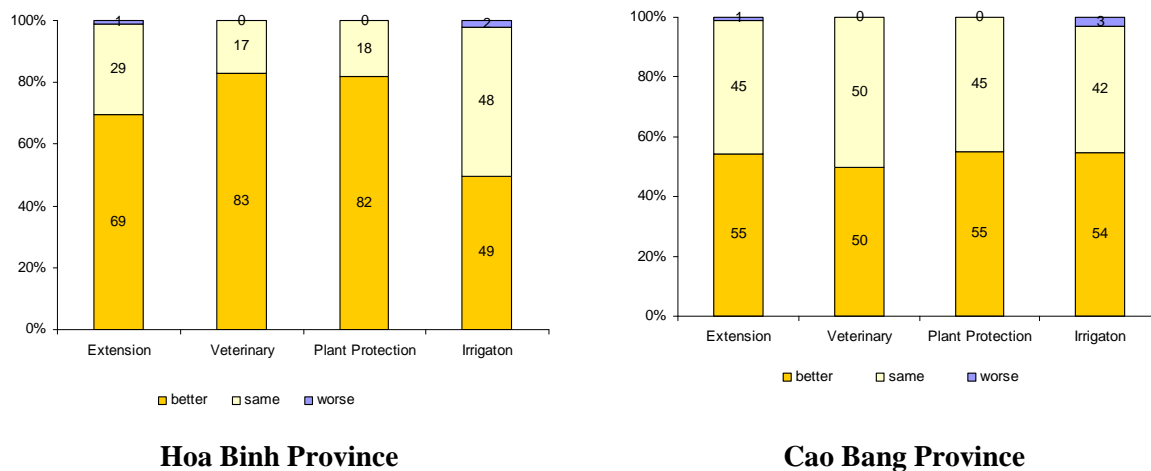
\*\*\*) Since general Irrigation services in Cao Bang are less used, satisfaction based on the total sample appeared very low. CB Irrigation Subdepartment decided to set the target as %age based on the actual service users; those numbers are given in brackets.

The data presented in **Table 13** show that service agencies managed to exceed largely the targets for increased farmers' satisfaction. Only in Cao Bang Province the result for irrigation management based on the actual users of this service was with 68% satisfied users slightly lower than the set target of 70%. It has to be noted that, the targets set by the agencies were rather modest due to the fact that farmers' satisfaction was a completely new indicator for them and it was not clear how much they were able to influence it in such a short time period.

As already explained in chapter 2.4.4 it has to be acknowledged that the satisfaction of farmers is a very 'volatile' indicator influenced by the general context and many factors that may be beyond the influence of the actual service providers. For example 2008, the year in which the first survey was conducted, was the year when the Global Financial Crisis hit and the economic implications associated with it may have had an impact on the statements made by farmers even though data was collected retrospectively for 2007. In 2010 the economy in Vietnam is vibrant and people in general may have recovered from the economic downturn, which may

have resulted in general more positive statements. Nevertheless the higher satisfaction two years after project start is confirmed in general by the responses given by farmers when they were asked if services were poorer, better or just the same as two to three years ago (see **Figure 40**).

Some 70 to 80% of the surveyed households in Hoa Binh stated that extension, veterinary service and plant protection are better than two, three years ago. For the irrigation services 50% of the respondents saw improvements. In Cao Bang Province between 50 to 55% of the responding households observed that all four service sectors performed better than two years ago.



**Figure 40: General perception of change in ARD service delivery in the last three years (% of HH)**

With regards to **Extension Services** the main changes observed in Hoa Binh Province were more support in terms of new seed varieties, fertilizer, new animal breed and timely delivery of those inputs; in addition extension staff provided higher quality training according to the request of the farmers. Staff had better ways to explain and provide technical guidance and seem to care more about the farmers. Also in Cao Bang the supply of inputs was praised by most of the respondents, but also an improved attitude of the extension staff providing better technical guidance, more timely training according to the farmers needs and easier to understand than before, including handing out of technical documents of good quality.

In Hoa Binh main reasons given for improved **Veterinary service** were a better staff attitude, demonstrated through the veterinarian coming to the house and treating the animals personally and in time; farmers also observed that veterinarians are more professional, provided higher quality veterinary drugs and conducted vaccinations on a more regular basis; staff was giving better guidance on general animal husbandry and animal care. In Cao Bang Province the main improvement of the Veterinary Service was seen in a higher variety of high quality Vet drugs and animal feed, which actually was not an aspect that had been supported by the PS-ARD. However it was also reported that drugs were available closer to the village, which could be a result of the PS-ARD supported Vet Service points. In addition staff attitude had improved, and veterinary staff provided better guidance in animal care and use of the Vet drugs; they also came to the farm for treating animals more frequently. The answers regarding staff responsiveness however were not consistent with the data in chapter 3.1.2.

**Plant Protection Service** in Hoa Binh province had improved mainly because of a wider variety of good quality and effective plant pesticides available; again this was an aspect that had not been directly addressed by PS-ARD. In addition the training and technical guidance generally increased and the PP staff and pesticides vendors are reportedly more enthusiastic and helpful to the farmers. In Cao Bang Province the majority of farmers appreciated the improved attitude of staff that visited the farms and provided better and easier to follow guidance on the use of pesticides. Also the availability of better quality pesticides and the forecast of pests and crop diseases were of high value to farmers.

Improvements regarding **Irrigation Services** observed in Hoa Binh were to a large extent a result of the new or upgraded schemes (done by the farmers themselves), which allowed to make better use of existing water resources; but also better information on the irrigation schedule was mentioned as a sign of improved management. Some negative remarks were also made regarding poor management, lack of interest by staff and poor coordination between villages. In Cao Bang also main improvement related to the upgrading or building of new schemes. However farmers sometimes still do not have enough water for a second crop, since most schemes are dependant on rainfall.

#### 4.2. Main achievements – Grassroots democracy

With regards to **local planning** and **commune financial management** the main achievements are summarized in **Table 14**. The formulation of the target set by the Department of Planning and Investment was a bit unfortunate, since their indicator and the question mainly related to the new procedures for participatory SEDP at commune level. However more important was to understand if the new procedures effectively contributed to a more demand oriented SEDP. For overall programme evaluation the figures in the following table summarize the results of chapter 3.2. and base the degree of participation, the degree of inclusion of village proposals and the consent with the commune budget on the total sample.

**Table 14: Degree of achievement regarding commune planning and budgeting**

<b>Aspects of people participation (% of HH)</b>	<b>Hoa Binh Province</b>			<b>Cao Bang Province</b>		
	<b>2007</b>	<b>target</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>target</b>	<b>2009</b>
Households finding their proposals reflected in the Commune SEDP*)	< 10 %	-	58 %	11 %	-	53 %
Households finding their proposals implemented*)	-	-	54 %	7 %	-	48 %
Households satisfied with the new SEDP procedures*)	-	70 %	89 %	-	50 %	97 %
Households knowing and agreeing with the fund allocation*)	-	50%	15 %	-	30 %	28 %

\*) based on the total number of HH surveyed

\*\*) SEDP procedures rating in Hoa Binh: 37%: good, 52%: fair; in Cao Bang: 3%: good, 94%: fair

According to the above data the effective participation of the local people in the Commune SEDP process increased significantly from less than 10% to more than 50% of the HH in both Provinces. If the rating ‘fair’ is accepted as ‘being satisfied’ than the majority of the

interviewed people agree with the new SEDP procedures and the targets set by the Provincial DPIs are achieved or even exceeded. In the last two years there was also no problem in terms of implementation, due to the allocation of Commune Development Funds, and the majority of the people saw the SEDP plans implemented. The allocation of funds for the realization of village and commune plans was crucial for the success of the new planning procedures at commune level.

Regarding Commune Financial Management the targets set by the Departments of Finance could not be achieved. General agreement with the fund allocation in communes remains with 15% low in Hoa Binh Province. In Cao Bang Province the target of 30% could nearly be reached with 28% agreeing with the use of commune funds. It has to be considered that in both Provinces still only few households do know about the Commune Budget, but those who do know agree with it to a large extent. As with SEDP it can be argued that people would be much less informed about commune level fund allocation without the CDF. Publicizing commune budgets in a transparent manner by visualizing on signboards in public places has started, but majority of the interviewed household still prefer to be informed by the village leader during village meetings.

### **4.3. Specific aspects of ARD service provision and grassroots democracy**

To better understand the shift in the general improvement of the public services the results presented in chapter 3 are summarized in the following and to some extent linked with each other, providing answers to the key questions for the different aspects of public services in ARD, such as access, demand orientation, suitability in terms of quality, timeliness of the services, staff skills and responsiveness.

- **Do all groups (poor households, women) the same access to the services?**

It has to be acknowledged that against the general assumption the same share of households in the group of the poor as in the non-poor group claimed to have access to extension, veterinary and plant protection services in general. Access to irrigation services was less for the poor however, due to the fact that poor households often have only limited area suitable for irrigation. The same observation was made comparing the lowland dwelling Tay-Nung ethnic groups with the predominantly upland dwelling Dao – Hmong groups in Cao Bang Province. Access to services was the same apart from the access to irrigation service, which was logically less for the upland dwelling households.

Regarding their direct participation extension activities such as training courses and demonstration sites, it could be observed that in Hoa Binh Province, while there was no difference between the poor and non-poor in 2007 the general increase of activities in 2009 was less expressed for the poor households compared to the non-poor HH, meaning poor households did benefit from the increase, but to a lesser extent than non-poor households. In Cao Bang Province the number of farmers benefiting directly from extension activities generally reduced in the last two years and was more or less equal for non-poor and poor HH in 2009. However it can be said that upland dwelling Dao and Hmong households participated to a lesser extent than lowland Tay and Nung farmers in all training activities and demonstration sites, except for forestry training.



According to the household interviews in Cao Bang, women account for half of the participants in the various extension activities. In Hoa Binh Province women participate much less than men in extension activities, not even accounting for a third of the participants.

***Recommendations:***

- + With respect to participation of different population groups it would be crucial for service providers to keep records and have statistics about participation of different population groups in their activities, i.e. the poor, women, farmers from various ethnic groups.
- + To increase the extension services' interaction particularly with upland farmers, the service agencies would need to adopt a more focused strategy and allocate its resources accordingly.
- + In Hoa Binh Province the causes for low female participation should be further investigated through interviews with service providers and group discussion with women and men at grassroots level. Reasons maybe manifold, like timing of the training, not getting invited because key-persons are male, domestic decision making etc... The assessment could be done in cooperation with the Women's Union.

- **Are activities / services according to the demand of the farmers?**

The simplest way to rate the demand-orientation is the degree of satisfaction with the services provided. As mentioned above in general the share of farmers who are satisfied or very satisfied with the various services increased. During the last two years the rise of numbers of farmers being satisfied or very satisfied was usually stronger for the poor group, diminishing the difference between the poor and non-poor households in 2009. This indicates that service providers followed a more pro-poor approach. In Cao Bang Province the share of farmers of the Dao and Hmong ethnic group who were satisfied or very satisfied more than tripled, but still stayed below that of Tay-Nung group whose share of satisfied farmers increased 1.5 times. Hence despite the observation that much fewer HH of Dao and Hmong group directly participated in the various extension activities (see above) the services became more inclusive and responsive to the upland dwelling farmers.

***Participation in planning of extension activities:***

In 2007 only some 10% of the households in Hoa Binh Province found activities in extension plans meeting their needs. With an increasing number participating in planning meetings in 2009 nearly 60% of the farmers found the activities meeting their demand. In Cao Bang Province participation in meetings for extension planning was high in both survey years, but demand orientation of extension plans even increased from some 44% to 70% of the farmers in 2009.

In contrast to the picture given by the change in general satisfaction above, which indicate a pro-poor approach, the demand-orientation of the extension activity plans seem to be less responsive to the needs of the poor. With increased participation of households in planning meetings poor households find their demands less met than those of the non-poor group. It was assumed that in 2007 most of the funding for extension activities came from poverty alleviation programs which explains the pro-poor orientation. In 2009 many activities might have been funded by the Commune Development Fund which should benefit poor and non-poor HH equally. Is it anyway possible that increased participation of non-poor households

resulted in poor households less heard? Another explanation why extension plans could be less responsive to the demand of poor farmers could be that their requests relating to free or subsidized inputs often results in standardized solutions given by the extension staff; i.e. distribution of high yielding hybrid varieties that are also promoted by national extension programs, does not take into account that these varieties are used as animal feed, while poor farmers need varieties that meet the criteria of a staple food for human consumption (see also *CDF Impact Assessment Report*<sup>11</sup>).

***Recommendation:***

- + Extension service should continue to include all farmers equally in planning of the extension program and shape activities according to the demand of the people.
- + Extension workers need to pay more attention to tailor solutions to the specific needs and available resources of farmers, particularly the poor; at least they need to provide appropriate and sufficient information on new technologies, including cost/benefit analysis, so that farmers can make an informed choice.
- + Staff of the various ARD service providers should be from the same ethnic group as the target group to contribute to the development of services that are more adapted to conditions of farming systems in the remoter upland villages with high proportion of ethnic minorities; this also would help to overcome the language barrier.

- **Are the contents of trainings relevant for the farmer, easy to grasp and applicable?**

In both years in both Provinces almost all interviewed households stated that the training courses were provided in time, their contents were suitable and easy to grasp. Most of Hoa Binh farmers found the new technologies applicable for their farms. The share of households in Cao Bang finding the new technologies applicable increased by 10% to 85% in 2009.

Despite the fact that training quality was already appreciated in 2007, higher training quality and better, easier to understand technical guidance, were among the reasons for improved service delivery. Here the assessment two years apart shows that it is difficult for farmers to rate services if they have nothing to compare them with. Apparently most farmers have little opportunity to compare quality of services provided, due to the fact that the GoV has a monopoly and activities are being carried out in pretty much the same way, most likely even by the same person, who is responsible for a specific task in her sector. Hence farmers only can compare with the past and everything seems better compared to the past. Meanwhile farmers could see that activities such as training can be done in a different way; improved training with better and more practical technical guidance and adequate training materials was seen as one of the big improvements in the service provision.

***Recommendation:***

- + While improvements regarding teaching methods and quality were observed by the farmers, it is unlikely that the full potential for quality training has already been exploited. Ensuring improvement and adaptation of training contents and application of suitable methodologies, such as Farmers Field Schools, through expanding capacity building of

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<sup>11</sup> Impact Assessment of Commune Development Funds in Cao Bang Province, August 2010

field staff needs to be sustained and is one of the constant tasks of the extension service and the provincial capacity building institutions.

- + The positive development in Cao Bang regarding applicability does not allow complacency. As with the demand orientation of the extension activities, the service providers need to pay more attention to specific needs of marginalized groups, such as upland ethnic groups. Efforts by extension service need to be increased to identify the most suitable technology which is technically and financially feasible and acceptable for the local people.

- **Are inputs provided according to request and timely?**

It seems that inputs, such as fertilizer, seeds and to a lesser extent livestock breeds are being provided in time and at the requested amount. While, according to the household interviews generally the proportion of farmers registering for input supply reduced from 2007 to 2009, a larger percentage of poor households registered for inputs compared to the non-poor HH. The increased share of poor HH registering could be explained through the CDF which allowed free input supply only for poor HH.

In terms of veterinary drugs farmers in Cao Bang found one of the main reasons for improved Veterinary Service was the availability of drugs, which were more effective than before and easier to reach (closer to the village). The same was true for Plant Protection Service, which supplied better quality and more effective pesticides than before.

Regarding irrigation management service of course scheme quality and management are important factors defining the water supply for irrigation. However the general availability, timeliness and amount of water for irrigation is depending largely on the type of scheme and the source of water. In most cases farmers stated that the supply of water to their fields was in time for the planting of the crop, however in Hoa Binh less than 50%, in Cao Bang even less than a third stated to have enough water for a second crop. In contrast to Hoa Binh, where many schemes are fed by a larger canals and irrigation is supported by pumping stations; in Cao Bang Province most schemes do not have such a water source and largely depend on seasonal rainfall. The biggest changes in irrigation are most likely the result of the CDF funded upgrading and building of irrigation schemes under the full responsibility of the people.

***Recommendations:***

- + With further expansion of Veterinary and PP service points to commune level sustaining tight quality control of products, such as pesticides, veterinary drugs and animal feed.
- + An important task for the irrigation management staff, particularly in Cao Bang, would be to identify the reasons for the lack of water in individual schemes and investigate if there is a technical solution to it.
- + Separation of the financial means from the public service provider and the decentralization of GoV funds to commune level could contribute to a wide scale improvement of the irrigation sector at least in the upland areas with a large proportion of small and village based schemes.

- **How are the technical guidance and the transfer of knowledge and information?**

Regarding the provision of Veterinary Service in both Provinces and years more than 90% of the interviewed households stated that they can follow the technical guidance of veterinarians. An increase in the vaccination against diseases outside of the GoV vaccination programs against Foot & Mouth Disease and Avian Influenza also indicated more confidence in the services provided. There was also a significant improvement in the treatments, with the proportion of successful treatments increasing by an estimated 60% in Hoa Binh Province and by even 90% in Cao Bang Province. With the existing data it is however hard to establish which of the different resource persons (drug vendor, commune/village paravet, and district veterinary staff) provided the different services directly to the farmers.

The Plant Protection Service provided pest & disease forecasts to farmers, to about a third of farmers in Hoa Binh Province, but to more than half of the households in Cao Bang Province. Most of the farmers receiving the information found it useful.

***Recommendation:***

- + The wide network of private service providers and drug vendors in the Veterinary sector should be fully exploited. The public sector needs to increase the interaction with these groups, ensure compliance with legal and quality aspects and make use of the informal sector to ensure the service outreach particularly into remote areas. This will be ever more important due to an ever expanding livestock sector.
- + The useful forecasts and recommendations by the Plant Protection Service should be wider disseminated. More and modern information channels need to be explored and also mass media could play a role to provide these regular updates as part of the agricultural news.

- **Is the service provider responsive to the farmers' requests?**

In 2009 farmers requested Veterinarians to come to their farm for advice and treatment of sick animals much less than in 2007, but also Veterinarians responsiveness was reduced; this observation is not consistent with statement given by farmers that services improved because of the preparedness of veterinary staff to come to the farm for treatment of animals, particularly in Hoa Binh Province. It is also not clear if the person responding to the request is the drug vendor, commune/village paravet, and district veterinary staff.

Regarding Plant Protection there were no requests by farmers for the technical staff to visit their field and advise on treatment; however more direct and improved guidance on how to apply pesticides by PP staff, extension workers or pesticide vendors has been mentioned by farmers.

The share of farmers stating frequent damages of irrigation schemes reduced in both Provinces during the last two years. Irrigation management is mostly done by local management, such as formal WUG in Cao Bang. Regarding irrigation management in Hoa Binh, the responsibilities seem somewhat unclear and most is left with the village leaders, who cannot address issues across village boundaries. . While water supply is usually in time, repairs reportedly are not as stated by one third to less than 50% of the farmers in HB and CB, respectively showing room for improvement.

***Recommendation:***

- + In line with the previous recommendation also for maintenance and repair of irrigation schemes the decentralization of finances to the lowest level could ensure a better service delivery, particularly ensure timely repair. A precondition is clear responsibilities and transparent fund management at the lowest administrative level.
- + In HB a proactive information strategy by the responsible agencies at district and province level should ensure responsibilities for irrigation management are communicated widely. Higher level staff should provide technical support and facilitate the coordination across village or commune borders.
- + More in depth research on formal and informal institutions managing irrigation at village or commune level as well as technical surveys would be necessary to clarify how services regarding irrigation could be improved.

- **Were marginalized groups sufficiently represented in local planning, did the plans reflect villagers' ideas and were the activities realized?**

Women were well represented (more than 40%) in the village planning meetings for commune SEDP in Cao Bang villages, while it was fairly low (20%) in Hoa Binh. In 2009 households finding their village proposals implemented accounted for about 50% of the total sample compared to less than 10% in two years ago. Participation in local planning was more or less equal for poor and non-poor, however participation of upland dwelling ethnic groups, such as Dao and Hmong was lower than that of the lowland dwelling Tay-Nung. Also less members of the Dao-Hmong group found their proposals reflected in the Commune SEDP and activities implemented.

***Recommendation:***

- + The question of female and ethnicity quota should be discussed among stakeholders, while ensuring that participation should be voluntary to ensure genuine participation.
- + Increasing participation of ethnic minority groups, women and the poor during the village level planning already could contribute to their demands being met; however in the long-term, representatives in decision making bodies should reflect broadly the share in the population.

- **Are commune budgets transparent and publicized and do people agree with the fund allocation and the means of information?**

In both provinces information on commune finances and budget allocation seems to have improved, and HH satisfied with commune budget allocation accounted for 28% in Cao Bang, but only for 15% in Hoa Binh Province. The differences between poor and non-poor households receiving budget information disappeared in 2009 at least in Cao Bang Province. Upland farming ethnic groups were less informed than ethnic groups in the lowland. In general most of those informed also agree with the fund allocation. While currently awareness about commune budgets seems still low, it is natural that people focus their attention only on matters that directly affect them (actually one wonders if a comparable level of awareness would be reached in western countries). One open question is if farmers are informed about commune budgets or if their knowledge only relates to the PS-ARD CDF and if the policy of budget

transparency extends to other funds. Most interviewees state that they would like to be informed via the village leader.

***Recommendation:***

- + Following the suggestion of the interviewed household's information on commune finances should be provided via the village leader and during village meetings. But to ensure widespread information additionally the publicizing of financial information for at least all investment budgets on signboards in public places should become standard practice.

#### **4.4. The Program's contribution to improve rural livelihoods**

According to a commonly accepted definition<sup>12</sup> 'a livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets including both material and social resources and activities required for a means of living'. Hence this chapter will try to conclude from the results the program's impact on social assets or social resources, such as access to and use of ARD services as well as aspects of grassroots democracy and on the economic situation of the households (average per capita income, poverty status, food security).

##### **Impact on social resources as element of rural livelihood systems**

Following the definition of livelihood given above in addition to the income, this survey paid particular attention to the social resources with respect to public services and grassroots democracy as fundamental elements of rural livelihood systems. Access to and use of quality public services is one important social resource and hence forms a part of the rural livelihood system. While the observed changes in ARD service delivery are generally positive as described in chapter 3.1 and chapter 4.1 admittedly it is difficult to totally attribute the observed changes to the PS-ARD. The comparison between districts with and without PS-ARD support does not provide sufficient foundation that the program contributed to the improved service delivery as such. In many aspects of service delivery farmers in non-PS-ARD districts did not rate the quality of services poorer than farmers in districts with PS-ARD support. In contrast there is a clear contribution of the program towards implementation of improved grassroots democracy, increasing effective participation in local planning and transparency of fund allocation at commune level. This in conjunction with the PS-ARD introduced Commune Development Funds provided the means to organize activities based on farmers needs and most likely contributed to the government staff being more in the field and more responsive than they used to be. The decentralization of funds to commune level and hence the separation of the financial means from the public services in ARD not only increased the interaction with farmers, but also allowed the farmers to set the agenda for the development interventions. In addition, the PS-ARD supported capacity building to increase technical knowledge and methodological skills enabled numerous field and management staff of the service providing agencies to respond better to the demand of the farmers and their local communities and thus increased their client orientation.

In general it can be concluded that the program already had a measurable effect on the social resources as important element of the rural livelihood systems, particularly with a view to

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<sup>12</sup> R. Chambers & G. Conway, 1992

grassroots democracy, but also improved access to quality public services in the ARD sector. However due to the limited time elapsed from implementation and changing the social aspects, the effects on income and poverty situation are not yet visible when based on the survey data. In contrast official statistics show clear improvement of the economic situation of the rural households. This is also supported by a separate report which assessed the impact of CDF on people's livelihoods. Obviously final conclusions can only be made with the repetition of the income survey, which is planned for 2013.

### **Impact on income as indicator for improved livelihood**

As a proof for improved livelihood the income of a household is commonly used as a standard indicator. According to the survey the average monthly income in Cao Bang Province in 2007 was 421'579 VND per capita and in Hoa Binh Province 533'894 VND. In this survey household income so far had only been assessed for 2007, since interventions were not expected to have a measurable and wide scale impact on household income. However official government data were used for an initial assessment (see **Table 15**).

**Table 15: Development of monthly per capita income in the PS-ARD districts (VND)**

	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>	Increase to % of 2007
Tan Lac	625,000	716,667	791,667	127
Lac Son	391,667	458,333	566,667	145
Yen Thuy	616,667	708,333	798,333	129
<b>Average 3 districts</b>	<b>544,444</b>	<b>627,778</b>	<b>718,889</b>	<b>132</b>
Hoa Binh	616,667	755,833	925,000	150
Cao Bang	620,687	717,134	907,500	125

In HB official government statistics provided useful additional information, according to which the monthly per capita income increased from VND by 23% from 544'444 in 2007 on average across the three districts to VND 718'889 in 2009. This is lower than the 50% increase on a provincial scale, which is to be expected for the rural districts. In CB province level data suggest an increase by 25% in the period from 2007 to 2009. It is likely that this increase was lower for the rural districts targeted by the program.

### **Poverty situation and food security as livelihood indicators**

In all project districts the poverty rate reduced considerably between 2007 and 2009 as shown in **Table 16**. This is consistent with the increase of the average per capita income. However it needs to be acknowledged that poverty rates are political targets and each level in the GoV is under pressure to achieve these, hence the figures have to be taken with care when drawing conclusions regarding the program's impact on poverty reduction. In comparison with the official data the samples of the survey show no changes in the share of poor HH over the last three years in Cao Bang Province and even an increase in Hoa Binh Province.

**Table 16: Development of poverty rates in the PS-ARD districts and the survey samples (%)**

Poverty Rate	2007	2008	2009	Sample 2007	Sample 2009
Tan Lac - HB	28.4	25.0	21.8		
Lac Son - HB	34.4	28.7	24.2		
Yen Thuy - HB	24.1	20.1	15.9		
<b>Average 3 districts</b>	<b>29</b>		<b>21</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>25</b>
Nguyen Binh - CB	42.8	39.2	35.3		
Quang Uyen - CB	36.4	30.3	27.5		
<b>Average 2 districts</b>	<b>40</b>		<b>31</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>46</b>

In line with the unchanged number of poor households goes the data on food insecurity. The number of households lacking food for one to four months or more has actually slightly increased from 2007 to 2009. This would indicate that the currently applied mainstream services may not be suitable to target the most marginalized groups. For this group of households it may require a more analytical approach to develop technically and financially feasible solutions to lift them out of poverty.

To gain more insight the income survey shall be repeated towards the end of a second programme phase when the improvements in service delivery and grassroots democracy had sufficient time to have an effect on this indicator. Particularly it shall be assessed if the economic development had the same effect on poor as on non-poor HH, and if there was a change from subsistence agriculture to increased commodity and market oriented production.

#### **4.5. Consideration for future interventions**

In order to provide inputs for the planning of future interventions the survey also addressed the questions of main problems currently faced by farmers. In short, the main constraints mentioned were weak infrastructure, remoteness and difficult road to the next market or town, followed by lack of capital for investment and limited technical knowledge. Pest, diseases and epidemics were also mentioned as well as lack of productive land. Regarding limited technical knowledge and problems with pest, diseases and epidemics farmers suggest that service providers should organize more technical training, continuously monitor the disease situation and provide timely forecasts. It is obvious that these recommendations are not very specific and cover to a great degree what service providers are doing anyway. Therefore the often very generally formulated demand of farmers must be specified to be able to match advisory services with the real situation of farmers. For this appropriate technical and economic knowledge, farm analysis and context analysis need to be combined to come to more specific recommendations for the service providers and ultimately to appropriate advise for the farmers. For general information dissemination the service providers should make more and better use of means of mass communication.

The areas, infrastructure, as well as access to capital, could be addressed with the Commune Development Fund. The question is to which extend micro-finance like credit should be managed by the commune level and how those households which are reluctant to take a credit could be supported better cannot be addressed in this report.



The decentralization of funds to commune level would be a key-strategy for improving service delivery since it changes the financial flow from service provider closer to the service user, the farmers. Mechanisms like the new participatory SEDP are now in place, clear responsibilities and transparent fund management ensured through the application of transparent commune financial management guidelines can be upscaled and the whole approach could be easily adopted by the GoV with a wide scale impact in the agricultural and rural development service sector. Naturally, providing the necessary knowledge and skills at the lowest administrative level, the commune, as well as further capacity building for the various service providers – public & private – needs to be ensured.

Regarding the use of satisfaction surveys for evaluation of programs it should be noted that citizen's satisfaction is a very subjective indicator influenced by many different aspects that can hardly be taken into the equation. In particular in a country where people so far had little experience to express their opinion freely the results need to be analyzed very carefully. Citizens' satisfaction surveys are necessary tools to assess public services in the course of time, however it has to be acknowledged that for the evaluation of projects and programs it needs to be considered that narrowing the attribution gap will be a big challenge.