

STREAM



Support to Regional Aquatic Resources Management

STREAM Journal

Learning and communicating about the livelihoods of fishers and farmers

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Note

From time to time, opportunities will arise to publish special numbers of the *STREAM Journal*, focused on a particular theme or event. In November 2002, the SAPA¹ Office of the Vietnam Ministry of Fisheries and STREAM organized a "Learning Workshop on Livelihoods Analysis" (see the report in the Virtual Library at <www.streaminitiative.org>). We are now pleased to publish six articles based on presentations made at that workshop in Long An province. Articles drawn from other presentations will appear in subsequent *SJ* numbers.

The theme of *SJ1(4)* is participatory livelihoods analysis, with the articles providing insights into processes and practices, and lessons learnt from experiences in Vietnam and the Philippines. The authors and their locational contexts in Vietnam (with one exception) are: Nguyen Thi Hai Yen and Bernard Adrien (Hon Mun); Ton That Chat (Tam Giang Lagoon); Michael Reynaldo, Orlando Arciaga, Fernando Gervacio and Catherine Demesa (Bolinao, Philippines); Nguyen Thi Thuy (Hanoi); Nguyen Viet Vinh (Trao Reef); and Le Quang Binh (Tra Vinh).

We would like to acknowledge the previous printing of versions of three of these articles in *Learning CBCRM 1(3&4)* [July-December 2002], a publication of LeaRN (CBCRM Learning and Research Network), CBCRM Resource Center, in the Philippines <www.cbcrmllearning.org>. These are the pieces on Hon Mun, Bolinao and Trao Reef.

Translation of the *SJ* is expanding and beginning to have an impact. The Ilongo² versions of earlier *SJ* numbers are now up in the Virtual Library. Jesper Clausen, author of "Giant Tiger Shrimp in Northern Central Vietnam" in *SJ1(1)*, told us that a friend who is farming shrimp in Nghe An, Vietnam, sent an e-mail about the article. He wrote that he would never have got the information without the Vietnamese translation and distribution of the *SJ* to his province.

Happy reading!

Graham Haylor, STREAM Director
William Savage, STREAM Journal Editor

¹ Sustainable Aquaculture for Poverty Alleviation Strategy

² A language of an area in the Philippines where STREAM is working

Hon Mun MPA³ Pilot Project on Community-based Natural Resources Management

Nguyen Thi Hai Yen and Bernard Adrien

Characteristics of the MPA Population

The six MPA villages have slightly over 5,000 inhabitants, in about 1,000 households, with an equal distribution of men and women. The population is unevenly distributed among the villages (from 32 households in the smallest to more than 500 in the largest). The major economic activity is fishing, as 80% of household heads are fishermen. Most have no other economic activity and thus have particularly vulnerable livelihoods. Aquaculture has developed dramatically over the last three years, and currently represents an activity for 30% of households. On average, a majority of MPA villagers consider themselves to have “medium” wealth. The relative level of poverty varies from one village to another, from less than 10% to over 50% of the village population.

In general, the education level of adults is basic. The literacy level is relatively low, and is higher among women than men. Overall, a relatively high proportion of children do not attend school. Nutrition status reflects the characteristics of island villages, i.e., high dependence on fishing and limited home consumption of agricultural products.



Children eagerly participate in MPA activities

Nearly half of houses are simple dwellings, and a few are rudimentary. Improved housing accounts for the other half. A significant number of households have generators, and more than half have televisions. During the long dry season, fresh water brought from the mainland to all villages has to be purchased.

Main Economic Activities

The average income per capita in 2001 amounted to 5.74 million VND⁴ (i.e., 478,000 VND per month), and the average per capita amount spent on living expenses was 3.68 million VND (i.e., 306,000 VND per month), with food accounting for half of living expenses. The average surplus (income less expenses) is quite substantial, corresponding to 36% of income (from 16% to 40% for poor and rich people respectively).

The fishing population is nearly evenly divided between boat owners – who generally belong to “medium” or “rich” categories – and fishermen more frequently from the “poor” category who work as hired crew members. Fishing at night – with large nets of various types and using attracting lights – is the most important practice, followed by diving (partly with cyanide) and squid fishing. The average net income for boat owners ranges from 43,000-340,000 VND per fishing day; for hired crew members, it varies from 14,000-66,000 VND.

On average, each household engaged in lobster culture has two cages, from which a net income of around 17 million VND was gained during the last production cycle of 1.5 years. Agriculture (e.g., fruit and cassava), animal husbandry (e.g., pig, chicken and duck) and retail trading are significant in some villages.

³ Marine Protected Area

⁴ VND = Vietnamese Dong (approximately 15,400 VND to the US\$ in February 2003)

A variety of government credit programs target a wide portion of the population, offering individual loans through credit groups. About 60% of MPA households are already covered, with an average loan amount of 4.7 million VND, mainly applied for aquaculture. The overall repayment rate is reasonably high (96-97% as of mid-2002).

Perceptions of MPA Villagers

Environmental Issues

All villages identified three major environmental issues: fish resources have decreased dramatically over the past ten to fifteen years, coral areas are heavily damaged, and there is pollution.

Villagers see the decrease in fish resources as a consequence of over-fishing (due to the increased number and efficiency of fishing boats and gear, and population increase), combined with destructive and illegal fishing techniques (e.g., trawling, nets used with strong lights, use of cyanide and dynamite).

To address those consequences, villagers proposed a series of actions, including allocation of the MPA area to insiders; enforcement of existing national rules to fight illegal fishing practices and establishment of new rules regarding zoning; improved efficiency of concerned agencies and participation of villagers in enforcement activities; education activities for villagers, particularly on the environment; and implementation of income-generating and credit activities.



Villagers share their views and make suggestions about their future

Villagers identified the main causes of coral damage as boat anchoring (tourist and fishing boats), fishing net use in coral areas, and cyanide and dynamite fishing. Actions proposed included setting up mooring buoys and enforcing their proper use, with the involvement of villagers.

It was not difficult for villagers to identify their own villages, in addition to other sources, as the main sources of pollution, from domestic rubbish, human waste, used oil spillage and aquaculture residues. Proposed actions consisted of setting a waste management system; promoting awareness campaigns and education; encouraging villagers to set up private toilets; dealing with the issue of used oil; and defining and implementing an “aquaculture development plan” for the MPA.

Social Issues

During the PRA⁵ process, villagers identified a range of social services and infrastructure which need to be improved (mainly electricity and fresh water), and also the complex issue of “jobless” women. One PRA finding indicated that women in some villages have around 70% of their time available for income-generating activities.

Socio-economic Aspirations of Communities

Community aspirations reflect the existing economic activities that people consider to be more viable and lucrative (e.g., mainly lobster culture), as well as the existing allocation of tasks according to gender. Aquaculture is by far seen as a priority activity to develop in the MPA, for both men and women. To a lesser extent, fishing and animal husbandry are also considered as priorities.

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⁵ Participatory Rural Appraisal

An Experience with Participatory Research in Tam Giang Lagoon, Thua Thien-Hue

Ton That Chat

The Lagoon

Tam Giang Lagoon, in Thua Thien-Hue province of Vietnam, covers an area of 22,000 ha with a length of more than 60 km. The lagoon's eastern edge connects with the sea through two lagoon estuaries – Thuan An and Tu Hien – while on the west are rice fields and river estuaries. A partly-closed lagoon, Tam Giang's unique form and physical characteristics have created a brackish-water ecosystem with a diversity of resources, supporting a large fishing community living on boats and in villages around the lagoon.

The shallow lagoon receives a mixture of fresh and salt water which causes regular, seasonal and spatial changes in salinity. The bottom is rather flat with an average depth of around two meters in most of the lagoon although some channels are 3-4 m deep, and near the Thuan An estuary, more than seven meters. Under such favorable conditions, the area of aquaculture ponds increased quickly in the last six years. At present, most shallow areas close to the lagoon edges have



been converted for aquaculture. Government officials consider aquaculture to be an alternative for improving fishers' income and reducing exploitation pressures on lagoon resources. However, aquaculture has developed so rapidly that it has strongly impacted the natural and social environments.

The Project

The first phase (1995-2001) of a research project – Management of Biological Resources in Tam Giang Lagoon – was funded by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and carried out by Hue University of Agriculture and Forestry, Hue University of Science, and Thua Thien-Hue Provincial Department of Fisheries. In the expansion phase – titled Community-based Coastal Resource Management in Central Vietnam – and with additional financial support from IDRC, the project officially started in December 2002 with a planned end in December 2005. The implementation agencies for the second phase are Hue University of Agriculture and Forestry, Hue University of Science, Nha Trang University of Fisheries, and Research Institute for Aquaculture No 3, which is currently based in Nha Trang.

Applying Participatory Research in Tam Giang Lagoon

Participatory research (PR) involves local people's participation throughout the process: learning about the situation, identifying problems, discussing alternatives, selecting solutions, designing and implementing activities, evaluating and disseminating results. PR was used to learn about and understand the natural ecological system of communities in Tam Giang Lagoon, and to study

community behavior and activities, including their livelihoods, aquaculture plans in lagoon areas, the ban on electric fishing, and the improved management of waterways. Through such an applied research approach, patterns can be understood about the diversification of livelihoods into other agriculture and aquaculture activities like growing tobacco, chili, peanuts and mung bean, and fish-cage and rice-fish culture in Quang Thai (a commune of Quang Dien district, Thua Thien Hue province).

A participatory research approach has made it possible for the project to address urgent problems in the Tam Giang Lagoon community, such as competition in resource use, planning in the context of an aquaculture “boom”, replication of project achievements, and mobilization of financial resources.

Benefits of Participatory Research

Using their local knowledge, villagers themselves identify existing community problems and work towards solving them together by contributing their own ideas to community management. PR can also ensure that often-excluded people can participate: those with low awareness, those of different “cultures”, women and poor people.

PR also creates opportunities for local people and “outsiders” to work together. This helps improve capacity among communities, local officials and researchers. With different stakeholders participating in the research, results are more comprehensive since they are based on an interdisciplinary analysis, and may lead to more balanced discussions and actions. In addition, PR helps local officials to better understand villagers’ lives and livelihoods objectives, and together develop more feasible, practical and effective solutions and activities. It can also help them have more open views on community resources management.

Difficulties Encountered

Initially, people thought this was a donor project, rather than a research activity, and they expected financial support. Staff found it necessary to explain the project objectives to community members. Among other “difficulties” encountered were:

- PR approaches require initial efforts to establish rapport with villagers.
- Local government officials are often unfamiliar with participatory research approaches and methods.
- PR requires researchers to acquire new skills.
- There is a general lack of experience and good models to follow.
- PR may be seen to be “informal” which can lead to questions of reliability.
- There can be several answers to the same question in participatory research.
- Quantitative data gathered through PR methods may not be accurate.

Lessons Learnt about Disseminating Research Results

Participatory research results can be disseminated through workshops and meetings at all relevant levels: specific community groups, villages, commune, district, province, nation-wide and to other related research groups. A variety of media may be used: radio, newspapers, documents and including information in teaching and technical training materials. For example, to disseminate the results of aquaculture development research with a “sub-community”, villagers can participate in the production of maps, figures and data tables in simple and understandable formats. Such information can be displayed in Commune People’s Committees and villages for local government officials and villagers to use in planning.

In any dissemination efforts, we need to pay attention to methodology, getting feedback and revising research “outputs”. In building and disseminating “models”, communities where the research was conducted are the best disseminators of the results.

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Experiences and Benefits of Livelihoods Analysis

Michael Reynaldo, Orlando Arciaga, Fernando Gervacio and Catherine Demesa

Failed Livelihoods Projects and Understanding

"I am a fisherman. I am not a vendor," says Jesem Gabatin, by way of explaining why their organization's meat processing project collapsed. As chairman of the fishers' organization, the burden of a failed livelihoods project weighs heavily on his shoulders. His story is not unique. Elsewhere in the Philippines, across the 55 sites identified in a study as having a CBCRM (community-based coastal resources management) program in place, the road is littered with failed livelihoods projects (Haribon Foundation, 2002). Fifty-three of the 55 sites had a livelihoods development component along with capability-building. The idea generally is to increase disposable household income and food security, and to lessen fishing pressure to allow the resource base to recover and replenish.

However, most organizations fall into the trap of being so focused on providing income-generating projects to fishers, that resources management and community organizing are often neglected. Fishers are "forced" to do livelihoods which are not to their liking, interest and capability. Furthermore, the livelihoods projects are usually not large-scale enough to redirect fishers from fishing. All these factors contributed to the failure of these micro-enterprises.

Over the past few years, organizations have sought to understand the complex and multi-dimensional relationships between social and physical environments, especially highlighting the vulnerability context in which decisions about livelihoods strategies are made. Drawing heavily on participatory methods, coastal resources management practitioners have sought to gain a better understanding of different factors that affect people's livelihoods, including the options that are available to them.

A Philippine NGO, the Haribon Foundation, has gained experience working with coastal communities towards the development of community-based mechanisms and methods for coastal livelihoods development, monitoring and evaluation. Haribon has perceived some benefits of using livelihoods analysis and it is changing the way they work.

Learning from Experience

In 1995, Haribon and two academic institutions forged partnerships with coastal communities in Bolinao, Pangasinan to undertake a community-based coastal resources management initiative with funding support from the International Development Research Centre (IDRC). Environmental education, community organization and mobilization efforts resulted in the formation of five people's organizations (POs) by the end of Phase 1 in 1997. While these POs made some headway by successfully facilitating the passage of a coastal development plan and securing funding support for their projects from the government, they were swamped with organizational problems leading to a slump in their operations.

The biggest problem resulting in poor performance was the way most of the livelihoods projects were undertaken. They realized that the level of people's participation in the initiatives directly influenced their success or failure, and that livelihoods development might have to be addressed at a more basic management level than through formally structured cooperatives.

Learning from the experiences of the first phase, Haribon and the communities sought to better understand the situation to design appropriate livelihoods interventions. They wanted to know, for example, the basic subsistence sources and practices at household level, and the horizontal and vertical linkages essential for ensuring sustainable livelihoods and fishery resources management. They also looked at social, cultural and economic factors necessary in implementing resources management options, including finding out the level of organization at which livelihoods, resources management and advocacy activities are viably managed.

For three years, they worked on improving communities' sustainability through effective forms of community organizing and livelihoods development activities. They used more appropriate units of

management, enhanced the selection and implementation criteria of livelihoods activities, improved individual and group capacities, and installed better sustaining mechanisms. These included the training of community leaders to become “village scientists” who gathered and analyzed information on ongoing livelihoods activities and the socio-economic and cultural situation. These leaders eventually evolved into Local Community Organizers (LCOs), becoming the partners of Haribon staff.

As a result of the livelihoods analysis and organizing work, an emerging conceptual model of livelihoods development was formulated by fishers in the village of Victory. Called the Sustainable Integrated Aqua-farm Development (SIAFDEV), it integrates land and marine-based livelihoods projects in sustainable resources management initiatives. They are also managing an environmental trust fund that will allow them to sustain their resources management program in a conducive policy environment.

Benefits of Livelihoods Analysis

From the collective experiences of Haribon and the communities they work with, livelihoods analysis primarily contributed to clarifying their way of thinking about poverty and its causes, and guided them in terms of analysis, program design, implementation and evaluation. Using local knowledge, they are taking a wider, more informed view of opportunities and their likely impact on and fit with people’s livelihoods priorities. It also enabled them to place people and their own priorities clearly at the center of analysis and objectives setting. Specifically, livelihoods analysis helped to bring about these elements that contributed to a more responsive livelihoods initiative:

Looking at context and relationships – Helped to “organize” factors that constrain or provide opportunities and how these relate to each other.

Identifying “fit” or “conflict” of livelihoods strategies – Generated recommendations on enhancing the fit between a new initiative and people’s livelihoods priorities, or address conflicts between them. It facilitated understanding and learning so that positive patterns of change were supported and negative patterns mitigated.

Encouraging innovations – Encouraged users to be aware of and think about combining or substituting available “assets” and “capital” to achieve desired results.

Generating ideas to improve project design – Livelihoods analysis provided useful methods to describe and analyze livelihoods systems of households and coastal communities. It helped in understanding strategies that communities have adopted to achieve their objectives, and in actively planning further livelihoods strategies.

Bridging the gaps in macro-micro links – Highlighted the importance of macro-level policies and their impact on community livelihoods options. It stressed the need for higher-level policy development and planning to be informed by lessons learned and insights gained at local levels.

Emphasizing the link between livelihoods and resources management – Emphasized the need for resources management to provide livelihoods for coastal dwellers, rather than focusing on alternative livelihoods projects for which they were ill-prepared. Resources management is not only about enhancement of bio-physical or natural resources, but integral to sustainable livelihoods. The sea is vital to a community’s survival and a coherent part of their sustainable livelihoods vision.

Reference

Haribon Foundation 2002 *Community-based Mechanisms and Methods for Coastal Livelihood Development, Monitoring and Evaluation Summary Report from Year 1999-2001*. Pangasinan, Philippines: Haribon Foundation.

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Lessons Learnt in Implementing PRA in Livelihoods Analysis

Nguyen Thi Thuy

PRA in Vietnam Contexts

Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) is an approach to learning about community livelihoods that is beginning to be widely used in development programs and projects in Vietnam. One strength of PRA is that it creates opportunities for farmers to be involved in research processes to bring democracy into full play, as they share their information and understandings. By being involved in processes from the beginning, PRA participants have chances to learn new approaches and tools. PRA also creates conditions for all involved to better understand the context in which they are living and working, and to identify problems encountered by the community and work towards solutions, which farmers themselves develop through the project to meet the needs of their community.

In the future, farmers will be able to participate in project implementation and monitoring in more effective ways. Therefore, successful development projects depend on the success of PRA processes. However, participatory livelihoods analysis approaches have only been applied more widely in recent years and not by too many agencies and organizations, especially Vietnamese ones. Therefore, there are many opportunities for learning lessons.

Implementing PRA

In the planning and preparation of PRA capacity-building or training courses, consideration should be given to setting objectives, designing a relevant process, activities and methods, and specifying timeframes for pre-implementation and the actual research process. In selecting PRA team members, numbers should be kept at that necessary to ensure that all stakeholders are involved. Once team members have been selected, colleagues experienced in participatory livelihoods analysis can work



Village modeling

with the team to successfully accomplish tasks. It should be noted that the timing and place of PRA implementation should be appropriate for the community, best organized during farmers' "free time".

Discussions with farmers should result in documentation and early understandings of community views. The team should spend sufficient informal time learning about local customs and traditions. They should create conditions for farmers in the community to learn about the PRA objectives and process, through clear explanations, so that the community will be able to participate effectively and provide relevant information. The PRA team can provide guidance on carrying out the research process and also learning opportunities for farmers to practice the tools before the work begins.

PRA should be implemented in two or three areas. Consideration should be given to the accuracy of collected information and data if the research is carried out all at once in all areas, or from one area to the next. If the team needs to be divided into smaller groups to carry out PRA at the same time, there need to be members in each group who understand and can use the tools. Team leaders need to monitor the process and the emerging results, and make recommendations and adjustments when necessary. The research time period should be sufficiently long to enable the collecting and checking

of information and data. But it should not be so long that some team members may not participate in the whole process, as they may be engaged with other work.

Much thought needs to go into the process design and selection and number of PRA tools. It is essential to allow for the continuous participation of community members. Information and data collected from the community should be checked right away to ensure their accuracy. After spending time in the community, the PRA team should maintain contact and keep farmers informed of the outcomes.



Making a Venn diagram

Outlook and Benefits of PRA Approaches

Although PRA approaches are still relatively new in Vietnam, the outlook for their increased use is positive. Some government agencies involved in poverty alleviation programs at grassroots levels are already starting to use PRA approaches. A recent government law promoting grassroots democracy also stresses participatory methods in obtaining information to better understand and respond to the needs of poor communities.

SUMA's work has benefited from PRA in planning appropriate community projects and building relationships with local people. From experience, PRA approaches are most effective if they are embraced by all concerned – both technical staff and community development workers – as well as all partners.



Needs assessment

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Lessons Learnt from Livelihoods Analysis and PRA in Trao Reef Marine Reserve

Nguyen Viet Vinh

Local Management and Community Livelihoods

The International Marinelife Alliance (IMA) Vietnam is currently facilitating the establishment of the locally-managed Trao Reef Marine Reserve in Van Hung commune, Van Ninh district of Khanh Hoa province. The project aims to support local people to be able to manage and protect their coastal resources – coral reefs and associated eco-systems – by applying sustainable mariculture and fishing practices and hence also developing and bettering their socio-economic situation.

As a marine conservation organization, IMA seriously considers that local people are at the center of conservation efforts and that the project can be successful only if local communities are provided with socio-economic development opportunities. Through awareness-building activities and Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), local people recognize the influence of marine conservation on their main livelihoods of fisheries and aquaculture. As a consequence, they have proposed the establishment of the marine reserve, while recognizing that this has also partly affected the livelihoods of local people, particularly those involved in near-shore fishing. At present, conservation and livelihoods issues at the project site include:

- Mariculture, particularly lobster culture, tends to be unsustainable, which could negatively affect the income of 500 households and worsen the economic situation of around 10,000 people in the whole commune.
- Coastal resources are rapidly decreasing, which is making fishing more difficult.
- Wetlands are not being utilized scientifically, which restricts other livelihoods alternatives for local people.
- Local people are poor and increasingly lack job opportunities.

IMA's Perspectives on Livelihoods Activities

Livelihoods issues are always linked to access to natural resources, yet also derive from socio-economic situations, and thus also require social responses. Livelihoods activities (including PRA) should be people-oriented and community-based. "Fair play" should be created for all people to ensure their full participation and equal benefits. People should be involved early and in all stages of the project – understanding and discussing issues, implementing and evaluating processes. Any solutions should be provided and decided by local people.

IMA's livelihoods perspectives can be defined as follows:

- *Maintaining current livelihoods* – Trao Reef Marine Reserve is not only necessary for conservation but is also a marine shield for the existing water area used for lobster cage culture. The deterioration of Trao Reef would directly and negatively affect local community livelihoods.
- *Reforming current livelihoods towards sustainable development* – Lobster and sweet snail culture is critically threatened because of high density, use of fresh food and lack of appropriate technology. The findings and recommendations of the socio-economic and environmental impact assessment of lobster culture are reported back to the local community and officials to raise their awareness about the necessary balance between aquaculture and the environment.

- *Developing new, environmentally-friendly livelihoods alternatives* – Targeting so-called "high risk" groups most affected by the marine reserve, and poor groups of fishermen and women, a livelihoods forum was held to discuss environmentally-friendly livelihoods options. After the forum, the most appropriate livelihoods were selected for implementation, i.e., those that require little capital and directly benefit poor people.

Lessons Learnt

- It is a challenge to balance access to natural resources and livelihoods issues in rural coastal areas since conflicts often arise. These are social issues and can only be solved if there is full community participation and coordination with local government.
- All activities and information regarding livelihoods should be transparent and discussed by local people, who should select any solutions and actions themselves. These activities should also be reported regularly to local government for their consultation and timely direction, and to get their policy support.
- Awareness-building activities need to be implemented regularly along with other project activities.
- Poor people, and particularly women and high-risk groups, should be considered as priority groups.
- Analysis is needed to understand livelihoods vulnerability.

Challenges and Constraints

- Open access to coastal and marine resources can lead to overexploitation and conflicts among different natural resources users.
- In general, aquaculture requires significant investment. Wealthier people are more likely to gain easier access to good sites with better conditions, while the development of these areas may bring them into the sphere of influence of local authorities and deprive poor people of access.
- The government is promoting aquaculture development but has not yet issued policies on water treatment or environmental protection.
- There is little market information on environmentally-friendly aquaculture products such as green mussel, oysters and seaweed.
- Knowledge and skills in integrated coastal zone management remain limited.
- The environmental impacts of aquaculture have been insufficiently assessed.

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Using the Findings from a Participatory Poverty Assessment in Tra Vinh Province

Le Quang Binh

PPA in Tra Vinh

In April 1999, Oxfam Great Britain (GB), in partnership with Tra Vinh People's Committee and the World Bank, conducted a Participatory Poverty Assessment (PPA) in the two districts of Duyen Hai and Chau Thanh in Tra Vinh Province. The purpose of the PPA was to better understand who the poor people are, how they define poverty, their priorities, and what significant changes have affected the well-being of people in the province over time. The objectives of the PPA were to:

- Influence poverty alleviation policies and strategies, particularly the government's Hunger Eradication and Poverty Reduction (HEPR) Program, in Tra Vinh and elsewhere in Vietnam.
- Strengthen Oxfam GB's understanding of poverty, and bring greater rigor to its analysis of poverty in Tra Vinh.
- Increase awareness among people and officials in Tra Vinh regarding dimensions of poverty and different approaches to poverty alleviation, and
- Develop poverty reduction projects for the poorest and most vulnerable groups in Tra Vinh.⁶

Some Findings

Among the poor people in Tra Vinh, six groups were identified as the poorest and most vulnerable to poverty:

- i. Landless people, who have to rely on selling labor and lack productive resources.
- ii. Poor Khmer people, whose problems include language barriers, landlessness and little skill in trading and business.
- iii. Poor women, who are heads of female-headed households. They are normally ranked as "poor" or "very poor" and extensively dependent on assistance from neighbors and relatives.
- iv. Physically isolated people, who identified lack of information and access as their biggest constraints.
- v. Illiterate people, who cited difficulties in interacting with the government as serious concerns (e.g., unable to read an instruction manual or fill out a loan application), and
- vi. Poor children, who are a marginalized group. Their education is often sacrificed when families find school fees unaffordable or their labor is needed to earn income.

The four main causes of poverty identified were i) few options for income-generation, ii) inability to accumulate savings, iii) landlessness, and iv) risky shrimp farming activities⁷. In both research sites, the income-generation ability of poor people was hindered by the lack of strong agriculture extension services. Accessibility to training courses is a problem for poor farmers – many participants said that "better-off" men were more likely to be invited to attend classes (women were almost completely excluded). In education, in Duyen Hai almost none of the children of poor families attended school past grade nine, or lower secondary school, and most did not go beyond grade five.

Using the Findings

At the national level, a report entitled "Tra Vinh – A Participatory Poverty Assessment" was released in November 1999. It was used as an input to the report "Vietnam – Poverty Attacking", which was produced by the Poverty Working Group, a coalition of government agencies, donors and NGOs working towards the eradication of poverty in Vietnam. This report was used for the Consultative Group Meeting for Vietnam in December 1999. The issues raised in the report were included in the Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy (CPRGS) for Vietnam. The CPRGS elaborates the general objectives, institutional arrangements, policies and solutions of the ten-year strategy and five-year plan into detailed specific action plans. At the same time, it is used to

⁶ This fourth objective was not in the Tra Vinh PPA report.

⁷ See *STREAM Journal* 1(1) for an article on shrimp farming by Jesper Clausen.

coordinate support from donors, international organizations and NGOs involved in economic development and poverty reduction. It is the first policy document in Vietnam that links growth and poverty and points out strategies for doing it. Furthermore, CPRGS also reflects the Vietnamese response to the United Nations Millennium Development Targets.

At the provincial level, the PPA findings were presented to provincial People's Committees and other departments. The findings helped provincial authorities have a deeper understanding of poverty and its causes from a different angle – the perspective of poor people. It was used extensively by the Department of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs in the development of poverty reduction programs and projects, especially those of HEPR.

The PPA findings have also been used extensively by Oxfam GB and its partners in poverty reduction program development. For example, "Agriculture Extension for the Poor, Women and Ethnic People" was developed to increase access of the most vulnerable groups to quality agriculture extension services. This project includes:

- The development of farmers groups at grassroots levels with a focus on people's empowerment. When poor people are empowered they can demand quality services, not only in agriculture extension, but also finance and market information.
- Capacity-building for the agriculture extension system, with a focus on decentralization and diversification of service providers, and
- Policy dialogue at provincial and national levels for more pro-poor and gender sensitive agriculture extension policies.

To support landless farmers, Oxfam GB funded the national Vietnam Farmers Union to conduct in-depth research on landlessness and communications work on landlessness issues. This has attracted the attention of the government to the issues – the Farmers Union was invited to take part in a special group of the government and Communist Party to review land laws and landlessness issues.

Oxfam GB will continue working on this issue by supporting provinces to find appropriate solutions to address landlessness in a sustainable and realistic manner. "Sustainable Natural Resource Management for Poverty Reduction" was developed to support landless farmers and small fishers to manage coastal areas and benefit from mussel production. This project aims to advocate with local and national authorities to allocate available resources for local poor people and secure their access to the natural resources on which they depend. "Promotion of Quality Primary Education" aims to ensure that all children living in poverty achieve their right to quality basic education. It was formulated to respond to these strategic change objectives:

- i. Removal of poor parents' financial contributions to primary education.
- ii. Adoption of child-centered methodologies to promote improvements in learning outcomes.
- iii. Provision of adequate resources for primary education on the basis of national standards, and
- iv. Participation of families and communities in educational decision-making.

Conclusion

It is clear that the results of any research or assessment can be used for different purposes at different levels. They can be used in advocacy to change policy in favor of poor people, women and ethnic groups. They can also be used to increase the understanding of local authorities about poverty causes to design better poverty alleviation programs for poor people. Research and assessment processes also can increase poor people's awareness of the causes of poverty and its solutions.

In the case of PPA in Tra Vinh, Oxfam GB has designed different projects to address identified poverty causes for different poor and vulnerable groups. Each project contains both direct support and advocacy and communication work to change policy and practice. Different strategies have been adopted to ensure that resources are used effectively and efficiently, and that the voices of the poorest and most vulnerable groups are heard and responded to.

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About the STREAM Journal

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Purpose

The *STREAM Journal* is published quarterly to promote participation, communication and policies that support the livelihoods of poor aquatic resources users in Asia-Pacific, and to build links within the aquatic resources management and other sectors across the region. The *STREAM Journal* covers issues related to people whose livelihoods involve aquatic resources management, especially people with limited resources, and government, non-governmental and international practitioners who work with them in communities. Such issues include learning, conflict management, information and communication technologies, aquatic resources management, legislation, livelihoods, gender, participation, stakeholders, policy and communications.

Another equally important purpose of the *STREAM Journal* is to provide an opportunity for seldom-raised voices to be heard and represented in a professional publication that is practical yet somewhat academic. The contents of the *STREAM Journal* should not be taken as reflecting the views of any particular organization or agency, but as statements by individuals based on their own experience. While authors are responsible for the contents of their articles, STREAM recognizes and takes responsibility for any editorial bias and oversights.

Distribution

The STREAM Journal is available in three formats:

- An electronic PDF version which is printed and distributed by the STREAM Communications Hubs in each country,
- A version which can be accessed and downloaded in PDF format from the Virtual Library on the STREAM Website at <www.streaminitiative.org>, and
- A printed version which is distributed by the NACA Secretariat.

Contribution

The *STREAM Journal* encourages the contribution of articles of interest to aquatic resources users and people who work with them. The *STREAM Journal* also supports community-level colleagues to document their own experiences in these pages.

Articles should be written in plain English and no more than 1,000 words long (about two A4 pages of single-spaced text).

Contributions can be made to William Savage, STREAM Journal Editor, at <savage@loxinfo.co.th>. For more information, contact Graham Haylor, STREAM Director, at <ghaylor@loxinfo.co.th>.

About STREAM

Support to Regional Aquatic Resources Management (STREAM) is an Initiative designed within the five-year Work Programme cycle of the Network of Aquaculture Centres in Asia-Pacific (NACA). It aims to support agencies and institutions to:

- Utilize existing and emerging information more effectively
- Better understand poor people's livelihoods, and
- Enable poor people to exert greater influence over policies and processes that impact on their lives.

STREAM will do this by supporting the development of policies and processes of mediating institutions, and building capacity to:

- Identify aquatic resources management issues impacting on the livelihoods of poor people
- Monitor and evaluate different management approaches
- Extend information, and
- Network within and between sectors and countries.

The STREAM Initiative is based around partnerships, involving at the outset a coalition of founding partners (AusAID, DFID, FAO and VSO) supporting NACA. It has adopted an inclusive approach, reaching out to link stakeholders engaged in aquatic resources management and supporting them to influence the Initiative's design, implementation and management.

The partnerships' work is coordinated in each country through National Coordinating Teams comprising the National Coordinator (a senior national colleague agreed with the government) and the Communications Hub Manager (a full-time national colleague supported in the first two years by STREAM), and linking a range of national stakeholders. The Communications Hub is provided with hardware, software, training, information-technology support, and networking and human resources support, and links national stakeholders through an Internet-based virtual regional network.

National coordination is guided by an annually-reviewed Country Strategy Paper (CSP) drawn up by the Coordinator and Hub Manager in consultation with stakeholders with whom they regularly network. A CSP identifies key issues, highlights regional linkages, proposes and prioritizes key actions, and seeks funding for these from STREAM and elsewhere (with STREAM support).

The STREAM Regional Office (at the NACA Secretariat in Bangkok) directs the Initiative, provides a regional coordination function, and funds and manages cross-cutting activities dealing with livelihoods, institutions, policy development and communications, the four results-based STREAM themes.

STREAM implementation is an iterative process, initially operating in Cambodia, the Philippines and Vietnam, and expanding within Asia-Pacific where opportunities exist to tackle poverty and promote good governance, as experience is gained, lessons are learned, impact is demonstrated and additional funding is secured. STREAM's communications strategy aims to increase impact by ensuring that existing knowledge and expertise inform ongoing change processes around the region, and that the lessons learned are disseminated throughout Asia-Pacific. The *STREAM Journal* and the STREAM website are components of this strategy.

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