

SIEED project Final Evaluation report

A. Cover Sheet

Name of document	Final Evaluation
Full title	Social Inclusion Economic Enterprise Development
Acronym/PN	SIEED
Country	Vietnam
Date of report	August 2012
Dates of project	Start: 1 April 2008, start-up was delayed until 15 July 2008 End: 31 August 2012
Evaluator(s)	Ingrid Richardson
External?	Yes
Donor(s)	EU
Scope	Project
Type of report	End of Project evaluation
Brief abstract (description of project)	<p>The SIEED project focussed on improving the incomes of Vietnamese and ethnic minority farmers in remote North-Western Vietnam through the provision of technical training and market linkages to groups of farmers. Farmer groups focussed on improving the quality, productivity and resilience of their chosen livelihood model in order to improve incomes. With project support, agricultural and forestry products were then linked to commercial buyers, improving the sustainability of income and practice change and introducing market-based production concepts. Project services were delivered in close partnership with the Women's Union, Farmers' Union and with local VNGO, CCD. CCD had a significant ownership stake in the project and has continued to deliver project services including group formation, technical training and agricultural marketing beyond the end of the project. In addition, the project supported improvements in the agricultural input and marketing services sector with the establishment of a new social enterprise, CCM, an organisation under the umbrella of CCD, that is committed to improving the delivery of quality, price competitive technical, input and marketing services to farmers across in Dien Bien Phu.</p>
Project Goal and Specific Objectives	Goal: Poor rural producers participate in and benefit from Vietnam's economic growth post World Trade Organization (WTO) accession.
Objectives / Outcomes/Outputs	<p>Specific objective 1: Poor farmers in 10 remote northern mountains communes benefit equitably from marketing of selected products regionally and nationally and sustainable farm/forest production systems.</p> <p>Specific objective 2: Community Centre Development (CCD), Women's Union (WU) and Farmers' Union's (FU) capacity to support community groups and their access to markets improved.</p>
Evaluation Methodology	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review of quantitative and qualitative data collected by project staff through interviews with individual households and beneficiary groups. 2. Review of project documents including project progress report, project data, prior evaluations and mission reports/ROM mission reports.

	3. Key informant and focus group interviews with project staff, partners and beneficiaries;
Summary of lessons learned (evaluation findings of interest to other audiences)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Form a limited number of groups and form groups early in the project cycle so that support can be provided over a longer period of time. 2. Screen livelihood models for market potential early in the project and select a small number of livelihood models for intensive support. Market-link activities need to occur simultaneously with group formation. 3. If developing NTFPs value chains, also consider value chains that can provide poor households with short and long term income streams 4. Provide an introduction to the VSLA model alongside training on livelihood models. 5. Consider partnerships with local civil society organisations or private sector providers to improve the likelihood that activities and services continue. Ensure partner's institutional and financial structures are sustainable.
Contribution to MDGs	1a:Income 3:Women's Empowerment

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Acronyms

BBC	Black bone chicken
CCD	Centre for Community Development
CCM	Centre for Collaboration business and Market linkage
DARD	Department of Agriculture and Rural Development
ECCODE	Thai Nguyen Women’s Economic Collaboration for Development
FU	Farmer’s Union
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MOU	Memorandum of understanding
NGO	Non Government Organisation
NTFP	Non-Timber Forest Products
PSC	Project Steering Committee
SIEED	Social Inclusion in Economic Enterprise Development
VCA	Value Chain Analysis
WU	Women’s Union

B. Executive Summary

The project's approach of improving economic conditions for poor farmers through group formation, capacity building and market development is unique and effective. Identifying and establishing market linkages was central to the effectiveness of the project. At the close of the project, these approaches have led to a number of participating groups and households reporting increases in income from 10 to 40%. Households reported being better able to cover the cost of schooling for children, make investments in agricultural production and purchase new household goods and motorbikes. The project's proactive involvement of women appears to have had positive impacts with the source of empowerment likely resulting from increased female-generated household income.

Inevitably, some groups experienced greater changes in their livelihood within the timeframe of the project because of the timing or nature of activities. The diversity of results highlights a tension in the project's approach: using market-based approaches to generate long-term livelihood change for the most remote and poorest farmers is a challenge, although not impossible. For some farmers the remoteness of their village and their limited capacity (financial, physical or institutional) hampers their chances to make use of identified market linkages. In the case of the black bone chicken value chain, sourced from remote Tua Chua district, the uniqueness and demand for the product underpinned its success irrespective of distance to market. Given the large number of groups and the diversity of livelihood models and differing market links, it is not surprising that there is also diversity in income impacts. One of the strengths of the project was that a number of different models were tested, however, this approach was also resource intensive. Forming fewer groups and supporting the implementation of fewer livelihood models may have enabled more intensive support and potentially improve the sustainability of groups, livelihood practices and market links.

CCD engagement by other donors is a strong endorsement of the SIEED approach and is an excellent example of the scaling-up of the project to new people and into new areas. In addition, there are a number of reports of the spontaneous adoption of techniques by non-project participants because of the accessible and practical techniques and the use of indigenous varieties.

CCD/CCM has ambitious social and commercial goals, and could be instrumental in connecting both farmers to markets and markets to farmers on an ongoing basis. But, at present, the organisation has limited reach and is financially very vulnerable. CCM is relying on business fee-for-service contracts with several development projects to provide steady income while the commercial business begins to scale-up operations. Commercially, CCM will focus on serving markets close to Dien Bien City. There arises a tension between the 'social' and 'commercial' elements of the business: pursuing customers near Dien Bien Phu, which is already well served is much lower risk than pursuing business with higher risk and less commercially viable poor and remote farmers. In order improve the accessibility of

services to farmers, CCM needs to sure-up funding sources, commercial strategy and staffing.

For project implementation, the Women's Union and Farmers' Union, were very well placed to provide the necessary network and skills to be able to reach remote sites and to improve the capacity of group members during the project, unfortunately, their role and reach is unlikely to be sustained without project funding. The experience with CCD/CCM suggests that partnering with local civil society organizations or private sector providers may contribute to improving the likelihood that farmer support services continue at the close of the project.

In conclusion, the project can demonstrate positive income impacts for a selection of groups and value chains by enabling the development of commercial market links. Some groups are reliant on CCM for links to markets and consequently, the sustainability of the impacts and outcomes of the project become linked to the sustainability of the CCM business model.

C. Introduction and background

The *Social Inclusion in Economic Enterprise Development* (SIEED) Project, funded by European Union (EU) and CARE Denmark, is implemented by CARE International in Viet Nam in Dien Bien Province, over a 53 month period. The project's objective is that "Poor rural producers participate in and benefit from Vietnam's economic growth post World Trade Organization (WTO) accession."

The project acts through the development of market-led approaches and interventions to add value to production and processing undertaken by the poor, while at the same time maintaining or enhancing environmental quality. Enabling poor women and men to form groups, and supporting these groups to develop and adopt new production methods and technologies, will lead to business opportunities and better capture of revenue in lower levels of the value chain. Equally, improved quality and business service provision to the processing and marketing sections of the value chain will allow improved revenue capture by other actors.

This evaluation aims to assess and make recommendations on:

- Project results and sustainability, as well as factors that have promoted or constrained their realisation.
- Further analysis of findings from previous reviews and other project reports on other aspects including Relevance, Effectiveness, and Efficiency.
- Monitoring and learning: The effectiveness of project monitoring and learning processes and its perceived result in terms of supporting project management (see Annex D, Terms of Reference for Final Evaluation).

D. Evaluation methodology

During the last four years, the SIEED project has been reviewed on a number of occasions, including: an internal mid-term review and annual EU ROM mission reviews. The four ROM mission reports provide a comprehensive and evolving view of the project and as a consequence, the focus of the final evaluation is on project results and sustainability. The evaluation has drawn on both quantitative and qualitative information from a variety of resources including:

- (a) Project staff; (b) Project documents and other records including monitoring data, ROM reports; and CCM's business plan; EU narrative reports; and presentations and data prepared by project staff; (c) Field observation and interviews with beneficiaries;
- (d) Interviews with project partners and other relevant stakeholders.

The choice of specific methods and sampling procedures was determined by the team in conjunction with the CARE Vietnam and project management team.

Step 1 – Survey of groups

The first step in the evaluation was undertaken by project staff who, using a series of survey questions, conducted individual and group interviews with groups and group leaders. Interviews took place from 16-19 July 2012.

Given time, budget and wet season constraints on travel, the groups and households selected for interview in the project team's survey were relatively few, however, all group leaders were interviewed in order to provide a broader understanding of change (See Table 1 for details).

Table 1: Interviewees and reasons for selection

People interviewed	Reason for selection
<p>Dien Bien: Nà Tấu and Thanh Nưa communes</p> <p>Group interviews: 1 interest group (17 members); 1 cooperative (22 members) 39 group members in total</p> <p>Individual interviews: 4 group members (2 from duck interest group, 2 from rice seedling cooperative);</p> <p>Group leaders: 10 group leaders drawn from 10 groups in Thanh Nua commune</p>	<p>Thanh Nua commune was selected to represent a flat land area, Na Tau commune was selected to represent a mountainous area of Dien Bien district</p> <p>One animal husbandry (duck raising group) and one planting group (rice seed group) were selected in order to provide diversity of group types in Dien Bien</p> <p>After group interviews, two members of each group were randomly selected for individual interviews.</p> <p>All groups leaders in Thanh Nua participated in group discussion in order to gather general information and achievement from every group in the commune</p>
<p>Tua Chua: Mường Báng commune</p> <p>Group interviews: 2 interest groups</p> <p>Individual interviews: 4 groups members from 2 interest groups: duck and BBC</p> <p>Group leaders: 30 group leaders drawn from 30 groups across the commune</p>	<p>Almost all groups in Tua Chua raised BBC and ducks, therefore BBC and duck groups were selected randomly to conduct group interviews</p> <p>Following the group interview, two members of each group were randomly selected for individual interviews</p> <p>All groups leaders in Muong Bang participated in group discussion in order to gather general</p>

Facilitators: 6 representatives

information and record the achievements of every group in the commune

All commune facilitators (3 communes) from Tua Chua district participated in group discussions

Dien Bien Dong: Pu Nhi commune

Groups discussion: 2 groups (goat raising group – 10 members and pig raising group - 14 members)

There are two significant ethnic minority groups (Hmong and Thai) in Dien Bien Dong. The project selected the H'mong goat interest group and the Thaaig pig interest group for interview to gather the views of these ethnic minorities.

Individual interviews: 4 group members (2 members from goat group and 2 members from pig group)

Following the group interview, two members of each group were randomly selected for individual interviews

Group leader's discussion: 10 group leaders from Pu Nhi commune

All groups leaders in Pu Nhi participated in group discussion in order to gather general information and record the achievements of every group in the commune

Step 2 – Review of documents

The evaluation has encompassed a thorough review of project documentation, including, but not limited to: project design documents; monitoring and evaluation plans; interim narrative reports; ROM mission reports, project indicators; CCM business plan; and no-cost extension documentation.

Step 3 – Staff interviews

On 19 July 2012 a presentation on the implementation and results of the project by the SIEED project manager was followed by interviews and a group discussion with the project manager and seven project and partner staff. Individual interviews with CCD/CCM staff also took place on 19 July 2012. A full list of interviewees is available at Annex A.

Step 4 –Partner interviews

A series of meetings were held in Dien Bien between 19 and 22 July with staff from the Women's Union (three individuals), Farmer's Union (two individuals) and WU/FU Facilitators (seven individuals). A full list of interviewees is available at Annex A.

Step 5 - Group and household discussions

On 21-22 July 2012, semi-structured groups interviews were conducted with eight members of the Goat Raising Group in Pu Nhi Commune, Dien Bien Dong District and ten members of the Sweet Potato Group in Dien Bien District.

I. Limitations to evaluation methodology

The project has been regularly reviewed and evaluated during implementation and in accordance with the ROM recommendations; the final evaluation has therefore concentrated on reviewing existing documents and project records from the final year, supported by a small amount of primary data gathering.

Two groups were interviewed by the evaluator and these interviews provide case study insight into the project's activities. The remoteness of project sites and the difficulty of accessing remote locations during the wet season meant that the two groups chosen for interview were located relatively close to Dien Bien Phu town and were accessible in the

short amount of time available for the evaluation fieldwork. Case studies such as these provide valuable information of the circumstances of a particular group, but the findings may not be able to be generalized to a wider population.

E. Results, analysis and discussion

Impact

I. Livelihood changes

In line with the project's goal¹, interviews with groups indicate that the project has contributed to improvements in productivity, quality, and, for a number of groups, income. All participating communes reported income increases, with the Province-wide average increase being a 17.35% improvement, ahead of targets. During the final evaluation interviews, both groups and individuals reported increases in income. In Dien Bien Dong District 20 out of 24 of group members reported income increases from 10% – 25%, with average increase in income was about 11% per year. In Dien Bien Dong district, interviews showed four (out of four interviewed) *households* had income increased from 15 – 40% and nine out of ten groups reported that their financial status improved. Provincial government statistics show that over the period of the project, incomes (in rice equivalent) in Tua Chua district have increased by 26.7%, In Dien Bien Dong by 20.1% and in Dien Bien by 5.37%. The project's participants show similar changes in income, and with similarly large variation across different areas. To complement quantitative data, interviews with participating households and groups in all three districts revealed income change can be demonstrated with changing behaviour and new purchases:

- Households reported that they were better able to cover the cost of schooling for children, including sending more children to school.
- Groups reported continued investment in the model, including purchase of fertiliser and other inputs to maintain the model
- Investment in other agricultural production and processing activities, including purchase of fertiliser for rice production and the purchase of a rice mill
- Purchase of household goods including televisions, fans, rice cookers, other household appliances and motorbikes

Inevitably, some groups experienced greater changes in their livelihood within the timeframe of the project because of the timing or nature of activities. Differences in group livelihood/income performance stemmed from

- some groups starting later or the model taking longer to deliver income (NTFPs)
- some value chains being less profitable
- some individual group members are yet to benefit because of the cyclical nature of their model.

For example, within the timeframe of the project, the non-timber forest product (NTFP) value chains have not been able to generate benefits for farmers. Benefits may accrue to growers of both rattan and acacia within five to seven years after planting, this means that

¹ "Poor rural producers participate in and benefit from Vietnam's growth post WTO accession", measured by the indicator: At least 50% target communes meet provincial SEDP targets for raised incomes 15% based on improved use of natural resources and access to services (segregated by ethnic minority and gender)

some income is expected in 2013. The project has assisted acacia growers in linking to buyers and sales are secured for when the timber becomes available. For rattan growers, CCM has been assessing rattan buyers in Hanoi to develop market links.

In a second example, livestock models take time to generate income for all because of the time required for an animal's life cycle. For example, in the case of the Pu Nhi goat group, five group members could report income improvements because they were waiting in turn to receive and raise a kid (juvenile goat). This is not a negative result, but rather reflects the time that it takes for a model such as this to generate returns for each member.

As indicated by the examples above, the extent of impact of the project on very poor farmers' livelihoods is not consistent because of the difficulties of linking isolated groups to markets. The diversity of results highlights a tension in the project's approach that was described succinctly by the ROM Mission report (October 2011) "...during the project inception phase, marginalized and remote villages received priority. Looking at these criteria from a long term project perspective, they are in open contradiction with market potential."

Using market-based approaches to generate long-term livelihood change for the most remote and poorest farmers remains a challenge that the project has gone some way to addressing. For example, the success of the BBC value chain in Tua Chua suggests that the uniqueness of some products may overcome difficulties with distance to markets, but by nature these products are few and not every remote community will be home to a such an opportunity. The introduction of CCM into the market, may also help to overcome some of the existing institutional challenges to linking remote farmers to markets. The efficacy of this organization at bridging the gap between consumers and farmers will be of great interest.

In conclusion, the project can demonstrate positive income impacts for a selection of groups and value chains. Given the large number of groups and the diversity of livelihood models and differing market links, it is not surprising that there is also diversity in income impacts. The methodology used to select value chains is important as income changes were dependent on the value chain. The project's use of a two-step approach to screening models: initial rapid value-chain analysis followed up with in-depth analysis for a smaller selection of products seems both sensible and efficient. For future projects, the screening of numerous models remains valid, as does the rapid and in-depth analysis. Using the value-chain analysis as a means to whittle down the number of supported models early-on would enable more intensive support and could potentially improve the sustainability of groups, livelihood practices and market links although with the trade-off of increased per-person costs.

Unintended impacts: Unique local products

Amongst the greatest strengths and innovations of the project was the practical application of knowledge generated by the deep VCAs to identify and marry unique local varieties with consumer markets. The most notable example being the black bone chicken (BBC) value chain, which has had substantial impacts on the livelihood of the BBC producers because of the high and sustained demand from restaurants. As discussed during the ROM Mission (October 2011) there is potential to safeguard the value of unique products, such as BBC, by

obtaining a ‘Geographical Indication’ (GI) for the product. The advantage of GI is in establishing and protecting a unique product with its own ‘brand’ that may have a higher market value. The downside of GI is that the cost of obtaining and protecting such certifications is usually very expensive and complex, and the return on the investment may be low. Pursuing GI certification could potentially be considered a long term goal for CCM, but should only be pursued if the economic return can be assured in the Vietnamese market context.

Unintended impacts: Identifying and managing value chain risks

There are price, production and environmental risks associated with some value chains. From a market perspective, encouraging the increased production of a commodity may result in over-supply and falling prices if market demand is not sufficiently large and growing. In the case of the sweet potato group, prices have fallen in 2012 as a result of falling demand, impacting income. Ensuring that value chain analysis is comprehensive and considers both market growth and potential risks may have provided some insurance against negative impacts. That said, it must be acknowledged that both agricultural and consumer market analysis is particularly difficult and prone to numerous uncertainties associated with changing production conditions and fickle consumer demand. Cautious implementation that allows beneficiaries to continue to access a diversity of income sources, coupled with technical assistance to tackle production and market risks can support change within tolerable levels of uncertainty.

Scale and outreach

Table 2: Replication of agricultural models, with and without project support

Agricultural Model	Number of households receiving support from the project	Number of households replicating the model, without project support
1. Goat	75	52
2. Black bone chicken	96	73
3. Pig raising	81	23
4. Duck raising	220	187
5. Rice seed	23	5
6. Sweet potato	93	208
7. Soy bean	205	183
8. Acacia planting	105	42
9. Fish raising	297	125

With reference to Table 2 above, there are a number of reports of the adoption of techniques and methods by villagers outside the groups formed by the project. Because the project tended to focus on improving practices for existing livelihood models, it is relatively easy for new practice to spread naturally within a community, particularly when the new practice has proven its effectiveness. For example, the sweet potato group reported that other members of the community have asked for advice on how to plant and grow sweet potatoes and how to use fertilizer properly to achieve better results.

The likelihood of adoption of the group models and the spontaneous creation of new groups, without assistance, is highly unlikely. For some livelihood models, spontaneous sharing and adoption of practices will be limited by the specific costs and more complex requirements of the model and/or the need for a group structure to make the model work. For example, the cost of some livestock models (e.g. goat) may be too high for individual farmers. In some cases, individuals will be able to join an existing group, although there is likely to be a natural limit to a group's size as the management of large numbers of members becomes increasingly difficult.

WU and FU representatives noted that they would like to continue to support groups, however, the frequency and intensity of support would diminish. In addition, there were not resources available within the FU or WU to support the formation of new groups where farmers were interested. There is scope that new donors are willing to fund the existing groups and/or the roll-out of the same group-forming approach to new groups, offering the potential for continued outreach of successful ideas. The uptake of SIEED approaches by new donors will require advocacy on the part of the WU/FU to endorse and promote the approaches, and openness of donors to external ideas.

CCD has been engaged by other development projects in the region, on a fee-for-service basis, to implement the SIEED approach to group and livelihood models. This is a strong endorsement of the SIEED approach and is an excellent example of the scaling-up of the project to new people and into new areas.

II. Women's empowerment

The project's proactive involvement of women appears to have had a number of positive and unanticipated impacts on women within the groups. For example, WU staff reported that women were bolder and more confident, some were involved in economic decision making within their families and beyond their family, both within groups and at community level. WU staff also described that they had noticed reduced levels of domestic violence amongst participating households. Further discussion and analysis would be required to establish the relationship between project activities and a fall in domestic violence.

The women of the all-female sweet potato group showed considerable ambition as a result of their involvement in the group. The group had discussed plans to experiment with growing other crops such as tomatoes and eggplants. In pursuing this goal, they faced limitations in availability of finance and access to crop-specific training but intended to draw on the knowledge of farmers outside the group who had experience with these crops, in order to learn. This example demonstrates the willingness of women, empowered by the project, to pursue new ideas.

III. Access to services

WU and FU

The project has contributed to changing the capacity of WU and FU staff, however, internal funding and human resource constraints will prevent the WU and FU from continuing to implement project activities *independently*. That said, the WU and FU are partners in a

number of other donor-funded projects within the province and there is scope for successful approaches to be shared from one project to another through the WU or FU. The WU and FU could be instrumental in communicating both what they have learned and successful approaches from previous projects and how this can be utilised within new projects leading to continuity of services to farmers, albeit with a different donor.

CCD and CCM

The durability of livelihood impacts is very much dependent on CCM being able to provide continued support to sustain the market-links established during the project. For several livelihood models, CCM is the essential link between poor rural producers and markets. Table 3 provides information about the services CCM has been able to offer to producers that go beyond those services funded during the project.

Table 3: Services provided by CCM

List of services provided by CCM that were not funded from project budget	Funding sources
Sale of black bone chickens to 120 households (Muong Lay and Muong Anh districts)	World Bank
Sale of chickens to 600 households (Tuan Giao and Muong Cha districts)	World Vision project and Dien Bien Center for Agricultural Extension
Sale of ducks to 120 households (Dien Bien Dong, Tuan Giao, Muong Ang districts)	World Vision and World Bank
Sale of cassava seedling to 50 households (Muong Cha district)	Dien Bien Extension Centre
Sale of Guatemala grass seedlings to 20 households (Muong Cha district)	Muong Cha Extension Centre
Provision of technical training for chicken raising to 80 households	JICA project
Provision of veterinary services to 500-700 households	Commercial market
Products purchased from households: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Black bone chicken: 42 households • Hmong native pig: 28 households • Rice: 37 households 	

CCM's marketing activities remain vulnerable to a number of risks, including the risk of price fluctuations of purchased agricultural and forestry products, difficulties associated with transport, housing and feeding animals and ensuring animals remain disease-free. The perishability of horticultural crops, grains or animals also means storage is expensive and requires careful management.

With regard to the provision of inputs and services, CCM has a role as the service-provider to farmers participating in donor-funded development project which will link CCM to some

otherwise un-serviced poorer farmers. In addition, through cooperative agreements with the Dien Bien government extension centre and the World Bank, CCM will be contracted to provide services to a number of other poor and remote farmers increasing the scale and reach of CCM considerably. As a social enterprise, poor and remote farmers are the group that should be of most interest to CCM because there is little competition in this market and the most potential for social good. Commercially, CCM's focus on lowland areas around Dien Bien City is low-risk and commercially sensible as these farmers have higher incomes and are better able to pay directly for services. However, in lowland areas CCM will be operating in competition to existing suppliers in Dien Bien city which will require CCM to provide a differentiated and price competitive service in a market where farmers may have existing relationships and loyalties to suppliers. In this market, CCM's differentiated, high quality and cost-competitive service will be key to converting and retaining customers.

Livelihood impacts of the project would be heightened if CCM is able to continue to support groups formed within the project. CCM is improving access and ensuring continuity of service by embedding farmer trainers within the CCM business model as 'collaborators'. Farmer trainers will provide a new means of communicating to farmers about services that are available and communicating to CCM the needs of the farming community. With a number of fee-for-service contracts already signed, CCM has secured funding for the short to medium term for a portion of its activities. Commercial profitability across all business services and/or the ability to cross-subsidise less profitable activities with profits from other activities is essential for CCM to be financially sustainable in the long term. Finding a balance in CCM's strategy between commercial and social-enterprise activities is essential if CCM is to be viable in the long term while also meeting its organization goals.

Sustainability

1. Sustainability of livelihood changes

The relatively minimal provision of financial inputs to groups and the stepped reduction of inputs over time has led to the development of financially self-sustaining groups from a very early stage in the group's life cycle. The considered use of local varieties of plants and animals contributes greatly to ensuring the environmental and agro-ecological resilience and sustainability of the projects outcomes. That said, some of the project's animal production models may not be environmentally or socially sustainable without changes to the model to limit harm from animal waste.

The project has enabled the development of commercial market links and group members report increased capacity to negotiate with other members of the value chain which increases the likelihood that farmers, traders and end-users will maintain relationships and interactions after the project ends, contributing to financial sustainability. Some groups are reliant on CCM for links to markets and consequently, the sustainability of the groups becomes linked to the sustainability of the CCM business model.

Financial sustainability could have been enhanced if groups were provided with an option to have training on the establishment of a group savings and loan fund alongside agricultural

training early in a group's development. Introducing community saving schemes would complement the agricultural activities and contribute to addressing the unavailability of reasonably priced credit for small producers.

It is clear from interviews with project staff and partners that not every group created under the project will continue. Groups that are more informal and loosely connected are likely to continue to employ agriculture production techniques taught through the project, however, are unlikely to continue to meet and the ability of the group to update knowledge and learn new techniques will be limited. The sustainability of groups themselves may not be critical for the sustainability of the projects livelihood impacts. Group formation was essential for the project to be able to efficiently and effectively deliver knowledge and training. However, with the end of the project, the individuals that make up these groups will choose to follow independent and different paths. Remaining in a group may be of diminishing relevance.

The sustainability of the project has the potential to be very good among more established groups that are well linked to both service providers and buyers. Sustainability is weaker for beneficiaries who are not well linked to markets or are more remote.

II. Women's empowerment

Interviews found evidence of changes in the social position of women within groups and more broadly within families and communities. Some of the most successful groups, including the BBC group and the Black Duck group had very successful and entrepreneurial female leaders. The project's approach has favoured 'showing' rather than 'telling' meaning the project provided relatively little in terms of training or activities to empower women. Instead, groups with strong female role models and women in management positions are likely to have provided positive and empowering images which will be remembered. The greatest source of direct female empowerment through the project is likely a result of greater economic empowerment from increased female-generated income. As discussed above, for some groups and models, livelihood change looks likely to be sustained, however, for others the market links are more tenuous and difficult to sustain without assistance.

III. Access to services

Women's Union and Farmers' Union

Institutionally and financially the WU does not seem to be well-placed to ensure long-term continuity in access to services for farmers. Internal funding does not appear available for the WU to provide project services, even if there is desire to continue. External donors may support some continuation in services, however, this depends on the WU advocating for continuity.

The Farmers Union has a large existing network of members and a mandate to work with farmers and provide services although, again, resources are limited. As suggested by the ROM Mission (October 2011), CCM could employ FU staff on a fee-for-service basis to provide technical assistance to groups thereby contributing to the sustainability of services. This approach would fit well with CCD/CCM's strategy by reaching remote areas where CCM

does not (yet) have a physical presence. However, this strategy relies on CCM being able to sustainably finance FU staff. At the close of the project, CCD/CCM long term financing remains reliant on donors and the expected increase in business.

It is anticipated that continued support at the same scale from WU and FU to farmer groups is unsustainable because of financial and human resource constraints.

CCD and CCM

CCD, as a local civil society organization, is integral to ensuring the sustainability of several key approaches of the project. Institutionally, CCD is well integrated and well supported by provincial authorities. The intention is that there will be a provincial representative on the board of the organisation in future, ensuring that the good relationship that exists between CCD and local administrators will continue.

CCM is relying on the fee-for-service contracts with development projects to provide steady demand for services and finance while the commercial business begins to scale-up operations. In spite of these donor-contracts, CCM remains financially vulnerable. CCM's status as a social enterprise, makes the organization ineligible to bank lines of credit that are available to private business. CCD/CCM are continuing to discuss alternative shareholder and donor financing options but these will take time to secure. In addition, new donors of shareholders will introduce reporting requirements and make demands on CCD/CCM as an institution that require time and resources that are in limited supply within the organization.

CCM's only option is to be a viable and price competitive business, quite a departure from CCD's experience. As a business strategy, prioritizing customers close to Dien Bien City reduces risks and transport costs but also exposes CCM to a degree of competition from the many existing input supply businesses. CCM's small number of employees have minimal experience in the private sector meaning that the sustainability of operations may be compromised. In this respect, farmer trainers may have a key role to play in supporting CCD/CCM in its transition to a fully commercial operation by being quasi-staff members and extending the reach for CCM into remote areas where there is less competition from other market players. Like staff, farmer trainers will need to be financially compensated in order to make the relationship viable.

Developing the institutional structures that create and support CCM earlier in the project cycle would have contributed to improved sustainability of the new enterprise as there would have been a greater level of support for appropriate capacity building and financial cushion through project funding.

The 'teething' problems described above for CCM highlight the complexity of setting up a new social enterprise/business and the time it takes for a business to develop a strategy, find customers and become viable. Another complementary or alternative approach to establishing a new business may be to involve existing small businesses in the project and improve their capacity to provide input, processing and marketing services. The experience of the project shows that existing input service providers often provide poor services and/or charge high prices. Understanding the reasons behind the poor input service provision and

the inefficiencies in the supply chain and then supporting change could improve the sustainability of the supply chain. In addition, encouraging competition and improvements in service provision may help to drive down costs for farmers. Building formal and informal partnerships with private sector enterprises may help to improve the effectiveness and long term sustainability of the intervention.

IV. Project methodologies: group formation and training, value chain analysis

Discussions with the WU and FU revealed that some of the skills and knowledge obtained through SIEED training courses have already been incorporated into non-SIEED project activities, ensuring these skills live on beyond the project. The FU stated that FU members had developed livelihood models independent of the project, suggesting that project methodologies have been absorbed with that organisation.

The fact that CCD has been contracted by other donors to continue to implement the nine step group formation approach and to deliver services to farmers, bodes well for the sustainability of these approaches within CCD and more broadly across the province. With reference to the sustainability of new skills, such as Value Chain Analysis, CCD have conducted analyses independently, on H'mong Native Pork and Thai Ducks, suggesting that CCD is embedding the new skills and practices. The donor funding will allow CCM/CCD to really cement skills in the long term. Continuing to use and train new staff members in the approaches will be essential to sustaining skills, individually and organisationally.

Results: Effectiveness and delivery of project results

The logframe, including targets and achievements is available at Annex B. The discussion below elaborates on achievements against indicators under each result area.

I. Livelihood changes²

Eighty-seven per cent of groups (ahead of a target of 75%) reported improved [group] financial performance during the project's implementation. Provincial government statistics show that over the period of the project, incomes in Tua Chua district have increased by 26.7%, In Dien Bien Dong by 20.1% and in Dien Bien by 5.37%. For project participants, incomes have increased between 10-40%, with variation between households, livelihood models and regions.

The project aimed to achieve improved incomes through the development of both farm and forest products, specifically non-timber forest products (NTFPs). However, within the timeframes of the project, the NTFP value chains have not been able to generate benefits for farmers, impacting the extent to which the project reaches its objectives of fair distribution of benefits. This finding does not undermine the possibility of these value chains for generating benefits in the longer term, but the success or otherwise cannot be captured within the project's results.

² Specific objective 1. Poor farmers in 10 remote northern mountains communes benefit equitably from marketing of selected products regionally and nationally and sustainable farm/forest production systems.

II. Women's empowerment

The proactive inclusion of women and ethnic minorities has assisted in ensuring that when benefits accrue to farmers from better market linkages, and that those groups that are usually excluded can benefit: targets for gender and ethnic minority participation in groups have been exceeded with 100% (against a target of >90%) of group members being from an ethnic minority and 70.6% being women (target of 66%).

III. Access to services

Women's Union and Farmers' Union

All provincial WU and FU staff have had access to a number of training activities which were uniformly described as being relevant and useful. The large majority of targets relating to the delivery of training to the WU and FU at the village, commune and district have been met. The training of both WU and FU management at the commune and village level is ahead of target (26 versus target of 20). Sixty-five farmers trainers have been trained, ahead of a target of 60, and now have the capability to provide training to groups.

CCD and CCM

In line with the Result #3, new business services have been established with the creation of Centre for Collaboration Business and Market Linkage (CCM). CCM has developed a business plan and is already contracted to work with new donor-funded projects. CCD, as an NGO, has continued to provide of technical agricultural information and services to farmer groups. Client satisfaction with CCD is reported as being high, with 98% of clients saying they are satisfied with services delivered. Over the course of the project, CCD reports a steep increase in demand for CCD's facilitation of project information packages suggesting the project has successfully stimulated demand and better connected CCD with farmers.

IV. Project methodologies

Group formation and organizational strengthening

In line with targets, project activities covered 100 villages of 10 communes in three selected districts. Ahead of end of project targets, 158 groups with 2,675 members were established and operating by July 2012. The number of group members well and truly exceeds the target of 1700 as new groups have formed and existing groups have added new members, suggesting that the approach is appealing and relevant.

Far fewer collaboration groups have been formed than expected and targeted: 22 groups compared to an end of project target of 50. Formalisation of group structures does not appear to appeal to groups and it may be that group members recall negative experience from 'old-style' cooperatives and consequently have reticence to join 'new-style' collaboration groups promoted by the project. While group structures enable a more efficient delivery of training to farmers, farming and marketing on an individual basis appears to be the preference of the majority. A lack of collaboration and cooperative groups does not indicate a failing of the project but rather suggests that the interest group may be a means to an end and not an end in itself for farmers.

Value chain analysis

The project has very effectively contributed to the identification and development of a large number of value chains through the practical introduction of new or improved techniques to farmer groups. Not all value chain models have performed equally well in terms of their ability to secure benefits for farmers (within the timeframes of the project) as stipulated by Result #1.

At the conclusion of the project, 39 products have been screened for productive and commercial potential, 34 models have been demonstrated in-field and 23 products have been adopted by groups. In line with the target, just under two-thirds of the value chains that were analysed have uncovered opportunities for the development and diversification of either production or processing techniques. In Year 4, CCD undertook a value chain analysis of the H'mong native pig and Thai duck value chains to assess market potential. The project has identified the most successful value chains as: chicken; black bone chicken; goat; pig; *bao thai* rice; soybeans; sweet potato; duck; acacia; garlic and fish. This finding supports the underlying assumption of the project design that there were untapped opportunities for production improvement and market development and supports the validity of the market-based approach.

Farmer Field School training and farmer trainers

Groups have proved to be an effective and efficient way of delivering training. Group retention rates have held at essentially 100% over the course of the project, suggesting there is appeal in remaining in the group, at least while the project lasts. Ongoing support and replication of models from existing to new groups has been encouraged through visits with 18% of group members participating in a visit, and, on occasion, uptake and replication of techniques by non-group members has occurred spontaneously.

Credit through VSLA

Credit provision was not incorporated into the original design of SIEED. However, demand from participants has led to the introduction of a voluntary savings and loan association (VSLA) model late in the project lifecycle which has been enthusiastically adopted by a small number of groups. Given the demand from farmers for reasonably priced credit, the community savings and loan model should be considered as potential product for future interventions.

Relevance

The overall project goal and two specific objectives are in line with the development policy of Vietnam. Improving agricultural productivity and access to markets for the rural poor is very much in line with Vietnam's increasing willingness to engage in international trade and openness to the world market. As described in the ROM Mission 2011 "[T]he project's Overall Objective focuses on poverty reduction and food security and is aligned with both SEDP and Vietnam's 2002 Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy." The constructive and ongoing relationship between CCD, WU, FU and the provincial government has allowed open dialogue between all parties cementing the relevance of the project to these partner-participants. In addition, the project's approach which encourages the

formation of cooperative and collaborative groups also aligns well with Vietnamese government ideology.

Needs-based assessment ensures the relevance of capacity building activities for both group members and project partners. The project's group-forming approach, knowledge and training in improved agriculture production is relevant, however, for the poorest and/or most remote farmers market approaches may not be as relevant as they may not be physically well-connected to a suitable market. For the poorest farmers, forming a connection to markets may be a secondary priority to increasing their own family's food security.

For the most remote communities, connecting product to market may prove very challenging, particularly for (highly) perishable agricultural commodities. It is not impossible to link products to markets but comprehensive market analysis is essential to ensure the right products/livelihood models are supported. If there are local varieties or products then these products may provide a comparative advantage from both a production and sales perspective. Indigenous products are adapted to local agro-ecological zones and are available locally, reducing the need for input links.

If the 'right' product is available, the poorest and most remote communities are likely to require more time and a greater level of support to access inputs (agricultural or financial), make connections and to meet market requirements on an ongoing basis. Thus, a market approach is not irrelevant, but requires analysis, investment and support to make it work.

F. Lessons learned

I. *Group approach*

The interest group model is relevant, appealing and an effective way of providing capacity building, however, the sheer number of groups formed during this project meant that considerable time and significant resources were spent on forming groups and providing training. Fewer groups would have enabled more intensive support and potentially improved impact and sustainability.

The majority of farmers demonstrate little interest in 'upgrading' their interest group to a collaborative or cooperative group status suggesting that this formal group model is less relevant and appealing to isolated farmers. Group interviewees found that individuals purchased services and sold their products independently suggesting that the group has a defined and limited structure and purpose. For future projects, the formalization of groups is not necessarily required for groups to function successfully and it may not be relevant for project participants. Given the experiences garnered from the SIEED project, it would not be appropriate to set group formalization a goal of the project.

Recommendation: Form fewer groups and form groups early in the project cycle so that support can be provided over a longer period of time. This will enable more intensive support and potentially improve the sustainability of groups, livelihood practices and market links.

II. Market based initiatives should be differentiated

There is an inherent tension for CARE in choosing a market-based approach: for the poorest of the poor, market approaches may not be relevant or are of secondary importance to food security. The project's group approach and training in improved agriculture production is relevant, however, these groups may not have capacity (financial, physical or institutional) to make use of market approaches.

Recommendation: Screen livelihood models for market potential early in the project and select a small number of livelihood models for intensive support. Market-link activities need to occur simultaneously with groups formation and technical training.

III. Indigenous products, product diversity, NTFPs and geographical indicators

The original objective of the project emphasized discovering new and diverse natural resource products, with an emphasis on NTFPs. Experience from the project's implementation has shown that opportunities lie not in uncovering multiple new products but in improving the productivity, processing and marketing of pre-existing (agricultural) natural resource enterprises. The notable 'product' success stories from the SIEED project are indigenous varieties which have both market appeal and are best-suited for local agronomic conditions, lending a substantial comparative advantage.

Recommendation: If developing NTFPs value chains, also consider value chains that can provide poor households with short and medium term income streams to balance the long-time frames associated with NTFPs and to ensure relevance to beneficiaries.

Recommendation: Thorough value chain analysis is valuable for identifying and marrying unique local varieties with consumer markets. Pursuing Geographic Indication certification for successful products could potentially be considered, but should only be pursued if the economic return can be assured in the Vietnamese market context.

IV. Financial sustainability could be aided by community savings and loan association

The project's strategy has been to limit the input of financial resources to groups, which appears to be a positive step to ensure participant engagement in the model. Introducing community saving schemes would complement the activities above and contribute to addressing the unavailability of reasonably priced credit for small producers. Not all groups may choose to adopt a VSLA model, but the experience in SIEED and ECCODE suggests demand exists.

Recommendation: Provide training on the VSLA model alongside training on livelihood models from the outset.

V. Partnerships

The SIEED project can provide a lesson in the value of investing in local NGO/CSOs as partners. While mass organizations are appealing implementation partners, they are frequently under-resourced and/or over-committed and are unlikely to be able to maintain project activities at scale after the project's close. Local civil society organizations may have local know-how like mass organisations but may also be better positioned to continue to implement project approaches. Although, CSOs also face funding constraints and need to rely on donations to continue, an inherently risky business. Another alternative is establishing private sector or commercially oriented partnerships that can align local knowledge and sustainable financing within one organization.

Recommendation: Partner with local civil society organisations or private sector providers to improve the likelihood that farmer support services continue at the close of the project.

Recommendation: Ensure institutional and financial structures are suitable and developed early in the project cycle when resources are available from the project.

VI. Lessons for project design, monitoring and learning

Better definition of terms used in indicators

Distinguishing between changes brought about by the project and those from economic growth or other interventions in the target area is not possible. The income indicators do not provide a good understanding of the direct impact of the project.

Some indicators use unclear and undefined terms such as ‘diversification’ and ‘improved financial performance’. Indicators could have been made more robust and useful with better definitions. Introduce definitions and details about how indicators will be measured into the M&E plan. There needs to be consistency in measurement from year to year and between evaluators in order to be able to make meaningful comparisons. This would allow consistency in interpretation across regions and over time.

Better measures of women’s empowerment

Staff from the WU mentioned change in domestic violence and social changes that they perceived to be as a result of the project. Formally capturing this data, with the help of the WU, could contribute to better knowledge about the broader social changes resulting from the project and this could contribute to improved project design in future.

When collecting data that may be sensitive and relate to one sex only, it is important to include a mix of male and female enumerators, because contacts are often easier between the same sex.

Better indicators for capacity development

Result areas 3 and 4 are focussed on capacity change and improved delivery of services, however, the associated indicators are chiefly focussed on measuring outputs (number of people trained), rather than measuring qualitative evidence of genuine capacity change.

G. Conclusions and recommendations

The project reached a large number of groups across three districts contributing to improvements in agricultural practices and with this, positive changes in income, for a number of groups. Women were well represented as group leaders and group members leading to economic improvements and empowerment for some.

The sustainability of the project has the potential to be high among more established groups that are well linked to both service providers and buyers. Sustainability is weaker for beneficiaries who are not well linked to markets or are more remotely located. Livelihood impacts would be improved and sustained if CCM were able to continue to support groups formed within the project. CCM must quickly sure-up its funding sources, commercial strategy and staffing in order to be able to sustain both itself as an organization and the livelihood changes that have resulted from the groups.

The following recommendations are drawn from evaluation interviews and are based upon the lessons learned:

1. Limit the number of groups formed to enable more intensive support. Form groups early in the project cycle so that support can be provided over a longer period of time.
2. Screen livelihood models for market potential very early in the project and select a small number of livelihood models for intensive support. Market-link activities need to occur simultaneously with group formation.
3. If developing Non Timber Forest Product value chains, also consider agricultural value chains that can provide poor households with short and long term income streams
4. Given the strong demand for credit and lack of supply for some groups, provide an introduction to the VSLA model alongside training on livelihood models.
5. Consider partnerships with local civil society organisations and/or the private sector to improve the likelihood that activities and services continue. Ensure the chosen partner's institutional and financial structures are sustainable during the term of the project.

H. Annexes

A. References

Documents analysed
ROM Mission Report 2009, 2010, 2011
ROM Conclusion report in excel, 2011
Follow up to ROM Mission reports 2009, 2010, 2011)
Project Interim Narrative Report 2009, 2010, 2011
SIEED presentation
Baseline Survey-SIEED
SIEED Action Plan Year 4
M&E Framework
Achievements against indicators
SIEED Year 4 Revised Budget with no cost extension, October 2011
CCM Business Plan

B. List of interviewees

Nguyen Van Anh/Programe Manager	CARE International
Le Xuan Hieu/ SIEED project Manager	CARE International (SIEED project)
Nguyen Danh Tinh/ Agriculture and Natural resource Officer	CARE International (SIEED project)
Mai Van Lanh/ Capacity Building Officer	CARE International (SIEED project)
Do Hoang Liem/ Maketing Linkage Officer	CARE International (SIEED project)
Hung	CARE International (SIEED project)
Vu Dinh Loi/ CCD Director	CCD
Tran Duy Huong/ CCD Officer	CCD
Nguyen Tran Toan/ CCD Officer	CCD
Ms Phuong	Women's Union
Ms Thinh	Women's Union
Ms Cao Thi Thu	Women's Union
Mr Dai	Farmers' Union
Mr Dung	Farmers' Union
10 members of the Goat Raising Group	Pu Nhi, Dien Bien Dong
10 members of the Sweet Potato Group	Dien Bien town, Dien Bien

