

10 years of cooperation with Vietnamese Lawyers Association ends

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With the end of the project 'Legal Aid to Contract Farming', ADDA's 10-year partnership with the Vietnamese Lawyers Association (VLA) ends. Anyway so far! VLA has in all ways been an interesting partner and the projects have benefited the target groups a lot.

Cooperation with VLA began with the project 'Legal Aid ' in 2008. The project was supported by the Danish Embassy by 4.3 million. The target group was the poor rural population in the northwestern provinces Dien Bien, Lao Cai and Lai Chau, bordering Laos and China.

Here, illiteracy is a widespread problem - up to 85% of women in some of these districts are affected. There are also provinces where more than 80% live below the poverty line and where the average income is about 200 kr./month. The areas are isolated and with only little access to information. Often the villagers do not know much about their legal rights and opportunities, and rules and laws are typically communicated badly to those who live apart.

Many questions have focused on land rights, land access and land use, including conflicts between villages on the use of agricultural land - areas where the authorities have not been clear in their decisions. Eg. rehousing by expropriation of farmland for road construction, expansion of hospitals or construction of hydroelectric power stations have caused problems. Other issues relating to civil rights are schooling, health care and insecurity of civil law, inheritance and legislation in connection with marriages. Generally, it is difficult for this poor population to access legal assistance. It's expensive and the lawyer offices are far from the villages. Communication is difficult, as many from ethnic minorities do not speak Vietnamese and do not have the ability to communicate the problems further.

The purpose of the project was therefore to strengthen the ethnic minority's awareness of their legal rights, and to enable them to approach relevant authorities in case of conflicts and disagreements. During teachings VLA provided that lawyers were available at meetings in the villages, and residents could encounter the problems either in joint forums or at individual meetings with a lawyer, who often spoke the local language.



VLA remote village in Lai Chau

The projects 'Legal Aid II' and 'Legal Aid to Contract Farming'

The result of the first project, 'Legal Aid I', had a great deal of attention with the Danish Embassy, as well as Danida. And, as a follow-up to the project, they allocated 6.7 million DKK to Phase II: 'Legal Aid to the Rural Population'. This time located in the provinces Dien Bien, Son La and Hoa Binh. The target group and project purpose were the same as in Legal Aid I. This means creating better economic conditions for the poorest and helping to give the population more control over trade agreements between the seller and the buyer.

The last project, which we have just completed in the provinces Lao Cai, Son La and Lai Chau, was called 'Legal Aid to Contract Farming', and it was supported by CISU with 5 million DDK.

Throughout the three projects, I have had the opportunity to attend more meetings with the poorest in the most remote villages and heard the types of legal problems they have had. There has been no payment of war damage compensation, ie. the money was usually paid, but "disappeared" along the way to the recipient! Or it could be a case of lack of compensation by expropriation, marital disputes, or else where there was a need for legal assistance. In addition, I have participated in meetings with representatives of the public authorities on the interpretation of new legislation. These were meetings where officials from regions and municipalities met to be updated, but also to establish networks with officials with the same area of work.

'Legal Aid to Contract Farming'

The most important topic of the last project was the design of trade contracts between farmers and companies. It was often the case that farmers and companies broke the deals, if they could each benefit from it. Even the state ran from agreements, both written and oral, so there has been and there still is need of a legal rights assistance. And the good thing is, that VLA will continue their efforts. The project has published "handbooks" with examples of contracts.

The target group comes from the mountainous regions of North Vietnam, where 65% of the population belong to ethnic minorities such as Tay, Nung, Dao, Thai, Hmong and Giay. The main occupation in the areas is agriculture with tea, rice, corn and vegetables, and a small number of livestock, for example chickens. Participants received teaching and learning in contractual terms when selling the products. At the final meeting in Hanoi, where there were representatives of VLA in the 3 project provinces, it was expressed the need for continued support for activities that have been included in the project, because there is still much to do.

Success with 'Contract Farming' in Phieng Phat 2 Village



Preparation for planting tea plantation in Phieng Phat 2 village.



Picking tea in the plantation of village Phieng Phat 2.

There have been very good results in several of the project provinces. Eg. in Phieng Phat 2 Village, in Lai Chau province, where 143 families with a total area of 160 ha with tea cultivation, have significantly improved their living conditions. The driving force behind the success was village leader Mr. Hoang Van Phuc, who was a pioneer in contracting with Than Uyen Tea Company. The contracts between the village and the company led to a better sales product for the company, and thus a better settlement price to farmers. With a delivery of 80 tons of tea leaves a year, a better price resulted in more winnings. The tea production alone gave work to 25 unemployed in the area, which was paid at 560 DDK a month. It sounds like much, but in an area where the average wage is about 200 DDK. pr. month, it is well paid.

In addition to the task of landlord, Mr. Phuc himself has 9 ha with tea.

That production has given the family an annual income of approx. DKK 38,000, which has enabled the family to pay for the children's further education.

With the improvement of cooperation between businesses and farmers, tea production in the last few years helped many farmers in Phieng Phat 2. Village in Lai Chau province out of the worst poverty. The cooperation has also contributed to the expansion of the tea production area, and step by step the tea production has increased. The village has been a role model for other villages in the province.



VLA meeting in village



Poor rural areas miss infrastructure