



Introduction

The ultimate purpose of CLCs is to enhance the quality of people's lives and contribute to development of the country, hence leading to the stability and prosperity of the region as well as of the world. This study was an objective assessment implemented by a research team that included educators from research institutes, universities and NGOs. The purpose of the research was to evaluate the actual situation of Vietnamese CLCs in terms of impact and effectiveness, as well as weaknesses, difficulties and areas that need improvement in order to make recommendations for the future development of CLCs in Viet Nam. At the same time, the research was also aimed at disseminating the results to EFA stakeholders for strengthening and promoting EFA programmes and to promote the institutionalization of CLCs within the framework of EFA action plans.

The five target areas,¹⁴ all of them with different geographical and socio-economic characteristics, do not represent the whole picture of CLCs in Viet Nam. Nevertheless, the conclusions drawn from the field study, together with recommendations and suggestions from the research team, local people and CLC managers, can help policy makers, management personnel, practitioners and international donor agencies obtain further understanding of the actual situation in Viet Nam. As a result, they will be able to formulate the proper policies and programmes for achieving EFA goals and the Millenium Development Goals -- targets that can benefit the people of low-income countries like Viet Nam the most.

Analysis of CLC Experiences

Viet Nam's CLCs have developed mainly in the rural areas to serve rural communities. In the city, most CLCs are in suburban areas. Most CLCs are created by local communities, not by the government or NGOs, or other international organizations. Local CLC committees and managers steer and oversee CLC operations. Some government funds have been received and various local efforts have occurred to supplement the income with local funds, although they are often small and modest.

During 1998-1999, a pilot study of CLCs in Viet Nam was undertaken by the Research Centre for Literacy and Continuing Education under the National Institute of Education Science (now the Research Centre for Non-Formal Education Strategy and Curriculum Development under the National Institute of Education Strategy and Curriculum Development [NIESAC]). This project, "Promotion of CLCs in Viet Nam", was supported through the UNESCO APPEAL framework and with financial assistance from Japan and Norway.

There were four CLCs in the following communes:

- Cao Son (Hoa Binh province)
- Pu Nhung (Lai Chao province)
- Viet Thuan (Thai Binh province)
- An Lap (Bac Biang province)

All were in the north of Viet Nam.

After the pilot period with its positive outcomes, at the beginning of 1999, the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) expanded the CLC model to other provinces and cities, such as Ha Noi, Lao Cai, Vinh Phu and Tien Giang. Assisted by Japan UNESCO (NFUAJ), the MOET has guided the establishment of 40 CLCs in Tua Chua and Phong Tho Districts of Lai Chau Province.

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¹⁴ The target areas selected by our team represent the different regions and characteristics: near the city (Tan Trieu CLC – Ha Noi, Hoa Tien CLC – Da Nang province), rural areas, delta areas (An Dong, Dong Duong CLCs – Thai Binh province), mountainous, remote, difficult areas with ethnic minority people in target provinces (La Hien, Dinh Ca CLCs – Thai Nguyen, Thuong Long, Thuong Nhat CLCs – Hue province). Besides, another criteria for selecting are CLC in a province considered to have best practice in CLC (An Dong CLC- Thai Binh and Tan Cuong CLC – Thai Nguyen) and a newly established CLC in a difficult area for comparison. All these CLCs are generated by local communities, not any one and are not supported by NGOs/ other agencies, or local/national governments.

Records show that the 15 centres existing in 1999 grew to 78 centres in 2001, and only a year later, 680 CLCs were counted (mostly in the North)! By As of February 2005, the whole country (64 provinces) had 4,783 CLCs serving 10,765 communes, urban precincts and district towns. More recently, this number has risen to nearly 6,000¹⁵.

There are nine provinces having 100 percent CLCs (Thai Binh, Ninh Binh, Phu Tho, Bac Ninh, Nam Dinh, Vinh Phu, Da Nang, Hai Duong, Dong Thap). Only one province (Binh Duong) has not yet established any CLC.

The MOET has acquired assistance from the National Federation of UNESCO Associations in Japan (NFUAJ) and UNESCO Hanoi to establish CLCs in some provinces, and to develop training courses to better organize, manage and operate CLC activities. Hanoi UNESCO has conducted a project for assisting Tay Nguyen and Binh Phuoc provinces in building CLCs and training CLC management personnel. Japan UNESCO has helped Lao Cai Province establish 40 CLCs and has established CLCs in eight northern mountainous provinces (Son La, Bac Can, Lao Cai, Yen Bai, Cao Bang, Ha Gang, Lang Son and Tuyen Quang). In addition, it has printed and disseminated materials related to building and developing CLCs.

The Party and the State have policies that promote CLC development as part of realizing the country's EFA programme goals and strive towards a learning society. In 2003, the Prime Minister issued Decision No. 06/2003/QD/TTG on the Action Plan of the Government: "The MOET, in coordination with the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Viet Nam Learning Encouragement Association, the Ministry of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs, and People's Committees of provinces is assigned the task of developing a project for the expansion of CLCs."¹⁶

At present, according to the Amended Law of Education, CLCs are officially included in the Vietnamese national education system as continuing education institutions. Thus, the CLC approach is now officially institutionalized in Viet Nam.

Apart from the role of the MOET, the active contribution of the Viet Nam Learning Encouragement Association should be taken into account. Though having limited funds, the Central Learning Encouragement Association has developed and published five books to help provinces in training, propaganda and steering the development of CLCs. Two of the most useful are *Widespread Development of CLCs – Necessary Tools for Building a Learning Society from the Grassroots Level* (2003) and *Questions and Answers on the Widespread and Sustainable Development of CLCs* (2003).

Social organizations at the central level such as the Viet Nam Fatherland Front and its members (Elders Association, Veterans Association, Peasants Association, Women's Association, Youth Unions, Trade Unions, Joint Association of Viet Nam Scientific and Technical Association) also made initial contributions to the establishment and development of CLCs.

Conclusions of the *Five-Year Summary Report* affirmed that CLCs are an important tool contributing to the stabilization of the political situation, the promotion of renovation and socio-economic development. CLCs have been becoming the school of the working people, an important basis for building a learning society from the grassroots level. It also affirmed that apart from the results achieved, there are still many difficulties, weaknesses and constraints in the process of building and developing CLCs.

In Viet Nam, the literacy rate is 94 percent,¹⁷ so illiteracy is not a severe problem, but other programmes such as equivalency, continuing education and income generation do need attention. The ultimate purpose of the CLC is to enhance the people's quality of life and to accelerate the pace of development in the country. Thus, CLC programme activities are generally classed into these types:

Programmes/Activities

Equivalency programmes complementary classes providing lower and upper secondary education for out-of-school adults and youth

15 Based on a September 2005 count.

16 Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, Office of the Prime Minister. Decision No. 26/2003/QD-TTg of February 17, 2003 Approving the National Target Programme on Education and Training until 2005. Art. 1, Item 4 (a-b) and Art. 2.

17 Continuing Education Department - MOET statistics

In Thier Words: Women in Viet Nam

“Community” (the way they refer to the CLC) helps us understand each other better, our production is better, like our fish breeding, much easier, only have to boil bran... This is the method taught by the class. Recently, we have caught black carp and grass carp, very big... weighed 3-4 kg, we grilled it... oh, very delicious ... The new technique is very useful.

Khang, age 70

An Dong CLC, Thai Binh Province

“Since I came here to learn embroidery, I find that the teacher is very dedicated, and helps me understand the methods, explains all my queries. CLC managers are also very good, pay attention to us and sometimes discuss with us... We have applied new methods in cultivating fruit trees and rice to have high productivity... We would like authorities of different levels to help us have sustainable jobs (embroidery) to get permanent income...”

Woman, age, 25, Thuong Nhat CLC, Hue Province.

“At first I did not understand what life skills are. Why ‘skill’? Gradually, when explained, I understood and found it very interesting. It helps me communicate effectively... I know how to behave more properly...”

Nguyen Thi Thanh, age 36, member of Commune Women’s Association, Tan Cuong CLC, Thai Nguyen Province

Income-generating programmes for enhancing the quality of life

- Improved agricultural practices: cultivation, husbandry, veterinary training
- Utilization of forestry resources
- Economic development and enterprises
- Development of traditional handicrafts
- Loans, savings, small credit
- Household accounting
- Law and policies of the Party and State
- Women’s empowerment
- Reproductive health and family planning
- Care and protection of mothers and children
- Personal health and hygiene
- Prevention of drug abuse, HIV/AIDS, combating prostitution
- Environmental sanitation and protection
- Preservation of cultural and historical sites
- Entertainment: art, culture and sports, dancing and music
- Social activities: respecting war invalids and martyrs, disabled self-support groups; blood donation
- Safety and prevention of traffic accidents

Programmes responding to individual needs

- Foreign languages, informatics classes, talks on national and international current news and events, vocational training, etc.
- Programmes for community development (establishing a fund for seniors or veterans, building improvements in the commune or village, etc.)

Major Findings

- The CLC is a form of lifelong learning and non-formal education that is very suitable to developing countries such as Viet Nam with low incomes and a high proportion of people living in rural areas, “where the lower the education level of the people is, the stronger the impact shows” (in the words of a Department of Education and Training official in Thua Thien Hue Province).

- Evaluating its impact on the lives of the people,¹⁸ we find that as an education institution reaching disadvantaged people at the grassroots level – those considered the “unreached” in the community – the CLC has an essential value in all areas of community life.
- CLC programmes and activities contribute significantly to transmitting useful knowledge and income-generating skills and to empowering youth, women, the underprivileged and the disadvantaged. Thus, CLCs do make and will make important contributions to the attainment of EFA and Millenium Development Goals.
- There is a big gap between CLCs not only in terms of infrastructure, but also in terms of quality of operation. In places where there is strong support, concern and regular monitoring and supervision at all levels (provincial, district, local authorities and other sectors and organizations), CLCs tend to have better quality.
- In general, the infrastructure is still poor and needs improvement.

The contents of activities and programmes are in general adequate and diversified, yet do not respond adequately to the needs and interests of the people. Some important and necessary content is still lacking, such as: human rights, peaceful resolution of conflicts and promotion of tolerance and co-existence, a full range of life skills and other necessary contents. Due to limitations in education level, the people do not know everything that is necessary and helpful for their lives. The higher level personnel in charge should study and provide what is missing.

- All CLCs do not have the necessary daily or weekly newspapers for people, especially women. Available books are often only concerned with politics, techniques or laws; although necessary, they do not attract people and sometimes are difficult to read. Newspapers provide them with updated knowledge and strengthen reading skills to prevent regression into illiteracy.
- The participation of the people, in general, varies according to the activities/programmes organized. However, they do not attend regularly, and are mostly beneficiaries, seldom owners and contributors. This may be due to propaganda about the roles and functions of CLCs.
- Most managers and facilitators do not receive adequate training (or even any training) in CLC management.
- Internal as well as external evaluation, monitoring and supervision are not regularly conducted (if at all).
- Policy linkages are established in a limited way. There are no clear-cut policy guidelines and mechanisms for the operation of CLCs, as well as for managers. This also affects the quality and effectiveness of CLC operations.

Recommendations

- There should be a nationwide survey to review all CLCs in the country to understand their actual situations for ensuring growth not only quantitatively, but also qualitatively.
- There should be policies and mechanisms for the recruitment and training of CLC teachers and managers, especially directors.
- Full-time staff are essential. (Reality shows that those CLCs with full-time management will have better operations. The manager of Hoa Tien has 14 roles to play and finds them too heavy for him.)
- All CLCs require financial and technical support from the government and other sectors, including international donors for sustainable development.
- “Poverty alleviation” programmes should receive priority at CLCs, especially where the poverty rate is high. The Grameen Bank model for the poor of Bangladesh, offering interest free loans, micro credit and savings, is very necessary and suitable for CLCs in Viet Nam.

¹⁸ As in the case of Tan Cuong CLC, per capita income is nearly twice increased, from 4.5 million VND in 2002 to 8.5 million VND in 2005 (according to a survey conducted for the whole commune in May /2005).

- Facilities such as a bookcase with books and especially daily/weekly newspapers like *Viet Nam Women*, *Science and Life*, or *Agricultural Development* should be provided for every CLC so that readers have an opportunity to exercise literacy skills and participate in “reading culture” – a tool for lifelong learning.
- Monitoring, evaluation and supervision should be strengthened.