

**VIETNAM'S COUNTRY REPORT FOR REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTRES:
Lifelong Learning For All Through Community Learning Centres
(Bangkok, 26-29 September 2012)**

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1. Thematic programs to respond to learners' need – an efficient literacy program in CLCs of Viet Nam

For many decades and particularly in recent years, Viet Nam has expressed a strong commitment and determination towards building a learning society and promoting lifelong learning as a means to ensure quantity, quality, and equity in education, reaching Education For All's goals. This has been concretely demonstrated in a number of Party's and State's guidelines and directions as well as legal documents concerning continuing education development and lifelong learning promotion (Hien, 2011).

Literacy, with its conceptual evolution since 1958, is nowadays perceived as a continuum, a progressive development of people's knowledge, skills, and awareness instead of a fixed point or a certain level of reading, writing, calculating skills as conventionally understood (Hanemann, 2011). In other words, literacy denotes a continuum of abilities, progressing from lower to higher levels throughout an individual's life. In this regard, *Thematic programs to respond to learners' needs, update knowledge, skills, and transfer technologies* (hereinafter referred to as Learners' Needs Responsive Program – LNRP) implemented mainly through CLCs, is an efficient literacy/ learning program in Viet Nam.

1.1 Basic information of the program

In fact, a number of learning contents which are similar to this continuing program's topics have been introducing since the 90s of the last century with the establishment of CLCs network, long before official institutionalization of LNRP in 2010. With a clear vision and a comprehensive curriculum framework, the newly developed program addresses a large spectrum of themes and specific topics to meet various learning needs of village/commune people, especially those from economically and educationally disadvantaged areas (see appendix for the list of 80 specific topics that have been developed in 2010 from 500 suggested topics in LNRP's complete curriculum).

a) Rationale for developing this program

- To meet new demands and learning needs of people in localities, especially disadvantaged groups and those living in remote areas;
- To go in line with new trend of promoting continuous and lifelong learning;
- To realize the Party's and State's guidelines, direction with regard to continuing education development and lifelong learning promotion;
- To address the pros and cons of CLCs network (quantity vs. quality; learning material shortage; increasing number of learners with diverse needs; unskilled teaching force...)

b) Goal and objectives of program

General goal: the program aims at responding to people's needs for continuing and lifelong learning, help learners update, supplement knowledge and skills needed for their daily life and production activities in order to improve life's quality of themselves, their families, and to develop the community sustainably.

Specific objectives: (1) To equip learners with some basic, practical knowledge and skills in socio-cultural, health care, environment protection, and economic development areas; (2) To provide learners with some necessary life skills to effectively adapt to and resolve challenges, requirements of life and production reality; and (3) To contribute to the development of learners' needs, habits, and skills for self-instruction, continuing and lifelong learning.

c) Process of program development

- Conducting learning needs survey of community people
- Organizing orientation workshop to gather ideas and advice from all stakeholders
- Developing program outline and curriculum framework (500 topics across 5 key areas)
- Collecting comments and feedbacks from localities and revise program outline/ topics
- Program appraisal (by MOET and relevant professionals)
- Program finalization.

d) Principles in developing program outline and curriculum framework

- Be relevant to learners' and community's need, abilities, actual learning conditions
- Ensure feasibility and flexibility
- Learning contents are updated, modern, diverse, covering different aspects of people's lives
- Represent common trends of different areas/ regions across the country
- Help learners update knowledge, skills, and access new technologies transfer
- Meet localities' requirements in cultural, social, economic, and environment development

e) Main characteristics of program

- Not leading to degree or certificate;
- No rigid structure by chronological order, hierarchy, grades, or cycle;
- No strict requirement of compulsory contents as they can be selected, adapted, and supplemented by users at different levels (central, province, district, village...) (Only core contents are suggested);
- No fixed provision of time and duration as these are depending upon program users' preference.
- Program's target is everyone who wants to learn; however the main group of beneficiaries would be adults in local communities, in which farmers and women make up a large proportion due to characteristics of Viet Nam's rural areas.

f) Five key content areas and suggested time allocation for each area

No.	Content area	Suggested no. of period/class	Suggested no. of sessions
1	Socio-cultural aspects	450	150
2	Health care education	300	100
3	Law education	150	50
4	Environment protection	300	100
5	Economic development and income generating activities.	300	100
	<i>Total</i>	<i>1500</i>	<i>500</i>

g) Some legal documents concerning/ relating to this program

- MOET's Circular No.26/2010/TT-BGDĐT on the issuance of continuing education program to respond to learners' needs, update knowledge, skills, and transfer technologies, which clearly stipulates that the program outline and attached curriculum shall be implemented in all continuing education institutions across the country;
- National Master Plan on Building a Learning Society 2012-2020;
- National Action Plan of Education for All 2003-2015;
- Law on Education 2005;
- National Plan on Environment and Sustainable Development 1991-2000.

1.2 Innovative points of the program, particularly linking to LLL

- *Using bottom-up approach in both program development and implementation:* learning contents are not imposing from higher levels, but initiated and suggested by local people's. After selection and revision of by localities, their own learning contents might be broader, more detailed than those initially suggested.
- *Covering a wide range of issues and areas* from personal and social development of people to health care, income generating/ economic activities, environment protection, law education, political awareness, and other issues.

- *Emphasis is given to both provision of knowledge/skills for households' economic development and improvement of life's quality as well as promotion of a healthy lifestyle (see Appendix for examples).*
- *User-friendliness, high level of adaptability, flexibility, and localization, as the program is intentionally designed to allow users (CEs and CLCs) to select, arrange, revise, and plan for their own learning experiences based on suggested themes/topics and learning materials provided. In this regard, local issues and learners' aspirations are taken into account and better addressed during the learning process.*
- *Creating opportunities for higher empowerment and freedom for disadvantaged groups, especially women, farmers, and low-income earners, as learners have access to knowledge, technologies, information, and more choices regarding income-generating activities, which would allow them to gradually escape poverty and improve general quality of life.*
- *Providing a platform for social exchange, experience sharing, and promotion of community cohesion/ a sense of belonging among village/commune people who come to learn at CECs/CLCs.*

1.3 Challenges in program implementation

- Lack of quality facilitators/ resource people to deliver these programs due to a wide range of topics and expertise required;
- Financial constraint persists, as there is no fixed budget for these programs as well as other programs implemented in CLCs. Financial assistance basically depends on the capacity of CLCs' management board in mobilizing and calling for supports from various parties/donors.
- Provision of learning materials is still limited in both quantity and quality.
- Difficulty in reaching the unreached: in most cases, CLCs are located at the centre of communes, whereas in remote and mountainous areas, many people live far away from commune's centre, resulting in their poor attendance and/or unwilling to learn.
- A mechanism for program supervision, monitoring and evaluation is yet to be put in place, leading to the lack of official data and statistics for a comprehensive and reliable assessment of program effectiveness.

2. New trends and innovations to reduce poverty in Viet Nam

2.1 Microfinance – one of the most effective tools for poverty reduction in Viet Nam

Microfinance is not a completely new innovation in Viet Nam, but it draws wider attention and attains more encouraging outcomes in recent years. Microfinance refers to diverse financial services offered to poor people so they can access small-scale loans, saving, money transfers and micro-insurance (MFWG, 2012). From those initial financial assistances, people living in poverty are able to start up their business, build assets, prevent and manage possible risks to gradually escape poverty.

Who are microfinance providers and how does it help the poor in Viet Nam?

Microfinance providers are called Microfinance Institutions (MFIs). They deliver small loans to unsalaried borrowers with very little or no collateral by using methods such as group lending and liability, pre-loan savings requirements, gradually increasing loan sizes, and an implicit guarantee of ready access for future loans if previous loans are repaid in due time (MFWG, 2012). Currently there are *three main groups of microfinance providers in Viet Nam: official MFIs* (People's credit funds, Bank for social policies, Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development); *semi-official MFIs* (local and international NGOs, social organizations' programs...); and *unofficial microfinance providers* (individual or group reciprocal lending among friends, relatives, small business owners...) (BSPV, 2008).

According to MFWG's description (2012), as microfinance provides a range of financial benefits, it serves as a secured and long-term alternative for poor households to establish, sustain and further develop their economic activities. One of adverse aspects of poverty is that incomes are often

irregular, unstable and/or unreliable. Hence, access to credit helps the poor to smooth cash flows and avoid periods where, due to some unavoidable circumstances, access to food, clothing, shelter, or education is lost or in severe shortage. Moreover, credits can also help the poor ease or reduce effects of unforeseen shocks like sickness (or even sudden death) of family's main earner, victim of burglary, or natural disasters (MFWG, 2012).

Positive impacts of microfinance and opportunities to link it with CLCs' operation

Until 2008, microfinance services have attracted approximately 500,000 households out of more than 4 millions households who are in need of such services (Rural Economy, 2008). Although this result is still far from meeting the poor's demands in financial resources, microfinance has proved and continues to be a significant channel of financial provision for poor and disadvantaged people. Thanks to credits given, the poor can either grasp an economic opportunity to overcome their current financial difficulties, or invest in assets such as land or production materials for future security and development. Other positive impacts of microfinance is that women participants and marginalized groups in microfinance programs are better empowered, both personally and socially, as they become more economically independent and are able to make their own choices in life. This also contributes to gender equity in rural and remote areas.

Apart from providing financial assistance, microfinance programs also equip the beneficiaries with necessary techniques and experiences for feasible, cost-effective business and production. This is where microfinance programs and CLCs' activities can work together and supplement each other to better benefit the poor, in which CLCs become a convenient venue and active platform for community members to share experiences, exchange dialogues with regard to information, access and efficient utilization of microfinance assistances. While microfinance projects provide some financial supports, CLCs can organize training and technology transfer courses on skills development, practical knowledge on income raising and microeconomic activities for microfinance recipients.

2.2 Innovations and new approaches through CLCs to reduce poverty – a case of Ninh My CLC in Ninh Binh province of Viet Nam over 10 years of operation

Ninh My is a commune of Hoa Lu district, Ninh Binh province, with population of over 5,500 people. Basic occupations of commune inhabitants are farming and some small scale household industries like woodwork, mason, small trading services... In 2000, there were 276 poor households, making up 15% of total commune's households. Ninh My CLC was established in 2002 to respond to people's learning needs and improve their general level of knowledge and understanding. The Centre is located in commune People's Committee's (PC) area; its management board includes one Director who is also Vice Chairman of commune's PC, two Deputy directors being Chairman of commune's Learning Promotion Association and Deputy Head of lower secondary school, respectively. The Centre personnel, with total 22 staff, is divided into 4 professional teams: Policies and News team, led by commune's Chairman of War Veteran Association; Science and Technology team, led by Chairman of a co-operative in the commune; Culture, Recreation, Sports, and Environment team, led by Head of commune's cultural affairs division; and Education, Foreign Languages, Informatics team, led by a retired teacher.

In the first stage of operation, the Centre almost started from scratch with no working facility, no budget to run its activities. Centre's management board had to call for supports from various organizations and agencies within and outside commune, such as provincial and commune's Learning Promotion Association, district's Department of Education and Training, district's Department of Public Security. The Centre had to borrow commune's meeting hall for its large scale activities, 3 rooms belonged to commune's barn and 2 rooms from lower secondary schools for organizing learning activities... The centre bought one VCD set, 40 suits for thai-cuc-quyen (taiji or tai chi) exercise (a traditional martial art often performed by elder people), and 300 books for centre's library. Annual

supporting budget provided by commune's PC was 1 million VND/year (~50USD) in the first years, then slightly increased to 2-3 million VND/year (~100-150USD), and 10 millions VND/year at present (~500USD).

Ninh My CLC provides two major forms of activities, namely *regular/monthly activities*, and *non-regular activities*. *Regular activities* mobilizes the participation from various mass organizations in the commune, for example: disseminations of current news and policies for Elderly Club on every 1st day of month (with about 200 participants each session); meetings of Women Club and Farmers Club on every 15th and 10th day of month, respectively. Centre's library is open for public on every Thursdays. Law information Club and Youth's Union Adolescent Club hold their regular meetings by end of months. Among these, Club of 'Fond of learning' families is one of the most effective model, with 423 club members under general coordination of a management board. This club organizes regular meetings anytime and anywhere, during which club members share their experiences and knowledge on educating children, science and technology; exchange library books; help each other overcome daily life's difficulties; encourage other members to participate in CLC's classes. This 'Fond of learning' Families Club has gained positive results over the years, for example in a club's team with 5 households, families' children have archived encouraging outcomes in learning: one has obtained Ph.D degree, 4 with master degree, and 11 with university degree.

Non-regular activities of the Centre include: education supplementary classes; vocational training short courses (embroider, blanket stitching for export, incense and toothpick making, fruit basket production for export, raising goats, techniques for high-yield rice cultivation...); hobby classes (using musical instruments, traditional martial arts...); technology transfer classes (winter-melon cultivation, IBM, poultry breeding, using NPK fertilizer, safe vegetable cultivation,...); counseling sessions for people who want to work overseas (Malaysia and Taiwan); foreign language and informatics classes; workshops on parenting skills, traffic safety and other topics; thematic classes to meet various needs of local people (law education; moral and ideological education; health care – child nutrition, mental health protection, prevention of summer and winter diseases, adolescent reproductive health, disease treatment by traditional medicines; socio-economic themes; cultural, recreational, and sports activities/exchanges; movement on learning from Ho Chi Minh ethics and ideology...); presentation of films and video clips related to above contents to help people better acquire skills and knowledge for a particular vocation or subject. The Centre has even conducted 3 research projects on cultivating Japanese sweet potato, cultivating high-yield rice, and civilized lifestyle.

Some results: During 10 years of operation (2002-2012), the Centre has organized 109 thematic classes with over 26,000 turns of participants, 107 regular and non-regular classes with nearly 24,000 turns of participants. The Centre's diverse activities have contributed to improvement of community's cultural and social life, maintaining current outcome of educational universalization. *Particularly, these activities have significantly contributed to poverty reduction of the commune, in which total income of the whole commune has increased up to 4,8 billion VND. Number of poor households decreased to 5,61% (or 136 households), compared to 15% (276 households) ten years ago.* Thousands of cooperative members have been equipped with new technologies and approaches for effective production and business.

3. New contents of life skills development in Viet Nam

3.1 Current contents of life skills under formal and nonformal education

*** Under formal education**

Life skills education has been integrated in formal education since the introduction of new national curriculum in 2000, with two main objective: (1) to equip students with appropriate knowledge, values, attitudes, and skills, helping them form healthy and positive behaviors and habits, reject negative ones in their relationships and daily activities; (2) to provide opportunities for students to realize their own

rights and duties, aiming at a comprehensive development of physical, intellectual, emotional, and moral aspects (Quang, 2010).

Contents of life skills education in general schools

There are a number of life skills introduced in school, but they can be categorized into 5 main groups: *Self-awareness, Communication, Critical thinking, Decision making and problem solving, and Self management*. Each group consists of more specific skills, for example ‘Self-awareness’ group may include: valuing skill, self-confidence, self-esteem, assertiveness...

Approaches and teaching methodologies

Approaches used in life skills education include: participatory; learner-centered; activity-based; individual- and group-focused; synergy and collaborative. Learning contents are delivered through interactive and participatory teaching methods such as: Brain storming, Group discussion/debate, Learning games, Role play, Project-based, Situation analysis, Case study, and Individual study.

Forms of integrating lifeskill education in general schools:

- *Subject integration*: Vietnamese Language – Moral and Civic Education – Nature and Society (Primary); Literature – Biology – Geography – Civic Education – Extra-curriculum Activities (Lower & Upper Secondary);
- Outside classroom activities (clubs, forums, contests, class debate/discussion...); “Army Week/Month”; “Guide of life path” (Huong-dao-sinh, in the South); Summer elective classes...;
- School counseling;
- Other activities: visits to historical places, handicraft villages, helping the poor and disable people...

*** Under nonformal education**

With its flexible nature, nonformal education seems to have more opportunities and advantages in delivering life skills contents. Basically this can be done via *three main channels*: integrating into learners’ needs responsive program (LNRP); conducting particular life skill courses for various target groups; and within local, national, international projects or initiatives.

Generally, contents of life skills introduced in such domains include:

- Social and personal skills: as in 5 groups of life skill mentioned above in formal education;
- Skills to help people protect and care for their health, safety, and for environment (for example in topics from number 46 to 60 of the appendix);
- Skills to assist people in income generating activities and household economic development (for example topics from 63 to 80 of the appendix);

Approaches and teaching methodologies

In nonformal education in general and in life skill programs in particular, participatory and community-based approaches are used. Most of classes/courses are conducted with active participation of learners in all stages of learning to draw on their rich experiences and innovative ideas. Specific teaching methods are generally similar to those applied for formal education, such as group discussion, project-based, brainstorm, case study, role-play, ... However, as most learners are adults, the ways and settings in which learning experiences are organized differ from that of formal schools. For example, instead of having a lesson in classrooms, learning can take place on a rice field, vegetable garden, or in the house of village’s Head.

3.2 New contents of life skills/ skill development required for future in Viet Nam

As stated in the National Strategy for Education 2012-2020, Viet Nam is now in the stage of shifting from content-based curriculum to competency-based curriculum with an aim to develop different levels of competencies for students through schooling years (Prime Minister, 2012). As those competencies are closely connected to and formulated from respective core skills, the new curriculum is also expected to suggest a set of life skills needed for learners to master and use their competencies effectively in daily life as well as in their future working environment. Particularly, in the current context when Viet Nam proceeds its deeper and wider integration into regional and international communities, skill development to enable all citizens to perform their functions effectively, develop their full

potentials both personally and socially in this globalized world proves to be one of the first priorities in education. Therefore, the following contents of life skills development – in its broad concept – might be necessary for future in Viet Nam:

- Groups of life skills required for different target groups in different areas and regions (preschool children, adolescents, rural women, farmers, the disabled, migrant workers, urban and rural youth, ethnic minorities, people who wish to work overseas...);
- Particular life skills for all learners, particularly grade 12 and tertiary students, to perform as an active, responsible and smart laborer when entering today's workforce with its new conditions and constant changes. In other words, these may be considered 'global skills and competences', or a set of skills and capacities for learners to be well prepared to succeed in working environment of the 21st century and to adapt to any life circumstances in local or global context (Hong et al., 2010);
- Life skills training as an integral part of professional development courses to promote workplace learning and encourage team spirit/ social and personal cohesion among employees of the same working environment.

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APPENDIX
LIST OF LEARNING MATERIALS DEVELOPED WITHIN
THEMATIC PROGRAMS TO RESPOND TO LEARNERS' NEEDS (2010)

I. Law education program

1. Local authority system
2. Local political system
3. Policies for the poor
4. Policies for people with merit through the war, the elderly, and disable people
5. Right to birth registration, ethnic and nationality identification
6. Right to property ownership
7. Right to freedom of religion and belief
8. Tax obligation
9. Citizen's obligation in national defence and security, social order and safety
10. Law on labor and employment
11. Law on cultural heritage protection
12. Law on food hygiene and safety

II. Program on socio-cultural education

13. Overview of Viet Nam's historical development
14. President Ho Chi Minh
15. Hà Nội capital city
16. Ethnic groups of Viet Nam
17. Limitations of Vietnamese people
18. Communication culture and behaviors of Vietnamese people
19. Vietnamese folklore
20. Vietnamese proverbs, quizzes, and folk-songs
21. Building a learning society
22. Causes and consequences of poverty
23. Causes and consequences of children illiteracy
24. Vietnamese family's traditions
25. Violence against children
26. Vietnamese women's traditions
27. Early marriage problem
28. Modern perception of 'Công - Dung - Ngôn - Hạnh' (women's 4 traditional ideal attributes: Industriousness-Appearance-Speech-Conduct)
29. Assertiveness and refusal skills
30. Help seeking skill

III. Program on Environment Protection

31. Nomadic living and environment
32. Tourism and environment
33. Protection of historical and tourist spots
34. Preservation of nature
35. Rare animals/ plants and extinction danger
36. Submerged land and sustainable use of submerged land
37. Village convention and environment protection
38. Some methods of processing water for daily use
39. Use of rain water
40. Ocean and our life
41. Diversity of marine ecology
42. Minerals exploitation and environmental issue
43. Energy and our life
44. Use of green energy
45. Benefits and dangers of synthetic plastics

IV. Program on Health Education

46. Environment and our health
47. Physical exercises to improve health
48. Prevention of pesticide intoxication
49. Obesity

50. Asthma
51. Tuberculosis
52. Hepatitis A,B,C
53. Helminthiasis
54. Cardiac disease
55. Nephropathy and ureteritis
56. Diabetes
57. Skin diseases
58. Arthritis
59. Goitre
60. Sexually Transmitted Diseases and Infections

V. Program on economic development and income raising

61. Human resource quality in the world's globalized and integrated trend
62. Labor export as a means to contribute to sustainable poverty reduction
63. Economic development and environment protection
64. Application of VIET GAP in safe production of fruit crops in Viet Nam (lychee)
65. Food safety and hygiene in production, processing, services, and restaurant business
66. Effective use of loans
67. Farming economic development
68. Vocational training for farmers
69. Rice cultivation technique
70. Soybeans cultivation technique
71. Orange cultivation techniques
72. Coffee cultivation technique
73. Technique of cultivating ginger under forest shade
74. Technique of cultivating local specialized crops (longan)
75. Pot plants cultivation technique
76. Pig breeding technique
77. Goat breeding technique
78. Biological safety in poultry breeding
79. Technique of carp breeding in family's pond
80. Preservation of livestock's breed