

**The Partnership between Government and International, Local NGO in
Managing Water at Commune Level in Vietnam:
A Case study of Thai Long Dam Project¹**

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Abstract

Until recently, research in Vietnam has focused on the role of state and business sectors as two main social domains in shaping the development in Vietnam towards sustainable development. At the cosmological or ideological level, each follows its own ideological view on development as sustainable development and sustainable economic growth. At the organisational level, each prefers its way of organising their program in forms of networking and corporation management. And at the technological level, each selects its means to achieve the goal of development as impact assessment and cleaner production.

The Reform Policy as 'Doi Moi' introduced by the Government of Vietnam at the end of 1980s opened new opportunities to other social domain to be involved in the policy and decision-making at various local levels. Innovations such as decentralisation of decision-making power to lower administrative level, recognition of the role of the local community in managing their natural resources, e.g. land allocation to households, community forest management, transfer of irrigated water management right to local communities were introduced. This new institutional framework has facilitated the formation of a thin at present but potential in the future public sphere in Vietnam where private individuals and groups interact for common purpose - a civil society - or the arena of social engagement existing above the individual and below the state. In this civil society, for example, the local communities at grassroots level set up their water users associations or cooperatives which can be regarded a new type of the local non-government organisations (NGOs) in Vietnam. These local NGOs have mobilised local farmers to participate actively in managing their local resources in a sustainable manner, thereby strengthening themselves as the institutions of civil society that mediate between the individual and the state, thus promoting increased government responsiveness and accountability.

With this new emerging civil society partly represented by local community organisations, one can argue that together with the state and business domains, a third social domain has been put in place as the civil society that follows its ideological view on development as sustainable livelihood, prefers its way of implementing its program in form of community involvement and selects its means of achieving its goal of development as the access and control over resources.

The paper presents a case study on the dynamic partnership between government and international, local communities in management of the irrigated water resource in the Cam Phu Commune, Cam Thuy District, Thanh Hoa Province, the Northern part of Vietnam. This partnership is illustrated through Thai Long Dam Project supported by the International NGO - the American Friends Service Committee (Quaker Service Vietnam), especially the spin-off organization of the project - the local Water User Cooperative set up by the Commune.

ACRONYMS

ADB	Asian Development Bank
APC	Agricultural Production Cooperatives
CPC	Commune Peoples Committee
DARDS	District Agriculture and Rural Development Service
DOI	Department of Irrigation
DPC	District Peoples Committee
IMC	Irrigation Management Companies
IT	Irrigation Team
MARD	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development
O&M	Operation and Maintenance
PARDS	Provincial Agriculture and Rural Development Service
PIM	Participatory Irrigation Management
PC	Peoples Committee
PPC	Provincial Peoples Committee
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
IMT	Irrigation Management Transfer
WUC	Water Users Cooperative
WUA	Water Users Association

1. Background and purpose of the paper

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2. A cultural approach to development and the Role of NGOs in a Civil Society

2.1. Cultural approach to development

Development policy and programs are often the result of resolving or asserting conflicting development interests of various groups of actors representing three main social domains or constituencies: (1) Government, (2) Business and (3) Civil society. (Jamison and Baark. 1990). Depending on their institutional background and epistemological orientation, these different groups of actors acquire and interpret different notions of development, carrying implications for their own political actions over the development process. These different actors with conflicting interests constitute the dynamic interactions among themselves that affect the political decision-making processes within which development plans and programmes are formulated and shaped (Bach Tan Sinh. 1998)

In Vietnam until now, the decision-making process associated with mainstream development has been highly centralized and compartmentalized, stemming from a legacy of the former centrally planned economy. Development plans are mainly dominated by the Government and recently by the newly emerging economic actors. A set of civic or non-governmental actors is still at the early stage of formation and plays only a minor role in shaping the development path of Vietnam.

In order to understand the dynamics of the social transformation process toward sustainable development in Vietnam the framework below is applied to examine the interaction between three social domains (government, business and civil society) at three levels (ideological, technological and organizational). The interaction between the two main social domains (government and business) and its influence on the way in which development in Vietnam has been pursued, have been discussed in Bach Tan Sinh (1998)². This paper attempts to examine the new aspect of the interaction between these three domains by bringing a new emerging or so-called third sector - the civil society in Vietnam into the play.

² For a detailed description of the framework, see the chapter 3 of Bach Tan Sinh (1998)

Domains \ Dimensions	Government	Business	Civil Society
Ideological	sustainable development	sustainable economic growth	sustainable livelihood
Technological	impact assessment	cleaner production/ cleaner technology	access to and control over resources
Organizational	networking	company management	public participation and community involvement

Figure 1. The conceptual framework: cultural tensions between different social domains

2.2. Concepts of Civil Society, and the role of NGOs in a Civil Society

Concept on civil society

For the sake of the case study presented later, there is a need to agree on the concepts of civil society applied in the study. There is no single, static definition of civil society. The term has a long and continually evolving, if not contestable, conceptual history (Wapner 1998)³. For the early formulation following Hegel, civil society was defined as "that arena of social engagement which exists above the individual yet below the state" and " a complex network of economic, social, and cultural practices based on friendship, family, the market, and voluntary affiliation" (Wapner 1998: 510). The concept includes the economy within its domain. The later formulation, most notably those offered by Gramsci and Parsons, introduced a three-part model that differentiates civil society from both the state and the economy (Parsons 1971 and Gramsci 1971)⁴. The concept offered by Gramsci and Parsons is in line with the framework above which classified a society into three sectors - government, business and civil society.

Recently, Kaldor proposed five different versions of the concept of civil society including: (1) *Societas Civilis*; (2) Bourgeois Society (*Bürgerliche Gesellschaft*); (3) The Neo-liberal version; (4) The Activist version; and (5) The Post-Modern version. (Kaldor 2000).

(1) The Societas Civilis: For Kaldor, civil society is define as "a rule of law and political community, a peaceful order, a zone of 'civility'. Civility is defined not as 'good manners' or 'polite

³ For an appreciation of the historical roots of the term and its usage in various contexts, see Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato. *Civil Society and Political Theory*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992; John Keane, "Despotism and Democracy: Origins and Development of the Distinction between Civil Society and the State, 1750-1850" in Keane ed. *Civil Society and the State: New European Perspectives*, London: Verso 1988.

⁴ Quoted in Wapner 1998: 527. For an extensive argument to exclude the economy from civil society, see Cohen and Arato 1992.

society' but as a state of affairs where violence has been minimised as a way of organising social relations. Most later definitions of civil society are predicated on the assumption of a rule of law and the relative absence of coercion in human affairs. Moreover, it is generally assumed that such a *Societas Civilis* requires a state, with a public monopoly of legitimate violence" (Kaldor 2000: 4)

(2) Bourgeois Society: Civil Society is defined following Smith, Hegel and Marx as "that arena of ethical life in between the state and the family. It was an historically produced phenomenon linked to the emergence of capitalism. Markets, social classes, civil law, welfare organisations were all part of civil society" (Kaldor 2000: 4)

(3) The Neo-liberal version of Civil Society: The term of civil society was popularised in the aftermath of 1989, neo-liberals and might be "described as 'laissez faire politics' a kind of market in politics. According to this definition, civil society consists of associational life - a non-profit voluntary 'third sector' - that not only restrains state power but also actually provides a substitute for many of the functions performed by the state. Thus charities and voluntary associations could carry out functions in the field of welfare which the state can no longer afford to perform" (Kaldor 2000: 4)

(4) The Activist version of Civil Society: It emerged from the opposition in Central Europe in the 1970's and 1980's. It is sometimes described as the post-Marxist or utopian version. On this definition, civil society "refers to active citizenship, to growing self-organisation outside formal political circles, and expanded space in which individual citizens can influence the conditions in which they live both directly through self organisation and through pressure on the State" (Kaldor 2000: 4)

(5) The Post-Modern version of Civil Society: Civil society is defined as " an arena of pluralism and contestation, a source of uncivility as well as civility". Following this definition, NGOs is only one of the many components of the civil society.

Among the five versions above, the last three ones seem to be relevant to the case study on NGOs as one of the institutions or components of civil society which grows out as "self organisation outside the formal political circles" and "expands space in which individual citizens can influence the condition.[...] through self organisation" and "provides a substitute for many of the functions performed by the state [...] and the function in the field of welfare which the state can no longer afford to perform" (Kaldor 2000).

The role of NGOs in Civil Society

Concerning the role civil society in general and the NGOs in particular in the political development of Third World Countries, Rifkin in his foreword to the book written by Fisher entitled "NonGovernments : NGOs and the Political Development of the Third World" stated that (Fisher 1998: viii):

Expanding the role of NGOs in socio-economic development requires that we rethink our notion of politics. While politicians traditionally divide society into a polar spectrum running from the marketplace, on the right, to the government, on the left, it is more accurate to think of society as a three-legged stool made up of the market sector, government sector, and civil

sector. The first leg creates market capital, the second leg creates public capital, and the third leg creates social capital. In the old scheme of things, finding the proper balance between the market and government dominated political discussion. In the new scheme, finding a balance between the market, government, and civil sectors becomes paramount. Thinking of society as creating three types of capital - market capital, public capital, and social capital - opens up new opportunities for reconceptualizing both the social contract and the meaning of work in the coming era

In this regard, it is more interesting to look at the dynamic interaction between three sectors that shapes the way in which development is planned, implemented and monitored. Depending on the political and institutional set-up in each Third World country, the extent to which NGOs can play role in promoting civil society varies with six major ways: (1) development of their communities and promote social change; (2) nurture sustainable development and viable civil societies; (3) promote political rights and civil liberties; (4) focus on bottom-up democratization; (5) influence other voluntary organisations; and (6) promote relationship between the for-profit and independent or non-profit sectors of civil society. (Fisher 1998: 16).

In relation to the government, NGOs as part of the products of the existing political system began to challenge the governance of the system. The failure of the government in the Third World countries to "meet the escalating challenges of sustainable development [...] has opened up unprecedented opportunities for NGOs not just replace government but to protest against them, influence them, and collaborate with them " (Fisher 1998: 30). The strategies of NGOs toward relationship with the government varies from (1) isolate themselves almost completely from the state to (2) engage the state through advocacy, which may or may not be confrontational; and to (3) cooperate with the state through parallel or collaborative field projects. (Fisher 1998:105-106)

The case study will address the three ways in which NGO can play important role to strengthening the civil society : (1) development of the communities; (2) nurture of sustainable development in the communities; and (3) enhancement of bottom-up democratization. In addition the case study also aims to illustrate that the third strategy of NGOs concerning cooperation with the government can be realised through collaborate projects.

3. Institutional, legal framework for irrigation in Vietnam

The general institutional arrangements in irrigation sector in Vietnam is carried out as a division of roles between those who provide water - the Government through its various instrumentalities, and those who receive water - the farmers in the hamlets. This is reflected in the Figure 2.

In comparison to the decentralization process of land management in Vietnam, management of irrigation water and its appurtenant conveyance structure are still centralised at the level of the IMCs and the Communes or the Communes' agricultural cooperatives where these still exist. Hence, the decentralization of the management of the O&M of irrigation facilities at lower levels lags behind. Recognizing that a clear definition of responsibilities and rights of water users plays an important factor for improvement of production efficiency, the Government promotes the policy and legal reforms in the irrigation management.

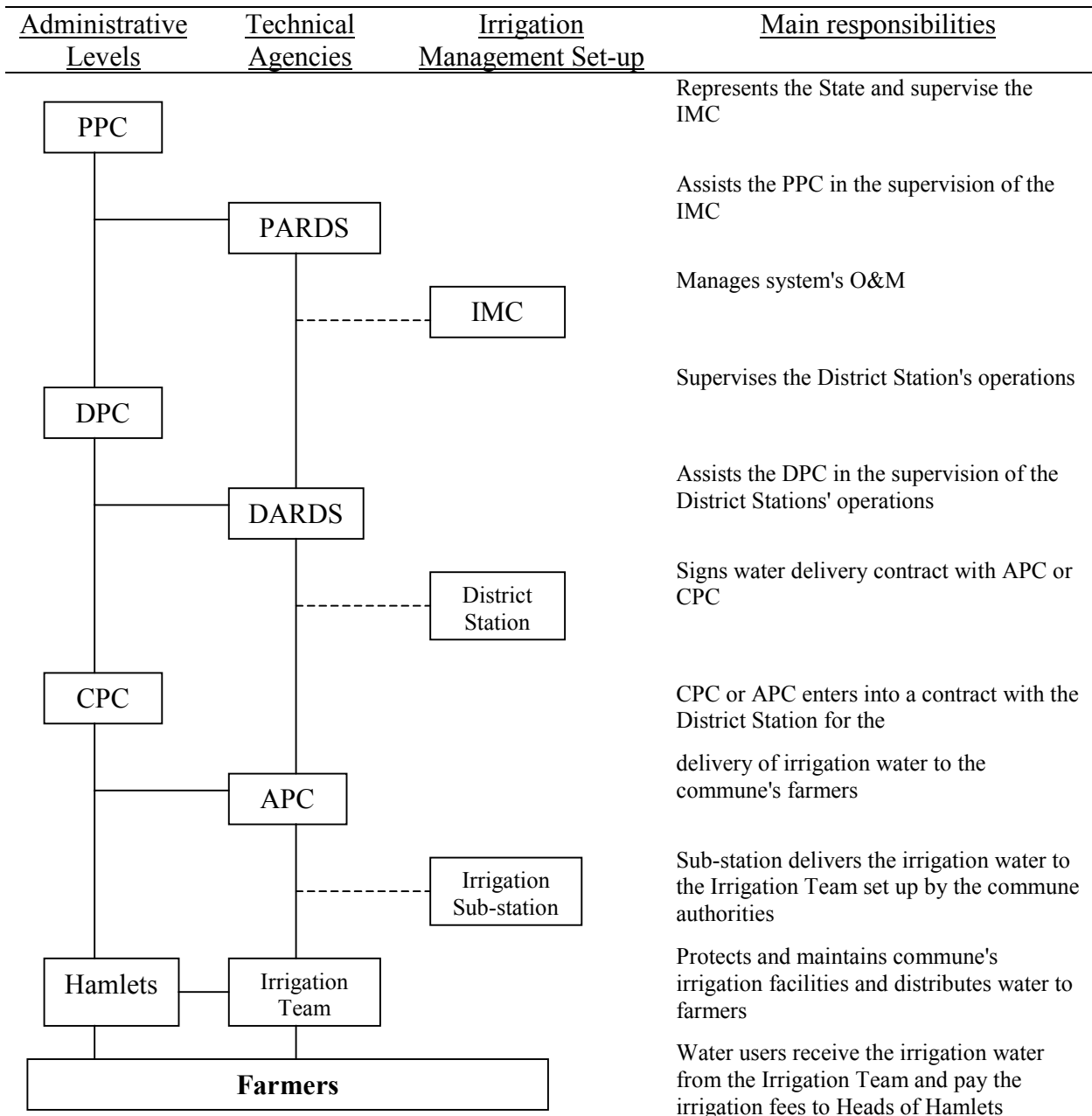


Figure 2. Institutional Framework for the O&M of Irrigation in Vietnam

4. Thai Long Dam Project

4.1. General information of the project

Cam Phu Commune is mountainous commune and located 23 km away from Cam Thuy Town (see Figure 3). It is difficult to access to Cam Phu due to the complicated topology linked with many streams. Cam Phu Commune area is 2100 ha, of which 460 ha is suitable for agriculture. Agriculture

is the main activity which relied on wet rice cultivation combined with subsidiary crops such as cassava, corn. The agricultural activities heavily depend on the supply of water from Thai Long Reservoir.

In 1997, the commune population was estimated at 5236 person with 971 families. The majority is Muong ethnic consisting of 4293 person accounting 82% of the total population. The remaining is Vietnamese (Kinh people) with 943 person. About 401 families were considered poor whose income is less than 300,000 VND per person annually. The number of households regarded as middle wealth is 430 accounting 47 % with their annual income of 500,000 VND per person. Only 10 of the families (10%) is considered better-off whose annual income per person is from 1,000,000 to 1,500,000 VND.

Proposal

Thai Long Dam was first built in 1961 as part of the irrigation system of Cam Thuy District. The Dam formed a reservoir which supplied irrigation water for 276 ha and at the same time provided water for domestic consumption for the local communities through infiltration in the soil into their well. The Dam was totally destroyed by flooding and rebuilt in 1976. Since then it had partially collapsed during each subsequent rainy season and had been rebuilt with local material during each dry season, a process that had proved expensive in local materials and labour.

The commune realised that they need a more stable dam and came up with their own proposal which was submitted to the Province for investment. It took two years (1993-1995) to find out that the province could not seek investment for this project. In 1996 QSV received the proposal from the commune and organised a series of appraisal trips to the area with the assistance of external consultants. The proposal was approved in December 1997. The implementation of the project started in February 1997, finished in May, and put in operation in June of the same year.

Objectives

The general development objective of the project is to improve the living standard of people in Cam Phu Commune. Its immediate objective is to increase the crop production outputs. The project aimed at replacing original dam by a new concrete dam on site of the original dam in order to improve the water distribution system not only for Cam Phu Commune but also for Cam Tan and Cam Van Communes. It is to reduce the cost of annual maintenance with the previous annual rebuilding of the dam and to increase the irrigation command area and therefore increase the production during harvest. With the new dam it is expected to increase the irrigated area from 35 ha to 195 ha of rice and 80 ha of corn and vegetables. It also creates drinking-water source for 4,709 people in 895 households. In addition, the dam will become an alternative income source for the local community through sustainable aquaculture.

Components and budget

The project consisted of building a new concrete dam and construction of four outlets. The financial structure of Thai Long Project is as below:

Total investment:		783.666.000 VND
- From QSV :		
• Main materials	426.252.000	
• high-skill labor and machinery	170.946.000	
• Reserve	29.000.000	
• Sub-total		626.198.000 VND
- From local community		
• labor and local materials	157.468.000	
• Subtotal		157.468.000 VND

Besides, the Commune contributes its persons to be involved in management , provision houses for workers to stay and for storage of construction materials. The Dam Thai Long creates a reservoir which is one major part of water resource. Together with 35 small dams it constitutes the irrigation system in Cam Phu Commune. The total length of the irrigation canal is 24.5 km.

Socio-economic and environmental impacts

- *Food production and food security*

The project has had a major impact on food production and food security in all 8 villages of the commune. An area of 35,6 ha which can only be used to planting rice for one season can be secured now for the second season. In addition, 80 ha can be used to cultivate subsidiary crops. Animal raising has augmented since more fodder can be found, and as the water in the system has had a greening effect on the area, animals can be grazed during the dry season also. A number of families have taken to fish farming which provides a source for food and income.

With the water keep in the reservoir along the whole year, the humidity in the surrounding environment increases which is favourable for planting different vegetables. About 350 households planted vegetable such as cabbage, onions, each received 250 m² and the vegetables were mainly used for domestic consumption. In 1997 more then 120 families planted fruit trees such as litchi, longan and bananas. Some families started planting cash-crop trees.

- *Distribution of benefits*

All farmers in the commune have benefited from the project. However the degree of benefit varies. The village Thai Long is the one which directly benefits from the Thai Long Dam Project. In addition, not only Cam Phu Commune but also the two neighbouring communes - Cam Van and Cam Tan benefited from the Thai Long Dam. With the establishment of Cam Phu WUC every households of the commune will benefit equally from the whole irrigation system because the WUC is in the position to control the water delivery to individual villages in the Cam Phu Commune.

- *Impact on workload*

Access to irrigation has had a positive impact on the workload of men, women and children, as many agricultural activities such as land preparation, transplanting and weeding become easier and less time demanding. With water supplied through irrigation during the dry season many families

can have enough water in their wells, which eases the collection of water for domestic use by women and children.

There has been a concern on increased agricultural workload by having additional crops for women and children since they contribute mainly work to transplanting, weeding, fertilising and harvesting. However, it may mislead to make too much of this point. For villagers interviewed, they did not mind working harder if it led to a great returns. The improvements brought by the project, combined with the increase in agricultural output, outweighed the additional workload of an additional subsidiary crops or a dry season rice crop.

- *Environmental impacts*

The impact of the project on the environment is limited, as the project covers an area which was already used for agriculture before the project. Because irrigation water, through infiltration in the soil, is the direct source of water in the wells from which families take their drinking water, there exist a risk that with intensification of the agricultural production (for which most likely higher quantities of fertilizer and insecticides will be used) well will get polluted which can affect the health of villagers using well water for consumption.

4.2. Management of the project

4.2.1. Role of key stakeholders in the project

Before presenting the whole management process of the project, it is worthwhile to discuss the roles played by key stakeholders. One of the crucial factor leading to the success of Thai Long Project is the full participation of all concerned agencies and stakeholders whose relationships are illustrated in Figure 4: (1) Funding agency (FA); (2) Farmers as benefited community (BC); (3) Local authorities (LA); (4) Technical institutions and companies involved in design and construction work (TC); and (5) Governmental technical agencies such as PARDS (GTA)

(1) Funding agency - QSV

The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), known in Vietnam as Quaker Service Vietnam (QSV) began its activities first in Vietnam in 1966. During the period 1966-1975, QSV responded to the needs of civilian victims of the war in Vietnam, in keeping with its long-standing tradition of aiding people on all side of conflicts when possible. Since 1975 QSV, apart from its traditional activities concerning support to victims of the war, expanded its profiles to include assistance in rural development for some selected poor provinces such as Thanh Hoa and Son La. The QSV Rural Development Program mainly focuses on small-scale irrigation project. In 1991, after many years of administrating the Vietnam Program from Laos, AFSC established an office in Hanoi under the name Quaker Service Vietnam. QSV's role in different stages of the project cycles is as follows. During the formation of the project, QSV organises feasibility studies to project proposals and decides whether to support these project based on information and data gathered from the studies. In the implementation phase (design and construction), QSV continues to monitor the implementation of the project after signing design and construction contracts with the technical companies. And in the Operation and Maintenance (O&M) phase, QSV provides fund to hire training experts coming to

the project sites to organise training courses on management and monitoring project performance according to the work plan. Besides, QSV conducts assessment of the project after one year of operation to draw useful lessons learned for future projects.

(2) Benefited community - farmers

The farmers are those whose management capacity needs to be strengthened and whose living standard be improved. As the owners of project, the farmers play the most important role in the whole process from initiating to implementing and monitoring project. During the formation phase of the project, farmers provided information for preparing the planning framework of small-scale irrigation projects at the district level. In the process of conducting feasibility studies, farmers participated and proposed options to repair and improve the project. They also contributed their labour and local materials, and expressed their commitments to implement project successfully. After the project has completed, farmers set up their own Water Users Cooperative (WUC) - a new type of local community organisation or NGO which will be examined latter in this paper.

(3) Governmental technical agencies (PARDS and DARDS)

Both PARDS and DARDS are governmental technical agencies in the field of agricultural irrigation and rural development. These agencies are involved through the following forms:

- appraise and approve planning framework of small-scale irrigation project.
- approve whether to go ahead with feasibility studies for those proposal submitted by the district authorities to QSV. In the case of Thai Long Project, PARDS agreed to conduct the feasibility studies with the suggested investment need.
- appraise and approve the technical design report: after the design company completed the technical design and construction report including the total investment need, the report document was submitted to the responsible approval agencies within the PARDS for approval. Based on this approval QSV decided the fund for the project.
- DARDS appointed technical experts in the irrigation field to assist the commune and Project Management Board in monitoring and accepting the completion of the project. In the necessary case, DARDS can send its experts to come to project sites in order to control the quality of the project during the construction process.

The participation of governmental technical agencies contributes to the success of the Thai Long Project because it can avoid the overlap between projects supported by government and those by NGOs. Thai Long project was thereby ensured to be well situated in the general planning program of the whole irrigation system of the district and province. The project was also considered in the wider context for three reasons. First, in many cases the project supported by NGO can be appropriate in one commune but inappropriate if considered in the general long-term planning perspective. Second, the project may be seen from farmers as possible to go ahead, but if taken into account the technical considerations can not be undertaken. Last, the project does not overlap with investment of local authorities. In addition, with the involvement of the governmental technical agencies, the project can receive technical assistance in how to manage the project in a more sustainable way.

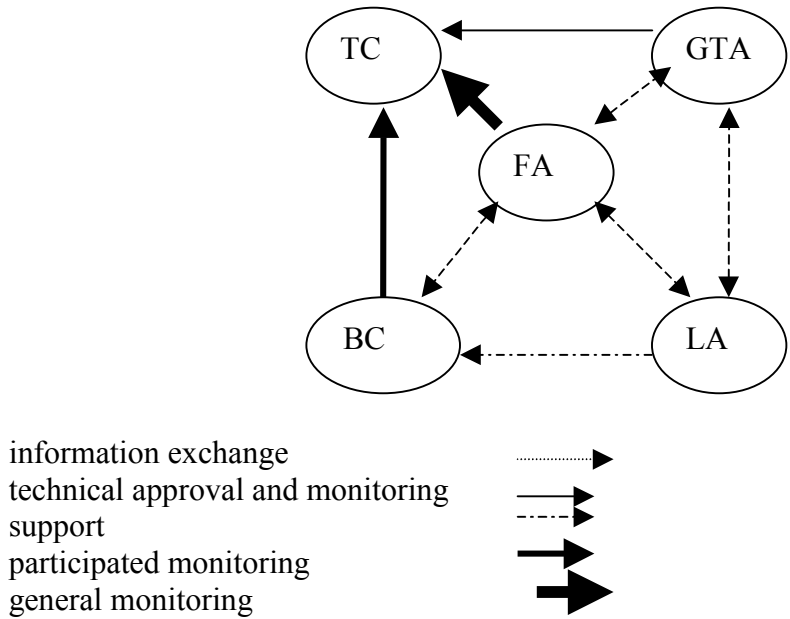


Figure 4. Key stakeholders involved in project

(4) Local authorities

District PC is the local governmental authority which is in the position to develop all kinds of affairs, sending the requests to suitable funding agencies (e.g. QSV). It assists communes in submission of technical design project documents for approval, monitors the management of the project carried out by communes, and ensures commitment made between representative of commune and funding agency. In addition, the District PC also assists communes in mobilising local labour from one commune to the others if needed or mobilise social labour for commune when the labour demand is fairly large.

The cooperation between governmental technical agencies, local authorities and benefited communities was important to the success of the Thai Long Project. It helps to select the right community which needs assistance, to tailor the investment suitable to the local conditions, thereby ensuring the efficiency of the assistance provided by QSV, to bring the results quickly, to ensure the compliance with present state laws and regulations.

4.2.2. Management Process :

The whole management process of the project is presented in Table 1.

Project Steps	Activities	Key stakeholders
1. Prepare and approve planning framework for small-scale irrigation projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify competent institutions assisting QSV in preparing the planning framework • provide training on PRA to the Centre • Centre jointly prepare with local farmer the planning framework • submit to the PARD for approval 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • QSV • Institution: Centre for Water Resource and Environment • local farmers • PARDS
2. Conduct and appraise feasibility study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feasibility study was prepared by two institutions, commented by QSV and approved by PARDS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centre of Irrigation in the North and Institute of Irrigation • QSV • PARDS
3. Design and construction of the Dam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design and construction of Dam by Centre of Irrigation in the North. • Construction was monitored by local farmers represented by the team appointed by the Management Board of the Project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centre of Irrigation in the North • Farmers
4. Monitoring the performance of the Dam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • organise training on management of water delivery to farmers • provide guidance to farmers in setting up water users organisations • establish the Water Users Cooperative of the Commune 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • QSV • experts from DARDS • members of Irrigation Management Unit • Centre of Water Resources • Farmers

Table 1



4.2.3. Cam Phu Water Users Cooperative: Role of local community as the local NGO

After the agricultural production cooperative in Cam Phu Commune collapsed in 1995 all irrigation projects were handed over to the Cam Phu Commune People's Committee to manage and collect irrigation fee. Each village had a irrigation team led by the village head. All the activities including irrigation in each village are reported to the CPC through its village head. (see Figure 6.)

Due to the different nature of water service compared to other traditional agricultural services such as fertilisers, Cam Phu Commune recognised the need of having a new irrigation institution. This organisation is to replace the former agriculture production cooperative with the new way of managing the irrigation water in accordance with the policy of government towards transferring management more to the community level - The Water Users Cooperative (see Figure 7). To help the Cam Phu Commune setting up the WUC, QSV asked the Centre of Water Resource and Environment to prepare a plan with three phases:

Phase 1: Management Guidance to establish the WUC

Phase 2: Technical Assistance and primary assessment of the performance of WUC

Phase 3: Detailed assessment of performance of WUC and adjustment to meet the conditions

The difference between two organisational structures in figure 5 and 6 (before and after the establishment of WUC) is in the former organisation the head of village was responsible for administration within the village including irrigation management. In the new organisation (WUC) in each village (group) there is a head of the group (irrigation team leader) whose tasks are to implement the water delivery contract signed between the village and the WUC, collect irrigation fee (for a more detailed tasks see Article 24 of the Regulation of WUC). The head of the group (village) has been chosen directly by the farmers in this village during the process of establishment of WUC. The village head is now only responsible for administration of the village.

Assessment of WUC

The success of Thai Long Project can not be assessed just from the narrow point - the completion of the Thai Long concrete dam supported by QSV, but from the broader point of creating a water users organisation which can increase the effectiveness of the whole irrigation system of the Commune. The Thai Long Dam was only one major part of the irrigation system.

First, the establishment of Cam Phu WUC rests on the existing organisation set-ups which already exist in the Commune (the irrigation teams in each village) but with the change of institutional arrangements including management ; in other words the hard-ware remains but soft-ware changed. This reflects the lesson drawn from other studies on irrigation in Vietnam. It argued that the current existing organisations represent a substantial amount of *social capital* in the network of institutions and relationships which have been developed. Therefore it is possible to establish federated organisations with much less disruption than completely reorganising management, and in such a way that maintains support from commune authorities rather than arousing opposition. At the local level in Vietnam, irrigation teams seem to be widespread and relatively effective (Bruns. 1997). This is true in Cam Phu Commune.

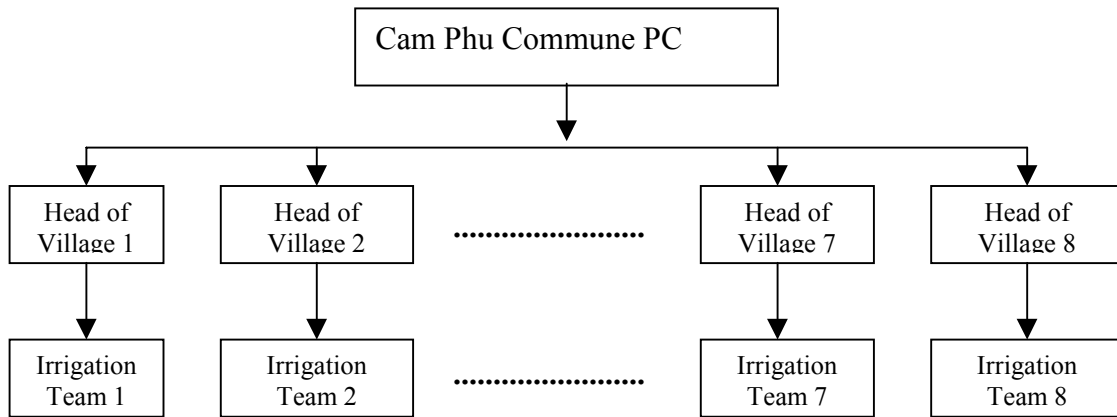


Figure 5. The organisational chart of Cam Phu Commune

The organisational structure of the Cam Phu WUC is illustrated as below:

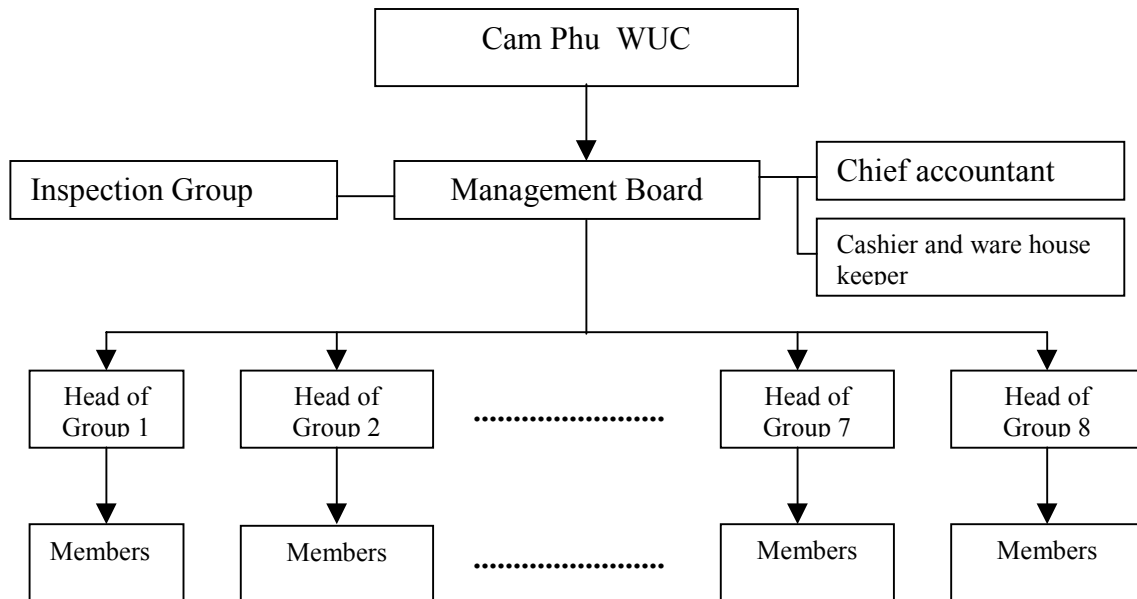


Figure 6. The organisational structure of the Cam Phu WUC

Second, the whole planning and implementation process regarding establishment of the WUC has ensured the decision-making of farmers which reflected through the regulation of the WUC as:

- Farmers are involved in decision regarding the water distribution plan and schedule which was prepared before the crop season began. Therefore, the water delivery is operated by irrigators (member of irrigation team in each group). The farmers who receive water can monitor directly the water delivery plan into its own spot based on the water contract agreed between the farmer and the irrigator.
- Farmers participate in financial matters through their participation and discussion on irrigation fee.

- Farmers are involved in deciding items of irrigation system which need to be repaired.
- Farmers delegate their representative through the head of group to which they belong in monitoring the implementation of their decision made together.

Third, with the full participation of farmers in formulating regulation of their WUC and jointly deciding the water delivery plans, potential conflict arose among the farmers in different villages before can be reduced and later eliminated. If there is any conflict, it will be first discussed among the farmers themselves to find solution or can be reported to the Inspection Group or discussed at the meeting organised by the WUC.

Fourth, the establishment of Cam Phu WUC is the first step in the effort to follow the government policy regarding transfer of irrigation management from the former management structure governed by the provincial irrigation department and carried out by the former agricultural commune cooperative to the recent emerging structure managed by the Water User Cooperative (Association).

4.3. Potential Role of the local NGO and its Cooperation with Government

The case study has examined three ways in which a local NGO (WUC) played important role in strengthening civil society in Vietnam - (1) development of the community; (2) nurturing sustainable development; and (3) enhancement of bottom-up democratization, and the third strategy of NGOs concerning cooperation with the government through jointly implementing irrigation project.

(1) Development of the local communities in Cam Phu Commune, Cam Thuy District

The project has achieved its objective set at the beginning of the project - to increase the living standards of benefited communities through expanding the irrigation areas. It has not only contributed to alleviate poverty in one of the poorest commune of the district but also to improve the efficiency of the irrigation system of the district, and to avoid development conflicts among various communes in one district.

(2) Nurturing sustainable development in the Cam Phu Commune

The project has been able to mobilise the resources by local benefited communities including institutional capacities (management skill for O&M of irrigation system, new management methods, planning skill), local labour and capital mainly in terms of local materials. The local community has exercised its function to monitor and approve the project from technical point of view once the project is completed. The social capital built during the project is crucial factor for the sustainability of the commune. This social capital in form of institutional capacity has been reflected in the following aspects:

- Using PRA to assess their local conditions relevant to the Thai Long Dam project and later to the implementation of the whole irrigation system in the commune. The farmers learn to share and make use of the information collected while they participated in preparing the project document.
- In the process of setting up the Cam Phu WUC, the farmers were involved in the open discussion, thereby learning how to exercise their rights and responsibility in managing water resource in a participatory and democratic manner. Such methods and tools as joint discussion

and walkthroughs with the expert of the Centre of Water Resource and Environment has facilitated farmers in demarcation of irrigation points which deteriorated, collect information regarding the present situation of irrigation system.

- The management capacity of farmers in Cam Phu Commune goes beyond M&O of the irrigation system to technical and economic assessment of potential improvements, such as holding the discussion at the village and household level, especially where construction or rehabilitation of land may affect individual fields.

(3) Enhancement of bottom-up democratization

The project has respected the rights and responsibilities to full participation of the local benefited communities in all steps of the project from origination through design construction to post-construction, and monitoring of the O&M. It thus ensures the exploitation of the project in a sustainable manner - financial, technical institutional, socio-economic and environmental sustainability.

(4) WUC as local NGO in cooperation with the government, jointly implement the irrigation project

The close cooperation among concerned parties and stakeholders - finding agency (QSV), benefited community (Cam Phu Commune), local authorities (Cam Phu Commune PC and Cam Thuy District PC), technical institutions and companies and government technical agencies (PARDS and DARDS) is important factor. With this close cooperation it is possible, on the one hand, to implement the irrigation project applying specific methods suitable for small-scale project receiving assistance from NGOs, e.g. PRA, community development approach, and on the other hand, to follow regulations of the government in the irrigation sector.

WUC recognizes both administrative and hydrological realities of the irrigation system and capable of managing both. As a newly organised institution in charge of O&M management of irrigation system, WUC relies on the existing irrigation teams already functioning well in the commune but operates with the more open and transparent procedures and financially autonomous. While meeting the nature of management of the irrigation system based on hydrological boundaries, WUC does not exclude administrative authorities from irrigation. For example the head of the inspection group - a member of the Management Board of WUC is the chairman of Commune People's Council. Experience elsewhere proved that any effort to simply exclude administrative authorities from irrigation in a newly organised water users organisation is likely to be futile and counterproductive⁵.

In spite of the success of the project, there remain some limitations. In the first place, concerning the involvement of women and the poor farmers in Thai Long Project, it appears that women and the poor did not have a strong voice in managing project. Again, looking at the list of the members of

⁵ Quoted from Bruns. 1997. The argument here draws on Norman Uphoffs (1991) emphasis on finding "both/and" solutions, rather than being locked into either/or dualities. Ideas about hydrological versus administrative boundaries for WUA have often stimulated endless, unfruitful debate, within which neither side often comes to grips with the issue of how, if their solution were adopted, it would deal with the issues of having both sufficient support from local authorities and sufficient scope to solve specialized, technically complex, management problems which cross administrative boundaries. A synthetic "both/and" approach seems much more likely to be effective in obtaining backing of administrative authorities, while having specialized management capable of dealing with multi-jurisdictional scope of water resource management problems.

the Management Board, no woman was found. The lack of active participation of women and the poor can be considered the limit of the Thai Long Project in terms of public participation in the decision-making process. Second, the lack of policy and legal framework of the Thanh Hoa Province regarding state management of the new type of water users organisation creates difficulty for the Cam Thuy District in regulating the activities of the Cam Thuy WUC. Until now the Law on Agricultural Production Cooperative is the only legal basis for such water users organisation in Vietnam. Applying this Law for such organization as WUC is not quite appropriate due to the nature of water service for irrigation in the rural area. If the WUC operates as an economic entity providing service for profit, the sense of participatory irrigation management is lost. Because WUC is considered as a type of agricultural production cooperative, irrigation fee is regarded assets of the cooperative, thus a subject to report to district PC (according to the article 2 of the Law). To what extent farmers of the Cam Phu WUC can discuss and participate in financial decision-making depends on the attention and monitor given by the district PC. Third, The project has assisted in solving the problems related to irrigation and drainage, provision of guidance to farmers in effective use of water and ensured sustainable exploitation of the project. However, when water is available meeting the need of the benefited community, there is a need to provide further guidance to farmers in improving agricultural activities to increase the efficient use of irrigated water.

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Figure 2. LOCATION OF THAILONG DAM PROJECTS IN CAM THUY DISTRICTS - THANH HOA PROV.

