Agro-climate Information Services (ACIS) for Women and Ethnic Minority Farmers in South-East Asia (2015-2018)

Project Interventions

The Project’s objective is that farmers have timely access to downscaled forecasts for each climate zone enclosed by specific advisories. This is to increase rice productivity and/or decrease losses due to impacts of climate change and extreme weather conditions, and at the same time, to improve production habits e.g. use of fertilizer and plant protection chemicals to a more effective and environmentally friendly way.

To achieve this, ACIS\(^1\) enhances capacity in climate change adaptation (CCA) agricultural production of farmers’ groups, community-based organisations and partners; provides information for specific agro-climate zones (instead of general information for the whole province); promotes learning and information sharing among farmers’ groups and community-based organisations; and recommends climate change adaptation policies in agricultural production based on research and actual models.

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\(^1\)ACIS activities took place based on the foundation of Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs). By joining a VSLA, women can save money, get loans and share benefits. ACIS disseminates climate forecasts and seasonal advisories or information about farming techniques through VSLAs’ meetings in addition to via village heads and village meetings.
There have been positive changes in forecasts and advisories. Climate forecasts have been more specific, detailed and reliable. Farming advisories such as those on techniques and time for sowing/planting, groundwork, pest and disease control, etc. have become more detailed for different climate scenarios.

There have been obvious changes in the coordination and collaboration capacity of relevant stakeholders including Hydro-Meteorological Stations, provincial and district Departments of Agriculture and Rural Development, and Agricultural Extension Centers at all levels with more frequent and effective exchanges, technical counseling, etc.

Communities have applied forecast and advisory information in their production. Thanks to the dissemination, guidance and discussion with communities before and after each forecast by district/communal agricultural extension officers, communal Women’s Union officials and VSLA leaders who are members of the Task Forces and Farmer Learning Network, communities now can better read, understand, and apply the advisories provided in the forecasts.

Farmers, especially women, are more self-confident and proactively provide comments, reflection and feedback on the accuracy of the forecasts, the understandability of language used, as well as the practicability and suitability of the advisories in reality.

The utility of plant protection chemicals and disease and pest prevalence in the 2017 winter-spring crop tended to decrease compared to the 2016 winter-spring crop. For example, the reported reduction rates in using plant protection chemicals in the 2017 winter-spring crop, compared to the 2016 winter-spring crop, were 43.3% among VSLA members’ households, 36% among non-VSLA households in project villages, and 11.1% only among households in non-project villages².

The use of fertilizer have decreased significantly, namely, VSLA households tended to use less fertilizer in the 2017 winter-spring crop than in the previous winter-spring crop.

Rice productivity has increased. Especially higher increase was recorded for VSLA households than the two other groups.

- **VSLAs:** productivity in 2017 winter-spring crop increased by 0.91 ton/ha, compared to 2016 crop.
- **Project villages:** productivity in 2017 winter-spring crop increased by 0.78 ton/ha, compared to 2016 crop.
- **Non-project villages:** productivity in 2017 winter-spring crop increased by 0.23 ton/ha, compared to 2016 crop.

² The Project measures changes in 1,095 households, including 612 households joining VSLAs who have access to, discuss and receive guidance on the forecasts; 168 households in the project villages who have access to the forecasts without discussion or further guidance, and 315 households residing in non-project villages.
Recommendations

The Project recommends promoting the application of weather and climate forecast information in agriculture production in Dien Bien through following activities:

- Improve infrastructure to serve forecasting activities, including both hardware and software.
- Allocate resources to make more downscaled forecasts for sub-climate zones in the province.
- Build capacity in interpreting and disseminating forecast information into actionable agro-advisories for farmers.
- Promote access to typical forecast information serving agricultural production.
- Improve effectiveness of communication system.

Provincial People’s Committee

- Consolidate coordination between Hydro-Meteorology Station and relevant departments/sectors.
- Allocate resources for relevant departments/sectors to promote access to information.

Dien Bien Hydro-Meteorology Station

- Continue building capacity, evaluating forecast quality to improve forecast effectiveness, promote feedback channels with relevant stakeholders to make sure disseminated information meets users’ needs.

Provincial Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (PDARD)

- Ensure that forecast information received by the PDARD is timely channeled to relevant departments/committees (e.g. seasonal forecasts).
- Proactively consult Provincial People’s Committee on specific contents required for agricultural production, counsel and propose budget allocation (if needed).

Dien Bien provincial Women’s Union

- Upscale the “Village Savings and Loan Association” model in the whole province to facilitate information exchange and sharing.

Dien Bien provincial Television Station

- Collaborate with Hydro-Meteorology Station and PDARD in the provision of weather and climate forecasts and agro-advisories based on the forecasts.

District Agricultural Extension and Plant Protection Station

- Build all staff’s capacity in the application of weather and climate information in agriculture and application of information technology in disseminating information to farmers.

Communal People’s Committees of Muong Phang and Pa Khoang

- Proactively engage in project activities and link project activities with the provision of seasonal calendar information and agro-advisories of the communal People’s Committees.