**Notes from District FPIC Awareness-raising Events, April 1-2, 2010**

The two district-level awareness raising events were very useful in highlighting issues that need to be addressed from this point onwards in the FPIC process. Based on experiences and lessons from the two events, the following issues need to be addressed:

1. **Number of villages**

The criterion of working in villages with more than 40 ha of forest is not appropriate, and seems designed simply to reduce the total number of villages. Ultimately we will need to secure FPIC from all villages with forest land. However, given that we are embarking on a process that has never been undertaken before, focusing on the small number of villages with large areas of forest may be justified as the first phase of a two-phase process, in which all other villages are addressed in the second phase. If some of the villages in the first phase provide FPIC, this will allow the programme to proceed with some field activities in those villages, while the second phase of the FPIC process continues. It may be worth requesting an “interim evaluation” by an independent agency of the first phase in order to allow us to implement any recommendations in the second phase.

1. **Awareness-raising events**

Awareness-raising events have now been held at the provincial level and at the district level. It is very clear that we are not yet ready to proceed to village consultations because:

1. Not all first phase villages were represented at the district awareness raising events, and no second phase villages were represented.
2. It was clear that understanding among commune and village representatives, and even among district officials is still poor.

Therefore, additional awareness raising events need to be held before we can proceed to village consultation. These are:

1. Commune-level awareness raising events – one in each commune, involving commune officials and village head from all villages (phase 1 and phase 2) in the commune
2. Zonal awareness raising events for women’s and youth unions (which are organized on the basis of zone, rather than communes)

In addition, awareness raising events should be organized for Forest Management Boards and Forest Enterprises. These are not part of the FPIC process, but are required as part of general awareness raising.

1. **Training of facilitators**

Since the facilitators will be the primary source of information for villagers, the training of the facilitators is a critically important step in the process. Therefore the trainers need to be of the highest quality. This may mean contracting top-class trainers or, if this is not possible, contracting less experienced trainers, but ensuring that they are themselves adequately trained by the most knowledgeable people available. The topics on which the facilitators need to be exceptionally well trained include:

1. **Background**: what is CC, what is REDD+, what is the UN-REDD programme seeking to achieve; what will a future REDD+ regime in Viet Nam involve. It is clear that a frequently asked question will be “*how will villagers benefit from UN-REDD*?” All trainers need to have a common and consistent answer to this question, which is long the lines of: “*Villagers will not benefit directly from UN-REDD in terms of financial benefits. However, UN-REDD will prepare villagers to benefit from REDD+ in the future. Villagers who participate in the UN-REDD Programme will be able to benefit much earlier than those who do not, and will probably be able to gain greater benefits from REDD+ than villagers who don’t participate*.” An analogy might be training villagers to process a forest product so as to add value. There is no direct benefit from training, but once trained, villagers are able to process and sell higher valued products. Carbon is a new product that can be sold internationally, but in order to be able to sell carbon, villagers need to understand how to do this – the UN-REDD Programme will provide this training.
2. **Principles governing the FPIC process**: this will cover issues such as:

* Goal of the process. It is very important that the facilitators understand that FPIC is a right of the local people, and we are undertaking a process to enable them to exercise that right. Therefore, the result of the process is not free prior informed consent, but a free prior informed decision. With-holding of consent is just as valid a result as provision of consent. Facilitators and village heads will not be rewarded for securing consent, but for securing a decision. A frequently asked question will be “*what happens if a village does not provide consent*?” The correct answer to this question is “*we will try to analyze the reasons why consent was with-held, consider whether we can modify the programme activities to address these reasons and, if so, repeat the process to request FPIC. If we cannot address the reasons for with-holding of consent; or if, having done so, FPIC is still with-held, then that village will not be involved in the programme*”
* Criteria governing FPIC. For example, the term “Free” implies that there is no pressure or coercion to provide consent. This means that government or Party officials should not be present while villagers are considering whether or not to provide consent. If it is considered necessary to have a government or Party representative present at the beginning/introduction of a village consultation, then that official will be required to state clearly to the villagers that they are free to with-hold consent, if they wish, and that a decision to with-hold consent will in no way result in any negative consequences for the village. The government of Party official will be required to depart before the villagers consider their decision. However, it is preferable for no government or Party officials to be present at all. If government or Party officials refuse to depart before the decision making process, the facilitator must terminate the process, arrange for re-education of the officials, and make arrangements for a new event that is able to meet the criterion of “Free”. Similarly, if it is apparent that not all villagers have received information about the U-REDD Programme, or that, having received material, they have failed to understand it, then clearly the criterion of “Informed” has not been met, and the facilitator should terminate the event, arrange for improved provision of information, and make arrangements for a new consultation.
* The decision is based on consensus, not unanimity. It is obvious that not everyone will reach the same conclusion – that is never the case in any decision making process. Therefore, it is not necessary or desirable to seek a decision from each household. Each household should be invited to participate in the decision making, but decisions of individual households are not relevant. Another issue is language – information must be provided (written or oral) in the language of preference of the villagers – not the facilitator, or village head. Proficiency of villagers in Vietnamese does NOT imply a preference for use of Vietnamese language. However, this provision does not include languages of ethnic minority migrants from other parts of the country.
* Consensus **does** imply representativeness. Although unanimity is not required, it **is** necessary that the consensual decision involves an appropriate representation of different groups within the village. This means that mean and women, elderly and youth, and all ethnic groups should be represented in the process in proportion approximating the situation in the village. For example, if the village consists of 80% K’ho and 20% Kinh households, but the majority of the people present at the village consultation are Kinh, this is clearly not representative. Under such circumstances (applying also to sex and age balance), the facilitator should terminate the event, arrange for re-education of the village head, and make arrangements for a new event that is sufficiently representative.

1. **Process for village events**: this will cover topics such as:

* Organization of the meeting: The date, location, and design of the village head is entirely up to the village head, as a representative of the villagers. The facilitator must not suggest or, even worse, demand certain arrangements to suit his/her needs.
* Role of village head: It must be made very clear to the village head that his/her role is to help to ensure that the village reaches a consensual **decision**; **NOT** that the village provides consent
* Record of consent (or with-holding of consent): Although it is preferable, for future reference, that consent (or with-holding of consent) be provided in writing, if this is considered not to be appropriate, a verbal decision will suffice (the facilitator to record in writing the verbal decision)

1. **Summary**

In summary, the following process is required from this point on:

1. Training of facilitators: early April (preceded by training of trainers, if considered necessary)
2. Commune-level awareness raising events: late April
3. Zonal-level awareness raising events: late April
4. Organizational arrangements for village-level events finalized: late April
5. Phase 1 village FPIC events: early May
6. Evaluation of phase 1 FPIC process: late May
7. Phase 2 village FPIC events for remaining villages: early June