

Local roading taps into global framework

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VietNamNet Bridge - Representatives from the Ministry of Transport (MoT) and Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) met recently in Hanoi to discuss the establishment of a landmark human resource training initiative.

The six-month project will see engineers from both ministries trained on research findings into rural road surfacing techniques, before venturing out to train 90 provincial department counterparts.

DF 55, will see the South East Asian Community Access Program (SEACAP)-funded project emerge as a unique case of government ministries working so closely together.

MoT secretary for the Rural Roads Surfacing Trials Steering Committee, Tran Tien Son, welcomes the co-operation of the ministries, and says there's often too much overlap in projects.

There's an expectation that once trained, the engineers will go and train communal personnel.

"The more we work together," he says, "the more we learn from each other."

In 2003, MoT, the World Bank and the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID) through SEACAP, combined to conduct research on the most sustainable and cost-effective ways of delivering rural road surfacing in Vietnam.

"SEACAP has served as a bridge for this cooperation to take place," says Nguyen Tien Dung, the vice-director of Finance and Administration for MARD. "It's very important that the provinces themselves, which are now responsible for rural transport, get up to speed on these new concepts and methods."

DF 55 is conditional on being able to utilise locally accessible materials and labour for road construction and maintenance. The ministries and SEACAP envisage that after being awarded certification through training, provincial engineers will have greater options when dealing with rural road building and maintenance.

For cash strapped, developing countries like Vietnam, there is a particular need to plan ahead so what little resources they have are used in the most sustainable manner.

"D 55 will give provincial engineers more options on surfaces, maintenance, standards and land slide protection," said MARD's Tran Xuan Ho.

Ho says that having the ability to plan ahead for things like land slide protection helps the ministries keep the roads intact.

"Remember, construction is a small piece of the life cycle of a road, maybe 6 months or a year long," he says "But maintenance goes on for 20-50 years. It is easy to see what you need to really plan for."

SEACAP manager David Salter highlighted the need for more road research programs in developing countries in order to reduce waste and fuel inefficiencies which hamper continued economic growth.

"Developing countries are going into debt by spending billions of dollars on roads they can't afford to maintain. If you build a road and have to rebuild

roads they can't afford to maintain. If you build a road and have to rebuild it again five years later, what's the point?" said Salter.

"We all know the importance of good practice and taking proven technologies from theory to use. But the discovery of local methods to deliver what we need is the way to go so we can get there sustainably."

Rural transportation is seen as a key alleviator of poverty. Without access, people are not able to utilise the basic social tools that urban dwellers take for granted, such as health, education and economic opportunities.

"Rural transport is vitally, vitally important for poverty alleviation," said Hoang Cong Quy, head of Rural Transport Unit under MoT. "It's simple really, when there are no roads, goods can't be sold. If they are sold, they are much more expensive due to the hassle in getting them there. Roads bring down costs for everything,"

SEACAP has expanded the reach of such strategies which look to support national transport to 30 research programs in Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. MoT unveiled it's National Rural Transport Strategy (RTS) in early 2007, calling for greater cooperation between ministries and line agencies, while MARD is currently designing the Integrated Rural Development Sector Project for Central Provinces (IRDSPCP).

IRDSPCP is a USD 168 million dollar infrastructure project for the country's impoverished central provinces. Close to half of the set aside funds are to be used on rural road maintenance and upgrades.

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