

Vietnam

Setting up bio-gas digesters

The protection of forests in the North of Vietnam is a major challenge for the Vietnamese government. The need for firewood is such that forest reserves and protected areas are under severe pressures. A feasibility study shall identify whether alternative fuels such as biogas could help reducing the pressure on the forest while at the same time enhance and sustain a rural social and economical development in remote mountainous villages.

Forest represents a resource for the country and a precious asset for the local populations. The forests in the province of Son-LA, located in the high-plateaux in the Northwest of Vietnam, worry Vietnamese authorities. The slash-and-burn culture practice and wood for heating harvest for domestic use or for the preparation of pig feeding has considerably contributed to lower bio-diversity and forest cover reduction (the forest of Son-La stretches over 138.810 ha, the bare surface area is 890.000 ha). The consequences are ground erosion and ground water degradation.

The project concerning the setting up of bio-gas production units in rural areas has two aspects : on the one hand it must contribute to the improvement of the environment (forest and agricultural) and the living and hygiene conditions while compensating for energy inadequacy. Then and above all, this project should help set up sustainable, local and rural development by integrating forest

heritage preservation and the control of energy need in accordance with the national strategy of Vietnamese agricultural economic development.

A feasibility study of bio-gas introduction has been undertaken, in addition with exploring studies of sustainable development main lines, and in particular agro-forestry, energy aspects and traditional industry. A British foundation finances these studies and the S.I.P. Sustainable Investment Partners performs the financial management.

Partnerships with local players like the People's Committee of Son-La and the Institute for International Co-operation (ICPC), technical and scientific assessment at the local and international level in social-economic, agronomy and energy systems areas have confirmed the pertinence of the aimed objectives as far as sustainable development criteria is concerned. These criteria are forest protection, improvement of hygiene and living conditions families, combustible wood savings.