

**PROVISION FOR POST PROJECT EVALUATIONS FOR THE UNITED NATIONS
DEMOCRACY FUND
Contract NO.PD:C0110/10**

UDF-VIE-10-392 –

Acknowledgements

Table of Contents

- I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 1
- II. INTRODUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT CONTEXT 7
- III. PROJECT STRATEGY 10
 - i. Project strategy and approach

I.

Effectiveness: Overall, the project was successful in contributing to the development objective of increasing the participation of Vietnamese CSOs in democratic decision-making. It also performed well in achieving the two outcomes concerned with increased CSO competencies and enhanced levels of participation in policy development. Interviews with representatives of partner CSOs indicated the value to them of both the initial 5-day advocacy training course provided to staff members of the partner organizations and of the experience of implementing the small grant projects. In surveys conducted by MSD some months after the completion of the training programs, a majority of the partner organizations reported that they had been able to apply the newly-acquired knowledge and skills in ongoing work. This finding was confirmed by the evaluation.

The project supported 15 CSO small advocacy projects, implemented by 14 CSO partners, with small grants provided from project funds. In most cases, the CSOs selected supplemented the \$1,000 awarded by securing additional resources from government and donor funds. Designed and implemented with guidance and advice from MSD, the projects were generally successful in delivering advocacy initiatives which engaged government officials and made progress towards the solution of specific problem issues. The projects also enabled the CSOs to obtain recognition from government for the legitimacy of their role in contributing to policy and decision-making.

The training-of-trainers component of the project was well planned and implemented. It was delivered through a 3-day course given to ten CSO staff members, selected from those who participated in the initial advocacy training, and two others. On completion of the course, MSD provided further guidance to the twelve trainees, now working in small teams of 2 or 3, to prepare and conduct their own training courses. Custom-designed training manuals were provided to assist them in their task. On this basis, a further six training courses were provided, reaching a further 154 trainees, drawn from 94 CSOs in the North, Centre and South of Vietnam.

The remaining outcome was a composite, which was concerned with networking among CSOs and between them and government, as well as enhanced implementation of existing government frameworks and policies concerning CSO involvement in policy- P D N L Q J 7 K H S U R M H achievement as measured against this outcome statement and the indicators set out in its results framework were quite good.

A CSO network was established with a focus on improving the enabling environment for civil society to play a role in the public sphere. There were also indications of interest on the part of government in working with the newly-established body. However, the association, the Action for CSO Development Alliance, has yet to become an active force. Similarly, while government has given signals that it will pursue more effective implementation of current policies and regulations, it is likely to take some time (well beyond the project timeframe) for visible changes to be seen. To balance against this, it is noteworthy that the 15 small grant projects all resulted in improvements or adjustments to implementation of regulations, changes in current government practice, or agreements for the CSO to take part in dialogue on the development of new policies and laws. Taken together, these results demonstrated what CSOs could achieve through carefully-prepared, professional advocacy initiatives.

Efficiency: The project was highly cost-effective, with great care taken in stewardship of the

policy advocacy falls into that category.

opening for engagement with government on the development of a CSO Alliance, there was a reduction in the overall coherence of what was, in many ways, an excellent project.

f The project was rated highly by the evaluation team for its cost effectiveness and managerial efficiency.

f In responding to a gap in the knowledge and skills of Vietnamese civil society organizations, the project was highly relevant to their needs. It was also of value to government as it considered new ideas concerning the role of civil society in working with government. Through the project, and the practical and constructive approach it adopted to building CSO credibility in the eyes of government, MSD proved itself to be a very capable advocate on behalf of Vietnamese civil society.

f While all components of the project were relevant to project objectives, there was also a lack of completeness to each of the components, with representatives of partner CSOs commenting on the need for more support in the case of all major activity-sets to complete the job. However, despite these limitations the project succeeded in contributing to the overall

f In terms of enhanced capacity of the partner CSOs, their representatives have reported that their understanding of public advocacy, its legal basis, and methods of undertaking it, have been considerably enhanced. They have also demonstrated that they have been able to apply the newly-acquired knowledge in their work.

f The training-of-trainers (ToT) program, which included opportunities for the newly-trained CSO staff members to plan and deliver training of their own, was effective. experience in conducting advocacy activities, before they would

f The principal project beneficiaries were the CSO partners. Within this group, WKHUH ZHUH WZR FDWHJRULHV RI SDUWQHUV 7KH ³FRUHSDUWQHUV benefited from participating in the full array of project activities. A second group of partner organizations, joined halfway through, following the completion of all major training activities. While they benefited from the small grants process, this group did not receive the necessary level of overall support to enable them to build their organizational capacities.

f Through the project, MSD succeeded in forming the Action for CSO Development Alliance (CSA). The Alliance clearly has potential, and government officials have expressed support for its possible role in representing CSO interests in policy discussions. However, without securing additional resources to build the network, little more can be done. In addition, member organizations indicate a concern that the network should include a broader capacity development mandate.

f In that the partner CSOs all reported that, following the project, they had been able to integrate advocacy with their ongoing work, project results will be sustainable. At the same time, it is apparent that additional resources and technical guidance will be needed to further strengthen organizational and training capabilities.

(iii) Recommendations

It is recommended that:

f MSD and its partners seek additional funds to make possible the completion of the capacity development programming initiated by the project.

f In developing plans for future projects, MSD (or MSD and its partners) gives careful attention to ensuring that sufficient resources are allocated to core project components to enhance the prospect for capacity development programs to achieve optimal results.

f Except in the case of initiatives with longer-term funding and extended time-frames, in developing future projects, MSD avoid adding participants in the course of implementation, where they will be unable to benefit from taking part in the full range of project activities.

f In order to maintain the commitment and interest of the members of the Alliance, MSD and its partners consider broadening the mandate of the CSA to include capacity building and professional development for its members on a broader front (beyond advocacy).

II. INTRODUCTION AND DEV

(ii) Evaluation methodology

The evaluation took place between late March and late May 2014, with field work done in Vietnam from 20-26 April 2014. The evaluation was conducted by an international and a national expert. The UNDEF Rounds 2, 3 and 4 evaluations follow a standard set of evaluation questions

that focus on six critical issues: W K H S U R M H F W ¶ V U H O I effectiveness, efficiency, impact, sustainability and any value added through UNDEF funding (see Annex1). This report follows that structure, with a chapter on each evaluation issue.

The evaluators reviewed basic documentation on the project and on the context for civil society cooperation with government in Vietnam. Additional documentation in Vietnamese was obtained by the national consultant, who reviewed

As elsewhere, International donor activity and the presence of international NGOs have stimulated the growth of civil society groups, while the emphasis of the state on poverty reduction and inclusive economic development has led it to permit the engagement of independent CSOs in service delivery and development information services. At the same time, public awareness of the contribution which can be made by CSOs has grown.

The state continues to exert tigs u(w)15(hi)6(o-4()-417()3(p)1384(N)5hi)6ov il - soc1(t)-t

enabling environment within which civil society might take on a constructive role as a recognized partner of government in policy development.

Advocacy follows similar principles wherever it takes place. However, implementation can be effective only if it is adapted to the local governance and cultural context. The definition of advocacy used in the project was as follows:

- x Follow-up coaching and mentoring by the MSD team Z L W K W K H 7 R 7 , who D G X D W H worked in small teams, in developing their own training curricula; holding of 6 further training workshops, organized and delivered by the ToT graduates, working in groups of 2 or 3. Each workshop catered for up to 30 trainees, for an anticipated total of 180 participants, drawn from the staff of CSOs which were included in the networks of the CSO partners;
- x Formation of a national CSO network: the CSO Development Alliance of Vietnam (CSA), adoption of an organizational strategy, and development of its website;
- x Conducting a review of the legal framework for CSOs/NGOs in Vietnam and of its

impled.373 0.5t

**Two dialogues between
government and civil society
organized.**

.

IV. EVALUATION FINDINGS

The evaluation is based on a framework reflecting a core set of evaluation questions formulated to meet the evaluation criteria of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. The questions and sub-questions are listed in Annex 1 of this document.

(i) Relevance

As noted above, despite an opening in the economic sphere in recent decades, Vietnam has been a very restrictive setting for civil society. While there have been limited opportunities within firm boundaries for civil society organizations to take part in consultations on new policy and legislation, it is Hanoi-based organizations with close and long-established links to government, such as professional and business associations and university research centres, which have been most active in this regard. However, what has become apparent is that, with a careful and negotiated approach, civil society can undertake advocacy on a broader front.⁵ Further, in such areas as environmental protection, management of fisheries, understanding citizen concerns about urban renewal, and land expropriation in rural areas, state agencies are recognizing that they

this was, in many ways, an excellent initiative. However, ultimately, it tried to fit in too many activities into one small project.

The grantee proved to be highly competent in its ability to both identify risks and to develop appropriate mitigation strategies. Some of the risks anticipated did become concrete, and all were dealt with effectively.

**Community meeting on Land Rights and Resettlement in Phu Loc District, Thua Thien Hue Province,
convened by Project Partner, CSRD (Center for Social Research and Development)**

(ii) Effectiveness

The project was rather careful in defining the objectives it sought to achieve. On the whole, it can be fairly concluded that the project did succeed in contributing to the overall objective of increasing the participation of Vietnamese CSOs in democratic decision-making. As interviews conducted for the evaluation confirm, core partner CSOs were better able to take part in dialogue with government officials, and more confident in doing so, as a result of participating in the project. However, those partners who joined the project later, and did not benefit from initial training, or have staff members take part in the training-of-trainers program, did not receive equivalent support. Despite this, in surveys completed several months after training, a significant majority of participating organizations indicated that they had been able to apply the new knowledge acquired through the project in their regular work. This finding was confirmed through interviews conducted by the evaluation team.

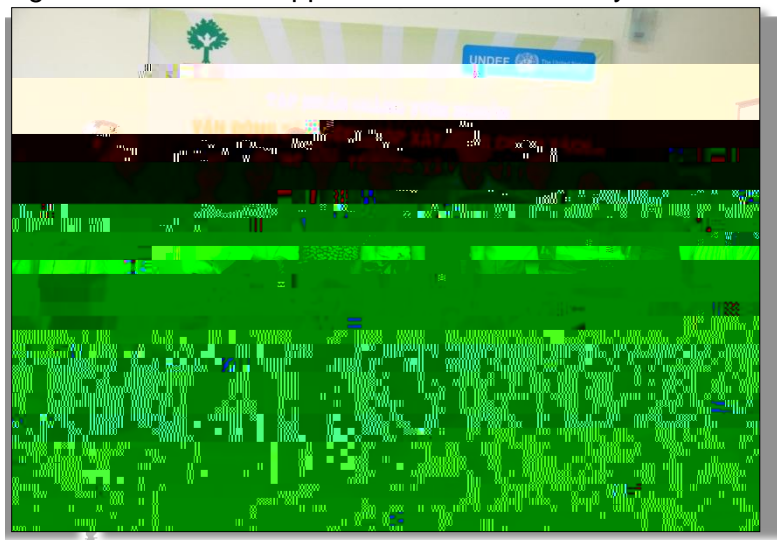
It should be noted that MSD is not alone in having supported the increased participation of

are struggling with finances, with staff positions and salaries dependent on receiving project funds. Few, even the larger organizations which took part in the project (for example, LIFE in Ho Chi Minh City), had the luxury of allocating staff working time to the ToT process.⁹ The inability of the new trainers to integrate preparation for the training into their regular work loads was an important factor in limiting the effectiveness of this component of the project.

The 15 small grant projects implemented with project support and guidance were quite successful in facilitating the engagement of partner CSOs in developing an advocacy initiative in support of their regular work. MSD provided considerable expert assistance to the partner organizations in taking an initial project concept into a well-focused, implementable project. While the dollar value of each grant, \$1,000, was very small, the total value of support provide, including technical assistance, was much higher.

needed to prepare their initiatives, although here too MSD support would be necessary to finalize project partners at the half-way stage, and which had not participated in any of the training provided by the project, a broader level and depth of support was required.

A requirement of obtaining the grant was for the receiving organization was to develop some form of formal or informal agreement with a government agency, generally at district or commune level¹⁰, but, in some cases, with national government ministries, indicating the right of the CSO to take part in discussions on policy issues or decision-making on a particular topic.¹¹ In most cases, MSD took part in, or provided support to, the negotiation of such agreements. While government officials in the North are familiar with the involvement of at least some non-government organizations in policy discussions, in the Centre and South, officials lack such familiarity. It was CSOs in these areas which most required such support.



All Participants in the Training of Trainers Workshop with the Training Team

⁹ LIFE is the abbreviation for the Centre for the Promotion of the Quality of Life.

¹⁰ There are 3 levels of local government in Vietnam: province or city with equivalent status district; and, commune. There are 62 provinces, 660 + districts and more than 9,000 communes.

¹¹ In participating in such agreements, government agencies were confirming the applicability of Vietnamese law concerning the rights of civil society to take part in such activities. The key laws or regulations involved are: the Grassroots Democracy Ordinance; the Law on the Promulgation of Legal Documents, and the Decision 22/2002-Ttg DV GLVF XV VHG LQ WKH SURMHFW) LQ D

Typically, the small projects involved an initial research phase (as a basis for evidence-based advocacy), along with local consultations, leading up to a joint seminar with government aimed to produce commitments and an agreement on further action to address the problem on which the initiative focused. In most of the cases examined, the CSOs were able to raise additional funds from donor or local government sources to cover the costs of the exercise beyond those that could be covered by the grant from the project.

The CSOs involved in the project and in the small grants process, whether working in the health, HIV-Aids, or environmental protection, spheres, were all engaged in work in support of vulnerable populations. All of the case-studies reviewed by the evaluation team seemed to have been successful in achieving their objectives of facilitating CSO input to the policy-making or decision-making process (see examples highlighted in text-boxes). At the same time, they also succeeded more broadly in bringing CSOs and government officials together in a cooperative setting, while also building CSO experience in planning, focusing, and organizing advocacy initiatives by building coalitions with other groups with complementary interests.

The second outcome was more complicated than the first, concerned with networking and the legal framework, and involving a number of different kinds of results bound together: ³ 1 H W Z R U N L Q J

small projects became larger and more substantial, contributing to both their ambition and results obtained. Overall, a great deal was accomplished for the total project cost of \$157,500 (of a total budget of \$175,000, with the balance allocated to UNDEF monitoring and evaluation).

Professional and administrative staff costs amounted to \$23,520, or 15 per cent of the budget. The budget covered the cost of only 25 per cent of the time of the Project Director and 50 per cent of that of the Senior Project Officer and Project Accountant. Only the Project Coordinator was full-time for the 24 months of the project. Given the level of engagement by the project team in the provision of training and technical support, and the sheer number of activities completed, these costs were rather modest.

In addition to staffing costs, a further 15 per cent of the project budget (\$23,666) was devoted to payment for consulting services. This budget line was perhaps a little higher than might have been expected. However, it covered the costs for trainers and ongoing CSO coaching of the memb HU & 6 2 V 7 KHUH ZHUH DOVR VPDOO SD\PHQWV WR WKH 3 JUD C delivered their own training programs. The largest single contract was for \$4,000 for a review by senior consultants of the legal framework for civil society participation in advocacy and policy development and input to the training needs assessment. However, MSD has advised the evaluation team that, while the line item was included in the UNDEF project budget, it was, in fact, funded from other sources and not included in project expenditures¹⁴

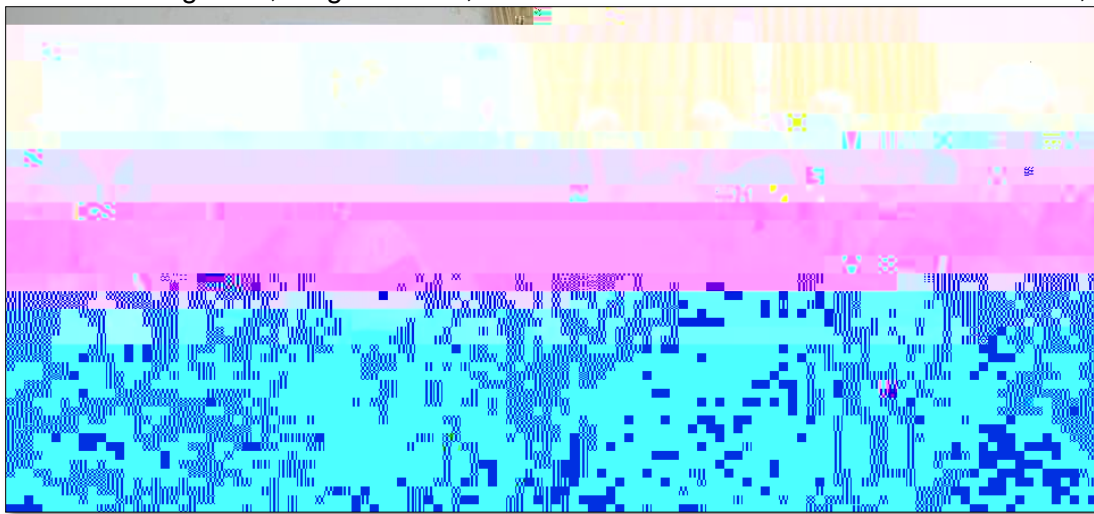
There was a long list of meetings, workshops and seminars organized by the project. The allocation for costs under this budget line amounted to \$64,016: 40 per cent of the budget. Given that these activities formed the core of the project and the large number of participants involved, these costs seem reasonable.

MSD retained complete control of management and administration throughout the project, even

MSD has also proved to be an effective advocate for civil society interests, and, as measure of its success, has managed to obtain a place at the table as a civil society representative in government dLVFXVLRQV ZLWK GRQRUV RQ 9LHWQDP¶V 3DUWQHUVKL

work. All felt that they had a better appreciation of the place of advocacy in supporting organizational objectives and have taken, or are taking, steps, larger or smaller, to integrate it with other activities. Some, for example, the Social Development Research and Community Development Centre (SDRC) in Ho Chi Minh City, have gone further and organized training for the staff members of other organizations in their networks, beyond the project. More broadly, however, there is a view that the ToT initiative can only fully bear fruit with sustained funding and the presence of an organization to provide ongoing professional support and leadership to extend and deepen the training and make it available to a wide range of civil society organizations and activists.

The experience of those CSOs which took part in the Small Grants program seems to have been extremely positive. The support MSD provided was highly valued. Among the most important lessons learned by those who undertook the projects were: the need to focus each advocacy initiative on a manageable, tangible issue; to seek to build a coalition of interest around it; and,



Training Workshop: Initial 5-Day Training for Staff of Core CSO Member Organizations

to collect detailed evidence concerning the effect of the problem, before seeking to engage with the relevant authorities. The guidance provided by MSD on the development of informal or formal agreements with government, and their frequent accompaniment in supporting negotiations, was particularly valued, and helped break down the apprehension of many CSOs, particularly in the Centre and South, at engaging with government officials. As suggested above, this is likely to have a long-term positive effect.

CSOs recognize that there is a need for more effective representation of their interests with government. Hence, there was considerable interest in the initiative to develop the CSA network, and all partners became founding members. However, as with the ToT component of the project, it is felt that, without securing significant longer-term financial resources to develop and strengthen the network, little will come of it. The level of interest of member organizations is strong, but their level of commitment at this stage is weak. None is willing to contribute its own time and resources to building the network.

undertaking it, have been considerably enhanced. They have also demonstrated that they have been able to apply the newly-acquired knowledge in their work.

(viii) The training-of-trainers (ToT) program, which included opportunities for the newly-trained CSO staff members to plan and deliver training of their own, was effective. +RZHYHU WKH 7R7 3JUDGXDWHV' UHSRUWHG WKDW WKH\ ZRXOG experience in conducting advocacy activities, before they would feel fully competent as trainers in this field.

(ix) The 15 small grant projects proved to be a success in enabling the SURMHFW¶V &62 SDUWQHUV WR GHYHORS HIIHFWLYH DGYRFD F constructively with relevant government officials. Results obtained included recognition of the positive contribution and practical knowledge CSOs could bring to policy development and decision-making. Along with this went a series of agreements for specific CSOs to contribute to the policy process in fields related to their expertise.

(x) The role of MSD in supporting its partners in the design and focusing of the projects, as well as in building support and understanding for the CSO initiatives on the part of government officials, was fundamental in ensuring positive outcomes. 7KH 3DFFRPSDQLPHQV provided by MSD to its partners in this and other components of the project was a key factor in WKH HIIHFWLYHQHV RI WKH SURMHFW¶V FDSDFLW\ GHYHORSPHQ

(xi) The principal project beneficiaries were the CSO partners. Within this JURXS WKHUH ZHUH WZR FDWHJURHLSUVWIRIQSDUVWZHUH the LQHYROR beginning and benefited from participating in the full array of project I

ANNEX 4: LIST OF ACRONYMS

CBO	Community-Based Organization
CMD	Center for Coastal Management and Development Studies
CODES	Center for Community Development and Social Work
CPV	Communist Party of Vietnam
CSA	Action for CSO Development Alliance
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CSORC	Civil Society Organization Resource Center
CSRD	Center for Social Research and Development
DANIDA	Danish Agency for International Development
DP Hanoi	'LVDEOHG 3HRSOH¶V \$VVRFLDWLRQ +DQRL
IPFCS	,QVWLWXWH RI 3RSXODWLRQ)DPLO\ DQG &KLOGUHQ
MOHA	Ministry of Home Affairs
MOU	Memorandum Of Understanding
MPI	Ministry of Planning and Investment
MSD	Research Center for management and Sustainable Development
NGO	Non-Government Organization
SDRC	Social Development and Community Development Center
ToT	Training 8 8 8.07.19 Tm(er f)nter
UN	
UNDEF	
US	
VCCI	