

UNDEF



The United Nations
Democracy Fund

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

EVALUATION REPORT



**UDF-VIE-10-392 – Civil Society Empowerment in Advocacy and Policy Development
in Vietnam**

30 June2014

Acknowledgements

The evaluators wish to express their appreciation to the Research Center for Management and Sustainable Development (MSD), its Director, Ms Linh Phuong Nguyen, the Chairman of the Board of Directors, Mr. Lam Ngoc Nguyen, and members of staff, for their assistance and support in arranging meetings for the evaluation field mission, and for the time they dedicated to providing inputs to the evaluation. Thanks are also due to representatives from partner civil society organizations for making themselves available for meetings with the evaluators in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, as well as, in one case, for a phone conference (a project partner from Hue). The evaluators also wish to express their appreciation to officials from government ministries, and from UNDP, for agreeing to be interviewed.

All photographs used in the report were provided by MSD.

Disclaimer

The views expressed in this report are those of the evaluators. They do not represent those of UNDEF or of any of the institutions referred to in the report.

Authors

This report was written by Phillip Rawkins with the valuable support of Ms. Mai Nguyen, the national expert. Ms. Aurelie Ferreira provided quality control, while Mr. Landis MacKellar provided editorial and methodological advice. Mr. Eric Tourrès was Project Director at Transtec.

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

(i) Project data

The project entitled *Civil Society Empowerment in Advocacy and Policy Development in Vietnam* was implemented over a two-year period, between 01 February 2012 and 31 January 2014, with a budget of \$175,000 (along with \$13,400 provided by the grantee). The project was implemented by the Research Center for Management and Sustainable Development (MSD), located in Hanoi, along with 18 partner organizations, drawn from Vietnamese civil society in the North, Centre and South of the country. The project's overall objective was to increase the participation of Vietnamese civil society organizations (CSOs) in democratic policy-making. The project sought to achieve this through the realization of three outcomes:

- Achieving the competency of CSOs in advocacy for democratic participation in the policy development process in Vietnam;
- Networking, cooperation and communication among CSOs with related government bodies enhanced, and existing legal frameworks/policies implemented;
- Participation of CSOs in democratic policy-making process achieved.

(ii) Evaluation findings

Relevance: The Vietnamese state has exercised great caution in providing space for independent organizations to play any role in the public arena, beyond the provision of social services under close supervision. However, in recent years, some of the constraints on civil society activities have been relaxed to a limited degree. With its excellent connections with government and its ability to anticipate new directions in government thinking, MSD was in a good position to organize a project which took advantage of a new opening for civil society in Vietnam.

The objectives of the project were directly relevant to the exploration of new possibilities in civil society engagement with government agencies on public policy, at both local and national levels. The project contributed to facilitating the insertion of a public voice in discussions and problem-solving on issues of concern to particular disadvantaged and vulnerable communities. The constructive approach in working with government adopted by MSD and, through its guidance, by its partners, was in keeping with Vietnamese political culture, and helped to strengthen the respect of government officials for the professional competence and reliability of CSOs.

The project design demonstrated an appreciation of the gaps in CSO understanding of what could be accomplished through public advocacy, and of how to organize advocacy work. The blend of training and support for focused advocacy projects, funded by small grants, with hands-on support from the MSD team, amounted to an imaginative strategy for capacity development. However, the integration of project components in practice suffered to some degree from the grantee's effort to refocus a number of project activities in order to take advantage of an unexpected breakthrough with the government in building a CSO network. While the changes in design were understandable given the need to act quickly, the addition of new priorities to the project did give to some project activities a sense of incompleteness, which was felt by project participants.

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 the country. Interviews with the ToT “graduates” revealed that all felt that their knowledge had been substantially improved through the process. However, none felt fully equipped as trainers on advocacy and policy development, particularly since they themselves lacked hands-on experience of organizing and conducting initiatives in this sphere. All reported that there was a need for additional training and preparation.

A number of the “graduates” indicated that one limitation was the failure by MSD to give sufficient attention to the fact that CSOs in Vietnam lacked the financial strength to permit staff members to devote time during working hours to preparation for training course delivery. This also restricted time available for the members of the small groups to work together. The general view was that there would be a need for further dedicated funding, along with an organization to steer the process, and the opportunity for CSO staff members to build the training responsibilities into their normal workload, if the ToT program was to be sustainable and expanded.

Despite these limitations the project performed well in terms of the increased capacity of CSOs to take part in advocacy and policy development, as well as bringing about a higher level of participation and engagement by the project’s partners. In this way, the project was able to achieve two of its three outcome-level objectives. A qualification should be added regarding the “second generation” of CSO partners, which joined the project at the half-way stage, after the major training activities had been completed. These groups took part in the small grants process, but did not receive the necessary overall level of support from the project to enable them to build their organizational capacities.

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-making. The project's 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 budget and very strong, consistent central management. All project activities, including all training events, wherever their location, were organized directly by the MSD project team. This was a positive factor in project efficiency, but may also have been a reflection of the limited capacities of CSO partners, given their other responsibilities and staff commitments. The only qualification to project efficiency was the fact that resources were stretched too thinly to cover too many activities. This contributed to the sense among partners of a lack of completion where some project components were concerned, despite the fact that much was accomplished.

Impact: The project's impact in contributing to strengthening the role of civil society in relation to policy development was greatly influenced by its timing. It was initiated at a time when an opportunity existed to push the boundaries of what civil society organizations might do in seeking to influence in a cooperative way government policy and practice. MSD is to be complimented in its ability to appreciate that the time was right to take action and to understand what was possible. Ultimately, as Mr. Lam, Chair of the MSD Board and formerly a senior government official, pointed out, the project came to be viewed by government as reflecting the interest of the state in exploring and giving consideration to new ideas in this sphere.

The partner CSOs were the principal direct beneficiaries of the project. While there were limitations to the short-term impact of specific project components, the overall effect, certainly for those core CSO partners which had participated in the project from the beginning, was to build a capacity to think of advocacy as a normal part of their work, assisting them in strengthening their efforts to provide support to vulnerable communities.

Vietnam is a highly-centralized political system, where provincial and lower levels of government look to Hanoi for direction on all things. This is particularly the case in the South of the country, and to a lesser extent in the Centre, away from the hub of government and the historical base of the Communist Party of Vietnam. Local officials everywhere in Vietnam, but particularly in the South, are risk averse where "sensitive matters" are concerned, and civil society engagement in

policy advocacy falls into that category. Particularly through the small grants program, the project contributed to breaking down barriers between CSOs and government. It not only built the confidence and competence of CSOs in undertaking advocacy initiatives, it also reassured government officials that civil society could play a constructive role in addressing policy and policy implementation concerning social issues. In this regard, MSD, with its strong credibility and good connections with government in Hanoi, played a direct role in supporting its partners in engaging with officials. In this way, the project provided a foundation for enhanced cooperation and reduction of tensions between government and civil society in the three major regions of Vietnam.

Although it is too early to arrive at firm conclusions, the establishment of the CSA network and the encouragement given by government officials in recognizing its potential role in representing civil society interests may make a long-term difference in supporting the project's overall objective of "increasing the participation of civil society in Vietnam in democratic policy-making." As yet, the network lacks both the resources and a sufficient level of commitment by its members to be an active player in policy matters. However, there remains a strong interest on the part of its CSO members in more effective representation of their interests with government, and in building an association which can assist them in strengthening organizational competencies. Hence, there is long-term potential for the CSA network, if the resource problem can be solved and its mandate is broadened.

Sustainability: The CSO partners of the project have already demonstrated an ability to build advocacy into their ongoing work, and, to this extent, project results are likely to be sustained. However, there are limits to the knowledge and expertise on advocacy that the partners have gained through the project. Much more remains to be done in ensuring that the CSO partners have the capability to develop effective organizational strategies, along with the skills to build alliances and partnerships in support of shared advocacy objectives. The evaluation also revealed some of the limitations CSOs face in finding the time and resources for the professional development necessary to facilitate organizational capacity development. Any future project must find ways to address this issue. An extension of the "accompaniment" MSD provided as technical assistance to its partners in both the training-of-trainers and small grants components of the project may be one part of a possible solution. The development of the CSA network may be another.

(iii) Conclusions

- The project took place at a time when there appeared to the grantee to be new opportunities for civil society to play a role in policy advocacy on social, environmental and related issues, while also influencing the enabling environment for its role as an actor in the public sphere.
- MSD brought to the project solid credentials in the policy sphere, as well as credibility and excellent connections with government.
- The project design was well thought-out, and, taken together, its components were built around an imaginative approach to capacity development. However, mainly because of changes in the project plan (approved by UNDEF) in order to take advantage of a new

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.

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

- 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.

- 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 objective of “increasing the participation of Vietnamese CSOs in democratic decision-making.”

- 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.

- 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. However, the ToT “graduates” reported that they would require additional support, as well as experience in conducting advocacy activities, before they would feel fully competent as trainers in this field.

- The 15 small grant projects proved to be a success in supporting the project’s CSO partners in developing effective advocacy initiatives, enabling them to engage 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.

- 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. The “accompaniment” provided by MSD to its partners in this and other components of the project was a key factor in the effectiveness of the project’s capacity development strategy.

- The principal project beneficiaries were the CSO partners. Within this group, there were two categories of partner. The “core partners” were involved from the beginning and 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.

- 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.

- 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:

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

- 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.

- 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.

- 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 DEVELOPMENT CONTEXT

(i) The project and evaluation objectives

The project entitled *Civil Society Empowerment in Advocacy and Policy Development in Vietnam* was implemented over a two-year period, between 01 February 2012 and 31 01 2014, with a budget of \$175,000 (along with \$13,400 provided by the grantee). The project was implemented by the Research Center for management and Sustainable Development (MSD), located in Hanoi, along with 18 partner organizations, drawn from Vietnamese civil society in the North, Centre and South of the country.

The project implemented by MSD sought to play its part in strengthening the participation of civil society in “democratic policy-making”. It sought to do so by building CSO capacity in policy advocacy, and by facilitating more intense networking, cooperation and communication among CSOs, as well as with relevant government bodies. Three outcomes were identified in the Project Document:

- Achieving the competency of CSOs in advocacy for democratic participation in the policy development process in Vietnam;
- Networking, cooperation and communication among CSOs with related government bodies enhanced and existing legal frameworks/policies implemented;
- Participation of CSOs in democratic policy-making process achieved.

The project sought to build partnerships with CSOs from the three major regions of Vietnam: North, Centre and South. Careful attention was given to the selection of the partner CSOs. MSD put in place a two-stage process of registration of interest by the CSOs, followed by interviewing and selection. Of the 15 CSOs which applied to become initial project implementing partners, 10 were selected, drawn from a range of sectors of focus. Two additional partners were added later, as two of the original 10 experienced problems in exercising their responsibilities. In the second phase of the project, six additional partner organizations were included in the project. The two organizations which were unable to take part in the small grant component of the project nevertheless remained as partners in other project activities. Hence, in total, there were 18 CSO partners.

This evaluation belongs to a larger set of evaluations of UNDEF-funded projects from Rounds 2, 3 and 4. The purpose of these evaluations is to “contribute to a better understanding of what constitutes a successful project, which will in turn help UNDEF to develop future project strategies. Evaluations are also to assist stakeholders to determine whether projects have been implemented in accordance with the project document and whether anticipated project outputs have been achieved”.¹

¹ See: Operational Manual for the UNDEF-funded project evaluations, page 6

(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: the project's relevance, 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 and summarized selected materials. Given time limitations, it was agreed by the Evaluators and the grantee, in consultation with Transtec and UNDEF, that the field mission would be restricted to visits to Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, the two major centres for project training, networking and dialogue activities. Initial interviews were held with the grantee and its project team in Hanoi, following which interviews and small group discussions took place involving implementing partners, as well as relevant government officials.

Particular attention was given to partner organizations implementing small grant projects, as well as to those individuals who had participated in the training-of-trainers program, and who had subsequently delivered training courses to other CSO staff. Also interviewed was a UNDP representative, knowledgeable about the place of civil society in Vietnam, and who had been present as an observer during the two formal policy dialogue sessions involving CSO partners and government officials. Interviews also took place with two senior government officials.

The complete list of persons interviewed is provided in Annex 3.

(iii) Development context

Despite the economic reforms of recent decades, like China, Vietnam has restricted change in the political sphere. Since the launching of the “*doi moi*” (“renovation”) reform policies in 1986, the space for civil society has been dominated, as before, by “mass social organizations”, as well as professional and labour organizations, linked directly to the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV). However, in the years following, the government and the Party have permitted the emergence of a broader-based and more diverse civil society.

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 tight control over civil society, and involvement of civil society organizations (CSOs) in advocacy for political reform or human rights is not permitted. Yet, it is apparent that Party authorities and government ministries are willing to consider incremental changes and a more prominent role for CSOs within firm boundaries. Many organizations, presenting themselves as NGOs are closely affiliated to state bodies and receive direct financial assistance from the government. Even so, such organizations have demonstrated an ability to take on innovative roles in furthering the emergence of civil society as a distinct social sector, and as one capable of playing a constructive role in informing public policy and legislation.²

The proliferation of CSOs in recent years, the increasing range of sectoral fields of activity in which they are engaged, as well as the diversity in their organizational character, goes along with a pressing need for professionalization and improvement in the quality of their work. Relations with government, whether at national or local level, remain critical to the ability of CSOs to achieve their objectives. Hence, the importance of establishing credibility with government bodies, while also understanding how and when to approach them. The project took place in this context, and its goals reflect a shrewd appreciation of the priorities of Vietnamese civil society and of major capacity gaps.

² See: Asia Foundation, *Civil Society in Vietnam: a Comparative Study of Civil Society Organizations in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City*. Hanoi: 2012; Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2013, Vietnam; Reflections on Vietnamese Civil Society*. Helsinki, Finland: KEPA, 2013.

III. PROJECT STRATEGY

i. Project strategy and approach

The UNDEF project built on a previous initiative funded through the European Union's Justice Initiative, supported by DANIDA, which was also concerned with public advocacy and civil society. The baseline/training needs assessment for the UNDEF project was provided by the predecessor project.

One of the organizational assets MSD brought to the project was the credibility of its leadership with the government and its understanding of the way the Government of Vietnam approached politically sensitive topics. The grantee drew on these strengths in designing and implementing the project and managed activities in such a way as to ensure government support and acceptance.

The timing for the initiative was propitious, in that MSD believed that there was a new opportunity at national level for advancing the recognition of civil society by government as a legitimate development partner. This was confirmed in Vietnam's commitment under the Busan Partnership Agreement to prepare a National Partnership Document, under which NGOs would be accepted, alongside others, as official partners of the government.³ MSD saw itself as in a unique position to build on this commitment and facilitate dialogue between government and civil society in pursuit of a more favourable enabling environment within which NGOs might contribute more effectively to policy development and implementation.

The organization had begun to engage with government on topics relating to the enabling environment in 2010. Its initial working relationship had been with the Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA), where Mr. Lam Ngoc Nguyen, Chair of the MSD Board, had previously held the position of Head of the Department of Non-Profit Associations. Over time, MSD was able to begin discussions with the Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI), responsible for foreign economic relations and development cooperation, including implementation of the Busan Partnership Agreement. Eventually, the organization was invited by MPI to take part in discussions on the Partnership Document with donor organizations and to provide input to the drafting process.

The concept underlying the project design should be viewed in this context, and in the light of MSD's ambition to facilitate the entry of Vietnamese civil society into a new relationship with government, whereby it might perform a constructive role as a partner in policy and legislative development. First, the project sought to build understanding on the part of Vietnamese civil society organizations (CSOs) of the need for engagement in public advocacy (and the means to do so) in order to improve government policy and regulations and strengthen the effectiveness of implementation. Second, it aimed to build the knowledge and skills of CSO leaders and activists in undertaking advocacy, while also providing opportunities for putting this knowledge into practice. Finally, it intended to work with its CSO partners in establishing the hub of a national CSO network to act as a representative partner in working with government in enhancing the

³ See: "Vietnam Looks to Implement Busan Partnership", VNA Vietnam News Services, 19 November 2012; <http://en.vietnamplus.vn/Home/Vietnam-looks-to-implement-Busan-Partnership-document/201211/29985.vnplus>

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: *Advocacy is a process in which CSOs influence legally policy makers to create a policy change in policy for the disadvantaged community (or communities) that CSOs are serving.* Key points of emphasis in the project's approach to strengthening CSO capacities in undertaking advocacy included:

- (that) Advocacy is a continuous process; It uses different methods to exert influence;
- Key terms emphasized in training were: process, methods, the targeting of those individuals to be influenced (selecting the right people), setting objectives, and developing a strategy, not just the plan for an event;
- Actions to influence those with power, able to make or change policy or implementation practice; focusing on actions which will bring pressure to bear, and which will bring forward suggestions for a change in policy or practice;
- Development of a process focusing on benefits for the community, and not individuals.⁴

The project design included two major streams of activity, both intended to contribute to the capacity development of CSO partner organizations in policy advocacy. The first focused on the training of individuals drawn from the partner organizations and development of the skills of a smaller group to train others. The second focused on the provision of funding and coaching for the development and implementation of local advocacy initiatives, featuring engagement with local authorities on issues relating closely to the ongoing program of the CSO partner concerned. There was integration between the two streams, since the intensive, initial training provided to teams from all core partner organizations also facilitated their ability to design and implement the small projects. Further, the project's advocacy manual was a central resource document drawn on in planning the advocacy projects. In turn, the projects themselves proved to be valuable in providing the partner organizations with practical, hands-on experience in planning and undertaking focused advocacy activities, drawing on their training.

In more detail, the principal activities conducted by the project included:

- Completing a baseline study and CSO training needs assessment (updating earlier work);
- Design, preparation and publication of an Advocacy Manual, accompanied by a training plan and curriculum; introduction of the manual and associated training materials through a series of 1-day workshops;
- Holding a 5-day organizational training workshop, intended for 30 personnel, 3 from each of the 10 initial CSO partners (in practice, there were 34 participants from 12 CSOs and two press agencies);
- Planning and holding a 3-day training-of-trainers (ToT) workshop for 10 individuals, one from each of the 10 initial CSO partners (in practice, there were 12 participants, drawn from 8 participating CSOs; each of the CSO staff members involved had previous experience as trainers, though not in advocacy);

⁴ Based on the project's: "Definition and Principles of Advocacy", in Milestone Activity Report – Training Course on 'Developing Advocacy Strategy for VCSOs (3-7/7/2012), Day 1.

- Follow-up coaching and mentoring by the MSD team with the ToT “graduates”, who 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;
- Formation of a national CSO network: the CSO Development Alliance of Vietnam (CSA), adoption of an organizational strategy, and development of its website;
- Conducting a review of the legal framework for CSOs/NGOs in Vietnam and of its implementation by government, to identify gaps in the framework and current practice; consultations on development of a national advocacy strategy for CSA, based on the findings and recommendations deriving from the review;
- Support to participating CSOs through a small grants award process to fund concrete advocacy activities; ongoing coaching and mentoring by MSD of the 14 organizations awarded small grants. Facilitation of negotiation of agreements between CSOs from different sectors and relevant government departments to support CSO participation in policy and legislative development (through the small grants process).

In addition, there were two Policy dialogues involving both government officials and CSO partner organizations, along with a number of national consultative meetings.

All of the listed components remained part of the project. However, unexpected openings with government, following on from the announcement of the plan to draft a National Partnership Document, concerning the possible role for the CSA network and official support for the establishment of a CSO Resource Center (CSORC), led to a re-focusing of some activities. As a result, there was a lesser focus than originally planned on the follow-up on the small grants projects, as well as a transformation of the planned policy dialogues and consultation sessions. These changes in project plans were approved by UNDEF, and may well have been beneficial to project stakeholders in a broader sense. They did, however, have the effect of reducing the internal coherence of the project and this was recognized by project participants interviewed by the evaluation team.



CSO Participants in Policy Dialogue with “Policy Advocacy Tree”

ii. Logical framework

The chart is based on detailed information included in the project’s revised results framework, as well as the final report. There is an awkwardness concerning the overlap between the project’s overall objective and the third of the impact statements. Further, Outcome 3 is, in practice, a continuation and component of Outcome 1, while Outcome 2 is a hybrid. However, in order to preserve the logic of project results planning, these issues have been ignored in presentation of the framework. A more fundamental problem arises from the decision of the grantee to make significant changes in project plans in the course of implementation. While the shift in focus may be understandable, it caused major problems in rebuilding the program logic for the project. This is reflected in difficulties in fitting some important activities into the results framework, while also leading to some overlap and repetition.

Project activities	Intended outputs/outcomes	Medium-term impacts	Long-term development objective
<p>Conducting a baseline survey and training needs assessment of CSOs;</p> <p>Formulation of an Advocacy Manual and training program;</p> <p>Organization and delivery of 1-day consultation workshop to introduce the draft manual and obtain feedback from CSOs and government representatives (Workshop 1);</p> <p>Publication of the Advocacy Manual and completion of training materials; dissemination of both;</p> <p>Workshop 1 (Ho Chi Minh City) also focused on “creating an enabling environment for CSOs, and promoted the formation of the CSO Development Alliance (CSA);</p> <p>A second Workshop was organized (Hanoi) to focus on a consultation on the planning of the CSO Resource Center (CSO RC)</p> <p>An Organizational training program (5 days) for 10 core CSOs held to improve organizational competency in advocacy and related skill areas;</p> <p>10 core CSOs develop mini project proposals for small grants at the end of the training program; MSD supports CSOs in finalizing small grant proposals (Round 1),</p>	<p>Baseline survey and training needs assessment are completed, with the results informing detailed project planning;</p> <p>The draft Advocacy Manual and training plan are delivered, with advice from partner organizations and others taken into account in revisions;</p> <p>1000 copies of manual produced, and distributed to stakeholders, along with 500 copies of the training materials;</p> <p>The CSO Development Alliance is formed and CSOs participating in Workshop 1 agreed to become members.</p> <p>A concept note on the establishment of the CSO RC is finalized.</p> <p>34 participants completed the training course</p> <p>8 CSOs implement mini-projects, with coaching & monitoring from MSD;</p>	<p>1. Capacity Building: the competency of CSOs in advocacy for democratic participation in the policy development process in Vietnam is achieved.</p>	<p>Increased participation of Vietnamese CSOs in democratic policy-making</p>

<p>approving and funding them</p>			
<p>Training of Trainers (TOT) program (3 days) for 10 selected trainers from 10 core CSOs</p>	<p>12 trainees selected from 8 CSOs included, plus 3 others nominated by MSD, and TOT course delivered by MSD training team;</p>		
<p>Support provided by MSD to the 15 new trainers in designing customized training courses for target CSO groups</p>	<p>4 teams of trainers were organized (2-3 trainers in each team): 2 for the North, and 1 each for the Centre and the South;</p>		
<p>6 training courses, 3 days each, organized on advocacy for 180 CSO staff in all 3 regions of Vietnam</p>	<p>6 training courses delivered for 154 participants from 94 CSOs (20-30 in each course): 54 from the North; 42 from the Centre and 58 from the South; participants included 93 women and 60 men; 20 were people with disabilities;</p>		
<p>A new group of CSOs (5) was invited to formulate proposals for small grants (Round 2)</p>	<p>7 CSOs presented proposals for small grants and implemented the projects;</p>		
<p>Further coaching and monitoring provided by MSD to both trainees and small grant implementers</p>	<p>Follow-up with all project training participants several months after training to assess capacity of those trained to apply new knowledge in their daily work. Positive results were reported.</p>		
<p>Desk study review of the existing legal framework and its implementation by government re civil society and its role re policy development and monitoring of implementation; selected interviews with CSOs</p>	<p>Draft review report completed.</p>	<p><i>2. Networking and Legal Framework: Networking, cooperation and communication among CSOs, and with related government bodies is enhanced, and existing legal framework policies are implemented.</i></p>	
<p>Based on review, develop draft advocacy strategy for CSOs</p>	<p>Draft advocacy strategy developed</p>		
<p>National consultation organized on review report and draft strategy</p>	<p>National consultation held in May 2012 with multi-stakeholder group (38 participants from CSOs, government, donors, INGOs and media);</p>		
<p>Consultation on strategy for CSA Vietnam</p>	<p>Consultation held with 22 representative members of CSA Vietnam in March 2014, after formal closure of project.</p>		
	<p>Further work on strategy, following establishment of CSA in March 2013. Distribution of review and strategy document;</p>		

<p>Two dialogues between government and civil society organized.</p>	<p>2 policy dialogues held in Hanoi (both after formal closure of the project):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In January 2014, a dialogue was held to advocate for the participation of CSOs in the policy-making process, and to launch the Code of Practice of CSOs in contributing to policy development; 2. A second dialogue was held in May 2014 to officially launch the CSO Development Alliance and its advocacy strategy. 		
<p>Regular consultations and informal monthly lunches involving key governmental representatives and CSOs.</p>	<p>These events did not take place, though there were other events bringing the two parties together.</p>		
<p>Formal or informal agreements (MOUs) with relevant government agencies at different levels, ensuring opportunities for CSOs to take part in concrete policy development activities (linked to small grant projects)</p>	<p>15 small grant projects implemented successfully, with 10 formal, and 5 informal, agreements with government counterparts;</p> <p>Guidance and support provided by MSD on development of the agreements.</p>		
<p>Recruitment of member organizations, and develop website to support new CSO network, focusing on public advocacy</p>	<p><i>Action for CSO Development Alliance (CSA)</i> established, with 35 initial members, on March 28, 2013. The project website was transferred to the CSA.</p>		
<p>Development of the network</p>	<p>CSA's development and advocacy strategies are developed, with participation of members (project partners); 17 newsletters prepared and widely distributed to 1,200 recipients</p>		
<p>Tasks assigned to network members</p>	<p>Regional coordinators appointed, but without support or guidance; no action has followed.</p>		
<p>Small grants award process established; 10 CSOs formulate project proposals, following initial training; 5 other projects funder later through a 2nd round;</p>	<p>Advocacy project formulation and implementation in 2013 by CSOs (small grants) – 14 CSOs implement 15 small grants; MSD provides TA to partners throughout.</p>		
<p>Reports on project results presented during policy dialogues.</p>	<p>5 CSOs present their reports during the first policy dialogues; All CSOs presented their results in summary form at 2nd dialogue</p>	<p>3. The participation of CSOs in democratic policy-making process is achieved.</p>	

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 can benefit from receiving advice from civil society, which, at a time of dramatic social and economic change, often has better access to relevant knowledge and expertise than the state.

Recognizing this state of affairs, MSD was able to guide CSOs from a number of different sectors in enhancing their appreciation of the contribution that advocacy and coalition-building can make to forwarding their objectives, as well as of the kinds of opportunities which exist for taking the initiative in engaging in advocacy. In this way, the UNDEF project opened up new possibilities for CSOs, most of which had little or no prior experience with systematic advocacy work. Hence, the project was highly relevant to UNDEF goals in that it contributed to enabling Vietnamese CSOs to become effective and accepted actors in local democracy in Vietnam, and, in so doing, advanced democratic practice in the country.

The initial strategy of the project was wholly appropriate in both anticipating and responding to the needs of Vietnamese civil society. However, there was an element of incompleteness to the UNDEF project, which may be understandable given the grantee's history of designing, and securing resources for, successive projects, each of which has built on the achievements and lessons of its predecessors. In this case, first, the support for training of trainers stopped short of what was required to ensure that those trained would be fully equipped to go forward, beyond the project, as trainers on public advocacy for civil society. Second, there was a need for more attention to follow-up on the small grant projects in reinforcing the capabilities of partner organizations to develop advocacy strategies and communications plans to support them. Finally, the adjustment to project activities during implementation resulted in a lack of fit between public events and core elements of the project, with resources pulled away from core activities to serve a broader agenda. As will become clear from the discussion in later sections of the report,

⁵ See, for example, the interesting discussion of the experience and lessons learned from a series of recent OXFAM-supported advocacy initiatives in Vietnam, "*Is advocacy only feasible in formal democracies? Lessons from 6 multi-stakeholder initiatives in Vietnam*", Oxfam Blogs, 30 April, 2014:

<http://oxfamblogs.org/fp2p/can-you-only-do-advocacy-in-formal-democracies-lessons-from-6-multi-stakeholder-initiatives-in-vietnam/>

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 Vietnamese civil society in policy advocacy. DFID, for example, is funding a substantial program of support for CSO coalition-building in facilitating advocacy. A number of the coalitions supported, including those partnered by OXFAM, have been quite successful in achieving their goals.⁶

At a more detailed level, in terms of the three outcome results pursued by the project, it might also be said, with some qualifications, that the project was quite successful. As noted earlier, in the introduction to the Logical Framework, there are particular technical problems with Outcome

⁶ See: http://www.oxfamblogs.org/vietnam/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Oxfams_to-gap_En.pdf

3, which is, effectively, part of Outcome 1. Leaving this issue aside, a review of project achievements against anticipated results, and with reference to targets and indicators included in the revised results framework developed by the grantee, produces a generally positive picture.

For outcomes 1 and 3, concerned with *enhanced competency of CSOs and increased levels of participation in the “democratic policy-making process”*, solid results were secured. The initial 5-day training, which took place in July 2012, was offered to staff members of the core partner organizations. Design for the training program was based principally on the findings of the training needs analysis, which included a survey completed by the 10 participating CSOs which had registered earlier in April-May 2012 as “strategic partners. The course was viewed as well-conceived and well-delivered.⁷ According to interviews with MSD staff and project participants, this was true despite some problems with trainers who deviated from the agreed curriculum and training methodology.

Key topics included: development of organizational advocacy strategies; types and methods of advocacy and the implementation process; case-studies and models of advocacy in Vietnam; legal frameworks and government policy concerning the rights of CSOs to engage in public advocacy; and, evidence-based advocacy.⁸ The curriculum was well-adapted to the needs and knowledge level of the leaders and staff of the partner CSOs, and those interviewed reported that their understanding of their rights under Vietnamese law, and of public advocacy and how to undertake it, was much enhanced. At the same time, all commented on the need for more training and support to assist them in the further development of their organizations’ advocacy strategies.

The training-of-trainers (ToT) course was also viewed as highly professional and well-executed. In addition to providing the course, MSD staff provided further support to the “graduates” as they developed training plans and delivered their own course to the staff members of other CSOs. An MSD trainer was present to provide assistance on the first occasion on which each new group of trainers presented the course. In addition, MSD took full responsibility for organization and logistics for all of the workshops, whether delivered in Hanoi, (the North), Hue (The Centre), or Ho Chi Minh City (the South). This comprehensive follow-on support was highly valued by the “graduates” of the ToT program, and was also indicative of the thoughtful approach to capacity development adopted by MSD.

The ToT trainees reported that they learned a great deal through the process. At the same time, all reported that they lacked complete confidence in their own capabilities and saw the ToT process as a beginning only. They reflected that more training and support would be required before they would feel that they could present themselves as fully-fledged trainers on public advocacy, capable of operating independently.

A crucial problem stemmed from the hard reality that the new trainers were obliged to do the preparation for their own training plan and its delivery on their own time. Most Vietnamese CSOs

⁷ The course was also one of the milestones under the project agreement with UNDEF. It was monitored by Ms. Mikiko Sawanishi of UNDEF, who compiled the Milestone Verification Report. Ms. Sawanishi confirmed that participants evaluated their experience in the training course positively, emphasizing its practicality and relevance to their needs.

⁸ Details of the course and its curriculum are set out in MSD, *Milestone Activity Report – Training Course on “Developing Advocacy Strategy for VCSOS”*, Hanoi, 3-7/7/2012.

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.

For the “core partners”, the earlier training had provided them with the basic knowledge they needed to prepare their initiatives, although here too MSD support would be necessary to finalize the planning. For “the second generation” of CSOs, which became 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* (as discussed in the project's Final Report).

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.

Case studies of Small Grant Projects: . Promoting the Implementation of Construction Standards and Regulations to Ensure Accessibility for People with Disabilities Undertaken by the Disabled People's Association of Hanoi (DP Hanoi)

The Association, which was registered officially in 2006, had been attempting to influence the Ministry of Construction and Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MOLISA) in the drafting of the Law on Disability. However, it also came to recognize that many problems derived not from the absence of legislation, but rather from major gaps in implementation of existing policies and regulations. With the assistance of MSD, through the small grant component of the UNDEF project, and with additional funding from the Danish Embassy, they designed an advocacy project, focusing on deficiencies in implementation and supervision of construction by government authorities to ensure that regulations concerning accessibility were being observed.

With the support of its 9,000 members, the Association conducted a survey of accessibility of a sample of public facilities in Hanoi. The report on the survey, which indicated many problems at local government level in enforcing regulations, was then presented at a 1-day workshop, highlighting the situation concerning a number of public buildings. In addition, the workshop included a review of relevant legislation and regulations. Representatives of the Ministry of Construction and its provincial counterpart, as well as the Provincial Department of Labour and Social Affairs, took part.

As a result, all participating government agencies are now working closely with the Association in more effective implementation of construction standards concerning accessibility for people with disabilities. DP Hanoi gives credit to MSD and the project for guiding it in taking a more comprehensive and pragmatic approach to advocacy planning, in building alliances, focusing on the right officials and on how to advocate.

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: *“Networking, cooperation and communication among CSOs and with related government bodies; enhanced and existing legal framework policies implemented.”* Overall, it may certainly be said that there

were significant developments under this heading. The Action for CSO Development Alliance (CSA) was formed, with all partner CSOs agreeing to become members.¹² A number of planning and consultation meetings were held. However, those interviewed commented that, as yet, there has been little action following up on the establishment of the network and the adoption of a strategy document. Its members are skeptical that it will survive without dedicated funding (the future of the CSA and MSD's plans are discussed further under Sustainability). Further, judging by feedback from CSO representatives provided during interviews for the evaluation, there may well be a need to broaden the mandate of CSA to enable it to support further capacity development of its member organizations.

In addition, the 15 “case-studies” supported by the small grants process represented practical examples of government recognition of the role of CSOs in relation to the policy process and decision-making. Hence, they all contributed to more effective implementation of the legal framework concerning the place of civil society in Vietnam's public realm.

The participation of senior government officials in the public dialogue sessions organized by the project also marked informal acknowledgement of the relevance of the development of CSO networking and coalition-building to effective policy-making. In the half-day policy dialogue on “*promoting the enabling environment for CSOs in Vietnam to participate in advocacy and policy development*”, held in Hanoi on 28 May 2013, senior representatives from the Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA) and the Ministry of Planning and Investment made formal presentations. This was the occasion when CSA was established and when the declaration of CSA on Advocacy and Policy Development was presented. Following the presentation of the Declaration, the government representatives indicated their commitment to support CSA Vietnam in particular, and CSOs in general, in taking part in advocacy and policy development.¹³

Despite the changes in the overall design, discussed above, the project succeeded in achieving its objectives, and activities were adequate as a means to reaching the specified results. The process for implementing core activities was exemplary. However, there was a need for follow-up to the two major training programs, as well as the small grant projects, to ensure that key knowledge and skills had been fully assimilated by the partner CSOs and their staff. Similarly, the work on the CSA network represented only a start. Hence, there was a degree of incompleteness about the project. For all this, MSD will probably have the opportunity to remedy this state of affairs in future projects.

¹² At the time of writing, there are 53 formal member organizations, with more than 100 organizations included on an electronic mailing list. Membership of the Alliance is open to Vietnamese CSOs and individuals who commit to and share values and in the mission of promoting an enabling environment for the development of civil society in Vietnam.

¹³ Account of the policy dialogue session based on: *Milestone Verification Mission Report*, prepared by Vu Tuan Minh, Policy Officer, UNDP Vietnam.

Media Coverage 1 – 1st Policy Dialogue: The first dialogue was organized on 28 May, 2013 with 68 participants from various stakeholders. The event attracted some official media agencies, namely *the Communist Party of Viet Nam Online Newspaper*, *Thanh Tra Viet Nam* (Viet Nam Inspection) Newspaper, *Baomoi.com* and the *Viet Nam Economy Newspaper*. The event was reported consistently in these newspapers, and was described (*with minor edits*) as follows:

"On the afternoon of May 28, 2013, the Action for CSO Viet Nam Development Alliance collaborated with MSD to organize a dialogue on "*enabling an advantaged environment for CSOs in Viet Nam to participate in advocacy and contribute to policy development.*" On this occasion, the Alliance was officially launched, together with its declaration on advocacy, which focuses on dialogues with state agencies and other relevant stakeholders in order to promote an improved environment for CSOs in Viet Nam.

In the dialogue, participants shared opinions on (i) the practice of current policies for CSOs to participate in the development process, advocacy and contribute to policy development; (ii) the launch of CSA Viet Nam and its Advocacy Declaration; and, (iii) the shared experience of members of the Alliance in connecting/networking with policy makers in order to participate in policy development. Through the dialogue, those attending also had a chance to discuss their needs and approaches in order for CSOs to actively advocate and contribute to policy development. This might result in support to identify a future collaborative mechanism and commitment between CSOs and relevant stakeholders to facilitate an improved environment for the development of CSOs Viet Nam.

In recent years, CSOs in Viet Nam have been developing rapidly and have contributed greatly to the development process of the country. To recognize the role of CSOs, to enable organizations of the people to be established and developed, and to create relevant policy conditions as a proper legal environment for those organizations to develop, the State has been providing and stipulating many laws and policies to facilitate an advantaged environment for those organizations. However, in practice, the implementation of those regulations has been limited. In addition, a lack of clarification and detailed guidance of those regulations also limits the effective contribution of CSOs. Therefore, to enable an advantaged environment for the CSOs to operate in accordance with those regulations, the Action for CSO Viet Nam Development Alliance (CSA Viet Nam) was established. The CSA Viet Nam is considered as a collective group of CSOs and individuals in Viet Nam, who are dedicated to a common goal in advocacy capacity building and are contributing to policy development, and thus to meeting the needs of the development of CSOs and protection of vulnerable groups."

(iii) Efficiency

The project performed extremely well in terms of cost effectiveness. The only negative factor to consider in this regard was the spreading of project resources too widely. While project objectives were achieved, there was a clear need for a further round of support to partner organizations to reinforce what had been learned and to secure results for the longer term. This was particularly problematic in the case of the CSOs which were invited to join the project at a later stage and received small grants in the second round of awards.

Leaving this issue aside, the budget was well-designed and implemented with great care taken in the management of cost elements. Through the small grants program, the project was successful in supporting its CSO partners in leveraging additional resources. In this way, the

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 member CSOs. There were also small payments to the “graduates” of the ToT program as they 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 handling directly the organization of meetings and training activities in locations distant from Hanoi. The whole project was managed in business-like fashion, with strong central control exerted over activities to ensure consistency with planned objectives. This contributed greatly to its effectiveness.

(iv) Impact

The project was extremely timely, in that it took place just as the Government of Vietnam was giving consideration to taking cautious steps in opening more space in which civil society might collaborate with government. Through strong connections and regular contact, MSD was in a position to be well-informed about developments in government thinking. Further, through a previous project on transparency and accountability, bringing government officials and CSO representatives together, it had enhanced its credibility in the eyes of officials, while also earning their trust.

¹⁴ Source: *E-mail communication from MSD, dated 21 May, 2014*. According to information provided by MSD, the assignment under the contract was to review 73 legal documents relating to the rights of CSOs participating in policy advocacy, as well as the responsibilities of relevant governmental agencies to facilitate participation by CSOs. The work also included producing a handbook on CSO rights, and development of a set of proposals to improve the legal framework. Prior to its publication, the research report was reviewed several times through consultations with different stakeholders. Through the consultations, the consultants also conducted an assessment of the training needs (TNA) of the CSOs involved.

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 discussions with donors on Vietnam's Partnership Document, following on from the government's signing of the Busan Partnership Agreement (see also III, Project Strategy, above). This was a significant development in that, officially, all "opinions" from civil society on national policy matters are to be conveyed through the Fatherland Front, an official Communist Party of Vietnam body, or the Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VCCI).¹⁵

There is an apparent recognition on the part of government that, in the context of social change and the growing complexity of economic and social life in Vietnam, there is an absence of appropriate mechanisms through which government may relate to civil society in developing policy and legislation, and in local decision-making. Hence, state agencies are willing to consider new ideas. Effectively, in this context, as Mr. Lam, Chair of the MSD Board, suggested, the

Case studies of Small Grant Projects: 2 Raising Awareness on the Role of CBOs and the Enabling Environment for their Operation Undertaken by the Centre for Promotion of the Quality of Life (LIFE), Ho Chi Minh City. LIFE was established in 2005 and registered with the government in 2007.

The small grant project supported by MSD through the UNDEF project grew out of an ongoing HIV/AIDS project, financed by the Global Fund, supporting 24 small community-based organizations (CBOs) in Ho Chi Minh City. The focus for the small project was on addressing the difficulties 12 of the CBOs, working with men living with HIV/AIDS, in being recognized and understood by the local authorities and the police.

Initially, LIFE brought together the leaders of the 12 organizations for a discussion about the common problems they faced. Secondly, a survey was undertaken of the needs of the CBOs and their members and the difficulties they faced. The third step was to invite representatives of the local authorities at commune and district levels to a special meeting to discuss the survey findings and provide an overview of the work the CBOs were undertaking.

The local authorities indicated their appreciation of the opportunity to learn of the LIFE Project's contribution and of the community role of the CBOs in contributing to the control and prevention of the spread of HIV/AIDS. Subsequently, matters have improved for the 12 CBOs. They now share a monthly action plan with local authorities and the police, and sometimes the officials and police officers attend community events. No further problems have been experienced, and the CBOs have achieved recognition by local government and law enforcement officials for the value of their work. Further, an informal agreement reached, between LIFE and local authorities, providing for the involvement of the organization in policy-making concerning CBOs and their role.

As Ms. Trang, Executive Director of LIFE, explained: "We gained something from the project. We found that working with the official HIV/AIDS Committee was not enough. We needed to involve *all* the local authorities. Now things are better...We lacked knowledge of a systematic approach. Now we understand the steps, developing a general plan for advocacy and how to plan to implement it within a budget...In the Global Fund project, we had a huge budget, but no line item for advocacy, so support from the UNDEF project was very timely.

¹⁵ Source: evaluation interviews with Mr. Vinh Trong Le, Justice and Legal Department, Ministry of Home Affairs, and Mr. Lam Ngoc Nguyen, Chair of the MSD Board of Directors.

project was viewed as reflecting the interest of the state. The veracity of this view is reinforced by the statements of senior government officials during the Public Dialogue of May 2013 (see discussion in Effectiveness, above), as well as by the decision by the government's official media agency and the magazine of the Communist Party of Vietnam to carry news stories on the project (see text box on the 1st Policy Dialogue for summaries of media coverage).¹⁶

The encouragement given by government to the establishment of the CSA network and the commitment by MPI to support it in its efforts to secure donor funding for a CSO Resource centre (CSORC) suggests that the project may well have an impact on the development problem, which formed the focus for the project: "increasing the participation of civil society in Vietnam in democratic policy-making."

At a more mundane level, the 15 small grant projects may well have contributed to changing the outlook of a number of local governments, at district and commune levels, with regard to partnering informally with civil society organizations in addressing pressing issues. Along with parallel initiatives, supported by other donors, in this way, the project may well have contributed to establishing a more positive enabling environment at local level, within which CSOs may demonstrate more effectively their capabilities to make a difference in public life and to provide support to vulnerable communities.

In this respect, it is significant that it was not only the national public dialogues which received official media coverage. The same was also true with the small grant projects, most of which were reported by official media at provincial and local levels (see text box).

The partner CSOs were the primary beneficiaries of the project. In interviews conducted for the evaluation, all confirmed that they had received tangible benefits from the project and expressed their appreciation for the quality of support provided by MSD, as well as for the strong level of commitment shown by the MSD leadership and staff in carrying out the

Media Coverage of Small Grant Project Implemented by the Center for Community Development and Social Work (CODES) in Hue, Central Vietnam.

The small grant project attracted the attention of official media agencies in the province. Under the grant, on June 17, 2013, CODES, MSD, CSA Viet Nam and the Office of National Assembly Delegations and the People's Council of Thua Thien Hue Province collaborated to organize a seminar on "*Raising Awareness of Protecting the Privacy of Children*." The event was reported on the *Thua Thien Hue Provincial Web Page*, the gateway of *Hues.vn* and *tinmoitonghop.com*.

The seminar was described as an opportunity for practitioners, administrators, specialists in the field of children's rights, relevant organisations and individuals to share and raise awareness of the urgency of protecting the privacy of children. The results of the seminar will be the basis for the contribution to the draft Law on Protection, Care and Education of Children (revised). The seminar also had group discussion sessions between relevant stakeholders, including: state agencies, researchers, legislators, CSOs and relevant related parties, and media agencies, in order to provide a basis for the necessary actions to reduce the violations of children's rights in media reports.

¹⁶ There was similar coverage for the Second Dialogue, held on January 6, 2014. Press reports were included in the following official media channels: *the Communist Party of Viet Nam Online Newspaper*, *Lang Son Province Online Newspaper*, *Thanh Tra Viet Nam (Viet Nam Inspection) Newspaper*, *the VTV4 (Viet Nam Television for Vietnamese Overseas)*, and *Thong Tan Xa Viet Nam (Viet Nam News Agency)*.

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.

(v) Sustainability

In the sphere of democratization, there are many factors beyond the span of control of civil society organizations which may influence whether any of the results accomplished through an UNDEF project will be sustained. Despite this, the role of key civil society organizations as a change agent remains critical. In Vietnam, MSD is strongly committed to continue its pursuit of the objective of strengthening the position of civil society in influencing government decision-making in policy-making and implementation by taking a collaborative and non-confrontational approach.

Traditionally, the government has permitted the involvement in advising on the preparation of legislation of a restricted number of trusted non-government organizations, all closely associated with specific government departments (such as the Vietnam Lawyers' Association, closely supervised by the Ministry of Justice). A real weakness in the Vietnamese system, as is the case in many other countries in transition and developing countries, is in policy and legislative implementation and the absence of any mechanism for public feedback on the impact of implementation (or the failure to implement). The emphasis in the project on focusing attention on practical issues and gaps in policy implementation is likely to have considerable influence in the future in enabling CSOs to present themselves to government as constructive partners, capable of assisting it in developing solutions which will reduce public dissatisfaction with policy effectiveness.

Beyond this, as noted above, there is a need for more to be done to build on the work done in the project on both the training-of-trainers and the CSA network components in order to secure enduring, longer-term results. In addition, in a broader sense, the capacity development assistance to partner CSOs remains incomplete, with more attention required to the building of organizational advocacy strategies as a key feature of planning in the service of fulfilling their respective mandates. Further work on the building of advocacy alliances or coalitions will also be required. MSD does seem well-positioned to secure the additional resources necessary to support further investments in these areas of work.

vi. UNDEF Added Value

From the grantee's perspective, UNDEF support was highly valued because there were few other sources of equivalent funding available at the time for assisting Vietnamese civil society organizations with strengthening their work in public advocacy at the national level. Apparently, The UNDEF project has had an impact in persuading other donors, including UNDP, that the provision of funding for public advocacy initiatives may be a worthwhile addition to the support they currently extend to civil society organizations.

Democratization in Vietnam, if it can be called by that name, is a highly-restricted and carefully managed process. In this context, there are a limited number of avenues through which civil society can play an active public role. By supporting MSD in this project, UNDEF assisted in highlighting new possibilities. The UN label may also have provided a measure of reassurance to government officials as they proceeded cautiously in indicating support to new forms of civil society engagement with government.

Finally, it might be pointed out that this was the first UNDEF project in Vietnam with an independent NGO, rather than a government-affiliated body or a Vietnamese chapter of an international organization. It involved a large number of Vietnamese CSOs, and also reached out

to many others through electronic newsletters and received broad coverage in the official media. Hence, an indirect effect of the project may well be to make the name of UNDEF known in the country and to encourage other applicants to prepare proposals for consideration under future rounds of funding awards.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

(i) The project took place at a time when there appeared to the grantee to be new opportunities for civil society to play a role in policy advocacy on social, environmental and related issues, while also influencing the enabling environment for its role as an actor in the public sphere.

(ii) MSD brought to the project solid credentials in the policy sphere, as well as credibility and excellent connections with government.

(iii) The project design was well thought-out, and, taken together, its components were built around an imaginative approach to capacity development. However, mainly because of changes in the project plan (approved by UNDEF) in order to take advantage of a new 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.

(iv) 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 state agencies.

(v) 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.

(vi) The project was rather careful in defining its overall objective, as well as its three outcome-level results statements. Consequently, despite the limitations noted above, it succeeded in contributing to the overall objective of “increasing the participation of Vietnamese CSOs in democratic decision-making”, as well as to the three outcomes.

(vii) In terms of enhanced capacity of the partner CSOs, their representatives have advised 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.

(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. However, the ToT “graduates” reported that they would require additional support, as well as 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 project’s CSO partners to develop effective advocacy initiatives, enabling them to engage 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. The “accompaniment” provided by MSD to its partners in this and other components of the project was a key factor in the effectiveness of the project’s capacity development strategy.

(xi) The principal project beneficiaries were the CSO partners. Within this group, there were two categories of partner. The “core partners” were involved from the beginning and benefited from participating in the full array of project activities. A second group of partner organizations, smaller in number, which may be termed “the second generation”, joined halfway through, following the completion of all major training activities. While they benefited from the small grants process, this group of partners did not receive the necessary level of overall support to enable them to build their organizational capacities.

(xii) 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, beyond the current focus on advocacy and the enabling environment for civil society.

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

(xiv) MSD has proved itself to be a very capable advocate on behalf of Vietnamese civil society. Through the project, and the practical and constructive approach it adopted to building CSO credibility in the eyes of government, it facilitated further modest advances in securing recognition for the value to the public interest of civil society involvement in providing input to policy development and more effective policy implementation.

(xv) 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 capabilities to enable the partners to develop and continually update comprehensive advocacy strategies and to act with confidence in building alliances with others around shared interests. Similarly, the training-of-trainers initiative will not bring significant results beyond the project without further support.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

(i) MSD and its partners seek additional funds to make possible the completion of the capacity development programming initiated by the project (based on Conclusions V, VIII, XIV and XV).

(ii) 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 (based on Conclusions III and IV).

(iii) 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 (based on Conclusion XI).

(iv) 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 (based on Conclusion XII).

VI. ANNEXES

ANNEX 1: EVALUATION QUESTIONS

DAC criterion	Evaluation Question	Related sub-questions
Relevance	To what extent was the project, as designed and implemented, suited to context and needs at the beneficiary, local, and national levels?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Were the objectives of the project in line with the needs and priorities for democratic development, given the context? ▪ Should another project strategy have been preferred rather than the one implemented to better reflect those needs, priorities, and context? Why? ▪ Were risks appropriately identified by the projects? How appropriate are/were the strategies developed to deal with identified risks? Was the project overly risk-averse?
Effectiveness	To what extent was the project, as implemented, able to achieve objectives and goals?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To what extent have the project's objectives been reached? ▪ To what extent was the project implemented as envisaged by the project document? If not, why not? ▪ Were the project activities adequate to make progress towards the project objectives? ▪ What has the project achieved? Where it failed to meet the outputs identified in the project document, why was this?
Efficiency	To what extent was there a reasonable relationship between resources expended and project impacts?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Was there a reasonable relationship between project inputs and project outputs? ▪ Did institutional arrangements promote cost-effectiveness and accountability? ▪ Was the budget designed, and then implemented, in a way that enabled the project to meet its objectives?
Impact	To what extent has the project put in place processes and procedures supporting the role of civil society in contributing to democratization, or to direct promotion of democracy?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To what extent has/have the realization of the project objective(s) and project outcomes had an impact on the specific problem the project aimed to address? ▪ Have the targeted beneficiaries experienced tangible impacts? Which were positive; which were negative? ▪ To what extent has the project caused changes and effects, positive and negative, foreseen and unforeseen, on democratization? ▪ Is the project likely to have a catalytic effect? How? Why? Examples?
Sustainability	To what extent has the project, as designed and implemented, created what is likely to be a continuing impetus towards democratic development?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To what extent has the project established processes and systems that are likely to support continued impact? ▪ Are the involved parties willing and able to continue the project activities on their own (where applicable)?
UNDEF value-added	To what extent was UNDEF able to take advantage of its unique position and comparative advantage to achieve results that could not have been achieved had support come from other donors?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What was UNDEF able to accomplish, through the project, that could not as well have been achieved by alternative projects, other donors, or other stakeholders (Government, NGOs, etc.). ▪ Did project design and implementing modalities exploit UNDEF's comparative advantage in the form of an explicit mandate to focus on democratization issues?

ANNEX 2: DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

Project documents:

Project Document, UDF-VIE-10-392

Mid-term Progress Report

Final Report

Memorandum of Understanding

Milestone Verification Mission Reports, 28 May, 2013 and 3 July, 2014

Milestone Activity Report, Training Course on Developing Advocacy Strategy for VCSOs, Hanoi, 3-7, July, 2012;

Report on Training of Trainers Course, Ho Chi Minh City, 3-5, December, 2012

PO Additional Note prepared by UNDEF

PowerPoint presentation on project, April, 2014

Selected Vietnamese Media Reports on the Project, provided by MSD.

Other Documents and Reference Materials:

Asia Foundation, *Civil Society in Vietnam: a Comparative Study of Civil Society Organizations in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City*. Hanoi: 2012;

Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2013, Vietnam*;

KEPA (Finland): *Reflections on Vietnamese Civil Society*. Helsinki, Finland, 2013.

US Department of State: Annual Human Rights Report, Vietnam, 2013.

ANNEX 3: SCHEDULE OF INTERVIEWS

20 April 2014, Sunday, Hanoi
Introductory meeting and joint planning, International and National Consultant
21 April 2014, Monday, Hanoi
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Meeting with MSD Team: Ms. Linh Phuong Nguyen, Executive Director, and Ms. Trang Thu Hoang. 2. Group Meeting at MSD with local partners in Hanoi: Mr. Dinh Xuan Lap, V-Director, Research Center for Resources and Rural Development (RECERD); Mr. Nguyen Duc Manh, Director, Institute of Population, Family and Children's Studies (IPFCS); Ms. Van Xuan Quynh Trang, Center for Support Development of Education and Culture Community (ENC); Mr. Dang Van Khoat, V-Director and Ms. Pham Thi Manh Van, Centre for Research and Development of Sustainable Communities (CREDES). 3. Meeting with participants in Training of Trainers Course from Hanoi: Mr. Trang Thu Hoang; Mr. Tien Viet Nguyen; and, Ms. Trang Thu Hoang.
22 April 2014, Tuesday, Hanoi
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Meeting with Local partner at their office: Disabled People's Association of Hanoi (DP Hanoi); Ms. Duong Tan Van, Chair. 2. Meeting at MSD with Mr. Vinh Trang Le, V-Chair of the Justice and Legal Department, Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA). 3. Meeting at MSD with Mr. Dinh Xuan Lap, V-Director, RECERD 4. Second Meeting with MSD Team.
23 April 2014, Wednesday, Hanoi
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Meeting at Ministry of Construction with Dr. Tran Huu Ha, DDG, Department of Science, Technology and Environment. 2. Meeting at MSD with Mr. Lam Ngoc Nguyen, Chairman of the Board of MSD; and Ms. Linh Phuong Nguyen. 3. Telephone interview by National Consultant with Mr. Phap, Center for Coastal Management and Development Studies, Hue; debrief on interview with International Consultant.
24 April 2014, Thursday, Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Meeting at MSD with Mr. Vu Tran Minh, Program Officer from UNDP. 2. Concluding meeting with Ms. Linh Phuong Nguyen at MSD. 3. PM: Depart Hanoi and fly to Ho Chi Minh City.
25 April 2014, Friday, Ho Chi Minh City
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. At Novotel Saigon Centre: Meeting with Mr. Le Bich Phong (LIFE) and Ms. Truong Nguyen Bao Tran (SDRC) on Training-of-Trainers Course and their experience in delivering their own training workshops. 2. Meeting at LIFE office with Ms. Trang, Director.
26 April 2014, Saturday: Consultants depart Ho Chi Minh City and Vietnam.

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	Disabled People's Association, Hanoi
IPFCS	Institute of Population, Family and Children's Studies
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 of Trainers
UN	United Nations
UNDEF	United Nations Democracy Fund
US	United States
VCCI	Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry