

## **Minutes for the INGO Forum Meeting**

Date: 5 May 2006

Time: 14.00 – 17.00

Location: NGO Resource Centre

The first INGO Forum of 2006 opened with a warm welcome from the new Co-director, Ms. Trine Glue Doan. Mr. Phong, from PACCOM also extended his congratulations and insisted that both he and the Steering Committee were looking forward to future work together. Mrs. Glue Doan comes to the RC as a replacement for David Payne, who has moved onto a position at the UNDP.

### **1) The National Program for Promotion of INGO Assistance (NPP)**

- a. Mr. Phong, of PACCOM, provides an overview of the NPP
  - i. Thank you for your interest and cooperation in developing this process. This document has been guided by the Prime Minister and will be subsequently be approved by him when the time comes.
  - ii. Why is this document necessary: Over the past 10 - 15 years, there have been large amounts of assistance (monetary and qualitative contributions – capacity, understanding, innovation, etc.) from INGOs to Vietnam's development. However, as Vietnam moves forward, he believes that the country should be proactive in working with INGOs. In the past, local authorities have only cooperated when they have themselves come to various areas. Therefore it would improve the quality of the aid to Vietnam by proactively targeting resources. The policy of the government is now to further promote cooperation between Vietnam and INGOs, and determine where to prioritize the contributions of INGOs. This includes new stakeholders, with more emphasis on local and decentralized ownership of the processes.
  - iii. The 9<sup>th</sup> Party Congress only required that the effectiveness of INGO cooperation be raised. Under the 10<sup>th</sup> Party Congress Vietnam must now both increase and expand the effectiveness of INGO cooperation. The time frame for the NPP is 2006 – 2010. Because the projections are of an emerging sector, particularly when discussing the voluntary sector, it can be difficult to look too much further ahead than five years from the present.
  - iv. The NPP is divided into three different parts. 1) Reviews the situation and understand how it will develop 2) Provides an orientation in terms of sectoral and geographic locations 3) Outlines key implementation measures.
  - v. This is the 4<sup>th</sup> draft of NPP. Work began on the NPP following the consultations in 2003. VUFO has tried to work with a variety of different organizations in developing the NPP. They are now looking for the comments of the INGOs and local stakeholders. They will then get this approved by COMINGO and finally by the Prime Minister. The NPP has already surpassed its time line,

however it is now aiming to incorporate INGO comments and complete a draft by the end of May 2006.

- b. Participants in the INGO Forum split into groups to discuss the three sections of the Draft separately, in order to provide a collective feedback to PACCOM written by the NGO Resource Centre.
  - i. Input on Section One of the Draft NPP: INGO Contributions
    1. While the group felt that in Mr. Phong's address to the meeting, there was emphasis given to contributions that are non-financial, this needs to be better included in the document. How do we start to define these non-financial contributions? What are INGOs really contributing to Vietnam? For example policy formulation, community development, capacity building, etc. are not accounted for.
    2. It is not appropriate to talk about INGOs in isolation from NGOs. The development of NGOs is clearly linked to this process. The NPP needs to recognize civil society in the larger context.
    3. Vietnam is on its way to becoming a middle-income country. It is no longer the case of a poor state that will require huge INGO support in the future. Therefore the NPP needs to consider that there will likely be a decline of INGO support in the future. Is there going to be a pique and subsequent decline? This needs to be considered.
    4. Can the document incorporate the Market Place Approach.
    5. We would like to see a good legal framework for the creation of civil society organizations.
    6. The arrangement of the document, around geographic and sectors, misses out on the other contributions of INGOs.
    7. This strategy – how will it be promoted between Ministries? From the Government to the local levels? This needs to be more explicitly explained, as not all bodies are as used to working with INGOs, understand their operations and are able to evaluate their contributions.
  - ii. Input on Section Two of the Draft: Programme Objectives
    1. There is no reflection of Vietnam as a middle-income country.
    2. The sector focus loses many of the other issues.
    3. The relationships and connections between INGOs and NGOs was not clearly elaborated on. This is a big portion of INGO work that needs to be more specifically laid out.
    4. Is this a list of suggestions, or is this a binding list of what INGOs may do? What are the implications for future activities?
    5. There is no mention of policy influence and advocacy work.
    6. There is no mention about INGOs work with other decrees (grass-roots democracy decree, etc. ) bottom- up approach, participatory planning, transparency issues, accountability,

etc.

7. Look towards utilizing INGO strengths, as money will decline in coming years. Value may be much more on a soft approach, not the “traditional” work.
8. Goodwill for foreign links and friendships
9. There is a need to highlight or further include vulnerable groups
10. It is unclear how the various “sectors” were identified.
11. There is no mention of approaches such as RBA and the participatory learning of processes in development is not reflected.

c. Input on Section Tree of the Draft: Implementation

1. What is going to be coming out of this process? How is it going to affect the work that we are caring out?
2. Simplified, faster and more efficient project approval process.
3. Is there a timetable for approval?
4. There is a need to broaden the defined areas of cooperation to include areas such as governance, building civil society, non-formal education.
5. MPI and Ministry of Finance are not traditionally familiar with the operations of INGOs in Vietnam. There are concerns about the extent to which they will be able to assess the overall benefit of programmes, not simply their dollar benefit.
6. 2.4.2 change the wording of supplementing the State’s activities – are INGOs comfortable with this?
7. Why are we being consulted so late? Can we do anything about this?

d. Mr. Phong thanks participants for their contributions

- i. Consultation is not only a requirement, but it is also beneficial to the overall quality of the documents produced.
- ii. In response to concerns over the time frame of this programme, this is why we have cut down the time line - because there are so many potential developments in the sector (INGOs, local, etc.). There is limited elaboration, and it is understood that this will transform a great deal. The policy of promoting social mobilization – encouraging the society to take part in socio-economic development – has been drafted to promote this. The National Assembly will be discussing the law on associations in the coming weeks, and we can hope that it will be passed in the following session. There are difficulties in classifying these kinds of organizations – nonprofit, not for profit, mass organization like the women’s union, etc. Should there be a common framework for INGOs and NGOs? Level playing field? Therefore INGOs must be considered in relation to the plans for NGOs. As soon as the local capacity is there, then the direct presence of INGOs (operational) may start to decline.

- iii. Where is this process going from here? PACCOM is consulting INGOs, Ministries and local authorities. They are receiving this feedback all at the same time. This is the first formal consultation. Usually the Vietnamese consultation is done first, but in this case it will all be weighed equally. They will take all of your feedback into account. They must present the NPP to the Prime Minister as soon as possible. Therefore there is room to make more comments until the last minute (the NPP should be finalized in the next 2 weeks). PACCOM will update you on how they have incorporated your comments at the next INGO Forum.
- 2) Announcement on the Workshop on Promoting Cooperation with INGOs in Quang Nam. This workshop will take place on 12 May 2006. Please contact the RC for a copy of the invitation. Please RSVP before Monday / Tuesday.
  - 3) Tax Audits
    - a. The INGO Centre sent a letter to PACCOM (18 April) requesting a follow up on the comments sent at the end of 2005. On the 21 of April a letter was returned to the RC acknowledging receipt of the 2 letters.
    - b. PACCOM has been in contact with the Ministry of Finance and tax Bureau. The earliest meeting will take place next week. There will subsequently be a meeting with INGO representation. The NGO RC suggests that INGOs select a team to be represented at this meeting. If this question goes beyond the capacity of the tax bureau and the ministry, then the issue will go before the PM.

*Q: Has anyone come up with a checklist that we should be following for the taxation process? Now that we have been shifted to the tax bureau, there are many questions that we don't have any experience with. How do we find these answers?*

A: This used to be done directly by DIPSICO, and now that it has shifted. PACCOM is only now getting involved in the issue. Therefore they are not only working on answering the questions about audits, but also on developing clear guidelines. They do not know at present what kind of issues they are interested in. This will also be discussed at the meeting.

*Q: It is not only the problems with DIPSICO, but also the inconsistencies with the HCM authorities. Who should we be listening to?*

A: There is still a debate that DIPSICO should consider the role of mitigation. Thank you for bringing this to our attention. PACCOM will look into this further.

*Q: How do we select a group of representatives to attend the meeting with PACCOM?*

A: These should be participants who have undergone the process from the beginning and have a good understanding of the issues. There are 8 of the larger INGOs who have volunteered. It might also be interesting to get INGOs from other areas of the country, as the process seems to be really quite different. We will send this out to other INGOs who are not able to be here.

*Q: There was some discussion a while ago now, so perhaps we could send round an email to collect other ideas that people not represented will be heard.*

A: We will do this over email in the coming week.

*Q: Have any other INGOs been audited?*

A: As far as anyone knows, no. However there have been more requests and the INGO RC will also try to find out through email if this has gone any further.

- 4) Call for further participation in the Campaign against Poverty
  - a. GCAP – Global Call for Action against Poverty. It is a loose coalition between organizations. In Vietnam, there has been only limited success to date. This year there is a call for more organizations to join on. This is a global campaign, and has been very successful elsewhere, but not yet in VN.
  - b. This year the campaign will focus on issues of national government accountability against corruption and inclusion.
  - c. How can VN contribute to the campaign? There will be a series of activities throughout September and October. VUFO supports the idea and would like to be a main partner in this campaign. There is also room for mass-mobilization.
  - d. Last year there were four organisations involved, but they are hoping that with more time this year, there will be more opportunities for mass mobilization.
  - e. Please visit the website for more details. [www.whiteband.org](http://www.whiteband.org)
  
- 5) Consultative Group Preparations – by Steve Price-Thomas
  - a. Mid-term CG meeting is coming up June 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> in Nha Trang
  - b. This is a forum between the government and donors, and INGOs have 4 seats as observers, though at the mid-term consultation they cannot comment.
  - c. The topics for this CG meeting have not officially been announced, but are likely to include the implementation of the Socio-Economic Development Plan and Aid Effectiveness.
  - d. Once the agenda is posted, we will set a meeting date to gather input about what you would like us to present.
  - e. There is no formal written statement (only at the year end meeting).
  - f. The meeting to gather input will be held around mid-may.
  - g. There will be elections held for 2 new representatives to attend the CG meeting in December.
  
- 6) The Health Partnership Group – Jackie VanDerMeulen
  - a. The INGO representatives to the HPG met on 3 May to brief INGOs working in the health care sector about discussions to adopt a programme or sector based approach.
  - b. It was decided that INGOs would provide their comments on the draft presented at the last HPG meeting, and collectively present them.
  - c. Please review the document (posted on the NGO Centre website) and send any comments you may have to either Laura or Matthew so that they may be included in the statement.