

**INTERNATIONAL NON-GOVERNMENTAL
ORGANISATION (INGO) STATEMENT
FOR THE VIETNAM CONSULTATIVE GROUP
MEETING**

4-5 DECEMBER, 2008

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1. Introduction

INGOs in Vietnam

More than 600 international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) have now established ties with Vietnam, and INGO programmes reach all 64 provinces and centrally administered cities in the country. The Government of Vietnam estimates that INGOs disbursed around \$250 million in 2008.

The major focus of INGO assistance in the area of human development in Vietnam includes:

- poverty reduction;
- social equality, with a particular focus on poor, isolated and vulnerable groups, including ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, women and children;
- HIV/AIDS;
- environmental sustainability;
- disaster preparedness and response;
- capacity development; and
- governance and increasing people's participation and promoting democracy, particularly at the grassroots level, and civil society strengthening.

INGOs support both governmental and non-governmental partners in Vietnam, seeking to support Vietnam's efforts to balance the major objectives of simultaneously combating poverty and integrating more fully into the global economy.

INGOs have a strong commitment to information-sharing, partnerships and coordination. This can be seen through the VUFO-NGO Resource Centre (NGO RC) and its associated working groups, as well as through wider government-donor-NGO partnership groups and other initiatives.

Preparation of the INGO Statement

This statement reflects the outcome of a series of email consultations through the NGO RC email lists, and one consultation meeting held in November with both international and Vietnamese NGOs and networks concerning policy and development issues relating to the agenda of the End-Year Consultative Group Meeting in December 2008.

During the meeting on November 28 held at the NGO RC, participants endorsed the following issues to be included in the statement: socio-economic situation (unsustainable development, growing disparity, post-WTO issues, access to land, gender gaps/children's issues, rampant inflation and policy dilemma, and HIV/AIDS), harmonisation and aid effectiveness, governance and institutional reform, and climate change.

Following this meeting, various INGOs and VNGOs then prepared input for the statement, which was compiled by the NGO RC and the three INGO Representatives.

The INGO delegation to 2008 End-Year CG Meeting includes the following three elected INGO representatives and the Managing Co-Director of the NGO RC:

- Kim N. B. Ninh, Country Representative, The Asia Foundation;
- Phan Van Ngoc, Country Director / ActionAid Vietnam;
- Stephen Price-Thomas Country Programme Manager / Oxfam Great Britain.
- Trine Glue Doan, Managing Co-Director / NGO RC.

1. Socio-economic situation

Vietnam has stood as an example of a development model that has lifted millions of people out of poverty while trying to ensure the benefits of its vibrant market economy are fairly evenly distributed across society to keep up the country's socialist orientation. Vietnam's macro-economic performance has been remarkably strong with an average GDP growth rate of 7.6 per cent during the past half of the decade.

A lot has been predicted on Vietnam's accession to the World Trade Organisation (WTO), which created a positive mood in the government, among the people and in the country's market sentiment at the time. Economic predictions have declared the impact of joining the world trade body would be highly positive and the country is gearing up to achieve all the Millennium Development Goals by 2015 - some well ahead of time. These achievements have undoubtedly expanded people's choices and improved participation in the development process.

The social and economic progress in Vietnam's recent economic integration has been basically nothing short of remarkable, but important challenges remain

a. Unsustainable economic development

One of the development tools addressing this issue - micro-finance - has resulted in some successful examples of poverty reduction, but problems remain. Micro-finance services in Vietnam are fragmented, and coordination among the many stakeholders (including the Vietnam Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development, Vietnam Bank for Social Policies, State Bank Vietnam, People's Credit Funds, micro-finance organisations and mass organisations) remains limited. A consensus needs to be forged on how to most effectively advocate, educate, and transparently inform policy-makers on the achievements and constraints of the industry. Important in this process is the role that resident and foreign donor agencies (e.g., Asian Development Bank, World Bank, Agence Française de Développement, International Fund for Agriculture Development, etc.) can adopt, such as following 'Good Micro-finance Practices' in the crowded and fragmented market.

KEY MESSAGE: A consensus needs to be forged among donors on how to most effectively advocate, educate, and transparently inform policy-makers on the achievements and constraints of micro-finance.

Lack of coordination, coherence and attendance to Good Practices has impeded the sustainable development of the micro-finance sector. Donors should promote the development of a healthy, sustainable, and market-led financial sector (double bottom-line, substantial outreach to the 'Bottom of the Pyramid' and financial sustainability), rather than distorting the market and crowding out private capital by channelling low-cost funds through banks and policy-lenders to meet social goals (micro-credit as a policy lending instrument that needs to be fed by subsidies).

KEY MESSAGE: Donors should promote the development of a healthy, sustainable, and market-led financial sector, rather than distorting the market and crowding out private capital by channelling low-cost funds through banks and policy-lenders to meet social goals.

The sustainability of agricultural returns also requires greater attention given recent shifts in practices that are at least partially due to household responses to inflationary pressures. These shifts include changes in crop production to mono-cultural models, which are subject to high production risks and quickly erode soil fertility. These practices, if sustained, will lead to increasing vulnerabilities and potentially a deterioration in household incomes and assets. It is

therefore recommended that agricultural policies are subjected to environmental sustainability tests, and are not solely driven by market forces.

KEY MESSAGE: Agricultural policies should be subjected to environmental sustainability tests and should not be solely driven by market forces.

b. Growing disparity

There have been increasing concerns about the possibility of growing disparities in well-being across various sections of the population. Such growing gaps and inequalities indicate that the rights of poor and excluded people are still compromised in the development process as the gaps between rich and poor, rural and urban, and the majority and ethnic minorities increase.

Progress remains precarious in view of the large number of people subsisting on incomes only marginally above the poverty line. Less inclusive development tends to keep more vulnerable groups of people such as migrants, landless people, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities, people living with HIV etc. among the poorest. Rapid urbanisation is also forcing many farmers into vulnerable situations, which will only increase as industrial sectors continue to overtake agriculture as the main engine of the economy.

Alleviating poverty and attempting to narrow the gap between rural rich and poor people, especially in ethnic minority areas, will be most effective when it focuses on human capacity and resources, especially of the poorest, through schooling, job training, and developing the social capital of community institutions. This enables poor people to better access support from the state and other donors, make better use of market opportunities, and cope with the risks likely to be encountered in escaping poverty.

Poor people, especially ethnic minorities, continue to face significant barriers to accessing key state support mechanisms such as credit and agricultural extension. These, as well as other support mechanisms, must be carried out in a manner appropriate for people who may not be literate or do not speak the Kinh language, especially ethnic minority women. There are already good models to promote this socialisation of services and they should be used to inform future policy development, as well as policy implementation resourcing and guidance.

KEY MESSAGE: To address the increasing disparity in society, state support mechanisms, as well as other support mechanisms, must be carried out in a manner appropriate for people who may not be literate or do not speak the Kinh language, especially for women.

c. Post-WTO issues

Economic forecasts predict that by opening up trade in general and joining the WTO in particular, the Vietnamese economy will reap overall positive impacts in terms of greater access to world markets, more foreign investment, access to instruments for “protection against protection”, and stronger motivation for accelerating domestic reforms towards perfecting the market-based economy.

There are, however, big challenges facing Vietnam in relation to WTO accession. First, tariffs and non-tariff barriers have been gradually reduced and further changes are expected due to WTO commitments, but unless the potential adverse impacts of reforms are explicitly addressed, poor and excluded people in Vietnam may be unable to benefit from these changes. Furthermore, Vietnam does not have sufficient resources to succeed in dispute settlement mechanisms under the WTO. The catfish and recent leather shoes incidents have negatively affected the lives of many poor people.

Second, deepening international integration means both higher returns and higher risks for businesses. In the absence of comprehensive social protection policies, the latter may be severe for the poor and the near-poor. Poor and socially excluded people, in particular women and children, stand to lose out as traditional income-generating opportunities disappear in response to the country's economic integration. At the current rate, economic integration will outpace the agenda to reduce poverty, and unless it is well-managed, it could contribute to a growth in poverty and injustice among the most vulnerable groups of people in Vietnam.

KEY MESSAGE: Comprehensive social protection policies are required in order to protect poor and socially excluded people in the post-WTO environment as traditional income-generating opportunities disappear in response to the country's economic integration.

Third, it is also important to note that in an opening market economy, failure to maintain or enforce environmental standards will result in market forces posing serious threats to the environment.

KEY MESSAGE: Environmental standards must be maintained and enforced to prevent market forces from damaging the environment during Vietnam's global integration process.

d. Access to land

Land is a vital productive asset for poor and excluded people. The recent conversion of agricultural land for industrial and commercial use appears to be a major factor affecting poor households in rural and semi-urban areas, and concerns have also been raised about the food security effects of the large-scale conversion of paddy and forest land.

There are still several obstacles preventing poor households from gaining formal land titles. Many land users are not aware of the importance of formal land title and registration of land transactions. This is particularly common in cases of inheritance or transfer between family members. Formal registration is often deemed unnecessary by those involved, though failure to do so can lead to family disputes.

There is also a lack of understanding among local authorities on the need for registering both the names of husband and wife in land certificates. A recent survey¹ found that less than 20 per cent of households in remote areas have registered both names on their land certificates. The absence of women's names on land titles puts women at a disadvantage in many cases. Finally, there is the prohibitive cost of the process, which renders the policy unaffordable for most people.

KEY MESSAGE: Training and information dissemination should be conducted among local authorities and poor households to deepen their understanding of the need to register land title and land transactions, as well as including both the names of husband and wife on land certificates.

In addition, there is the ongoing problem in certain areas, particularly in the central region, of dangerous contamination of cluster munitions, landmines, and other wartime ordnance that restricts access to land for agricultural use and other productive activities and endangers the lives and livelihoods of poor people in the affected areas. In order to join the growing global call for prohibiting the production, sale and transfer of cluster munitions, as well as adhere to victim assistance standards and clearance regulations, INGOs urge Vietnam to sign the new Convention on Cluster Munitions.

¹ The survey was conducted by ActionAid Vietnam and the local NGO network Civil Society Inclusion in Food Security and Poverty Elimination Network (CIPFEN).

KEY MESSAGE: INGOs urge Vietnam to sign the new Convention on Cluster Munitions.

e. Gender gaps

While gender equality has progressed more in Vietnam than in other comparable countries, significant gaps persist. Women continue to be under-represented in public office, particularly at local administrative levels, and women also face barriers to participation in public life. While women's involvement in legislative bodies is relatively high (27.3 per cent in Vietnam's National Assembly), executive decision-making bodies such as People's Committees comprise only from 5 -7.5 per cent women at the provincial, district and commune level. In addition, women are still often denied equal rights to production property despite improvements in legislation.

Women and children largely comprise the most vulnerable groups, such as migrant workers, trafficked people, sex workers, people living with HIV, and to a certain extent, the landless. Conditions for these population groups are demonstrating quite unfavourable trends recently due to changing socio-economic factors such as insufficient development of urban infrastructure, restricted access to social services for migrants, and the absence of strong social and safety networks etc. These factors are pushing them into the vicious trap of poverty.

KEY MESSAGES: INGOs urge the Government of Vietnam to develop strong social and safety services and networks, in order to protect women and children from the adverse effects of changing socio-economic conditions in the country.

f. Rampant inflation and policy dilemma

The soaring cost of living and recent rampant inflation continues to be the main factors driving up the general price level, which affects lower-income groups of people the most. While the Government of Vietnam has unveiled a set of measures designed to dampen inflationary pressures, the implementation of these measures might continue to pose policy dilemmas, given that they could also slow economic growth and poverty reduction.

The impact of high inflation has already taken place and cannot be reversed. The Government of Vietnam therefore needs to urgently consider revising all social protection instruments in light of increased costs of living. This should begin with a recalibration of the poverty threshold and a clear policy for adjusting for intra-national differences.

KEY MESSAGE: The Government of Vietnam should urgently consider revising all social protection instruments in light of increased costs of living, including a recalibration of the poverty threshold and a clear policy for adjusting for intra-national differences.

It should be recognised that this upward revision of the poverty standard will bring millions of Vietnamese back under the poverty line. Social protection instruments must be designed to provide basic rights for these people and must be adequately funded and targeted to ensure that those who have not yet benefited significantly from previous funds are not overlooked again. In particular, key enabling infrastructure, such as roads and irrigation, and agricultural extension must reach the poorest and hardest to reach.

The calibration of the poverty standard also provides perverse incentives, which must be taken into account during the reassessment and re-design of the standard and associated support programmes. The clearest examples are in health and education, where poor people's access to these services has improved significantly; however the near-poor, who do not differ substantially from the poor, continue to face significant barriers of access. Policies which motivate people to continue to be classified as poor are liable for manipulation and abuse and should be re-designed.

KEY MESSAGE: Policies which motivate people to continue to be classified as poor are liable for manipulation and abuse and should be re-designed.

Finally, inflation is clearly affecting many people's choices of what they can afford to eat. If sustained, this is likely to lead to worsening malnutrition rates. It is strongly recommended that current food security and nutrition programmes are strengthened. New programmes for poor villages/communes, such as school meals, should also be considered.

KEY MESSAGE: INGOs strongly recommended that current food security and nutrition programmes are strengthened.

g. HIV/AIDS

The NGO community recognises the many important steps the Government of Vietnam is taking to reduce HIV transmission, as well as to mitigate the impact of HIV for people living with HIV, their families and society. Nevertheless, continued commitment and action is required if Vietnam is to overcome the serious challenges that still impede a more effective national response.

Thirty-one INGOs are engaged in key areas of the national HIV strategy, as outlined in the nine programmes of action. In support of the strategy and the government's priorities, INGOs are committed to supporting a full continuum of prevention, care and treatment. We are strongly supportive of the current focus on harmonisation of funding and programmes, and are actively engaged in efforts to strengthen coordination at national, provincial, and sub-provincial levels – where programmes meet populations, and where a fragmented response has its most costly human effects.

The INGO community is dedicated to collaborating closely with diverse stakeholders, including government, mass organisations, civil society, communities and the private sector. We are also committed to ensuring the active engagement of groups affected and at risk.

A number of challenges remain in the fight against HIV in Vietnam, and it is important that these continue to be on the agenda of government, donors, NGOs and all other partners.

The HIV epidemic is still concentrated in key populations, including injecting drug users, sex workers and their clients, and men who have sex with men. These groups are engaged in sharing of contaminated needles and syringes, unprotected paid sex, and unprotected sex between men. However, these behaviours are by no means mutually exclusive. Drug injectors buy or sell sex, including sex between men; sex workers use or inject drugs; and men who have sex with men and women use or inject drugs.

HIV-related stigma and discrimination continue to undermine the national responses to the epidemic, preventing people from using HIV prevention, care and treatment services, as well as accessing employment and social services. The above key populations may experience double or even triple stigma due to their involvement in social taboo behaviours, such as sex work, drug abuse and male-to-male sex.

Despite laudable efforts to extend care and treatment services to adults and children living with HIV, coverage is far from universal. It is estimated that less than 50 per cent of those in need of anti-retroviral therapy (ART) have access to it (WHO 2008). Furthermore, palliative care service availability, including treatment of pain, remains highly limited.

Continued promotion of free HIV counselling and testing and widespread provision of HIV rapid test kits are needed to immediately link people living with HIV to care and treatment and other related services. There is a need to consider opt-out testing for key groups such as pregnant women, children of infected parents, and STI and TB patients. We recommend that the government establish and maintain systems that provide continuous and sustainable access to ART for all who need it. Access to palliative care services, including treatment of pain, remains highly limited despite the recent promulgation of national policies and laws regulating palliative care and use of oral morphine to treat pain. We urge the government to ensure implementation of these policies.

KEY MESSAGE: Care and treatment services, including palliative care, need to be expanded for adults and children living with HIV. Broader access to coordinated, high-quality, and free testing, care and treatment services needs to be expanded in both urban and rural areas. This includes special attention being paid to children and women living with or affected by HIV.

Despite the progress in gaining political engagement and support in Vietnam so far, there is still a lack of consensus, commitment and support from different levels and stakeholders. Continued political leadership and commitment are required to set the right agenda and drive a potentially effective response.

Given that injecting drug users, sex workers and their clients, and men who have sex with men are driving forces of the epidemic in the country, there is an urgent need to implement and scale-up evidence-informed interventions, such as methadone maintenance treatment, needle and syringe exchange programmes, and condom and lubricant distribution. Without a harmonisation of the relevant laws, implementing these interventions continues to be challenging. To overcome this challenge, we recommend that the government takes the lead in harmonising the laws, in order to better support the implementation of the national harm reduction action programme.

KEY MESSAGE: There is an urgent need to harmonise the HIV law with other laws such as the Law on Drug Prevention and Control, and the Ordinance on Prostitution Prevention and Control, to create an enabling environment that supports the implementation of the national harm reduction action programme.

The high rate of drug relapse among residents released from 06 Centres calls for a focus on effective community-based services, including methadone maintenance treatment, drug addiction counselling, vocational training and job placement for recovering drug users. INGOs welcome and support the implementation of the pilot methadone maintenance treatment programme, and the scaling-up and integration of this programme into ART programmes.

Stigma and discrimination remain problematic for people living with and affected by HIV, as well as among those who engage in social taboo behaviours that put them at risk. Combating stigma and discrimination must, therefore, remain a focus at all relevant levels of policy and across the prevention-to-care continuum. It is important that the Government of Vietnam champion this issue and set a clear leadership example to promote a community environment free from stigma and discrimination. This will also greatly improve access to health services. Of particular concern is the need to ensure that children living with and affected by HIV are able to go to school and experience an educational environment without fear of stigma and discrimination.

Indeed, government leadership is required to eliminate confusion between HIV and social evils, and to reduce HIV-related stigma and discrimination that prevents people from accessing care and treatment services.

KEY MESSAGE: Combating stigma and discrimination must remain a focus at all relevant levels of policy and across the prevention-to-care continuum, and it is essential that government leaders champion this issue.

Because of the concentrated nature of the epidemic, resources must focus on prevention among most at-risk populations, including injecting drug users, sex workers and their clients, and men who have sex with men. Implementation and scaling-up of programmes for these populations can provide high impacts at a relatively low cost. The risks faced by migrant and mobile populations should also be addressed.

The government plays a critical role in allocating resources, setting the agenda, facilitating and supporting the implementation of integrated and comprehensive programmes that provide a full range of services to reduce HIV transmission in injecting drug users, sex workers and their clients, men who have sex with men and referral services (for HIV counselling and testing, sexually transmitted infections, and ART).

INGOs strongly support interventions that have been shown to work and that maximise the number of new HIV infections prevented. Interventions need to be tailored and targeted to reach the majority of injecting drug users, sex worker and their clients, and men who have sex with men, and to protect the wives of men who buy sex, inject drugs or have sex with other men, in order to reverse the trend of the epidemic. As young people account for the largest number of new infections, attention needs to be paid to preventing youth at-risk from initiating drug use and sex work.

KEY MESSAGE: Continued, tailored and targeted prevention focused on most at-risk populations, including injecting drug users, sex workers and their clients, and men who have sex with men, with extended coverage, is the key to halting and controlling the epidemic.

There is a recognised need for comprehensive support for children living with and affected by HIV. The National Plan of Action (NPA) for Children Affected by HIV and AIDS provides a detailed, costed plan for how to improve and scale-up access to essential services for children. We urge the Government of Vietnam to approve the NPA and to continue inter-ministerial engagement in its implementation. We encourage both government and donors to earmark funds immediately to support the roll-out of the NPA once it is approved.

KEY MESSAGE: INGOs urge the Government of Vietnam to approve the NPA for Children Affected by HIV and AIDS and to continue inter-ministerial engagement in its implementation. Both the government and donors should earmark funds immediately to support the roll-out of the NPA once it is approved.

Family-centred care and support is considered as a best practice in Vietnam and warrants further expansion. A force of dedicated and trained social workers is essential to providing sustained support to children and families affected by HIV. In addition, the INGO community supports expanding interventions to prevent HIV transmission from mothers to newborns.

The needs of women vulnerable to, living with or affected by HIV must be addressed. Although the epidemic is predominantly male, the gender gap continues to narrow, primarily due to prevailing gender norms that place women at-risk of infection. Women living with HIV are disadvantaged, as they are more likely than men to experience HIV-related stigma and discrimination within their

families and communities, as well as in health and social services. Women also generally carry the task of caring for family members who are ill.

It is now widely recognised that community and civil society engagement is an essential part of the HIV response in Vietnam. Community and civil society involvement can effectively deal with sensitive and controversial issues, help overcome some barriers of stigma and discrimination, and foster a sense of ‘ownership’ of the response. Community and civil society involvement should be ensured at all stages of policy, programme design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. The INGO community recommends that a clear and operational framework for community and civil society involvement in the HIV response be put in place, that the government strongly supports the meaningful involvement of civil society, including people living with HIV, in all aspects of programme design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. The government should also be open to innovative interventions from civil society and be willing to expand interventions that have proven to be effective.

KEY MESSAGE: A clear and operational framework for community and civil society involvement in the national response to HIV is required to further improve policy, programme design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the HIV response.

2. Harmonisation & Aid Effectiveness

A number of experiments have been undertaken to improve aid effectiveness by enabling communities to direct and manage aid. This increased level of ownership has ensured that aid is used more effectively and in some cases more efficiently. It is therefore recommended that policies and programmes should consider providing more flexible modes of support, such as through cooperatives, clubs or interest groups, to help implement services that cannot be done by individuals. They should do this by promoting participation in policies, programmes and projects. The 'Community Development Fund' could be a good model to empower communities in decision-making and implementing their own initiatives to reduce poverty in the most disadvantaged communes. Additionally, links between business enterprises and farmers should be strengthened in order to develop market chains that benefit the poor.

KEY MESSAGE: To enhance aid effectiveness, policies and programmes should consider providing more flexible modes of support, such as through cooperatives, clubs or interest groups, to help implement services that cannot be done by individuals alone, including promoting civil society participation in policies, programmes and projects.

3. Governance & Institutional Reform

The first phase of reform for Vietnam was primarily about generating a more conducive environment to attract foreign investment for rapid economic growth. By pushing ahead with WTO accession and Permanent Normal Trade Relations (PNTR), the Vietnamese leadership has confirmed its commitment to market-oriented economic development that is central to its ambitious goal of becoming a middle-income country by 2010.

In light of greater market volatility and less economic control, the government's challenge is now how to continue to produce high levels of economic growth while addressing a range of governance and social concerns. Corruption is a significant public concern; land disputes are widespread; labour strikes have become more frequent; and environment degradation is visible. These issues are exacerbated by rapid economic growth, which exposes the inadequacy of the old system to manage a much more complex economy, and a modernising society that is increasingly connected to the global information network.

a. Role of civil society and the media

Much effort has been exerted this past decade on the aspects of government and donor system, however huge challenges remain in public administration reform, legal reform, and anti-corruption. As these issues are long-term challenges requiring many fundamental changes to institutions and practices, the overall effort to improve governance in Vietnam needs the participation of the public.

Governments everywhere find it difficult, if not often impossible, to reform themselves, and hard-won reform efforts have shown that the civil society organisations play an important role in monitoring government performance, maintaining the pressure for change, and contributing practical solutions to solving these difficult problems. While the Vietnamese Communist Party and the government have recognised the importance of civil society and the media in the fight against corruption, for example, there is little official support for neither civil society nor the media to do a better job in reporting and monitoring corruption.

While donors have often emphasised the importance of civil society in Vietnam, there has yet to be sustained and insightful support from donors to help the nascent civil society sector in Vietnam build its capacity to participate in the governance discourse.

KEY MESSAGE: The Government of Vietnam and donors need to provide more support for civil society and the media to engage in the fight against corruption by helping to develop an enabling environment for reporting on and monitoring corruption.

b. Administrative petitions and land disputes

Recent legal and administrative reforms in Vietnam provide greater space for citizen economic rights, particularly the right to petitions and administrative justice. There have been many efforts by the government to create a legal framework for redressing economic grievances and to improve citizen petition processing procedures. A range of stipulations aimed at procedural processes and the relevant substantive laws containing provisions on handling petitions have been issued. However, despite legislative efforts, administrative petitioning, of which more than 70 per cent are land-related, has become more frequent, larger in scope and more complicated in nature. As the next stage of Vietnam's development will entail further industrialisation and urbanisation, more responsive and effective mechanisms for redressing citizen's complaints, particularly land-related petitions, will be necessary for the country to maintain social and economic stability.

KEY MESSAGE: More responsive and effective mechanisms for redressing citizen's complaints, particularly land-related petitions, are necessary for the country to maintain social and economic stability.

c. Policy research and analysis

The making and implementation of laws continues to be problematic this past year, with a host of regulations issued only in response to significant outcries by the public and experts, although government agencies note that these laws have gone through the required review process. As society grows increasingly complex and economic activities continue to be globalised, requiring rapid and informed responses, the top-down policy formulation and law-making process needs fundamental change.

d. Labour strikes

Although the government has enacted protective legislation for workers and allowed trade unions greater autonomy in recent years, these measures are inadequate in addressing workers' concerns in an increasingly complex environment of growing economic competition and rising production demand.

A focus on basic labour rights alone is insufficient. Labour disputes in Vietnam are increasingly about clashing economic interests between employees and employers; an increasingly differentiated labour force structure is adding to the complexities; and workers are becoming more savvy in expressing their discontent. For example, mass work stoppages are becoming more common than strikes, given that most strikes are considered illegal by the authorities. Moreover, as the country continues to modernise, there has been a dramatic shift in the structure of the labour force, with large numbers of rural migrants becoming factory workers. These migrants are not familiar with factory work, do not know their labour rights, and are unable to access existing support services. The dramatic increase in the number of strikes these past few years is a concrete indication of the inadequacy of responses to workers' concerns.

KEY MESSAGE: Greater attention needs to be paid to ensuring workers, especially migrant workers, understand their labour rights and are able to access existing supporting services.

e. Migrant labour

Dramatic changes in the rural economy are resulting in higher rates of landlessness and joblessness, fuelling greater migration to urban centres and abroad for employment opportunities. However, most workers are unskilled and not prepared for work in factories, nor life in the cities – a situation that impacts women even more negatively. In addition, under Vietnam's current policies, most migrants are not able to access government services in the places where they migrate to, such as registering their children for schools or accessing healthcare. If unaddressed, these challenges will generate unhealthy social development, widening the gap between the rich and the poor, and thereby rendering Vietnam less competitive and less socially stable. It is therefore recommended that more attention should be paid to assisting migrants by including them in poverty screening exercises, giving them access to support services such as credit, investing in infrastructure facilities in areas where most migrants live, taking measures to protect migrant workers, and organising communication activities to help them better integrate into urban life.

KEY MESSAGE: More attention should be paid to assisting migrants to ensure that they are able to access government services such as education for their children and healthcare services, in order to promote positive social integration during the urbanisation process.

4. Climate Change

To protect human rights and continue global moves towards ending poverty, the international community - including Vietnam - has an obligation to forge a post-2012 climate regime that minimises the climate risks that poor people around the world face. This means a regime that limits global warming well below 2°C over pre-industrial levels, requires global emissions to peak by 2015, and be cut by at least 80 per cent from 1990 levels by 2050.

Global efforts to tackle climate change must be shared across nations based on their respective historic responsibility for the crisis, as well as their capability to confront it. An equitable post-2012 regime is one in which rich, industrialised countries bear the lion's share of the global effort. This means both domestic emissions reductions in donor countries of at least 25-40 per cent below 1990 levels by 2020, and provision of significant financial and technological support for developing countries, including Vietnam.

Climate change impacts on pro-poor growth, pro-poor rural and urban development, livelihood diversification and access to productive resources. Such impacts are threatening livelihoods and poverty eradication efforts in the most vulnerable areas. Climate change adaptation and mitigation efforts are required urgently.

a. Climate change communication and education

Education is key to building awareness at all levels on the causes and consequences of climate change. Available knowledge from science and local experience needs to be accessible and localised to enable accurate predictions and develop relevant responses. Information distribution and communication on climate change needs to be delivered appropriately and strategically, using all means, including well-informed mass media and communication, which enables people to be better informed and change their behaviour.

These strategies should engage learners and educators in the climate change debate; and schooling and tertiary education should include climate. Climate change education should not only aim to build and develop the scientific and cultural knowledge base, but also enable people to take action that could result in significant and sustainable behaviour changes. Climate change education should be implemented through an integrated approach for both formal and informal education.

KEY MESSAGE: Climate change education should be implemented through an integrated approach for both formal and informal education that aims to build both Vietnam's scientific knowledge base, and enable the Vietnamese people to take action that could result in significant and sustainable behaviour changes.

b. Adaptation to climate change

Support for adaptation action in developing countries such as Vietnam needs to be massively scaled-up to address the immediate life-threatening impacts facing vulnerable communities today, as well as the growing, unavoidable climate hazards in the future. The scale of resources required globally is at least \$50 billion annually, and the obligation for providing these resources lies largely with rich, industrialised countries. These resources must be provided over and above existing ODA commitments as grants rather than loans. Communities throughout Vietnam are already having to adapt to the impacts of climate change, and the need for adequate, community-based adaptation financing is rapidly increasing.

KEY MESSAGE: Support for adaptation action in developing countries such as Vietnam needs to be massively scaled-up in the form of new grants not loans to address the immediate life-threatening impacts facing vulnerable communities today, as well as the growing, unavoidable climate hazards in the future.

c. Reaching the most vulnerable

Adaptation funding must reach the most vulnerable groups and provide these groups with the opportunities they need to adapt to climate change. These groups must be systematically identified and their vulnerabilities assessed. Their representatives must be ensured participation in relevant processes at the local and national level, including poor people and ethnic minority groups in the deltas, coastal zone and also mountainous areas.

The proposed local level climate modelling should be prioritised in the most vulnerable areas in all vulnerable ecological zones. Adaptation processes and actions must be fully integrated into existing plans and programmes, including SEDP plans and plans for environmental protection. A transparent approach with the broad involvement of stakeholders is also key to ensuring synergies and avoiding the creation of perverse incentives or duplication of efforts.

Community-based adaptation must be an integrated part of adaptation activities. Channelling funding through the UNFCCC, and holding the receivers accountable to the UNFCCC, can help to ensure implementation of the principles and procedures agreed upon in the global climate change agreement.

Capacity building/awareness raising is needed for local authorities and communities in vulnerable areas to ensure their meaningful participation, which will be crucial to success and sustainability.

KEY MESSAGE: Adaptation processes and actions must be fully integrated into existing plans and programmes, including SEDP plans and plans for environmental protection.

d. Adaptation to chronic long-term changes

Vietnam is likely to experience threats to the food security of poor populations from rising temperatures, droughts, floods and unpredictable seasons long before the impact of sea level rise is felt. It is essential that adaptation actions include supporting long-term changes to agricultural development and opportunities based on known predictions. Sustainable agriculture and integrated farm/forest management, including organic agriculture, are options that can support livelihood diversification, risk spreading and control of erosion and land degradation, which limit the impacts of climate change while providing for economic development.

e. Adaptation to increased risks of disaster

It is essential to up-scale support for Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and management actions that help communities reduce their vulnerability to the increased frequency, scale and intensity of the disaster risks posed by climate change. Practical lessons for adaptation to catastrophic climate change impacts can be drawn from existing experience in disaster risk management, social protection, micro-finance, climate insurance, climate science and adaptation tools.

Multiple-benefit projects should be designed which protect livelihoods, provide new economic opportunities, spread risks, and mitigate future climate change impacts. The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development's plan to plant an additional 100,000 hectares of mangrove forest along the seaboard of 29 coastal provinces from now to 2015 is a welcome initiative which will protect dykes from damage, protect coastal community land and livelihoods and reduce the

impact of sea level rise.

KEY MESSAGE: It is essential to up-scale support for Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and management actions that help communities reduce their vulnerability to the increased frequency, scale and intensity of disaster risks posed by climate change.

f. Mitigating climate change in Vietnam

Vietnam has a unique opportunity to limit emissions before they happen while at the same time benefiting from technology transfer and the innovative use of carbon markets. By responding to climate change *now* through sensible adjustments to its growth path, Vietnam can:

- protect its citizens against inevitable impacts;
- avoid reversal of economic growth and poverty reduction; and
- build a sound 21st century economy based on low-carbon technology and sustainable clean development.

According to the 1994 Vietnam Initial National Communication to the UNFCCC, agriculture in Vietnam contributed 50 per cent of total GHG emissions while forestry contributed 18.6 per cent. Organic agriculture and methods such as sustainable rice intensification (SRI) and biogas production are obvious systems that could address these issues and maintain food security and economic development. Organic or sustainable agriculture and biogas could also play an important role in waste management and soil carbon sequestration through its increased use of crop residues, manure, composts and other organic solids. This will not only further off-set emissions but also enhance soil fertility and productivity (particularly in marginal and rain-fed areas), improve soil water retention and enhance the activity of soil fauna.

KEY MESSAGE: Attention should be paid to agricultural production systems (e.g., organic agriculture, rice intensification and biogas) that reduce the use of chemical inputs, reduce waste and are more efficient in the use of other inputs, such as water.

g. Carbon finance

Access to carbon finance enhances incentives for mitigation but should also provide benefits to those who provide the environmental services involved, in terms of planting or protecting forest resources and sustainable land use.

Mechanisms for carbon finance must also provide *social safeguards* to ensure that, for example, REDD activities do not lead to increased poverty, marginalisation or discrimination of rural poor populations. Such initiatives must also ensure an *equitable sharing of the benefits* arising from CERs, voluntary emissions reductions (VERs) and REDD. Social safeguards and benefit-sharing arrangements are necessary, regardless of whether the financing for mitigation projects is generated and distributed through market- or non-market mechanisms.

The rights of vulnerable rural communities, including their access to sufficient productive land and forest resources, must be adequately addressed and reflected in social safeguards under any future financing mechanism for REDD. Funds generated through carbon finance should therefore be channelled towards equitable poverty reduction and livelihood improvement actions with social and environmental benefits.

KEY MESSAGE: Carbon finance must be supplemented by social safeguards and benefit-sharing mechanisms to ensure that such policies do not lead to more poverty, marginalisation and discrimination.

Mechanisms established to regulate and motivate projects in low-emissions technologies, carbon offsets and storage (energy efficiency, renewable energy and land use CDM projects, voluntary carbon markets producing VERs and the upcoming REDD) must be affordable and accessible to local project developers, and must be rigorously monitored in order to deliver credible carbon credits.

One gap that the government must urgently address is the provision of a baseline calculation for each approved technology for the CDM, and voluntary carbon markets that are applicable in Vietnam. These calculations should be made available to any potential project developer as this will reduce transaction costs of developing the required project documents and enhance the capacity of Vietnam to deliver carbon credits to the market from a variety of sources. Currently, calculations are only available for hydroelectricity projects and therefore most CDM projects being implemented in Vietnam use hydroelectricity technology.

h. Climate change responses in Vietnam

INGOs in Vietnam welcome the development of the National Targeted Programme to Respond to Climate Change (NTP) and the Natural Disaster Management Plan to Mitigate the Adverse Impacts of Climate Change (NDMP-CC). INGOs also highly appreciate the ongoing opportunities being provided to participate in the policy formulation processes with government and donors. INGOs are ready to support NTP implementation, bringing expertise for developing and testing adaptation and mitigation approaches to authorities at the local and national levels. INGOs are working with NDMP implementing agencies to mainstream climate change adaptation within disaster risk reduction (DRR) projects.

Implementation of climate change responses and sufficient capacity is needed by all sectors at all levels to ensure a sufficient level of response and behaviour change to cope with the impacts that will inevitably be felt. Strong leadership, multi-stakeholder and cross-sectoral cooperation and coordination are essential to addressing the diverse impacts and causes of climate change. Careful thought must be given to how resources are actually used and distributed for economic growth and development, environmental protection and disaster risk management to ensure a pro-active response to climate change at the provincial and lower levels, which should be incorporated within socio-economic development plans (SEDPs).

The participation and commitment of all actors in the country – government agencies, mass organisations, civil society organisations, private sector and NGOs in collaboration with donors – is needed to effectively meet the demands of planning for and responding to climate change. Mechanisms are needed to allow for innovation and capacity building and to ensure coordination.

KEY MESSAGE: Strong leadership, multi-stakeholder and cross-sectoral cooperation and coordination are essential to addressing the diverse impacts and causes of climate change.