

People's Participation Working Group (PPWG)

Strategy Paper 2008 - 2010

June 2008

1. OVERVIEW & BACKGROUND

1.1. Who is the PPWG?

The People's Participation Working Group (PPWG) was established in 1999 as part of a network of thematic Development Partnership Groups. As a partnership group, the PPWG is providing inputs to the Consultative Group (CG) meetings, held semi-annually between the government and donor committee. PPWG is an informal network and forum for international organisations, NGOs, government employees, donors, NGOs, project managers, consultants, researchers, etc. to meet and exchange information, ideas, and experiences.

PPWG is made up of a Steering Committee (SC), and a broad groups of members. Currently, there are 275 organisations and individuals, signed up to the email list, who take part in PPWG activities organised by the PPWG SC.

1.2. Our Mission

PPWG acts as a platform providing people and civil society organisations with opportunities to exchange information, participate and contribute to Vietnam's development and poverty reduction processes.

1.3. Revision of the PPWG Strategy

Since the *Doi Moi* reforms were launched in 1986, Vietnam has made great achievements in reducing the national poverty rate. In the period from 1998 to 2004, the poverty rate was brought down from 37.4 per cent to 19.5 per cent¹. During this period, Vietnam's political reforms have emphasised the importance of mobilising people nation-wide to further the country's development goals. This determination has been emphasised by a range of new policy developments relating to people's participation in development, such as the Grassroots Democracy Decree and Ordinance, and the new draft Planning Law², etc. As a result, during the past few years new spaces have been opening up for people's participation in Vietnam,³ which can be seen in aspects of government policies, national plans and programmes.

Since its establishment in 1999, various changes in Vietnam have offered new opportunities for the PPWG to play a role in sharing information and experiences on people's participation, civil society development and in relation to policy making.

In response to these broad range of changes since 1999, the PPWG decided to analyse the latest developments in Vietnam and update the PPWG strategy, including its overall goal and objectives, and strategic directions from 2008 to 2010. Originally, it was planned to develop a strategy for the period 2006-2010 to be fully aligned with the period of the government's Socio Economic Development Plan 2006-2010. However, due to the delays in the process, this strategy paper covers the shorter time frame of 2008-2010.

¹ Poverty and Poverty Reduction in Vietnam, 2007

² Context analysis, PPWG

³ CIVICUS Civil Society Index Study for Vietnam, 2005

The process of revising the strategy lasted from early 2007 until the end of May 2008 and used a strategic analysis framework that included a context and stakeholders analysis, an environmental scan and SWOT analysis, which are attached to this paper. Members of the SC fully participated in this process, and inputs and comments from PPWG members were sought during a consultation workshop held on May 6, 2008, in Hanoi.

As part of the strategy development the PPWG has also prepared an activity plan for the period 2008 to 2010, which form a separate document.

2. STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS & THEMATIC AREAS

2.1 Strategic Directions

Based on thorough analysis, which included past successes and unique propositions⁴, the PPWG will concentrate its future efforts and resources on the following three key strategic directions:

1. The PPWG acts as a platform for the exchange of information, knowledge and experiences for the benefit of its members. We do this through:

- tapping into the available information, knowledge, experiences and resources from the group's wide network of members;
- increasing the visibility of PPWG activities;
- improving linkages with the most relevant working groups and networks;
- improving input from and understanding of the PPWG members' interests, and refocusing PPWG's activities to be more systematic and strategic according to members' demands; and
- by improving the current internal governance structure of the PPWG.

2. PPWG promotes thematic dialogue amongst key stakeholders at different levels by:

- increasing the support for participation and input from a wider membership (e.g. VNGOs, other CSOs, mass organisations and relevant government agencies in and outside of Hanoi); and
- promoting needs-based and topical thematic issues relevant for enhanced people's participation and civil society development.

3. PPWG advocates for policies that enhance peoples' participation and civil society development based on evidence drawn from the grassroots level and research evidence from projects implemented by PPWG member. We do this through: by:

- researching, documenting, and communicating good practices and lessons learned by

⁴ PPWG is perceived by its members and external stakeholders as a unique forum due to its diverse membership base and of its focus areas, which can provide a space for topical discussions and debates otherwise difficult to be raised by single individual member organisations in other fora. PPWG can go broad, deep and open, which provides it with unique extra value.

- linking grassroots experiences and evidence with policy-making processes; and
- maximising evidence-based policy advocacy capacity of the PPWG.

2.2 Key Thematic Areas 2008 - 2010

PPWG has identified a number of themes and issues as key to people's participation and civil society development in Vietnam. These themes and issues will provide focus for the outputs and activities of the PPWG until 2010. The themes and issues include:

The changing legal and policy framework for people's participation and civil society.

During the past few years the Government of Vietnam has showed determination to promote the growth and increasing role of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and the active participation of people at all levels in promoting socio-economic development nation-wide⁵. Several legal documents have been or are in process of being drafted offering new opportunities for CSOs and the participation of people. As this legal framework is constantly changing it is important to take ongoing stock of the opportunities and implications provided by these changes.

Local governance. People's participation and CSO's roles are key in relation to local governance issues, including such as planning and budgeting processes, local legislative bodies, political representation at the local level, the electoral system, etc. As the legal framework is changing it is becoming even more important to focus on the practice of application and opportunities and constraints in this relation.

Civil society and Anti – Corruption. There is an increasing mention and emphasis of the role of the civil society in support of the Vietnamese Party-State's anti-corruption efforts. Currently, the government of Vietnam is in the process of drafting its long term anti- corruption strategy, period 2010-2020. Enhancement of the civil society's roles and contributions are among three key issues [1] to be dealt with in this strategy.

Socialisation (Xa Hoi Hoa). The concept entered currency to government policy with Resolution No. 90/CP (21.8.1997) on “directions and guidelines for socialization of activities and operations in the fields of education, health and culture” and then Decree No. 73/1999/ND-CP (19.8.1999) on “the policy of encouraging socialization of activities in the fields of education, health, culture, sports and games”. But the idea - of engaging the people in public service, either as collaborative groups or as private sector actors - is larger and more pervasive and appears in other areas as well.

In addition to the above four issues, the PPWG might also include other issues in response to new developments and interest of the members of the PPWG⁶.

⁵ VDR/PRSC Consultation Exercise, VUFO-NGO Resource Centre, 2006.

⁶ These might include, *Emerging Social Identity*: and how new ideas are integrated and reframing the meaning of older terms as a country develops.

3. HOW DO WE WORK?

3.1. Working Approach

PPWG is open to all those who have an interest in promoting people's participation in Vietnam. The group soundly believes in participatory development and advocates for greater involvement of local people, knowledge, priorities and skills as a key to sustainable development. PPWG conceives people's participation as a multi-dimensional process through which socially, politically and economically marginalised people and non-State actors increase their involvement in decision-making processes that affect their lives. The group is devoted to addressing and properly integrating into the Vietnamese context a number of key concepts related to participatory development such as grassroots democracy, civil society development, decentralisation and empowerment. PPWG approaches these concepts from an impartial perspective, acknowledging the fact that truly democratic systems cannot be imported, but must be home-grown and internally-led, and developed. The strengthening of the channels and mechanisms of people's participation, along with the creation of innovative participatory arrangements within existing local institutional frameworks, may contribute significantly to the enhancement and consolidation of any country's socio-economic development process.

The groups activities are based on the following key principles:

Diverse and open membership

Membership of the PPWG should include representatives from the NGO and donor community, as well as members from mass organisations, media and government agencies. All members should show a high degree of commitment to participate in the group's activities and work towards achieving its objectives.

Macro-micro linkages

As many PPWG members are engaged in community work to support direct grassroots participation, efforts are made to link their grassroots experiences with national policy making in order to make the group's advocacy efforts more effective.

Dialogue and information-sharing

The PPWG is not project-based in its operations. This means that it does not aim to seek funds for project implementation. Rather, PPWG serves as a channel to strengthen information-sharing and policy advocacy. Depending on the nature of the activities, resources (mostly in kind) will be mobilised from its members as voluntary contributions and on case-by case basis.

Demand-driven

While every organisation has their own mission, participation in the PPWG implies an appreciation of PPWG members' common needs/interests based on the real policy context. The group will respond to the needs of its members as much as possible, in order to provide timely inputs and contributions to policy development.

3.2. Operational Arrangements

Steering Committee & the Chairperson

The group's core membership covers different sections of Vietnamese society and currently includes both international and Vietnamese NGOs, as well as donor organisations. The membership is currently being broadened to also include government and Vietnamese mass organisations. Core Group members are proactive in identifying policy shifts or policy advocacy opportunities, and are experienced in public mobilisation. These members play an important role in directing the group to succeed in its objectives. Core membership will be reviewed every six months in order to enhance consistent participation.

The Chair of the PPWG is elected among Core Group members on a rotational basis. The choice of Chair is shared with the PPWG wider group for support before being finally endorsed.

An internal Operational Plan guides the operations of the Steering Committee, this document is separate from the strategy document.

PPWG – the broad group

The composition of PPWG is more diverse than that of the Core Group and includes all who have an interest in people's participation, grassroots democracy and civil society development in Vietnam. The PPWG comprises of people in and outside Vietnam, NGOs, mass organisations, various government agencies, international organisations, donor agencies, institutes, mass media, and individual researchers, etc. While the Core Group meets on regular basis, the wider group is invited to four-to-five thematic meetings yearly, which are organised by the Core Group. The PPWG wider group is equally consulted through the e-network to provide comments on certain papers and issues connected with the work of the Core Group.

3.3. Review & Reporting

PPWG has a semi-annual reporting cycle. The main report will be prepared for the the End-year Consultative Group (CG) meeting in the form of a separate PPWG report, or as part of the Partnership Report. The preparation of the report will including a number of key stakeholders, including Ministry of Home Affairs, while the broad PPWG group will be consulted on the draft report.

In extension of the annual PPWG report, an End-year PPWG meeting will be held to review the activities of the part year (review of the log frame) and plan activities for the year ahead. This will include a review of the existing thematic and issue focus themes of the group. The second reporting period is conducted to coincide with the Mid-term CG meeting in May/June.