BENCHMARK ASSESSMENT OF CIVIL SOCIETY SPACE IN VIETNAM

LE QUANG BINH, NGUYEN THI THU NAM, PHAM QUYNH PHUONG, PHAM THANH TRA

REFERENCE BOOK



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PUBLISHER'S FOREWORD

In a society based on the rule of law and market economy, the three spheres of the state, market, and civil society are often seen as indispensable pillars of the society's operation. In the context of Vietnam, the process of building a socialist rule of law-based state and socialist-oriented market economy has been progressively researched alongside its actual development. However, there has been little in-depth research on civil society due to many objective reasons. Besides, Vietnamese civil society organisations themselves are in formative stages, still remain relatively spontaneous, and cause much debate.

There have been some studies by domestic and foreign authors that attempt to describe the activities, classify and structure civil society in Vietnam. This research report may be seen as a continuation of those studies, with new approaches and research methods. A new academic feature here is the concept of "civil society space". "Benchmarking", or measurement of this space by quantitative indicators, is conducted by a process developed and tested rather strictly. This approach is quite innovative, highly effective, and sufficient to provide a new and thorough look on Vietnamese civil society as a multi-dimensional "space" of inside and outside operations and interactions, which is quantitatively measured and qualitatively analysed in an explicit way. As the authors confirm, this has been the first study in Vietnam that "uses quantitative methods to measure the perception of civil society space directly from the people who create and use this space" (Section 5: Conclusions).

Regarding the methodology, the researchers have built an analytical framework with 3 components and 33 indicators to measure the "dimensions" of civil society space, also with a measurement component of civil society's impacts on the values it pursues. These factors have allowed a detailed and comprehensive research into different "dimensions" of the civil society space, and particularly, they are not too complicated to follow, with logic and convincing evidence.

Although many points in this research report may be debated (for example in relation to the sample size, representativeness, or some biases in judgement), it can be affirmed that this study on the "hot" topic of present-day Vietnamese civil society has been conducted "systematically", with rigorous methods and in a captivating and persuasive way. The research report helps readers sense a quite realistic picture of the scale and scope of civil society space in Vietnam today - a multi-dimensional space whose enormous potentials have not yet been fully explored. At the same time, the report points out the challenges, obstacles, potentials and prospects for expanding this space in the near future.

The data, opinions, and comments are those of the authors. But readers who are researchers or policy makers will consult and discuss them further. The publishers strongly support publishing this study.

ABBREVIATION

APF	ASEAN People's Forum
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CEDAW	The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Wome
CIVICUS	World Alliance for Citizen Participation
CSI	Civil Society Index
CS0	Civil Society Organization
CSO Pride	Civil Society Organizations Pride
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
DFID	The Department for International Development of the United Kingdom
EU	European Union
EVN	Vietnam Electricity
FTA	Free Trade Agreement
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IA	Irish Aid
IDS	Institute for Development Studies
INGO	International Non-governmental Organization
iSEE	Institute For Studies of Society, Economy and Environment
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender
MTTQ	Father Land Front
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
PTTH	Secondary School
SOGI	Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity
TPP	Trans - Pacific Partnership
U&I	Unregistered and Independent Organization
UBND	People's Committee
UPR	Universal Periodic Review
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WTO	World Trade Organization
XHDS	Civil Society

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PREFACE

We feel extremely grateful and honoured to interview respondents who agreed to participate in our study. They represent different perspectives on civil society space on a basis of their experiences in the space created by themselves, and of which they form a part. But more importantly, their perceptions of this space are based on the limits they are reaching in their work. Only when they reach the limits of the space do they know where those limits are. We appreciate that they have expressed their experiences to make readers aware whether the space is wide or narrow.

We prepare this report as a synthesis of perceptions of civil society space from different perspectives. However, some accounts are not presented in this report, partly due to our limited ability to understand and demonstrate the feelings of respondents, and partly due to the boundaries set by the research team. This explains why we do not provide any particular personal names in this report, although we respect all of their views and stories.

We did not produce this report for any particular target audience or for the service of any stakeholders. We sought to understand the research questions from different perspectives, and then to present these different perspectives so that everyone has a chance to see other person's perspectives. We hope that the readers of this report will share it with us and look at it not only from their own interests or purposes, but for the sake of the future of Vietnamese society.

Bearing that in mind, we once again thank those who have participated in this research. We could not have completed the research without their sincerity and generosity.

The research team

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The views presented in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect the views of Oxfam, Irish Aid, DFID, Norwegian Embassy, or iSEE.

INTRODUCTION

Since 1986, when Vietnam began implementation of $\mathcal{D}\tilde{o}i$ mới ('Renovation') policies, many civil society spaces have been renewed and created. When international charities and development organisations entered Vietnam in the early 1990s, the concepts of 'non-governmental' and 'civil society' were gradually introduced to state agencies, beneficiary communities, and the society. The first Vietnamese non-governmental organisations were established as 'not-for-profit science and technology' organisations, alongside mass organisations of the state. Charity work was also resumed by the Vietnam Fatherland Front, unions and citizens. As the Internet appeared in Vietnam in 1997, the economy integrated more deeply and broadly, and citizens became more independent, civil society space has gradually opened further. More independent civil organisations have been established, active on policy criticism, human rights protection, and objection to Chinese expansion in the East Sea.

Civil society has become an attractive topic for domestic and international researchers. Some research focuses on the nature, role and components of Vietnamese civil society. For example, the research of Norlund (2007) categorises different organisational forms (mass organisations, professional associations, NGO, and community-based organisations). A study by CIVICUS (2006) categorises civil society into mass organisations, umbrella organisations, professional organisations, NGOs working on science and technology, other NGOs, informal groups, faith-based organisations and international NGOs.

Other researchers are more interested in the relationship between the government and civil society organisations. Kerkvliet and colleagues (2008) researched forms of engagement between civil society organisations and state agencies in four sectors: service delivery, conveying citizens' voices, monitoring and holding officials accountable, and policy and law-making. Wells-Dang (2012) analyses the nature of 'networks' of civil society with participation of individuals and organisations inside and outside the state to influence towards shared objectives. Thayer (2009) analyses the relationship of political civil society groups in opposition to the state, especially the dominant role of the Communist Party, so as to predict different future scenarios.

However, there has not yet been any deep research in Vietnam on civil society space, the degree of its breadth or narrowness, or the reasons for expansion or contraction of the space. Besides, previous studies seem to focus on a particular component of civil society. For example, CIVICUS studied registered 'official' organisations, while Thayer focused on groups which the government sees as having conflicting opinions, even as reactionary. No research to date has analysed the interaction among these components, and between them and the state, media and businesses.

This Benchmark Assessment of Civil Society Space in Vietnam is the first initiative to measure the space created and used by civil society actors. It aims at measuring the feelings of insiders about their space and indicates opportunities and challenges of opening the space. The research aims to provide stakeholders with understanding about Vietnamese civil society, contributing in changes in policies, practices, and cooperation towards shared objectives.

As this is the first research of its kind, there are surely some mistakes and shortcomings that need improvement. Firstly, as the sample size was smaller than expected, some important indicators, especially in the component of state regulation, are excluded from the measurement model. In the next assessment, it will be necessary to add a larger sample for rechecking to reflect factors affecting civil society space. Secondly, since the research assesses 33 different indicators, each of which merits a report of its own, it is impossible to deeply analyse each indicator. Besides, these indicators measure the views of people acting in civil society who may have different opinions compared to those of experts, or people belonging to the 'state' or 'market' sectors. Researchers interested in particular indicators may pursue the study in this direction. Thirdly, the research group had difficulty in 'categorising' interviewees, because they participate in many different groups and play many different roles. Therefore, some sections of this report, especially the one on cooperation among civil society groups, may fail to satisfy readers who expect clear categorisation of civil society's components. Finally, as research focussed on people active in civil society, it only reflects the view of insiders. This view may be different from that of people in the state or business sectors. This is a normal situation, but it can also foster new research topics to compare views on civil society space among different parts of society.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

'Space' is a relatively abstract concept. While 'place' refers to a particular and physical area, 'space' lays focus on feelings and experiences. 'Space' is not only physical or tangible, but also, more importantly, is cultural, social and experimental. Henri Lefebvre states: '(Social) space is a (social) product...Therefore, space is produced as a tool of ideology and action..., moreover, as a means of production, it also serves as a tool to control and thus to establish the rule of power.' As space is characterised by social construction and comprised of social relations, it is not static but always dynamic.

Whether civil society space is expanded or narrowed depends on three important factors. The first factor comprises social and cultural values that promote or restrict the development of civil society, as both the state and civil society are included in 'society'. The second factor is the capacity and agency of civil society agents in promoting their space of freedom. The stronger, the more proactive and the more cooperative civil society organisations (CSOs) are, the bigger the chance they can have to expand their space, and thus civil society space will be expanded. The third factor is the state's interventions in civil activities and its view of and attitude towards civil society. Arguably, the more tolerant the state towards civil society and the less its intervention in and control of civil society actors, the wider the civil society space as the presence and coverage of the state has been contracted.

Civil society space is not measured directly, but rather through three particular components as follows: 1) Social and cultural values; 2) Civil society capacity; and 3) State regulation. Each of these components is reflected through specific indicators. To verify whether changes of the three components will expand or narrow civil society space, a component on civil society impacts is added to indirectly assess

¹ Henri Lefebvre. 1991. The Production of Space. Donald Nicholson-Smith trans. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

the accuracy of the measurement tools produced by the first three components. The wider the operating space of civil society, the stronger the impacts civil society can make on society, and vice versa. After a single-factor model is run, the study shows that this model is completely applicable to measure civil society space.

Most respondents consider Vietnam's civil society space to be narrow. This is confirmed by the findings from the scales to measure civil society space. On a five-point scale, all components have lower scores than the mean (3); in particular, the component on state regulation has the lowest score, with only 2.24 points. The component on social and cultural values has the highest score, with 2.94 points, followed by the components on civil society impacts and capacity, with 2.92 and 2.91 points, respectively.

The component on civil society capacity has a highly positive correlation with civil society space overall (0.86), which reflects that the existing civil society space is determined chiefly thanks to civil society capacity. Similarly, the correlation between civil society capacity and the impacts of civil society is also strong (0.63), hence civil society capacity determines not only the extent of civil space but also its impacts on society. The correlation between state regulation and civil society space is very low (0.36), which makes it more evident that the extent of civil space depends more on capacity than on state regulation. As a result, investment in civil society capacity is an efficient and smart choice in expanding civil society space as well as overall social impacts.

Among the indicators in the component on social and cultural values, the indicators on 'public contributions to charitable activities' and 'the extent of interest in injustice' have relatively high scores, above the mean, with 3.12 and 3.65 points, respectively. However, the public's support for independent criticism and acceptance of ideological differences is very low, with only 2.63 and 2.64 points. Negative statements about civil society and civil activities such as social criticism, demonstrations, freedom of association and assembly have hindered people from participating in and supporting activities of civil society.

Some people argue that this issue can be tackled when the public has higher knowledge and awareness of policies and better understands deep-rooted causes of injustice and the socio-economic and cultural issues that they are facing.

Civil society capacity is shown through various indicators and remains rather poor. Over the recent years, the composition (3.97 points) and activities of civil society (3.77 points) have been increasingly diversified despite some gaps, particularly the roles of think-tanks, religious organisations, and universities. These are important links that can make impacts on the capacity and quality of civil society. The human resources of civil society are considered being strong in technical aspects but weak in civic activism (3.08 points). Financial capacity either depends on external sources, as with many registered NGOs, or is very limited, in cases of non-registered groups. Limited financial resources result in constraints in implementing broad and deep activities (2.51 points). Opportunities to mobilise resources from enterprises and the public have not yet opened, as most Vietnamese businesses are either closely linked to the government or keep their distance from it, and the public are not yet familiar with civil society activities. The cooperation amongst CSOs (2.88 points) has been improved recently despite many remaining challenges as a result of internal factors (lack of genuine respect and understanding of each other's roles) and external ones (restrictions from authorities). The relationship of civil society and the state (2.36 points) is very weak as a consequence of unequal relations, the 'ask-give' mechanism and the position of the state as controlling rather than supporting civil society. Relationships with the media (2.94 points) and international civil society (2.73 points) have been improved, especially thanks to the social network and the Internet, but remain limited.

The state has controlled civil society very strictly, even impeding some human rights groups or dissenting groups. Freedom of association (2.16 points) and freedom of activity (2.58 points) have not been protected, and it is more difficult to establish NGOs and associations in Ho Chi Minh City and southern provinces. Access to the Internet

has been expanded in Vietnam, but freedom of information (2.05 points) and freedom of expression on the Internet remain very limited. The publishing sector (2.37 points) is a 'leopard-spotted' picture, as freedom of publication has not been officially institutionalised but the reality is relatively relaxed with the partnership between private stakeholders and state publishers. Freedom of press is considered limited (2.27 points) as censorship and self-censorship still linger and the Press Law, which is being revised, has not recognised private press, with no mechanism to protect journalists, especially investigative ones. Freedom of fund raising was evaluated as the highest indicator, but remains below the mean score (2.93 points) as there is a lack of a clear legal framework, and fund-raising organisations and individuals are operating in a gray zone, without state interventions.

The impacts of civil society on protecting human rights have not been appreciated (2.94 points) as a consequence of NGOs' self-censorship, the state's impediments and limited capacity of CSOs. CSOs have not effectively and fully communicated the voice of minorities groups (3.07 points), primarily due to a lack of CSOs of these groups, or a lack of civil society's understanding of and sensitivity to their needs and rights. The impacts on the state's accountability are also limited (2.44 points) due to a lack of a legal framework to protect these rights. However, in combination with the mass media and the public, social networks and civil society groups have created precedents. For instance, the Health Minister has used Facebook to 'explain' her positions, and the Hanoi People's Committee stopped the tree-cutting scandal. Civil society impacts on gender inequality (3.14 points) and poverty reduction (3.18 points) are appreciated more highly, but breakthrough approaches are needed to produce stronger impacts. In particular, it is necessary to tackle deep-rooted causes of gender inequality (the power relationship between men and women) and poverty (corruption, wastefulness, and dependence-generating policies). Finally, civil society's impact on a culture of democracy remains weak (2.84 points), chiefly as a consequence of limited capacity and knowledge, as well as the fact that many CSOs have not yet implemented democratic practices, either internally, among different organisations, or between them and society. As many as 61 percent of the research respondents believe that despite remaining narrow, civil society space has expanded over the last three years, and respondents hope that this space will further expand in the future. One of the main causes is that the wide use of the Internet and social media have made people more knowledgeable, thus giving them better chances to express their voices and connect with each other. In addition, the establishment of new free-standing groups, even antagonistic ones, has pushed the boundaries, thus expanding the civil space. The transformation of NGOs through policy advocacy, social movements, and especially the development of volunteer youth and charity groups has created much new space. The transformation in cooperation, coordination and mutual respect amongst civil society groups has increased operational effectiveness and formed the conditions for civil society space to be expanded further.

Vietnamese civil society is now at an important stage of development due to the ongoing expansion of space, established cooperation, and a series of new laws being prepared by the state, such as the Law on Association, the Law on Access to Information, the Law on Demonstration, and the Press Law. Arguably, the impacts of civil society on social, political and economic life have increased in the direction of democracy, transparency and liberalisation. However, Vietnamese civil society remains at a stage of learning, experimenting and developing. Civil society has not yet coalesced and does not yet have sufficient human, financial and influencing resources to become an important pillar in society. Civil society should continue to be nurtured and promoted for at least an additional 5-10 years so that NGOs become more independent financially and stronger in social mobilisation skills, non-registered groups become stronger in civil activism, and new civil agents such as think-tanks, religious organisations and universities become engaged more proactively in civil activism. Especially, youth and student groups have now grown up and become a major force in civil society networks, possessing not only knowledge and skills but also values of equality, freedom and tolerance.

1 CIVIL SOCIETY AND CIVIL SOCIETY SPACE

1.1. CONCEPTS OF CIVIL SOCIETY

The term 'civil society' originates from ancient Greek political ideology, implying social cooperation for survival. In the early days, 'civil society' means the same as 'state'. Civil society is not viewed as being separated from community and politics. According to Keane², the gradual separation of civil society from the state began in the 17th century. With the development of the mercantilist state in Europe in the 18th century, civil society - until then still considered as a commodity sector that competes according to market demands – has since been viewed as a public sector that has been protected and separated from family and the state³. In the modern form as it is now, civil society is considered originating from Adam Ferguson who argues that civil society emerged in the Enlightenment Period in the 18th century in Scotland. But Ferguson does not believe that civil society can be separated from politics: 'society cannot be separated from its state form, as an economic person cannot be separated from a political person'4. In the 19th century, the notion of civil society was forgotten as interests had been shifted to social and political consequences of the industrial revolution. After World War II, the notion of civil society was revived by Antonio Gramsci who viewed 'civil society' as a special weapon of independent political action.

Over the past decades, this concept has increasingly become popular, with the growth of democratic social movements⁵. Nowadays, in the

² John Keane, ed. 1988. Civil Society and the State. New York: Verso.

³ Muthiah Alagappa, (2004). Civil Society and Political Change in Asia: Expanding and Contracting Democratic Space. Stanford University Press. California.

⁴ Ferguson, A. 1995. An Essay on the History of Civil Society. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁵ Cohen, J.L and Arato, A. 1992. Civil Society and Political Theory. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

modern era, the term 'civil society' carries a variety of meanings. It means an intermediary territory between individuals and the state, the world of non-profit and charity organisations, or a network of NGOs. Using the term 'civil society', we refer to a domain where groups, movements and individuals organise themselves, with relative autonomy from the state, making efforts to disseminate values and creating associations and unity, as well as demonstrating their interests. Civil society may include 'multi-layer social movements... and citizens' associations from different social strata'⁶. Generally, several interpretations of civil society are currently used:

- Civil society as a normative idea: an ideal type of social organisations outside state control;
- Civil society as public space protected institutionally from the state's intrusion, where individuals enjoy freedom of association;
- Civil society as a combination of associations/organised groups whose members proactively take collective actions for the common good;
- Civil society as 'citizens' movements' (as opposed to state institutions and commercial firms).

On the other hand, the term 'civil society' is often theorised around seven basic aspects (Sievers 1999):

- Non-profit voluntary institutions;
- Individual rights;
- The common good;
- The rule of law;
- Philanthropy;
- Free expression; and
- Tolerance.

Despite various interpretations, civil society is commonly understood with two basic aspects, namely pluralism and social benefit. For more information on the relationship between civil society and the state, see Appendix 2 at the end of this report.

⁶ Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan. 1996. Problems of democratic transition and consolidation. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. p. 8.

1.2. CIVIL SOCIETY SPACE

Which factors determine civil society? 'Space' is a fairly abstract notion. Different from 'place' as a particular and physical area, 'space' lays focus on perceptions and experiences. 'Space' is not only physical but also tangible and, more importantly, cultural, social and experimental. Space itself is a social product, or a complex social construction on a basis of social values and products of meanings, regulating perceptions and the ways the people practice society⁷. That space is not characterised by natural geographical features created by urban planners and architects, although they play a considerably role in designing physical space for that society. In fact, social space is created by individuals who live there. In his work 'Critique of daily life', Lefebvre states: '(social) space is a (social) product... Therefore, space is produced as a tool of ideology and action... Moreover, as a means of production, it is also a means to control, and subsequently to establish the rule of power.'8 As space is characterised by social construction, and comprised of social relations, it is not static, but always dynamic.

Within civil space, both the state and society are social systems with their components bound by universal and unified value systems. Through laws, bureaucracy and other means, the state plays an influential role to create changes in social life. Therefore, arguably, the less state interference, the wider civil society space. However, not only the state creates changes, which here refers to civil society space, but society or community itself also makes impacts to generate and maintain distinct ways to build daily life. According to Habermas's concept of the public sphere, the capacity of agents engaged in civil society, who are actors, not only users of that space, will contribute to expanding civil society space. A democracy-building process will take place, not through institutions themselves, but in the context of daily life, in efforts to produce democratic values through social, cultural and political relations (Habermas 1996). As a result, democratisation lies at

⁷ Henri Lefebvre (1991). The Production of Space. Donald Nicholson-Smith trans. Oxford: Basil Blackwell

⁸ Henri Lefebvre (1991) The Critique of Everyday Life, Volume 1, John Moore trans., London: Verso.

the junction between the state, political institutions and civil society⁹. From a different perspective, Cohen and Arato (1992) argue that while communication forms in the political sphere, such as old-fashioned ones, may be strictly limited, 'new publics' have emerged, expanded, and diversified in both form and substance of communication. And this change at the lower level has transformed official political institutions¹⁰.

Therefore, basically, whether civil society space is expanded or narrowed depends on three important factors. The **first** factor is an environment or context that promotes or restricts the development of civil society, as both the state and civil society are included in 'society'. In other words, if a society has values and belief in freedom, democracy, ideological pluralism, and self-reliance of the people, it will have a foundation for CSOs to develop, which stands for the expanded space of civil society. On the contrary, the weaker these values, the harder the development of CSOs and the more contracted the civil society space.

The **second** factor is the capacity and agency of civil society agents in promoting their space of freedom. The stronger, the more proactive and the more cooperative CSOs, the bigger the chance they can have to expand their space, and thus civil society space will be expanded. In addition, the presence and outcomes of civil society's activities also contribute to enhancing the status of civil society organisations and space.

The **third** factor is the state's interventions in civil activities and its view of and attitude towards civil society. Arguably, the more tolerant the state towards civil society and the less its intervention in and control of civil agents, the wider the civil society space (as the presence and

⁹ Natalia Massaco Koga. 2012. Shifts in the relationship between the state and civil society in Brazil's recent democracy. PhD thesis, University of Westminster.

¹⁰ Koga, 2012, ibid

coverage of the state has been contracted). Conversely, if the state controls, prevents activities of civil agents, or discourages access to resources, the civil society space will contract.

2 METHODS TO MEASURE CIVIL SOCIETY SPACE

2.1. CONCEPTS

To measure civil society space is challenging as the concept of civil society has not been agreed upon theoretically and practically. In practice, depending on socio-political circumstances in each country, the formulation, components, and activities of civil society may vary. However, if civil society space is what stakeholders in civil society have created in society, then that space will depend on the policy environment, conditions of and relations with the state, the private sector and the public as a whole.

In this study, the notion of civil society space is comprised of three components: 1) **Social and cultural values** relating to the values that civil society pursues; 2) **Civil society's capacity** to realise its mission;

and 3) **State regulation** of civil society. Components 2 and 3 are specific conditions that make impacts on civil society space. These two components are correlated. For instance, when civil society has good capacity and strengthens its activities, the state's regulations and policies on civil society will be changed, thus expanding civil society space. But these correlations may be at different degrees, and other factors may also affect this correlation. Component 1 is the potential for civil society to promote their activities and the influential factor on the state's attitude towards civil society. On the other hand, society's fundamental value is a dynamic factor that changes over time as a result of the impacts of socio-economic development, including those of civil society. Consequently, the three components of civil society space are correlated.

With the notion of civil society space as defined above, measurement and comparison of this space over time will not depend on the structure of civil society if this structure is determined at the beginning and stable, specifying who make up civil society, or the concept of civil society is clarified. As a matter of course, the change in the quantity of each part in the civil society structure will make an impact on civil society space in general. But if there is no major change in the composition of civil society, it will be easier to compare results of measured civil society space over time.

In Vietnam, civil society has not been conceptualised officially, at least in state policy documents. On the basis of some previous studies, such as research by Norlund (2007), CIVICUS (2006), and Kerkvliet et al (2008), the research team determined that Vietnam's civil society in this assessment includes non-state organisations that are not state-funded, such as NGOs, independent associations, community organisations, clubs, self-help groups, interest groups, independent individuals, rights activists, bloggers and social network groups. Although international NGOs in Vietnam have made considerable actual contributions to general activities of civil society in the country, we exclude them from this assessment because we prefer to concentrate on spaces opened by domestic civil society actors.

2.2. COLLECTING QUANTITATIVE INFORMATION

Analysis of some instruments to measure civil society, including civil society space, developed by USAID, CIVICUS and others¹¹ (see Appendix 3), shows some controversial issues, such as (i) application of the same indicators in countries with different concepts of civil society; (ii) evaluation /scoring depending on a group of claimed experts in civil society in countries; (iii) qualitative data 'converted' to quantitative ones. This study has avoided these constraints because:

- The indicators have been continued and developed to measure the change of civil society space over time in the Vietnamese context;
- The result of measurement is the evaluation of all stakeholders in civil society through quantitative scoring scales, not depending only on a group of experts.

The study combines both quantitative and qualitative methods, including:

- Desk review of the related studies and references;
- Preparation of indicators to measure civil society space;
- Piloting of indicators; and
- Use of survey questionnaires and in-depth interviews with representatives from various components in civil society.

2.3. DEVELOPMENT OF MEASUREMENT INDICATORS

As mentioned in the section on conceptualisation, the structure or composition of civil society is very diverse, not only including registered NGOs. Therefore, it is very difficult to quantify the composition to understand the study sample. From their work contacts, the research team produced a list of 200 organisations, groups, associations and independent individuals. With such a small research sample, it

¹¹ Kees Biekart (2008). Measuring Civil Society Strength: How and for Whom? Development and Change, 39 (6): 1171–1180. Joseph Hannah (2007). Local Non-Government Organizations in Vietnam: Development, Civil Society and State-society Relations. (Doctor of Philosophy Dissertation). University of Washington.

required a lot of time and resources to develop indicators and ensure validity. In addition, as valid indicators to measure civil society have been developed and used in many countries, the research team decided to build on the indicators relevant to the development context in Vietnam and add some other relevant indicators.

As mentioned in Section 2.1 on Concepts, civil society space cannot be measured directly but through the three components that make up or reflect that space: 1) Social and cultural values; 2) Capacity of civil society; and 3) State regulation. Two important questions are: Do these components actually help measure civil society space? What can verify that the change of the three components would expand or narrow civil society space? To answer the questions, the research team decided to use the component of 'civil society impacts' to indirectly evaluate the validity of measurements in the three components. The wider the operating space of civil society, the stronger its impacts on society, and vice versa.

The research team selected indicators of the corresponding measured components that are relevant to the current development context in Vietnam. Each indicator is prepared to reflect one single content in a clear and easy-to-understand manner, and is scored according to the Likert scale range from one to five in ascending order for each content. The results are 43 indicators reflecting four measured components, including three that make up civil society space, namely Social and Cultural Values; Capacity of Civil Society; and State Regulation, and one that indirectly demonstrates civil society space, namely Civil Society Impacts.

After the research team had finalised the indicators, a small group of civil society experts were invited to assess their relevance. The group included individuals who were involved in working networks on various civil society issues in Hanoi. They would shortlist and select the most relevant indicators that best reflect important aspects of the measured components. At the same time, the expert group helped revise the language and contents within the indicators. They decided to

add two indicators and remove 10 irrelevant ones. Finally, 33 indicators were selected, including seven reflecting social and cultural values relating to the values that civil society pursues, nine reflecting capacity of civil society, nine reflecting state regulation, and eight reflecting civil society impacts (see Appendix 5).

2.4. PILOTING THE INDICATORS

A questionnaire including research background, social and demographic information, and measurement indicators was piloted face to face with 30 representatives selected from a list of 200 people who represented different strata of civil society (NGOs, independent individuals, community organisations, associations and networks), regions and genders. The composition of the 30 selected representatives is described in Appendix 4. The researchers provided the 30 representatives with information about the research and with questionnaires for them to fill in. The researchers asked some questions to assess the acceptability and clarity of the questionnaire:

- How long does it take to respond to each questionnaire?
- Is the introduction of the research and the concept of civil society used in the research acceptable?
- Are the indicators in the questionnaire easy to understand?

After collecting feedback from the 30 representatives, the research team revised the questionnaire. The time to respond to the questionnaire lasted between 10 and 20 minutes. Some questions were revised to be easier to understand. The total number of measurement indicators remained 33.

3 DATA COLLECTION and analysis

3.1. COLLECTING QUANTITATIVE DATA

The quantitative questionnaire was released on Survey Monkey for online responses. The link of the survey was emailed to different strata of civil society, as informed by the research team from various sources. As many as 200 emails were sent, but only 106 responses were received in nearly two months. The research team continued to ask the respondents to engage their acquaintances and colleagues within civil society. A week later, an additional 46 people responded. Due to the time requirement of the research, the team decided to stop collecting quantitative data within a sample of 152 people, which was fewer than the intended 200. Nevertheless, this sample size was sufficient for statistical data analysis.

3.2. ANALYSING QUANTITATIVE DATA

3.2.1. Factor analysis in developing indicators to measure civil society space

Factor analysis applies to each component to determine indicators reflecting that component in the following steps: 1) testing the hypothesis on the degree of correlation amongst indicators of each component (testing internal consistency, including Alpha and itemremainder co-efficient) (Paul, 1992); 2) developing a measurement model for each component using the maximum likelihood (ML) method to find the number of hidden factors in the model of each concept; using the Eigen value and the Scree plot to determine the number of factors; and Oblimin rotation methods with an assumption that the factors in that concept model are correlated (Cunningham, 2008:3) testing the relevance of the hidden factor model with the

indicators determined by confirmatory factor analysis through such numerical values as RMSEA, GFI, RMR, and CFI.

Factor analysis for developing indicators is carried out in a full sample, i.e. when respondents assessed all measurement indicators in the questionnaire (those who did not fully assess the indicators chose the 'no answer' or 'don't know' options). The rates of respondents who chose 'don't know' ranged from 0 to 14.5 percent while the rate of respondents who chose 'no answer' ranged from 0 to 12.5 percent. Generally, both rates increased according to the sequence order of the indicators in the questionnaire. This might reflect the fact that the respondents tended to gradually discontinue providing information. In the total of 152 respondents, only 68 fully assessed the degree of all measurement indicators. This sample size is relatively small but remained minimum for factor analysis of each component if Tabachnick and Fidell (2001)'s rule applies, which requires a minimum of five samples for an indicator for each factor analysis.

The last model is a 'one factor analysis' of civil society space. Now average scores of indicators in each component act as values of each component reflecting civil society space, including average scores of social and cultural values; capacity of civil society; and state regulation. With an assumption that this factor model actually reflects civil society space, the factor should be correlated with civil society impacts, i.e. the more expanded the civil society space, the stronger the impacts of civil society, and vice versa. In other words, the indicator on civil society impacts was used to test the concurrent validity of the factor model of civil society. The steps of factor analysis for each component apply to the indicators to measure civil society impacts to find the indicators reflecting this component.

As a result, the one-factor model of civil society space with reflecting values being average scores of **social and cultural values; capacity of civil society; state regulation** and **civil society impacts** must be statistically significant, demonstrated in the relevant indicators of the model as described above.

3.2.2. Analysing measured values of components of civil society space in the master sample

With a view to quantifying components reflecting civil society space, the research team selected measurable indicators that are relevant to the analysis in the above section. Two types of evaluation were employed: one for each indicator and another for the combined components reflecting civil society space. The evaluated score of each indicator is an average of all scores in the research sample. The evaluated score of each component is an average of indicators in each component after cases with missing data were excluded. These scores are not weighted according to the distribution of civil society strata in the sample relative to the population, since the total size of various civil society strata could not be determined.

As factor analysis for this study is only exploratory due to a small sample, the research team still calculated scores of indicators excluded from factor analysis. Results of the qualitative analysis relating to these indicators are presented in Appendix 1.

The study employed descriptive statistics to depict samples and evaluation results of measurement indicators. Linear regression, logistic regression and tests to compare rates and average scores were used to look for factors relating to evaluation results of the components and to compare results amongst socio-demographic variables.

3.3. COLLECTING QUALITATIVE INFORMATION

In parallel to collecting data to quantify indicators of the components of civil society space, the research team conducted in-depth interviews with 30 people, who were the same respondents selected to pilot the survey questionnaire. It can be seen that the 30 respondents joining in-depth interviews are actively engaged, have analytical ability, and understand activities of civil society in general and of their own areas in particular. They are outstanding experts in their technical fields and in activism. The interviews focussed on concepts of civil society

space, factors that affect the change of civil society space, and direct perceptions of the extent and change of civil society space over the last three recent. In-depth interviews were conducted for 60-90 minutes in private venues selected by the respondents. They were recorded with respondents' permission.

3.4. ANALYSING QUALITATIVE DATA

Qualitative information in word processing format was coded according to the measured components. Contents of the measurement indicators are sub-codes of each component. Most of the collected qualitative information could be captured in these codes. In addition, in-depth interviews produced some information on concepts of civil society space and changes in civil society space over the past three years.

Analysis of qualitative data was based on the representativeness and diversity of information in each code. Findings from each code and linkage of the findings is based on phenomenology to understand interpretation and perceptions through insiders' experiences. The findings from qualitative analysis included explanation of quantitative data and additional information on each component that quantitative indicators cannot measure.

While processing information, for the sake of confidentiality, we removed personal information of respondents and organisations related. In quotations, we keep respondents' original statements. But we edited some quotations to avoid wordiness, deleting slang or words irrelevant to respondents' main messages.

3.5. RESEARCH ETHICS

Respondents were involved in the study voluntarily, and the researchers keep their personal information confidential. All recorded data have been transcribed into a word processing form, personal information has been coded, and all recorded data was deleted afterwards. As much

information from in-depth interviews is personal, with qualitative analysis, in addition to data quoted from interviews, we provided general arguments produced from the data.

3.6. DISCUSSION ON RESEARCH METHODS

Different from general scale measurement depending on scoring from various data sources, which has been used in many countries, the indicators of this study provided findings only based on pure evaluation of civil society strata. In other words, the findings from evaluating the actual situation of civil society space reflect only the views of insiders who were interviewed. Therefore, generalised arguments come from direct evaluations, avoiding subjective evaluations of the expert group with their final scores based on other secondary data sources. Although evaluation results in indicators or general scores in each component are not based on other secondary sources such as information on policies and regulations, evaluated scores based on perceptions of civil society members who were involved in the study also reflect and are affected by the management environment and state policies. Therefore, data collection methods in this study are relevant to measure the actual situation of the components of civil society space.

This study reflects only views of civil society actors, not the views of policy makers or other social strata on civil society space. This does not in any way reduce the value of the research findings, since the purpose of the research is to understand which factors should be improved to optimise contributions of civil society to the country's common development. Policy documents may be 'dry' secondary information sources if the policy implementation is inadequate. It is uncertain that administrators and policy makers would evaluate their work performance in an objective manner. Meanwhile, civil society stakeholders can be seen as policy-using agents through whom practicality and efficiency of policies can be explored. Consequently, civil society space in this study is the actual space of the agents which use that space, not the space felt by the agents and entities outside civil society.

4 RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1. CHARACTERISTICS OF CIVIL SOCIETY RESPONDENTS TO THE SURVEY

As discussed, the total of survey respondents is 152, and some of their characteristics are described in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Characteristics of survey respondents

Total respondents	152			
Average age	39.9			
Age range of respondents	20 - 83 years old			
Age groups	(%)	(numbers)		
Below 30	28.4%	42		
30-39	28.4%	42		
40-49	20.3%	30		
50-59	11.5%	17		
60 or more	11.5%	17		
Gender				
Men	39.5%	60		
Women	57.2%	87		
Others	3.3%	5		
Education				
Upper secondary and equivalent	13.4%	20		
University graduates	31.5%	47		
Postgraduates	55.0%	82		

Place of residence		
Hanoi	54.4%	80
Ho Chi Minh City	27.2%	40
14 other cities/provinces	18.4%	27
Type of organisation		
Independent individuals	11.9%	18
NGOs	49.3%	75
CBOs, clubs, groups	26.3%	40
Foundations	0.7%	1
Forums, networks	0.7%	1
Independent associations	7.2%	11
Unknown	3.9%	6

As many as 73% of respondents who work in groups/organisations have registered their operation. For those groups which have not registered their operation, the main reason is that their groups/organisations have not met conditions to register (37.5%), have not decided whether or not to register (21.1%), or do not want to register (12.5%).

As social media are mentioned rather frequently among civil society's activities, the survey respondents were asked about their frequency and purpose of using Facebook. The findings show that Facebook is used commonly. Only 7.5% never used Facebook. The frequency of using Facebook is relatively high. As many as 80% of the respondents used it at least once a day, and 94% used Facebook for various purposes, with most of them for connecting with friends and relatives (83.3%), and 62.2% for work.

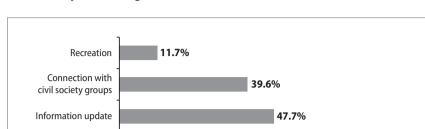


Chart 1: Purpose of using Facebook

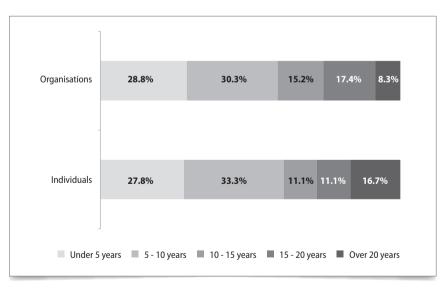
Study, knowledge

Connection with friends

Work

Duration of respondents participating in civil society activities are broken down in two groups, namely organisations and independent individuals, as presented in Chart 2. But differences in the rates do not have statistical significance.

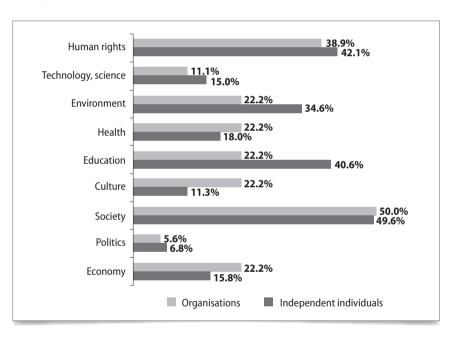




83.8%

Regarding work areas, around 50% of independent individuals and organisations are involved in social domains. A considerable share of individuals and organisations work in the areas of human rights (38.9% and 42.1%, respectively). A very small number of respondents claimed that they themselves or their organisations work in the political domain (only 5.6% and 6.8%, respectively). Amongst independent individuals, 61.1% work in multiple areas (two or more), but it is important to note that only 18 independent individuals participated in the survey. As many as 59.4% of the groups/organisations function in multiple areas.

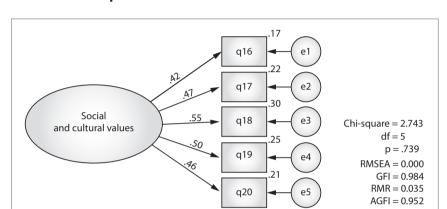




Therefore, the composition of survey respondents is rather diverse, representing various stakeholders, work areas and regions of Vietnam's civil society.

4.2. THE FINDINGS OF FACTOR ANALYSIS IN DEVELOPING SCALES TO MEASURE COMPONENTS OF CIVIL SOCIETY SPACE

4.2.1. The component on fundamental social and cultural values



Model 1: The component on social and cultural values

The indicator of action regarding 'the extent of citizens' contributions to charitable activities' is retained in the model, but its nature is different from the indicators in Q14 and Q15. Other indicators, such as RMSEA, GFI, RMR, and AGFI, have demonstrated their relevance to the factor model.

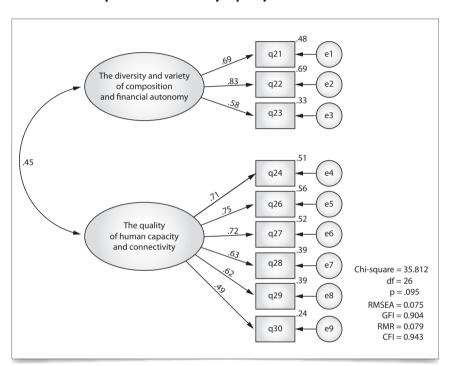
As a result, the component on the fundamental social values is measured through the following five indicators:

- O16: The extent of citizens' contributions to charitable activities;
- Q17: The extent of citizens' support to independent social criticism;
- Q18: The extent of citizens' acceptance of ideological differences;
- Q19: The extent of citizens' interest in social injustice; and
- Q20: The extent of citizens' interest in political activities, such as elections, law making, policy making and the Party Congress.

In the initial questionnaire, this component had seven indicators (questions), but factor analysis resulted in removal of two questions (Q14 – citizens' proactiveness in handling community issues; and Q15 – citizens' linkages to tackle common issues).

4.2.2 Civil society capacity

An analysis of the acceptance factor for all 9 civil society capacity gauging indicators.



Model 2: The component of civil society capacity

The indicators Q21, Q22 and Q23 reflect the diversity and variety of composition and financial autonomy of each civil society component. Meanwhile, the indicators of the remaining factors reflect of the quality of human capacity, connectivity and performance of civil society in relation with other sectors of society. All the indicators confirm the appropriateness of the model. No indicators are taken out of the model.

As such, the component of civil society capacity is measured by the 9 indicators below:

- Q21: The variety of civil society composition (associations, community organisations, NGOs, independent activists, etc.)

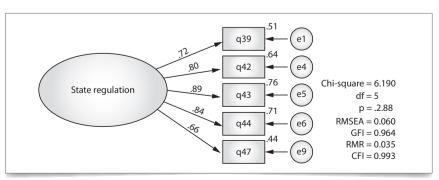
- Q22: Diversity in civil society activities (projects, philanthropy, capacity building, social movements, advocacy, demonstrations, strikes, sit-ins, etc.)
- Q23: The extent of civil society's financial autonomy
- Q24: The quality of civil society's human capacity
- Q25: The extent of social media use in civil society activities
- Q26: The extent of mutual cooperation among CSOs
- Q27: The extent of cooperation between CSOs and State agencies
- Q28: The extent of cooperation between CSOs and businesses
- Q29: The extent of cooperation between CSOs and media
- Q30: The extent of connectivity between Vietnamese and regional/ international civil societies

4.2.3. The component of State regulation of civil society

The component of State regulation is measured by the following 5 indicators:

- Q39: The extent of the State's protection of people's freedom of association
- Q42: The extent of the State's protection of people's right to access to information (the right to request and receive information and data held by public agencies)
- Q43: The extent of the State's protection of freedom of publishing and disseminating literary and artistic products
- Q44: The extent of the State's protection of press freedom
- Q47: The extent of civil society's freedom in fundraising





In this model, 4 of the 9 indicators have been taken out. The following indicators are excluded:

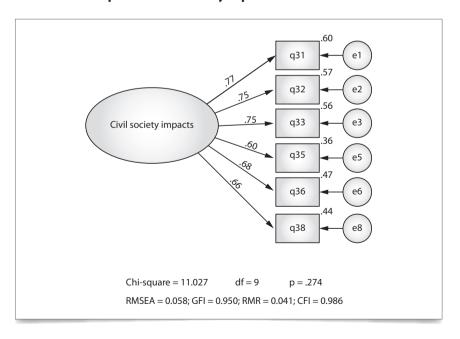
- Q40: Freedom in the organisation of civil society activities
- Q41: The State's protection of freedom of demonstration
- Q45: The State's protection of Internet freedom
- Q46: The State's tolerance of civil society supervision over policy

It is noted that of the excluded indicators, Q41 shows the highest rate of people who said they had no idea or refused to reply. These corresponding rates for the other indicators are 14.5% and 12.5% respectively.

4.2.4 The component of civil society impacts

A second-degree analysis of 8 indicators, including Q34 that is on 'civil society impact on State policy' and Q37 on 'civil society impact on people's awareness of social issues'.

Model 4: The component of civil society impacts

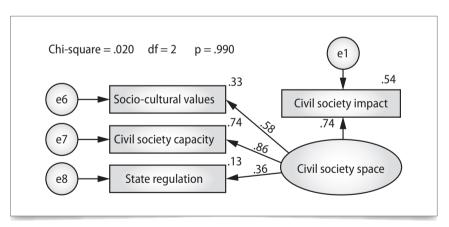


The component of civil society impacts is gauged by the following six indicators.

- Q31: The extent of civil society impact on the protection of human rights
- Q32: The extent of civil society's representation of the voices of minorities and disadvantaged groups
- Q33: The extent of civil society impact on gender equality
- Q35: The extent of civil society impact on poverty reduction
- Q36: The extent of civil society impact on the accountability of public agencies
- Q38: The extent of civil society impact on the practice of democratic culture in society

4.2.5. The model of components reflecting civil society space

The aggregation of civil society components into civil society space is reflected in the following model.



Model 5: Components that comprise civil society space

The single-indicator Civil Society Space model with the reflecting components of civil society capacity; State regulation and civil society impacts as the value of evaluation is totally appropriate. In other words, the combination of indicators for each component will produce a measuring scale of civil society space.

4.3. THE RESULTS OF CIVIL SOCIETY SPACE MEASUREMENT

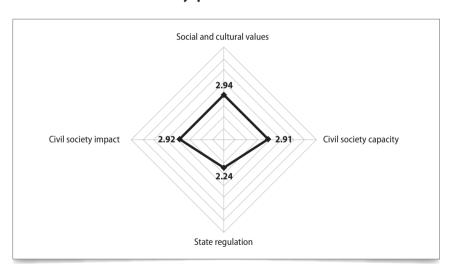
4.3.1. Civil society space

Civil society space is reflected indirectly through the components that have been evaluated as mentioned above. This scale is used to gauge civil society space. The score assigned to each component is the average of all indicators of the component after removing the cases where no full reply was given to the component's indicators with the choice of 'no reply' or 'no idea'. The achieved results are presented below on a five-point scale.

- Component of social and cultural values: 2.94
- Component of civil society capacity: 2.91
- Component of State regulation: 2.24
- Component of civil society impact: 2.92

The results are shown in the following model.

Model 6: Vietnamese civil society space



Looking at this model, we see the score of the component of state regulation is the lowest, accurately reflecting the quantitative results that will be shown in the following section. The other components have scores rather equal to each other. However, all the components have a score under 3, which shows that civil society space is limited as illustrated in the following chart.

25% 20% 15% 10% 5.0% Very limited 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 Very open

Chart 4: Survey respondents' opinions about civil society space (scale from 1-10)

4.3.2. Correlations among civil society space components

The relevance between the components and civil society space and among the components is shown in the following table:

Table 2: Correlations among civil society space components

	Civil society space	State regulation	Civil society capacity	Socio-cultural values	Civil society impacts
Civil society space	1.00				
State regulation	0.36	1.00			
Civil society capacity	0.86	0.31	1.00		
Socio-cultural values	0.58	0.21	0.50	1.00	
Civil society impacts	0.74	0.26	0.63	0.43	1.00

Note: Higher scores indicate stronger correlation

In the results shown in Table 2, we see civil society space highly correlated to civil society impacts (0.74). So it is possible to accept the hypothesis that the extension of civil society space is closely associated with civil society impacts.

Civil society capacity is most highly correlated to civil society space (0.86) as compared with the 2 other components. This shows that civil society actors are playing an important role in extending their own operational space. Similarly, the relevance between civil society capacity and civil society impacts is also high (0.63). So when civil society capacity is strong, actors will not only be able to extend their own space but also impact society.

State regulation has the lowest/weakest relevance with civil society space (0.36). This shows that while the state is taking a strict control of civil society, actors are still able to open up space for themselves in different ways (this will be discussed in the qualitative assessment section). Moreover, as they get stronger, they can 'negotiate' with the state to stretch civil society space.

4.4. The results of assigning the gauging scale to each component and civil society assessment of each indicator

In the following sections, the results will be presented.

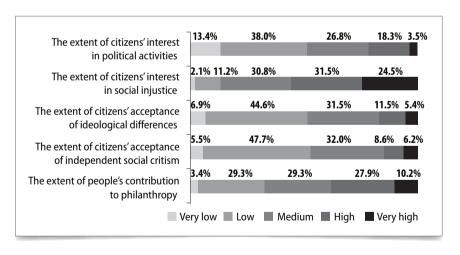
- The value of each indicator: is the average score of all values after the cases of missing data with the choice of 'no reply' or 'no idea'.
- The value of each component that reflects civil society space: is the average score of all indicators of the component after the cases where no complete answers were given to the indicators of that component with the choice of 'no reply' or 'no idea'.
- Analysis of civil society on every indicator based on the results of in-depth interviews with 30 representatives of different strata of civil society.

As respondents come from different socio-demographic groups, the researchers made comparisons of demographic characteristic between respondents that gave complete answers to the indicators of each component and those that gave incomplete answers with a view to assessing the probability of error when the participants skipped or failed to answer questions.

4.4.1. Socio-cultural values (2.94 points)

There were 113 people who gave full answers to the indicators of this component. When asked about socio-cultural values, the percentage of non-respondents on each question ranged from 3.1% to 4.6%. The percentage of people who said they had no idea was the largest on the questions about the assessment of people's support for independent social criticism (10.5%) and about people's tolerance of ideological differences (7.9%).

Chart 5: Distribution of the assessments on indicators of the socio-cultural values component



Out of a maximum score of 5, the socio-cultural values component gets 2.94, the highest of all components but still under the mean score of 3. The specific scores of each indicator are shown in the chart below.

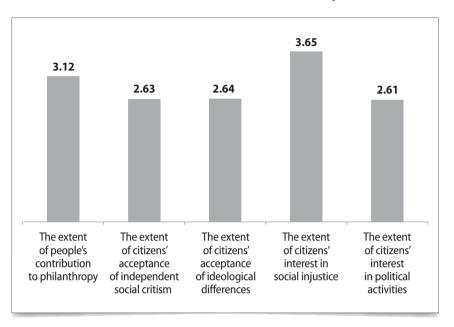


Chart 6: Scores of indicators in the socio-cultural values component

There was no difference in terms of statistical significance in the average scores of indicators among different socio-demographic groups (education, residence, type of organisation and age group).

Only the indicators on people's contribution to philanthropy and people's concern about social injustice received scores above the mean, respectively being 3.12 and 3.65.

The details about the indicators relevant to the socio-cultural environment are discussed below.

4.4.1.1 The extent of people's contribution to philanthropy (3.12 points)

Basically, most participants in this study, regardless of their age, region or sex, said that the Vietnamese were highly willing to make philanthropic contributions. This comes as part of the culture of 'good leaves protecting the worn-out leaves' of the community highly vulnerable to natural calamities and crop failures. The participants tended to

agree that philanthropic contributions in the south are greater than in the north. Beside the difference in economic conditions and religious faiths, 'the legacy of the command economy era remains felt until today as at that time the state took care of everything, not leaving anybody worried about anything or even not letting them take care of anything. Because this philanthropic space was destroyed as such, now philanthropy in the north is much inferior to the south, right in people's mindset.' (man, central region).

However, many people say that philanthropic contributions are worrying them, especially in terms of philanthropic drives. Apart from those who are really willing to share and assist others such as office workers and students, 'other groups in society consider philanthropy as a recreation. Merchants and even corrupt officials and smugglers use philanthropy as a way to wash away their sins and as a representation of their wish for good luck. For example, corrupt officials often spend on Buddhist temple buildings and philanthropy for God's protection of them.' (man, Hanoi).

Some people say philanthropic contributions in Vietnam are largely made by State agencies. Due to the quotas set, non-transparent use of money and revelations of appropriated philanthropic funds, people feel they are 'coerced to make philanthropic contributions¹³. 'Mass organisations come to people to urge them to make contributions. Many people will throw out some 10,000 or 20,000 dong to call it done...The amount of money raised depends on the people who do the talking and also on the transparency in how the money is used. But it seems that people nowadays just give money to be done with it and get [the fundraisers] out of sight quickly' (woman, Ho Chi Minh City).

CSOs are also involved in raising money for philanthropic purposes. However, their philanthropic activities are detailed with the images of

¹² The results are similar to Asia Foundation and LIN's study on philanthropy in enterprises.

¹³ It is similar to the results of the study on philanthropy in the public, conducted by iSEE.

people in need, such as people suffering from violence, ethnic children in mountainous areas or poor patients in hospitals. A woman in Ho Chi Minh City said, 'if there is a call for help for twenty orphans to enjoy the Mid-Autumn festival, it is easy to gather enough money for twenty gifts for them. However, it will be difficult to develop a kind of assistance fund because people can't see the impact of their contributions overnight and also they will feel reluctant to get involved in a bigger issue for fear of trouble.'

Many people said that several CSOs were raising funds from the general public to sponsor their projects for building schools, buying textbooks and other initiatives on art or education. These groups were said to be successful owing to contributions made by their members or the prestige they have cultivated in people inside and outside the country. 'Our fundraising call went everywhere and contributions just flew in...in a rather short period of time, say two to three months, we were able to collect some 200 million dong, which was used to build two rows of wooden classrooms for students in Son La' (man, Hanoi). Their advantages are transparency and effectiveness. Almost all CSOs declared their income and expenses, sharing financial reports with the contributors. Many youth groups in central Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi even posted their reports on Facebook. This has created trust in their philanthropic activities.

However, all CSOs pointed to the difficulty in raising funds from sponsors for longer-term activities such as environmental protection, research, policy lobbying or human rights protection. In addition to the 'vague' impact that contributors were not keen to hear, 'they are afraid of relating to sensitive issues that may get them into hot water with authorities with regard to their business. They fear they will be summoned by authorities to account for their sponsorship of this NGO or that NGO if the NGO has activities that 'get on the nerves' of the authorities.' (man, HCMC).

Sharing his opinion on this reality, an NGO executive in Hanoi said there was a missing middle class in Vietnam that had enough

wealth and interest in social issues. Additionally, 'the income of people working for NGOs is many times higher than the average of Vietnamese per head. It is hard for a person with a salary of three million dong to make contributions to a person with a salary of ten million dong so that the latter can have money for his development activities.' (man, Hanoi).

There is potential and willingness among the Vietnamese to make contributions to philanthropic and social activities aimed to help people less advantaged than them. However, due to the politically sensitive concept of civil society and the history of government intervention in philanthropy, as well as the inadequate communication by CSOs about their role and benefits of their activities, it is expected that it will still be challenging for CSOs to raise funds from people and businesses for development and human rights protection activities.

4.4.1.2. The extent of citizens' acceptance of independent social criticism (2.63 points) and ideological differences (2.64 points)

In this section, we provide general discussion of respondents' views of the extent of citizens' support of social criticism and ideological differences due to some similarities and connections.

When asked for their views, many respondents mentioned that the Vietnamese political system is been built on a Marxist-Leninist foundation, and the whole public has been trained with the same ideology from school to socio-political organisations. Mass organisations, such as the Youth Union, Women's Union and the Farmers' Union have disseminated the ideology to their entire grassroots networks, either through meetings or through the public loudspeaker system at certain times of the day. 'Every day, the authorities function like a machine under the fully-observed instruction of the Party, so any differences would be removed immediately, not to mentioned ideological differences' (woman, central region). 'The state has done this very well through its propaganda apparatus which communicates the

Communist Party's merits to both adults and children. All developments, including accessibility to electricity and TV are attributed to the Party... and anything opposite that they think about is considered "reactionary", and they should be educated immediately' (man, Hanoi).

In the period of information boom, the people are aware of other ideological systems, political regimes, and social models in the world but 'they cannot accept the fact that there exist such thoughts in Vietnam. They said it is acceptable in other countries, but not in Vietnam. Vietnamese people, whether Hanoians or countryside people, cannot be like that. This means they feel comfortable with their choice. Vietnamese society is made up of people who are put into various compartments, and feel very happy there, without thinking they can go to different compartments. They even don't accept the fact that somebody stays in a different compartment' (woman, Hanoi).

As it remains hard to accept ideological differences, the extent of citizens' support of independent social critics is rather small. This is also part of the historical legacy as the state has played a 'comprehensive' role in socio-economic development. The discourse on 'unification', 'unity', and 'stability' become values and truth. As a consequence, the people do not accept independent organisations, since 'you should belong to the state, the Party; how can you become independent like this' (man, central region). And they fear 'anything with "independence" like the Independent Writers' Association or the Independent Journalists' Association... The state-oriented mind has remained strong since the state subsidy period. In wartime, the state was always right as it mobilised resources. It was the same in the subsidised period: the state developed plans for the whole country, so the people have a strong mindset that the state is always right' (woman, Hanoi).

The underlying mindset that there exists only one truth in Vietnam has made the public afraid of opposition despite their discontent, 'they see injustice every day but do not understand political causes of the injustice for any action' (man, central region). Some people made a comparison: 'Vietnamese society is like a patriarchal family. The dictator-father

causes fear. Every member is afraid of confronting him even though they are aware that he is wrong' (man, HCMC. For instance, in the case of demonstrations against Chinese aggression, everyone was discontented and angry, but few people dared to join a demonstration. 'They might have been scared or dislike becoming involved in trouble. In fact, the Vietnamese administration remains a strict apparatus. It's like people feel paralysed' (man, HCMC). In the tree-cutting scandal in Hanoi, 'though it was not politically related and the people realised that the authorities were obviously wrong, many people did not dare not to support those who protested against the scandal. They feared any involvement as the authorities had asked families to keep their children from going into the street to cause disorder' (man, Hanoi).

However, in recent years, more independent critical voices have been heard on a variety of issues, from the bauxite scandal in the Central Highlands, and the East Sea, the Constitution and land issues to more specific issues of trees in Hanoi, education, healthcare, LGBT rights, and budget transparency. But pioneers have not necessarily received public support for various reasons. The information and analysis provided by respondents can be summarised into three main groups of reasons as follows:

First, 'many people don't trust social critics, not knowing who they are, and with what motivations' (man, Hanoi). The information becomes confusing as many critics have been claimed to have political motivations, to cause public disorder or to be reactionaries, thus keeping many people away from them. Since independent social critics have been harassed by public security officers and authorities, people prefer to avoid them. Also, some critics have been restrained by their families and friends in order to avoid troubles as a consequence of independent criticism. In some cases, the public was supportive implicitly but dared not to speak their support loudly; they talked with each other in a low voice instead. To step out of the darkness to voice support for independent critics remains a long way to go that many people have not thought about.

Secondly, independent critics have not always provided high-quality arguments due to a lack of participation and cooperation of intellectuals. In 'stone-throwing' critical conversations on socio-economic or cultural issues, limited voices from intellectuals have not made enlightening or enriching impacts. There exist many barriers that have barred intellectuals from independent criticism, such as prevention by the administration (a majority of researchers work for state research institutes and centres), lack of independent think-tanks for socio-economic and cultural issues that can provide a rationale to lead public opinion, and media censorship when criticism alludes to sensitive and powerful issues or individuals.

The tree-cutting scandal in Hanoi could be an exception when some intellectuals, such as Ngô Bảo Châu, Trần Đăng Tuấn, and three lawyers, namely Trần Vũ Hải, Nguyễn Hà Luân and Lê Luân, voiced their request to the Municipal People's Committee to handle the scandal from the citizens' perspective. Architects expressed their views on urban planning relating to trees. Biology and botany specialists stated which trees are suitable or not to be planted in Hanoi; civil society activists talked about accountability, access to information, and public participation in governance. The wide engagement of intellectuals in tackling the scandal created substantial changes, making people better aware of the issue and influencing the administration to handle the scandal more seriously. In this case, there was no coordinating agency, but only the common objective of protecting trees that connected the intellectuals.

Thirdly, the way independent criticism is implemented remains 'disorganised', resulting in negative perceptions or even adverse impacts. According to an activist in Hanoi, the existing social critics can be divided into three types. The first type includes 'hard-line anti-communists' who focus only on negative aspects of an issue, a policy or the role of the Communist Party, which produces negative perceptions for the audience. The second type comprises those who 'react according to feelings'. They are involved not for discussion to find truth, but 'flock to protest, to throw stones', or 'they jump in to release

their anger or frustration, not provide constructive or substantive inputs'. This is the biggest group that are often active on social media sites or in readers' feedback sections of e-newspapers. The third group, with 'rationalist critiques', is emerging but remains limited. They provide 'very straightforward criticism, with analysis that could convince those who remain in doubt. Their critiques are upfront but with clear and rationalist arguments, so could convince the people' (woman, Hanoi).

Arguably, independent criticism has been increasing in Vietnamese society. The social networks, independent groups and international integration have created a foundation for the establishment of the culture of independent criticism. Socio-economic crises with policy failures, such as Vinashin, Vinalines, bauxite in the Central Highlands, and reforms in education and healthcare, have raised the needs for independent criticism in society. Nevertheless, most people have not stepped out of single-minded thinking, being unaware of the value of independent criticism, while the authorities have prevented or even suppressed independent voices. Therefore, independent criticism remains rare and scattered like leopard skin, not yet becoming the demand or foundation for social development.

4.4.1.3. The extent of citizens' interest in social injustice (3.65 points)

All interviewees believed that people are paying increasing attention to social injustice. One of the reasons was that they see injustice with their own eyes every day. Another reason was that they have more information on injustice in other places thanks to the mass media, especially different views on cases as discussed in social media.

A communication worker said, 'people pay a lot of attention to articles about topics like [officials] making use of citizens' money, or finding a herd of goats intended poor people in the house of the commune chairperson. By comparison, articles like "Ngoc Trinh's uncovering her breasts" were shared and read a lot, but didn't receive many comments...I think that people are actually more interested in corruption issues, so they have more comments on those articles' (man, HCMC). Similarly,

'Negative images of traffic policemen, such as getting bribes, travelling without safety helmets, and violating rules while crossing the street, and the scandal on police beating citizens have been shared and liked by many people, which shows their concern to very specific cases of injustice' (man, Hanoi).

The people 'look at their shacks in the slums and then see villas owned by officials, which can't be hidden in a neighbourhood. They checked out each person: this house belongs to Mr. A while another house is owned by Mr. B, then by Mr. B's mother, they know, and it is obvious' (man, HCMC). 'In streets, shiny posh cars are located near poor women searching the rubbish for a livelihood; beautiful youngsters consume expensive phones and design goods; they have the same things as other people own in other countries. These images have betrayed stratification and inequalities, as well as a society that favours the rich while the poor have no chance to improve their life' (man, HCMC).

For civil society, the most frequently mentioned injustice is related to land, particularly farmers who have their land 'appropriated', as this demonstrates the sharp contrast in resources. The big group of farmers is vulnerable in the competitive process, while a small group of business people and officials benefit from the shift of the economy and power. In addition, the access to and use of public services have clearly reflected injustice: 'the poor with terminal illness are seen as being sent straight to the cemetery' while 'the rich are given priority in health checks'. An issue that has been stressed by many people is a lack of independence and impartiality in the judicial system. For poor people, 'the judicial system does not protect us at all', while for rich and powerful people, 'I don't hesitate to break the laws if this can serve me' (woman, central region).

While exploring why people have concerns but do not express a strong voice, many respondents believed that people remain scared. 'They feel safer when talking about a case of injustice in Ca Mau, but are silent about what happens in front of them' (woman, Hanoi). 'Many people may vehemently slam policemen who receive bribes, but are willing to give cash to them if they are stopped by police for violating traffic rules to settle the deal' (man, HCMC). The community structure, the culture of

association and the sense of collectivism have been broken, therefore the people only care for themselves, while anything belonging to the social environment is outside their control, at least as they think.

In recent years, better economic and cultural conditions and extensive social communication have helped people to break the wall of information. They have gained access to different perspectives, thus their awareness has raised very fast. They have gradually recognised injustices that they have been suffering from. But not many people are capable of analysing political aspects, structures and institutions held responsible for injustice, although they recognise the contradiction between slogans on equality and justice and the cases of injustice that they have experienced or known. The initial awareness has made them concerned and discontented, but this accumulated discontent has not yet been translated into action to participate in solving problems.

4.4.1.4 The extent of citizens' interest in political activities (2.61 points)

The extent of citizens' interest in political activities is considered small. From the perspective of civil society actors, the reasons could be divided into three major groups.

First, 'politics' or 'political activities' is a negative concept associated with the authorities, or even with opposition or overthrow. Anything that is contrary to the view of the Communist Party and the State is labelled as 'politically sensitive' to prevent debate. This has been reinforced in the context of political monopoly, and many political activists in civil society have paid a high price, even being imprisoned. People may complain about injustice and send petitions and recommendations, but if they go into the street with protest signs, they would be immediately labelled as trouble makers or reactionaries or those agitated by hostile forces, which scares other people from joining them.

Secondly, people think that 'they don't have any power in the so-called political activities'. They believe that 'they don't have any capabilities to influence political activities which are almost a privilege of some leaders, therefore they can't make any impacts on it if they want to. They

are not informed of even the closest event like local elections, they are only aware at the election time. They have a quick glance at the resumes, then might cast their votes arbitrarily without knowing why. There are no rationales for selection' (man, central region). Many citizens go to the election 'for fun' without understanding its core issues 'because since their birth in the existing election system, they have had no alternatives to compare' (woman, Hanoi). As a result, they accept the current status as a habit or inertia as they do not believe that they can change the existing giant apparatus.

Thirdly, the most important reason was citizens' limited knowledge of political aspects of injustice, socio-economic issues and rights to freedom that they are encountering. This is well described by a civil activist: 'the people are concerned about specific cases of injustice. So, we must say that the people are experiencing injustice everywhere, and when they see injustice, they react to it. But when it comes to political conceptions, the extent is more limited ... They are discontented with a particular person in a village, a ward, or a street, aren't they? But when it is translated into political action, the extent is small. Of course, it has developed....' (man, central region).

Political awareness has developed, as acknowledged by many civil society actors, partly because civil society space has expanded recently. In addition to the space of the state and mass organisations, such as the Fatherland Front and others, Vietnamese society has seen the gradual establishment of interest groups, clubs of youth and students outside universities, and independent forums. This is an environment for people to practice political activities through democratic debates, criticism, and listening, rule and charter making, election and selection of their leaders. However, this space remains limited at a community level, as Vietnam has not yet enacted the Law on Association or freedom of association, so that independent associations and societies can be established and function at the national level in the fields of policies, sectors or industries. The lack of this space leads to insufficient and distorted knowledge, interests and practice of political activities amongst the people.

4.4.2. Capacity of civil society (2.91 points)

There were 115 people who gave full answers to the indicators of civil society capacity component. There is no statistical difference in assessment of civil society capacity indicators based on geography, age group, or type of organisation. The rate of those who did not answer each indicator of civil society capacity ranged from 3.3% to 5.9%, and the rate of those who did not know how to assess indicators ranged from 0% to 6% (financial autonomy level of civil society).

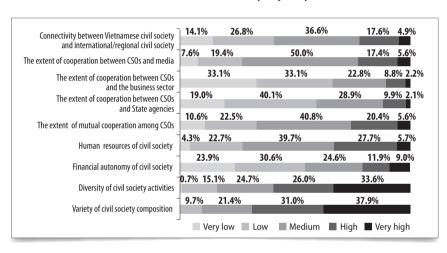


Chart 7: Assessment distribution of civil society capacity

Members of civil society highly appreciated the capacity of civil society. Specifically, civil society has vastly expanded its types of activities (59.6%) and its diverse elements (68.9%). However, the quality of human resources is not high and still depends on external funding (54.5%). The assessment of the financial autonomy of civil society is below the mean (2.51).

Network creating capacity, including linkages and cooperation between civil society and other social actors is weak. Civil society is particularly weak in cooperating with enterprises (66.2%) and state agencies (59.1%). The assessment on indicators for civil society's linkage and cooperation is below the mean.

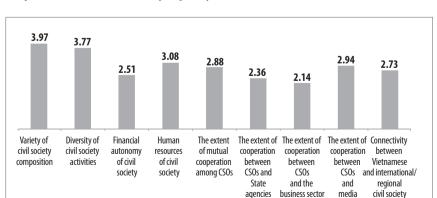
Difference in the value of indicators according to living place:

- Regarding assessment on the financial autonomy of civil society, participants in Ho Chi Minh City rated this indicator 0.86 points higher than those living in Hanoi.
- Human resource quality of civil society: research participants living in provinces outside HCMC and Hanoi rated this indicator 0.46 higher than those living in Hanoi.
- Level of cooperation among CSOs: research participants living in provinces outside HCMC and Hanoi rated 0.71 higher than those living in Hanoi.
- Level of cooperation between CSOs and state agencies: research participants living in provinces outside HCMC and Hanoi rated 0.55 higher than those living in Hanoi.

Difference in the value of indicators according to research participants' time joining civil society:

- Human resource quality of civil society: research participants with less than 10 years working in civil society rated 0.63 points higher than those with more than 10 years
- Level of cooperation between CSOs and the media: research participants with less than 10 years of working experience in civil society rated 0.68 points higher than those with more than 10 years

Detailed points of indicators are presented in the following graph:



Graph 8: Points of civil society capacity indicators

The average score for this component is 2.91. There is a difference in this component value among groups of different educational backgrounds (upper secondary education 3.04; undergraduate 3.03 and post-graduate 2.70), and among groups working in civil society field for less and more than 10 years (3.07 and 2.67 respectively). There is no difference in educational background and civil society working experience of two groups answering all or not all indicators. Therefore, the average score of this component would not have much variance if all participants had answered all indicators.

Three indicators: Variety of civil society composition; Diversity of civil society activities, and Quality of civil society human resources are above the mean: 3.97, 3.77 and 3.08 points respectively. The lowest indicators are cooperation with businesses and the state with 2.14 and 2.36 points, respectively.

Detailed contents of indicators related to capacity of civil society are discussed in the following section.

4.4.2.1. Variety of civil society composition (3.97 points) and diversity of civil society activities (3.77 points)

The level of civil society's diversity in composition and activities is rated rather high, possibly because of a fresh feeling that many types of organisations and activities that have recently come into being. Regarding the composition of civil society, independent individual activists, community organisations, student groups, NGOs, and independent associations are all existing and developing. Many people highlighted initiatives arising organically from daily life, such as 'Rice with meat', 'Restaurant 2000', and the Breast cancer network. This is a civic activity begun by individuals then expanded and largely accepted by community members. Additionally, networks such as otofun, webtretho or spontaneous groups on the Internet and Facebook have expanded and diversified civil society space considerably. This space does not either result from foreign donors or rely on project funding.

They work independently and actively and meet specific needs of members' lives.

One of the new factors of Vietnamese civil society, mentioned by around half of research participants, are youth groups working in various fields. In addition to hundreds of groups performing conventional activities such as hunger elimination, poverty reduction, or clothes donations for children in mountainous areas, some groups conduct new activities such as Art and environment protection (Go and Open), children's education (Vietnam Dream), music for orphaned children (Miracle Choir), and connecting positive values among youth (Good Jobs). Besides, there are youth groups working in the education field such as Book Hunter and Reading Circle in Hanoi, Dear Sesame in Da Nang or Lan Toa in Ho Chi Minh City. This is a really new active and creative force whose participation has strengthened civil society in Vietnam.

Another 'new character' of Vietnamese civil society mentioned by research participants is independent social criticism groups such as the Independent Writers' Association, Freelance Journalists' Association, and Civil Society Forum. These are unregistered CSOs working to implement rights that are regulated in the Constitution. These organisations developed from intellectuals' social criticism movements about the bauxite scandal in the Central Highlands, the Constitution, and other major policies of the Party and Government. They include prestigious people in society (Group 72) or senior Party members (Group 61) having relationships with high ranking leaders and political experience. Their main activities involve submission of suggestions to Party and State leaders about critical issues concerning the country's development and posting and sharing analysis and articles to provide the public with development theories through specific events. In spite of their limited numbers, their activities have enlarged the frontier of social criticism and expanded space for NGOs, youth groups and social activists.

In parallel with the above mentioned independent associations, another part of civil society that should not be forgotten is that of unregistered groups that opt for 'confrontation' to the authorities and are willing to organise mass activities in public, such as demonstrations against China, supporting citizens suffering injustice, or activities protecting human rights. An illustrative example is the NO U group, established after demonstrations against China's provocations in the East Sea. The NO U Group was described as 'begun by those participating in anti-China demonstrations since 2011, who had experienced fighting in wars. They are very experienced and conduct public activities regardless of police repression' (man, Hanoi). Besides, there are some other groups such as the Vietnamese Bloggers Network, the 'Bầu bí tương thân' Association or Vietnam Women's Human Rights Association that work in oppositional ways, accuse the authorities of human rights violations, and are often named in lists of 'reactionary' groups. For ease of analysis, such groups are referred to in this report as 'unregistered and independent' civil society (U&I).

Most interviewees shared that one of the reasons for the recent establishment of many Vietnamese CSOs with vibrant activities is the Internet. It can be said that social media is like a solvent that helps civic space form more quickly and expand more quickly. The recent development of notable social movements is mostly thanks to social media networks, such as '6,700 people for 6,700 trees' concerning the issue of tree cutting in Hanoi; 'Save Son Doong' opposing construction of a cable car in Son Doong cave in Quảng Bình, and 'I agree' related to same-sex marriage support. Social media also connects civil society with the state media, and from there connects with society and the government. This interaction has given civil society a more profound impact on political, cultural, and socio-economic life.

Vietnamese civil society is increasing in quantity and diversifying in its composition. Nevertheless, some roles in civil society are still weak or missing. As a freelance activist in Hanoi described, 'When civil society space is vibrant, it's like a football team with all positions filled. If one player gets injured, immediately there is a substitute. But our football team now does not have a complete set of eleven players, it only has four or five positions playing in an uncoordinated way. For example, there

are many clubs and mutual interest groups. But these are like herbivores low on the food chain; we don't yet have carnivores eating at the apex of the food chain that can work more intensively to solve social issues' (woman, Hanoi).

This is a relatively typical description of the shortage or unbalance in terms of the composition and activities of civil society in Vietnam. In recent years, activities have been vibrant, however not yet on the right track, as described by some respondents. 'We have a huge number of groups working on normal themes, but rarely do groups deal with tough themes' (man, Hanoi). Sceptics say that 'civil society is good at doing things that are well-funded and lightly controlled such as environmental protection, hunger elimination and poverty reduction, health, HIV, and protection of disadvantaged groups. But in sensitive areas such as anticorruption, media, and legal system reform, only motivated and talented activists can survive' (man, Hanoi).

The first missing element mentioned by many people is religious charity organisations. This was pointed out by many research participants in central and southern Vietnam. They hold that charitable activities should be based on value and trust, thus religious organisations have very important roles. 'I see there are many religious groups in other countries. I think civil society creates trust... they come to each other not just based on reason... there must be spiritual factors and morality... building personal trust from inside' (woman, central region). In parallel with charity, religious groups also have a school system and health clinics that help the poor and disadvantaged. 'That pagoda has a monk who has devoted his whole life for drug addicted people, or a nun who helps people with leprosy, prostitutes or the HIV infected. Experience from the former regime shows that with disadvantaged people, there should be organisations with members of those who have lived a moral life for others to rely on, so that if you get in trouble, the priest and God are there to help you. Along with Buddhist temples, churches are like Bodhi schools or tabernacles where people can come to study' (man, Ho Chi Minh City).

The second element to be mentioned as a missing link in Vietnamese civil society is professional and independent think-tank organisations, for example the now-dissolved Institute for Development Studies (IDS). At present, state research institutes cannot play think-tank roles because they depend on the political will of the State and disseminate the government's policies. Independent experts work for some NGOs or professional associations, or simply work as individual experts (these are mostly state retirees). However, these experts mostly just 'answer questions from the media' when asked to post on blogs or share on Facebook. Many experts do not know how to cooperate with each other, hence cannot lead public opinion, develop an agenda, enlighten the public or influence state policies. As a social activist shared, 'obviously, think tanks are an important form; without think tanks there would be a big gap in civil society... which is social criticism' (man, Hanoi).

Along with the absence of think-tanks is the weak role of universities. Unlike many countries such as Thailand or Malaysia, universities in Vietnam play a faint role in civil activities. Lecturers are seen as 'officials' rather than independent activists protecting human rights or academic freedom. 'Students' activities at universities are tightly controlled. Notices are regularly sent to students prohibiting them from joining civil activities such as anti-China demonstrations or tree protection parades in Hanoi' (woman, Hanoi). 'Students' participation in civil society activities, especially sensitive themes like anti-corruption and human rights protection is also limited. Hence, many student groups have to perform activities outside universities and face difficulties in connecting their studies and research to civil society activities' (woman, Hanoi). Listing recent civic activities that have not taken place in Vietnam, '[the lack of] sit-ins is often mentioned as a signal of tight control by the authorities over universities and passivity in student activism, even though the quality of education is one of the most burning topics in Vietnam' (man, central region). As compared with workers who frequently go on strike against bad working conditions, low salaries, and poor insurance policies, students seem to lack a fighting spirit to protect their own rights.

Both in the past and present, NGOs are often mentioned in a central position in civil society. NGOs have been founded since the 1990s, legally registered with the government and receiving funds from foreign organisations to carry out project activities ranging from hunger elimination and poverty reduction to environmental protection, from gender equality to micro-finance, from fresh water supply to HIV prevention, from education to assistance for the disabled. Due to the political and historical context, most NGOs were set up and located in Hanoi, with few founded in Ho Chi Minh City or other provinces. Nevertheless, NGOs' activities mainly take place in villages and communes in rural, mountainous areas. Because their activities often deal with specific local problems, unrelated to burning national issues that are the focus of media or discussed in political agendas, NGOs remain unknown to the majority of residents as well as to state leaders. Consequently, 'because NGOs are not well known, non-registered and confrontational activities of "oppositional groups" are better known by the authorities, and this leads to a negative attitude from the public towards civil society' (man, HCMC).

Recently, as shared by many interviewees who are NGO staff, NGOs' activities have gradually transformed from provision of services to the poor, women, children, and ethnic minority groups to research, policy advocacy, social criticism and community mobilisation. Despite many challenges, NGOs are step by step opening dialogue channels with the Government and the National Assembly about social issues such as HIV prevention, elimination of domestic violence, promotion of gender equality, protection of LGBT and disability rights. Some organisations have started to provide recommendations on the Constitution, drafting of laws on civil and political rights such as the Law on Association and Law on Access to Information, and the UN's human rights protection mechanisms, such as UPR and CEDAW. These NGOs' activities have contributed to diversifying civil society's activities, spontaneously expanding civic space to other arenas of power controlled by the state. In sum, the composition of Vietnamese civil society is relatively diverse in recent years, especially owing to the establishment of student groups, independent associations, and non-registered groups. Some important elements such as religious charity organisations, think tanks and the lack of universities' civil activities have been largely absent from civil society. But after all, thanks to social media, the diversification of community organisations and formation of youth groups have brought a new face to Vietnamese civil society. Nevertheless, though Vietnamese civil society is diversified, there has not yet been close cooperation to shape collective strength. Thus, in spite of presently active contributions, civil society has not created social movements with deep influence on the whole society like 'when the women's rights movement began and women started riding bikes, having short haircuts, and wearing western shoes... or later on in the communist time having movements such as modern labour and farmer literacy that had a huge transformational effect on society' (man, Hanoi).

4.4.2.2. Financial autonomy of civil society (2.51 points)

The extent of financial autonomy of civil organisations is rated relatively low by interviewees, especially those who have to rely on foreign funding. NGOs are normally taken as examples because nearly 100% of their resources depend on international donors. Except for a small number of rather professional organisations which diverse funding, many NGOs operate conditionally, depending on whether it is possible to get project funding or not. Recently, the landscape has worsened as some international donors have withdrawn from Vietnam after it gained 'lower-middle income' status.

In order to cope with this situation, NGOs have started to think about diversifying their income sources, specifically from enterprises and individuals. However, very few organisations gain success in this activity for the fact that 'their born capacity is to spend funds, not to raise money from enterprises or people' (man, Hanoi). Therefore, they face difficulties when enterprises and people do not know about or see their activities performed in rural and remote areas. Besides, people and enterprises are not so interested to give money to development, gender equality, or climate change prevention activities, and even if they are, their donations are normally not enough to maintain NGOs'

current work. 'I take the case of tree cutting [in Hanoi] as an example. The 6,700 organisation was established by the public who care about trees, so were willing to give money. If they hadn't seen trees being chopped down, or if trees had not yet been chopped down and someone asked for donations, no one would have given money. It's possible to raise money for issues that directly affect the community, or for charity or for business. For other kinds of organisations, financial autonomy is impossible'. (man, Hanoi).

In addition to trying to raise money from business and the public, some NGOs also consider social enterprise models. Yet the legal environment in Vietnam is not transparent enough for social enterprises, although the Law on Enterprises has stated this definition and some other decrees are being drafted. This still cannot 'rescue' NGOs. As a respondent who has worked for a long time in the social enterprise field shared, 'from the past up to now, I have never seen any NGO transform successfully into a social enterprise. The successful cases are all of transformation from a business to a social enterprise' (woman, Hanoi).

The level of financial autonomy of independent, unregistered groups varies. Most voluntary and youth groups rely on self-contributed or locally donated money. Community organisations in the south are more active and successful in raising local donations. These activities are normally specific and small scale, therefore it is easier to raise donations and less funding is required. For instance, charitable activities such as distributing clothes to pupils or presents to poor people are carried out with donated clothes and presents means of transport donated by businesses. For academic groups, the biggest expenditure is on meeting rooms which are mainly lent by agencies and organisations with which they have individual relationships. In many cases cafés are used as meeting rooms. Some groups have the initiative of charging very low fees to participants to cover their costs; presenters, experts or celebrities often join for free. Some groups also take on work as book editors, TV producers, video clips, or photography to raise funds for their activities.

Some groups working in sensitive fields consider not accepting foreign donations as one way to protect themselves from being 'claimed' by the state. 'The activity is completely voluntary, some specific activities need raising money from local donors, but never from foreign ones, not even a coin' (man, Hanoi). Some groups not only refuse money from foreign donors but also 'do not accept money from other organisations, only from individuals. If an individual sends millions of dollars, we still accept it, but we won't take even a penny from another organisation. We have our own perception, when our activities are not supported by the authorities, it is possible that we are blamed for accepting money from this or that organisation to do this or that. Secondly, we want to avoid interference from other groups and organisations because they must have their own purpose or policy, so we don't want that interference... We only implement the public's ideas, meaning individuals' (man, Hanoi).

In short, registered and unregistered civil groups face different challenges in terms of financial resources. NGOs depend on funding from foreign development agencies, which is decreasing; independent groups have to be financially autonomous, but with limited financial capacity they can just do little things, it is difficult to accomplish tasks which require much funding. Local donors are not yet ready to contribute to either registered NGOs or independent groups for various reasons as mentioned above in part 4.4.1.1. This tough problem needs to be solved: new and innovative forms of raising money such as organising public events, public appeal letters, or crowd-funding will need to be found, or else Vietnamese civil society will be 'flattened' and unable to support a democratic culture.

4.4.2.3. Human resources of civil society (3.08 points)

The human capacity of civil society is judged differently by various groups and primarily divided into NGOs, unregistered or collective action groups, and intellectuals such as retired officials and scientists.

The capacity of NGOs is generally assessed as rather good, especially thanks to support from international NGOs and donors. Some

Vietnamese NGO staff 'used to work as officers for international non-government organisations such as SNV, Oxfam, CARE, or Plan International... they matured in those environments. When they got "tired" of working for foreigners, they quit and set up separate NGOs' (man, Hanoi). Since NGO staff are paid salaries, it is possible to attract qualified people; this, added to learning and training opportunities and participation in local and international events, gives NGOs generally good capacity.

However, many respondents said that although NGOs have rather good technical capacity, they do not have as much experience in civic activities as colleagues in the Philippines, Cambodia or Thailand. Except for professional organisations, others have 'very weak organisational management, financial management, accountability and budget mobilisation capacities'. The reason is not that NGOs do not want to be strong, but just because 'NGOs are not updated with information, their status are not recognised. They just work on very trivial things; once their status unrecognised, having no working area then they cannot develop. They just work on small things in their tiny garden, in a very narrow farm' (man, Hanoi).

In the long run, there are many concerns about the human resources of NGOs, because if funding decreases after donors withdraw, it will be difficult to recruit qualified personnel. Broadly speaking, since 'NGOs are no longer the optimum choice for everyone, people move to work in the fields of banking, information technology, the stock market, finance or set up private shops such as Pho 24. People don't find working in NGOs to be interesting, and this leads to a shortage of inputs' (man, Hanoi). In other words, civil society may lose its competitive advantage if there are no strong changes in finance, the working environment, or its social significance.

The capacity of unregistered and independent civil society groups (U&I) is evaluated as lower, because most of their participants are 'ordinary people who are volunteers or are driven to become involved for various reasons. Nevertheless, no matter how weak their capacity is,

the number of participants is very large, and they have high enthusiasm and pure and simple motivation. Definitely, they work for free' (man, Hanoi). Some groups have 'experienced many battles' and are willing to face pressure, repression or jail. Their courage enables them to deal with the authorities and creates 'many people who are capable of leading the group. In many cases, [police] can stop one leader, but immediately there is someone else replacing them as if nothing unusual had happened. Today this person is the leader, tomorrow it is someone else, and if anyone feels it is dangerous, he or she can stay away for a period of time' (man, Hanoi).

One of the limitations of U&I groups is their lack of intensive skills to organise and perform activities effectively, for instance demonstrations. Many of their activities have not gotten the public involved or have been easily repressed by authorities. 'Those who organise demonstrations... must be extremely professional, if not it is impossible to call for a large demonstration. In Vietnam, there are no such people. Even activities such as organising events and public speaking are normally done by inexperienced people who are learning on the job' (woman, Hanoi). Some pessimists think that many activists in 'confrontational' groups cause difficulties for these groups because of their weak capacity, which creates barriers rather than contributes to the groups' strength.

The group whose capacity is rated highest is intellectuals who specialise in social criticism. 'Most of them are retirees, such as Vũ Mai, Chu Hảo, and Nguyên Ngọc... they live throughout the country from the north to the south, not just in Hanoi. They have many advantages because they are elderly, they are a bit more mature, they have many relationships and respect, most importantly they have relationships with the authorities' (man, Hanoi). This is the basis for them to focus their criticism on major programmes and policies of the Party and State, and it is this group who push the limits in discussions even of taboo topics such as the separation of powers, the role of the military or the necessity of civil society.

There is a near consensus among interviewees that CSOs in Vietnam, whether NGOs or clubs and independent groups, are all basically well-trained professionally, but their skills and approach towards activism remain weak. This cannot be 'improved in one day; it takes generations. If we want to improve quickly, we need a more open legal framework of the state. NGOs, centres, and institutes must be good employers who create jobs. Only if they pay staff appropriate salaries based on what they have contributed will their capacity be improved' (man, Hanoi).

4.4.2.4. The extent of mutual cooperation among CSOs (2.88 points)

Most respondents agreed that the extent of cooperation among CSOs remains limited, not only between registered and non-registered CSOs, but also within each of these groups.

Among different civil society groups, NGOs are considered 'the easiest to cooperate with' but the depth and quality of cooperation is not considerable. Previously, some donors wanted to encourage NGOs to cooperate though setting up networks and coalitions. However, 'many organisations have struggled to stay above water to avoid drowning, and to address concerns to maintain operations, thus sparing neither time nor space to cooperate' (man, Hanoi). An independent activist working with many NGOs said, 'nowadays, people join coalitions chiefly for funding opportunities, not for sharing a mission or anything' (woman, Hanoi). Many people argue that the funding approach applied by development partners and INGOs to a particular project or a logical framework has made it difficult for NGOs to cooperate. Organisations usually prioritise the implementation of their projects, therefore when an opportunity for cooperation comes, they cannot adjust themselves to take it up. The project-based funding approach itself has led to a fixed mindset on the project, thus anything unrelated to the project is given less attention.

However, recent years have seen a clearer cooperative trend among NGOs, which have also become more pragmatic in cooperation. A director of an NGO in Hanoi said that increasing activities of NGOs

have resulted in more opportunities for cooperation. Although not 'excited' to participate in networking activities, 'we would join only when we see the necessity, but not following any movement. Otherwise it serves no purpose but wasting time. For instance, there is an activity about mining which I don't think I can take up on my own because it should involve different stakeholders. The activity requires an enterprise, a state institution, and an NGO with good understanding of corporate social responsibility, so I joined the coalition' (man, Hanoi). Similarly, recently NGOs have cooperated fairly effectively in some processes, such as providing comments on the revised 2013 Constitution and writing shadow reports to the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Human Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The processes of providing comments on and inputs to the draft Law on Access to Information and the Law on Associations have been conducted professionally, with roles and responsibilities divided according to strengths of each organisation. These processes have raised the voices and enhanced the capacity and status of NGOs.

However, in addition to some specific processes, NGOs in the same area of operation have not cooperated effectively to further promote their objectives. The cooperation among NGOs has not been developed from a common perspective on the areas in which they operate. A respondent from the mass media shared his observation that 'when society is paying attention to a case of violence towards women, a case of child labour, or the way enterprises treat people with disabilities, NGOs in the areas of gender equality, child rights or disability do not cooperate immediately to communicate their messages. This leads to their loss of opportunities for provision of information to society and policy advocacy. The main reason is that their mindset remains more project-based than strategy-based, therefore they miss a valuable chance to make changes together' (man, Hanoi).

Cooperation among U&I groups, as commented by their members, is even more difficult 'because it is attacked internally and externally. Internal attack means that it's difficult for civil groups to find a

tolerant voice for complete sharing and promotion of each other's strengths. Meanwhile, external attack means external impacts from the management bodies which do not support, and, in many cases, do not even want the establishment of such linkages' (man, HCMC). Many people stressed difficulties in coordination among leaders of non-registered CSOs, chiefly as a result of differences in working approaches and perceptions, which are 'even rather severe in some cases'.

An independent observer shared that 'Over the last two years, informal groups have seemed to show more respect to each other, but their competition is also very fierce. This competition is reflected in finance, ideas, and working approaches, or is just a sense of jealousy in some cases. Despite their weakness, they still fight with each other' (woman, Hanoi). Another independent activist believed that the situation is gradually improving: 'It begins with a sub-group of young non-registered CSOs which are more open, with better awareness, and their communication is also easier. Additionally, social networks have better facilitated cooperation; it leads to a sort of cooperation that happens without apparent discussion or the need to clearly state the cooperation' (woman, Hanoi).

While internal cooperation among NGOs and among U&I groups is difficult, the cooperation between these groups is even more difficult. One of the reasons acknowledged by both groups is the prevention of cooperation by the State, as described by a U&I activist: 'In Vietnam, there are four things that are feared vehemently, namely having an organisation, a political party, a religion, and funding. Separate and fragmented activities already make people uncomfortable, but linkages to become an organisation, a coalition, or an association with working missions and principles are even more uncomfortable. That is why civil society groups are feared. They want to work in peace, so they don't cooperate with each other, which leads to fragmentation of their strength' (man, HCMC). This is implicitly understood by NGOs and leads to self-censorship of their cooperation with non-registered CSOs, especially when some NGOs' events are cancelled or stopped due to the involvement of U&I activists. 'The point is that I see most of those

working for NGOs are always afraid of being classified in the same way as dissenting groups. In a football team, if a fullback and a midfielder do not recognise the forward, it is unacceptable, isn't it?' (woman, Hanoi). Realising this, U&I groups sometimes refrain from joining activities of NGOs to avoid being blamed that due to them, NGOs cannot perform their operations.

Nevertheless, many interviewees believed that the main barrier does not come from outside but within groups. The first disagreement is about the recognition of different groups' roles in the entire civil society. Many members of U&I groups declared that they are the only true Vietnamese CSOs. Other organisations, even NGOs, are not independent CSOs because they have to register and are controlled by the state. This leads to debates which are described by an NGO director as being very extreme, making outsiders think that 'civil society is antigovernment groups... there is no such definition, that classification only enhances the ego and further segregation' (man, Hanoi). Furthermore, an independent intellectual said, 'dissidents have misplaced the definition of civil society. The incited dissenting parts have scared the state. The state fears it is a conspiracy that it cannot control, [hence it has to suppress], which is the current thorny problem' (man, HCMC).

An issue emerging from the interviews is the way that U&I groups and NGOs look at each other. A respondent in a U&I group looks down on NGOs because 'NGOs sometimes have very foolish projects. The name sounds foolish enough, such as "building leadership capacity for officials in Ben Tre province" but in fact no officials have their capacity enhanced. They apply all Western approaches in a workshop, participants at the workshop only have fun, this is both theoretical and also nonsense ...'. 'Because they cannot do anything, they only organise workshops, boasting and satisfying themselves'. For instance, 'while trees were being chopped down outside, NGOs were still holding workshops in air-conditioned rooms. While workshops were taking place, trees were still chopped down in streets' (woman, Hanoi). Meanwhile, a workshop organizer expressed pride in 'organising a workshop which is was the only legitimate symposium in the whole process of the green-tree issue.

It was a face-to-face and frank struggle with a legitimate cause, not just a quick overview' (man, Hanoi). According to him, '10 leading experts in the areas of urban issues, plants and laws were invited... technical issues were clarified such as varieties of magnolia trees ... journalists do not have to verify what the leading scientists stated'.

Conversely, some independent intellectual activists or NGOs also have negative views of U&I groups. As a respondent stated, 'some people made efforts to go to the USA to campaign for human rights. Representatives from both houses of the US Congress met A, B, C, and D to request preventing the Obama administration from facilitating Vietnam's entry to TPP. I think this is a constraint of those who struggle for human rights. They don't understand that most importantly, human rights should be based on an economic foundation. I remember a allegory image from La Fontaine, a fly buzzes next to some people pushing a cart and says it is helping them to push the cart, but in fact the fly is obstructing them'. Therefore, 'I don't want to sit at the same table with some people, not because I look down on them, nor because I oppose them. But I feel they and I cannot stand in the same footsteps' (man, HCMC).

However, there are many shared views that there should be understanding, respect and cooperation among different civil society groups. Firstly, groups should acknowledge differences instead of criticising and denying each other. They should respect and support each other. A U&I activist said that cooperation among groups is necessary and a matter of time. He said, 'NGOs are like gardeners growing flowers, while unregistered groups are working in immense fields which are not yet ready for cultivation. It's difficult to cooperate now because of the different working approaches, not because independent groups don't want to cooperate... Time is needed. A corn farmer and a flower gardener can cooperate when they are together' (man, Hanoi).

An intellectual working in the area of social criticism said that recently 'there has been cooperation to conduct this or that campaign. Some NGOs held workshops for social criticism which engaged intellectuals in presentations, analysis and critiques. As they are registered NGOs,

their workshops were effective, with good quality. Therefore, CSOs should divide their roles. One group should be involved in criticising and swearing, but NGOs shouldn't do that, if they tried they would fail. They should let louder groups stir up the public. The important thing is not to be turned off by these people; they do good work... The problem in Vietnam is that many people think that if I work in this area, I have to cover everything, and my role is number one. That's ridiculous' (man, Hanoi).

Another person also supported the idea on the division of roles: 'Cooperation should mean that each person has his or her own task. It's like a relay race, once a runner has reached Hai Van pass, the next must continue from Hai Van down to Binh Dinh [towards the south], not that when one person reaches Hai Van, another starts again from Dèo Ngang [further north]. It means that if there are no linkages in civil society, it would take a lot of effort and time' (man, Ho Chi Minh City). A leader of an NGO suggested: 'it should be divided geographically, each area should have at least a cluster of several NGOs. For example, the central region should have a cluster strong enough for mutual support. It's advisable to divide by working location because if you survive, you can solve the roots of an issue matter in each town and village in this country. Once divided, there should be a movement which should gain support from all stakeholders' (woman, central region).

An incident which was mentioned frequently due to its influence on the sense of cooperation among civil groups was the tree cutting scandal in Hanoi in early 2015. Despite no official cooperation, both NGOs and U&I groups modified their working approaches to increase the extent of influence. An independent activist said that for some U&I groups, moving from an extreme to a moderate message was a substantial change. 'In the tree-cutting scandal, some people from the oppositional groups also followed official and moderate activities. The opposition groups usually insult the authorities directly, but this time they focussed on protecting trees. I love trees, don't chop me down, something like that, no longer in the way that personally attacks some officials. I think this is a very good sign' (woman, Hanoi). With mutual respect, it's easier for

people to talk, empathize, and change their behaviour. Therefore, as an independent observer said, 'despite having no plan, nothing, each one did their own job, listening to each other for the best possible change and linkage' (woman, Hanoi). The tree-cutting scandal in Hanoi made various sides better understand the need of and demand for cooperation, and this may be a turning point, at least in the mindset of many people from NGOs, U&I groups, and independent intellectuals.

In summary, cooperation among civil society actors was rated low (2.88 points, below the mean). It is difficult for NGOs to cooperate because of their 'project-based' nature, therefore opportunities for cooperation outside the project framework are not taken. Non-registered CSOs face difficulties in cooperating, they even compete due to 'individualism', 'ideas', and 'finance'. Cooperation between NGOs and U&I groups remains limited, if not to mention negative, due to a lack of mutual respect and understanding, repression by the State's management apparatus (public security forces), as well as a lack of vision for the need of cooperation. However, there have been signs of change among parts of the two groups, especially encouragement for cooperation from independent activists as well as the 'division of labour'. This may be an emerging trend to improve cooperation among components of civil society in Vietnam.

4.4.2.5. The extent of cooperation between CSOs and state agencies (2.36 points)

The extent of cooperation with state agencies is rated low by most interviewees, simply because the nature of this relationship is not a 'equal partnership' but rather one between the managers and the managed, an 'ask - give' relationship, demonstrated by the fact that the State has the right to permit or reject the establishment of a CSO, and to reject or approve a project/activity of a CSO. This is reflected in Decree 45 on establishing associations, Decree 93 on approving foreign-funded projects and Decision 97 on areas in which private science and technology organisations are allowed to function. These

documents were produced on the basis of the state's concerns about civil society's challenge to its monopoly on leadership in society.

Due to their concerns about civil society in addition to monopolistic and undemocratic management, state agencies do not want to cooperate with civil society. An independent activist in Hanoi said 'the state doesn't care' about setting up partnerships with CSOs, nor do they bother to dialogue with CSOs. If someone in State agencies wants to, even just shows willingness, he or she would be prevented immediately. This prevention comes not only from within State agencies but also from a force that is 'more royalist than the king', who are 'pensioners, veterans, retired Communist Party members, the Fatherland Front, and the propaganda staff. They are like running with a light before a car coming... in many cases, the authorities have not wanted to take action but these opinion runners have already accused and pressured to force the authorities to act' (man, HCMC).

Consequently, very few CSOs, even registered NGOs, feel that they are being supported by State agencies. For non-registered CSOs, being respected by the State seems 'incredible'. They are determined to confront the authorities, 'they chose tougher measures, such as demonstrations, strikes, boycott or parades for tree protection' (woman, Hanoi). Due to their public and confrontational activities, focussing on what they regard as unfairness, violations of human rights or the state's fault, they have been marginalised completely. The groups that exercise freedoms of speech, association, and expression as stated in the Constitution gain no cooperation from the authorities. Instead, 'we are constantly supervised ... except for me, all members in my group have been summoned, investigated, and even arrested' (man, central region).

NGOs are required to obtain permission from state agencies to function. Partly, they want to receive state protection in case of emerging problems in project sites, and partly, they are required to ask for permission and approval of projects that will be implemented in an area. Some organisations regard integration of their activities in the local government's development strategy as one of their objectives. This

desire of NGOs to cooperate with the government is a unique feature of Vietnam as compared with other regional countries. This might be a barrier against NGO's impact on state agencies' accountability, to be discussed in section 4.4.4.5.

According to an NGO executive, the extent of cooperation with state agencies 'depends on each topic, it's easy to cooperate on less sensitive topics, for example, people with disabilities can cooperate effectively with state agencies in policy advocacy. Human rights groups will face difficulties. while groups working on environment and forestry issues do not encounter any problems. The issue of the Mekong River used to be very sensitive because it is related to China and Laos, and many government officials did not like talking about it, but it has become normalised after extensive experience. The issues of transparency, anti-corruption, information disclosure, or environmental justice are sensitive. The people's grievances about pollution issues and the cancer village scandal are related to many areas, such as the judiciary, law enforcement, local authorities and public security forces. Obviously, they have to protect their own benefits. It is hard to be involved in the case of the cancer village, villagers complain a lot but not much progress can be made to address their complaints.' (man, Hanoi).

Despite difficulties, NGO representatives said that they have opportunities to participate and dialogue with authorities at the policy making level. They are invited to advise on draft laws, decrees or national agendas relating to their activities. Nevertheless, these channels are mainly produced by development partners, UN and international organisations. When these organisations have projects to support the Vietnamese state agencies, they request or suggest inviting NGOs to join workshops and talks. As a result, some NGOs can build trust and long-term cooperation with state agencies, but chiefly through personal relationships.

Unregistered groups sometimes seek 'implicit' cooperation from state agencies such as acquaintances, former colleagues at publishers, the mass media or research institutes. 'Because these organisations want

to work independently, they are definitely monitored, harassed or restricted. But they are half this and half that. It's like how the Viet Cong did during the war - which was to take advantage of their legitimate half to deal with the authorities. Civil society is developing in that way, either registering with the authorities to be seen as being in their political system or collaborating with state-funded elements, but with a civil society spirit' (man, central region).

To sum up, cooperation with state management agencies remains a relatively tough domain for CSOs. This mainly results from the fact that civil society has not been recognised in Vietnam, or at least many of its roles, such as social criticism, human rights protection or demand for the state's accountability have not been recognised. The concern about 'peaceful evolution' also creates the mindset of controlling which leads to security-related obstacles for independent groups or groups working on sensitive issues. This will be analysed in depth in the section on 'freedom of activity' of civil society in Appendix One.

4.4.2.6. The extent of cooperation between CSOs and the business sector (2.14 points)

The cooperation between civil society and businesses is considered the weakest indicator, even weaker than that between civil society and the authorities. Apart from conventional comments such as 'corporate social responsibility in Vietnam is very weak' or 'businesses just care about their own benefits', there is substantial analysis on the current context.

Firstly, many Vietnamese businesses, especially state-owned and crony enterprises, attach importance to building an image with officials to do business. An NGO officer said, 'businesses know nothing about civil society at all. Our enterprises are mainly state-owned ones or represent a backyard of the state; they just maintain close relationships with the state, what's the point to cooperate with us, for no benefit at all. That reflects their current level of awareness and their relationships with the state. The state now still plays an important role in deciding businesses'

fates. It's hard to imagine that they care about us at this moment' (woman, HCMC).

A youth volunteer said 'here, some companies and hotels actively support our activities, partly because we are working seriously, so gain their trust, and partly because our club president is the son of the chairman of the city People's Committee' (woman, central region). Also, a community organisation leader said that it is easier for 'influential' people, having connection with the authorities to raise funds from businesses 'if Mrs. Truong My Hoa [former state vice-president] establishes an association then sends letters to raise funds from those corporations, their leaders will say "oh Ms. Hoa", and then this or that family will donate. If I ask, nobody gives anything' (man, HCMC).

However, there are bright spots in cooperation with businesses. The first is youth groups whose activities are more 'peaceful', and their images are better in the eyes of businesses, thus 'they mobilise businesses very effectively, and organisations can learn. Their activities are very transparent, donated money will be publicly posted on Facebook very quickly, and corporate donors feel very pleased' (man, central region).

Some NGOs cooperate closely with local businesses. An NGO executive said, 'when cooperating with businesses, it's better to work with local ones because if they are local, they belong to the area and then they are more willing to donate. For example, small playgrounds and flower gardens here are partially funded by local businesses. Construction material businesses sell cheap products, with no profit, and local carpenters and contractors charge only for labour costs... besides, some hotels provide free accommodation for architects... I have hundreds of examples of such local businesses' (woman, central region).

This was also mentioned by many others. There remains a 'sensitive' view on NGOs and civil society and a lack of an open legal framework to encourage businesses. Many businesses feel reluctant to work with NGOs, for fear of any involvement and political sensitivity. A respondent from an independent group said, some businesses give money with a

reminder 'in any case, please don't mention me... because they want to maintain a vague relationship, which is actually a hidden connection. They do so because if they [the security forces] come and ask: eh why do you fund this group, they don't know how to answer. Because they don't have a foundation to provide funds. It is also related to the freedom of assembly, and if they want to carry out activities, there should be a mechanism regarding the freedom of assembly. However, to establish a foundation remains very difficult in Vietnam' (man, HCMC).

In general, the cooperation between civil society and businesses is confined to funding and actually faces countless difficulties. Businesses primarily support charitable groups, especially state political organisations, or associations of former state officials having good relationships. They avoid developmental and sensitive activities or independent groups. An independent observer said 'our society has not recognised civil activity groups because the people don't see benefits and shapes of those groups and don't know what they are, with what benefits, and why they should give them money instead of giving those currently in need of buying rice or having medical treatment. On the other hand, CSOs are not proactive, not knowing how to approach businesses nor developing strategies for raising funds from businesses partly because they are satisfied with familiar external resources' (woman, Hanoi).

4.4.2.7 The extent of cooperation between CSOs and media (2.94 points)

The mass media and civil society are considered to have a common mission for a better society. Thanks to this, 'NGOs' activities, including support for women, HIV infected people, homosexuals or anything else, receives attention from the mass media. Even some issues such as the environment, hunger, poverty or corruption are also covered, but their voices are generally softer than those on other issues' (man, Hanoi).

Basically, the media covers activities of civil society, including activities of NGOs, community organisations, and youth groups. A member of a charitable youth group described, 'each programme has journalists from three, four or five newspapers to report. Journalists go to mountainous

areas to take photos and produce video clips. Local television stations and some online newspapers such as VnExpress also send correspondents to follow us from the preparation to the implementation phase. They also produce many feature stories. I think the first reason is our non-profit basis. Also, the people now don't care much about society, thus the media want to communicate this message' (woman, central region).

However, a journalist who has worked with civil society for a long time said that NGOs are still very passive in cooperating with the media. If they believe that inviting some journalists to report on an event is a success, then they have missed the power of the media. The media usually focus on scandals which draw the attention of the public. These scandals can be about environmental pollution, child sex abuse or violence towards women. Nevertheless, in most cases, NGOs do not appear when the whole society is boiling and paying attention to their areas of operation. As far as the media are concerned, this is the time when they want to have a new and different voice, but NGOs cannot provide it. As one journalist described, 'in a scandal of an official's assets being revealed, we were looking for some NGOs which have conducted research on corruption or even recommended criminalisation of illegal enrichment, i.e. punishing greedy officials who own money but can't prove its sources, we asked these NGOs to comment on the scandal but they refused. I don't understand why, firstly they are afraid of confrontation, secondly their projects have finished, all money disbursed, now no more obligation towards society is required' (man, Hanoi).

One of civil society's concerns is their image in newspapers. The media can cover news about activity A of organisation B, or the speech of person C, but readers do not know that A, B and C are all part of civil society¹⁴. The public is only aware that civil society is something vague, dangerous, reactionary and related to 'peaceful evolution' as described by the public security forces and the Commission for Education and Propaganda. According to a journalist working in civil society, this

¹⁴ See the study 'Images of CSOs in some printed and electronic newspapers', ISEE, the World Publishing House, 2011

is a matter of the communication approach. 'CSOs in Vietnam need specific, not abstract faces ... I hope civil society can be something not so abstract, as can be seen from the perspective of the media where we have to be a pioneer' (man, Hanoi).

One barrier against cooperation between civil society and the media is that journalists have not understood or reported activities and actors in civil society for the public to recognise. 'Mr. Nam Dong, the owner of Restaurant 2000, is the former chief editor of HCMC Law Newspaper. He initiated the idea of charging 2,000 dong for a meal that actually costs 15,000 dong by mobilising volunteers to serve and individuals to donate; this is an activity of civil society. Similarly, Mr. Tran Dang Tuan, the former vice president of Vietnam Television, initiated the Rice with Meat Campaign. This activity has involved many people and become a successful civil activity. However, Nam Dong and Tran Dang Tuan are widely known as former journalists, and they, along with the Restaurant 2000 and Rice with Meat campaigns, are not presented as part of civil society. These are links of a chain that need joining so that newspapers can communicate on civil society in an easier-to-understand and downto-earth manner' (man, Hanoi).

However, cooperation between civil society and the media does not rely on both sides' motivations and attractiveness of news but largely on the authorities, particularly the Communist Party Commission for Education and Propaganda. Some interviewees argued that civil society actors and organisations working in the fields of social criticism, human rights, and criticism against the administration, such as 'Group 72', could be on a 'blacklist' that the media are not allowed to mention. The names of U&I groups are completely banned and never appear in official newspapers. This is a disadvantage not only for the media, which miss in-depth analysis from many intellectuals, but also for the public, which thus has no chance to listen to the voice of independent civil society. Sometimes, a few brave editors-in-chief removed barriers, quoting comments of some members of Group 72. But this is rare, and comments are sometimes quoted without names.

There has been more cooperation thanks to some emerging NGOs specialising in communication and media. A manager of a prestigious newspaper said that 'an NGO provided a typical example for combining consultation with the homosexual community, the use of the social media and obtaining the support of the media. Many big and small newspapers provide support through writing articles on movements, while others just keep silent without any objection, that's good enough' (man, Hanoi). To achieve this, NGOs need to attach importance to communication, considering it a core part of their organisations' missions. Therefore, when planning or implementing activities, it is always important to think about messages and provide information to journalists. Very few NGOs employ full-time staff in charge of communication and information technology or produce their own websites, Facebook, and blogs to promote social communication¹⁵.

Informal cooperation between CSOs and the media has arisen through some recent events such as the tree-cutting scandal in Hanoi. The media only became cautiously involved in this case after social media networks had already discussed the issue. A leader from an NGO specialising in communication said, 'At first, we were still passive, mainly trying to counter other arguments, one by one. For example, some newspapers quoted sources from the city authorities stating that the public supports tree-cutting. We held an [online] vote, asking whether people agree, and up to 98 or 99% said that they never agreed. When Mr. Trần Đăng Tuấn wrote to the City People's Committee, it had no impact initially. I found him a little bit alone. I organised a vote explaining that Tuan had sent a letter to request [stopping tree cutting] while trees were still being cut, and then asking whether the public supported Tuan's request or Hanoi's continued replacement of trees. A vast majority of journalists, about 90%, supported Tuan, while only 10% was for the Hanoi authorities. This figure had an immediate impact on newspapers. Initially, they did not join but then quickly carried articles about Tuan's story, being aware of the importance of this issue' (man, Hanoi).

¹⁵ See the report 'Vietnamese CSO's communication capacity and needs', 2015.

As a result, in addition to direct cooperation between the media and CSOs, there exists a common space for both sides: social media. An NGO leader said, 'Toften receive messages from journalists via Facebook requesting interviews to provide information or recommend sources when they see my status on a certain topic. Some newspapers also ask to reprint my blog entries or for my ideas to develop the topic in their direction of interest' (man, Hanoi). An opposition activist said that social networks connect people very well, but the official media are better at encouraging the public to take actions. 'In the case of anti-China demonstrations, only after official newspapers carried news did social networks know to call for demonstrations. If no official newspaper had carried the story, there would been only silence, without any reason for people to go demonstrate' (woman, Hanoi).

Therefore, by nature, civil society and the media have a need for mutual cooperation. However, as the official media are still under state regulation, they cannot freely post independent views of civil society, and civil society has not made itself interesting or brave enough to take advantage of 'surfing the media'. Social media currently plays an intermediary role in connecting the two groups, providing information and supporting each other. This remains confined to specific cases. Making it habitual requires understanding and efforts from both sides.

4.4.2.8. Connectivity between Vietnamese civil society and international/regional civil society (2.73 points)

Vietnamese CSOs chiefly perform activities at home. Except for some special topics, such as those relating to the Mekong River or the environment with strong regional and international connectivity, other activities are chiefly in the form of participation in workshops, training courses or forums hosted by other organisations. Regarding international relations, a young person said that environmental activities 'are influenced by very big international movements, but they are more in the form of one-way influence, i.e. international influences on Vietnam, such as the "Earth Hour" - rarely vice versa' (man, Hanoi).

The first challenge mentioned by several U&I activists in terms of international linkages is the language barrier: not many people speak English fluently. As a result, the ability to communicate, search information and study is limited. The second challenge is related to the 'ambition' and 'priority' of civil society leaders in Vietnam. Many people think that working locally is enough, with so many things to do, with no reason for regional and international outreach. The third challenge is related to the fact that state agencies sometimes take over space of CSOs at international forums.

Recently, many NGOs and U&I groups have proactively joined regional and international forums, such as the ASEAN People's Forum (APF), the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Human Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). These organisations have cooperated on their own in implementing independent processes and preparing independent reports of civil society to submit to international committees. These independent processes have received the attention, recognition and support from many international organisations, the United Nations and diplomatic corps. Also, these processes have put pressures on the government, and especially questioned the legitimacy of 'the state's civil society' delegations. In international settings, an international definition of civil society applies, revealing the 'non-independent character' of state organisations.

An example of international and regional linkage can be found among CSOs working on LGBT rights. An activist in this area said that the LGBT community in Vietnam has good connectivity with the outside world. In the process of advocacy in Vietnam, many good practices from the US and Europe have been used for advocacy. Lessons on advocacy for LGBT rights learnt from Holland, the US, Sweden, and Ireland have been shared with Vietnam. Conversely, Vietnam is also the founding member of the LGBT rights network in ASEAN (ASEAN SOGI Caucus) and shares experience with other regional countries through regular visits. A member of the LGBT community said 'a victory in France, Ireland, or the US can be considered as the common victory of the LGBT community in general and the Vietnamese LGBT

community in particular. Very few communities have watched what is happening in Russia, Uganda or Australia as much as the Vietnamese LGBT community. This is why when the US legalised same-sex marriage, Facebook users in Vietnam rainbow-coloured their avatars and, furthermore, thousands of people flocked to Nguyen Hue Street in Ho Chi Minh City to share their happiness.

Arguably, the international integration of Vietnamese civil society still faces various barriers and challenges. However, the first channels have been opened by civil society itself. With emerging social media networks, the involvement of some NGOs and U&I groups, the world has realised the existence of true independent CSOs in Vietnam. This is a foundation for international organisations to enter, cooperate and dialogue with the Vietnamese government to expand space and build capacity to develop civil society.

4.4.3. State regulation (2.24 points)

There were 101 respondents who answered all indicators of this component. In this component, the rate of non-responses for each indicator was high, ranging from 9.3% to 12.5%, and the rate of 'no idea' ranged from 3.9% to 14.5%. This indicates that some segments of civil society themselves may not fully understand the rights that the state should protect.

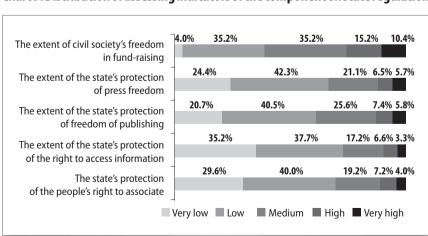


Chart 9: Distribution of assessing indicators of the component on state regulation

Respondents gave low ratings to indicators regarding relating to rights protection and formation of operating space for civil society participants.

- The extent of the state's protection of the people's right to access information: respondents living in provinces outside Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi gave a score 0.62 points higher than those living in Hanoi.
- The extent of the state's protection of the press freedom: the respondents living in provinces outside Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi gave a score 0.80 points higher than those living in Hanoi.
- The extent of civil society's freedom in fundraising: respondents living in provinces outside Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi gave a score 0.86 points higher than those living in Hanoi.

Scores for each indicator are presented in the following chart.

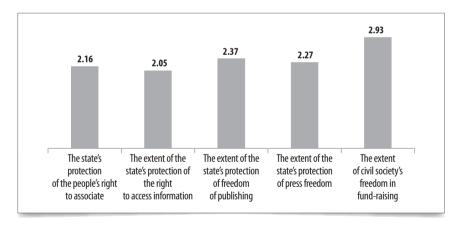


Chart 10: Scores for indicators in the component on state regulation

The average score of the component is 2.24, the lowest among the components reflecting civil society space. The component's average scores differ according to the place of residence (Hanoi 2.15; HCMC 2.02; other provinces and cities 2.84). Respondents living in Ho Chi Minh City scored these indicators 0.16 points lower than those living in Hanoi, while respondents living in 14 other provinces/cities scored those indicators 0.55 points higher than those living in Hanoi.

There was no geographic difference between those who responded to all component indicators and those who did not. As a result, the average score of this component would not vary significantly if all respondents had provided full answers.

The scores of all indicators were below the mean score of 3. The highest score was for fund raising with 2.93 points, and the lowest for the freedom of access to information with only 2.05 points.

Details of the indicators concerning state regulation are discussed below.

4.4.3.1. The state's protection of the people's right to association (2.16 points)

The people's right of association was rated low. To register an NGO or an association is much more difficult in Ho Chi Minh City than elsewhere. Marked discrimination exists between retired officials and ordinary people who have an independent idea in applying to establish an NGO or Association. Marked discrimination also exists between associations under state agencies, with 'umbrellas', and those that want to be independent. Additionally, different forms of civil society have different needs regarding registration with the state.

Many people argued that it is very easy for retired officials to set up an NGO or an association but extremely hard for others. This can be seen clearly even in less sensitive areas, such as HIV/AIDS prevention and control. An experienced activist said that 'although the Law on HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control is very progressive, it doesn't matter much and cannot support the establishment of CSOs in this area. All HIV/AIDS prevention and control associations and organisations are founded by retired officials from the Ministry of Health or provincial Departments of Health. When these people apply, their applications would be approved immediately, while nobody approves applications of independent associations' (man, HCMC). 'Even HIV-infected people who have done good jobs and made a positive impact on society are still despised, told to go away and barred from so many things. At first, those

people are not allowed to organise anything. Only after the benefits of their work are seen, then they are allowed to register' (man, Hanoi).

A similar story also happened in other sectors. An activist who has extensive experience in social work in the south said, 'I applied three years ago [to register an association] but my application remains at the Department of Home Affairs. No official reason why I haven't granted a permit has been provided. There is no official document explaining why my application has not been approved. I mean, they do not permit, but don't say that they don't. It is suspended there, and I am asked to add this and that. But actually we all understand what the root cause is. The point is that all the people in the mobilising board for that association work for international organisations, no one belongs to the Party's political system. Nobody says this, but we have implicitly understood it, and it is also a barrier' (woman, HCMC).

In a similar process of application in the north, 'it went so quickly. As soon as the profession of social work was recognised, the Association of Social Work was established. We recognised "big names" there, such as the former Minister of Labour, Mrs. Nguyễn Thị Hằng, and others. That is why they got the permit so quickly. They asked why we don't merge with that association. But southerners have their own perspective, and the working approaches in the two regions are very different' (woman, HCMC). The difficulties in establishing an association, faced even by the most experienced and knowledgeable people who know well about the people's rights and the right of assembly but are not allowed to set up it, have made them hopeless.

This was also shared by an activist with more than 40 years of experience: 'Even though all efforts have been made to justify the application for setting up a scouts' association, the application has not been approved. Recently, a professor established an ear-nose-throat society for kids. There exists one for adults but he insists having another one for kids, and the authorities approved it immediately, because a state agency can provide an umbrella for it. The authorities are very open with what does not help the issue of community, but it becomes very difficult with what is related to community relations and the people' (man, HCMC).

For NGOs, whether the establishment is easy or difficult depends considerably on their areas of operation or the relationship with line management agencies. The interviewees who are NGO managers said 'procedures are not very difficult, and establishment is easier'. One of them said 'the provincial science and technology union encourages it, and we also have good relationships, thus the process was very quick. Generally, no problem at all. We were granted a permit within around two months' (woman, central region).

However, not everyone can establish an NGO, especially for sensitive issues such as anti-corruption and human rights protection. Some organisations cannot register officially, thus have to register under the form of a limited liability company. A member of such an organisation said, 'with regards to functions, we can do what we want. The company can even issue receipts when we raise funds. The company pays all taxes in a transparent manner. But we think only about our status. We feel that if we were able to register as a social organisation for community development, that would be much more relevant to its nature' (man, HCMC).

As a consequence of difficult registration, many community groups 'choose not to register, partly because the mechanism does not enable them to register and partly as they don't care whether their groups have legal status or not. If yes, they must have a structure and a working space where they can manage staff. Sometimes it's too cumbersome and not flexible as they just get together to work to develop internal strengths, there's no need to devote full time to the work. Nevertheless, many organisations still want to register. For example, with legal personhood, they have the legitimacy for working relationships, contract signing, account opening and fund-raising ...and their authority is recognised in legal terms. Having no status is a different story; you are like an illegitimate child or a child without a birth certificate' (man, HCMC).

Some U&I groups also opt not to register. A person from such groups said that his group is 'an unregistered organisation which is viewed by the authorities as a reactionary and hostile force. We know that our registration will never be accepted, thus we don't care about registration.

Registration is a possibility, not an obligation. The state says that it is compulsory, but I suppose that not facilitating my registration is the fault of the state, not mine. Hence, we just keep working' (man, Hanoi).

Some groups 'don't bother to establish themselves as I already know [it can't be registered]. Actually we want to register, but here it is the registration with the state, which also a complete loss of the independence of a CSO. We don't need the state to recognise us; we need the people to recognise us. That is the point' (man, Hanoi). Another group has also not registered as 'it does not want its activities to be limited under state management. Once registered for establishment, all activities will be censored by the state...In case of any violations, the state will definitely have the right to punish. But for the current activities, there is almost nothing to be controlled or punished...The risks are the same either way' (woman, Hanoi).

An independent observer said that the State does not protect the people's right to freedom of assembly 'because there hasn't been any exemplary case; that is, there is no precedent. The state may have an intention but never a precedent. If I can find a precedent, I will answer yes. Especially, from the past up to now, there haven't been any cases in which the court system judges a violation of the rights listed in the research questionnaire. The point is that every society has violations of these rights, however obviously in our society; violations of these rights have never been punished. Therefore, that can be considered the first indicator to determine whether a state protects these rights or not. In Vietnam, that bell has never rung; and is still hanging out there' (woman, Hanoi).

Therefore, the right to the freedom of assembly is a problem for Vietnamese CSOs, especially for independent, social-criticism and southern groups. It is easier for NGOs in the north, but there remain some NGOs which are unable to register due to their 'sensitive' topics or are suggested to change their names to avoid 'risks' for licensing agencies.

4.4.3.2. The extent of the state's protection of the right to access information (2.05 points)

The right to access to information is important, since it helps enforce other human rights. However, the Law on Access to Information is still being drafted by the Ministry of Justice. Due to state agencies' mindset of 'no guidelines, no implementation', access to important information seems impossible. Although the extent of the state's protection of the right to access information is considered limited, there exist different views on this right.

An NGO director said that there still exist many barriers to the right to access information in Vietnam. Within their working areas, 'some reports of environmental impact assessments for certain projects should be disclosed to the public according to the laws. But currently there is no such disclosure mechanism, thus one has to ask for it from personal sources. Fortunately, in Vietnam, many things are disclosed by the state, thus it is easier. For instance, legal documents are disclosed publicly and professionally. The Ministry of Justice and the Government's databases are very good. In terms of statistics, figures are rather good. For example, the data on incomes and expenditures of the state budget are perfect. When working with friends around in the region, I realise that our conditions are much better than theirs. Data are available but further details are a different story' (man, Hanoi).

However, an independent activist argued that the government is 'keeping secrets like cats. That [right to access information] does not exist at all. The income of the central Party office was recently revealed because people are fighting each other. It's not corruption; it's preparation for the upcoming Party Congress. Has anyone ever known the budget expenditures of the Vietnam Communist Party? The Office of the Vietnam Communist Party alone spends a hundred million dollars a year. Whose money is that? Our tax money!' (man, Hanoi).

One researcher became very upset about the absence of the right to access information in Vietnam. He said, 'now I want to know who signed

the decision on replacing 6,700 trees, who made the decision to cut and how many weeks were spent on cutting these trees in Nguyen Chi Thanh Street, who said magnolia trees would be grown to replace them. Is there such information? No one knows anything behind those magnolias at all. Which company had grown those rubbish trees and who allowed it to grow. Nobody knows, right? And that is the simplest thing out of the simplest ones. To know how much EVN and PetroVietnam's losses and profits are seems utopian' (man, Hanoi).

The discussions about the Law on Access to Information, which some NGOs have been invited to advise, highlight the philosophy that the drafting of the law should be based on rights, not needs. The mindset is not what the people's needs are and how they are met, but a maximum amount of information should be provided to anyone regardless of whether they would use it or not; and secret information should be kept at a minimum level, with a clear list that includes only what would actually affect national security. Information which is not provided publicly but on demand should always be available for the public to access. Besides, the public should be able to access the information produced and managed by all agencies that use the state budget, which is, by nature, the people's tax money. Therefore, the public should have the right to access information of these agencies.

However, according to an independent activist participating in the advising process, these principles have not been reflected in the draft Law on Access to Information as the state still does not want to make information transparent, which would enable the people and civil society to access and supervise its activities. This definitely has a great impact on civil society's activities, especially on organisations involved in social criticism, research and policy advocacy. If this right is not guaranteed, it would be difficult for these important functions of civil society to be implemented.

4.4.3.3. The extent of the State's protection of freedom of publishing (2.37 points)

To understand the right to publish in Vietnam, it is necessary to look at both institutional and practical aspects, as an independent observer analysed. 'Institutionally, this right is rated very low, but in practice, illegal publishers operate freely. Publishing is still "privatised", and the people say that that censorship now is only post-censorship, not prior censorship. That means, publishers have to censor their contents by themselves, no one has responsibility to read all what will be published. But in institutional terms, this cannot be acceptable, right? That is a low score but the reality is much better' (woman, Hanoi).

A person working in the independent publishing field said, 'the core issue of publishing in Vietnam is still the permit. However, the publisher management agencies are just permit sellers. Thus in case of trouble, they will push the responsibility to publishers' (man, HCMC).

An activist said that as a result of 'permit selling', in reality, '80% of the publishing work in Vietnam is currently conducted by the private sector, from selection and translation of books to publishing. State agencies have the sole task to grant or sell permits' (man, Hanoi). 'In addition, state publishers now also involve some progressive forces from the private sector. The former take advantage of their state authority to sell permits, without doing anything at all. Publishers like the Writers' Association don't do anything but sell permits. Thus, the progressive forces buy permits by this or that way to publish difficult books' (man, central region).

Although the picture of the publishing sector is ambiguous, both beneficial and harmful as two sides are exploiting each other, after all it is still a censored publishing system, 'not quite free. They still strictly censor, burn and pulp books' (man, Hanoi). A writer said that the right to publish freely does not yet exist and has not been protected. 'I am a victim of this issue, once only but that is more than enough. A book of mine was confiscated one month after it had been published. That book has no political problem or anything sensitive. It is a normal literary

novel. Due to nonsense imagination, an insane writer denounced it to the Publishing Bureau, which then banned my book on the grounds of slandering a historical figure. The main and actual reason is that someone read that book while my film which criticised writers vehemently was hot' (woman, Hanoi).

Many people argue that publishers should employ different ways to avoid censorship. They may change book titles to avoid sensitivity, for example from 'Democracy in America' to 'Public Governance in America'. Sensitive vocabulary, such as 'civil society' or contents relating to human rights, political institutions, or pluralism, are removed or 'euphemised'. Another way which is relatively popular but riskier is publishing without a permit. It refers to professional publishing organisations, such as the 'Waste Paper Publisher', or simply irregular activities of many organisations and agencies which print books with a note 'for internal circulation only' to avoid state censorship.

Another rather popular coping strategy is to publicise books in the Internet for free download. Authors of many memoirs or translated books which cannot be published officially accept to publicise their products in the Internet. An independent activist said 'Here is the reason; it [book publishing] takes time and money, and then more effort just to give the books away. Thus, I then prepare a PDF version and a Word version to post online, no matter where it is posted. I am not the one who shares it, and it has a ton of influence!' (man, Hanoi).

According to an independent observer, posting works online 'is free, thus everyone can do it. This is a good point in institutional terms which proves that the legal framework hasn't fully recognised or caught up to the diversity of reality. It's then their disadvantage, since people no longer go through that framework; they have been outside it for a long time' (woman, Hanoi). This is a problem of law making in Vietnam where laws are made to 'cover' all practices without setting up a clear scenario for oriented changes. This has produced a mixed picture as can be seen with protection of the right to publish.

4.4.3.4. The extent of the state's protection of press freedom (2.27 points)

In Vietnam, private citizens are not allowed to publish; hence, press freedom is still limited. The press has no 'prior-reviewed' censorship, but 'post-review' censorship exists and has been conducted rather strictly. A person working in the media said that although topics of printed newspapers are no longer required to be approved, 'it is necessary to attend meetings every Tuesday at the Commission for Propaganda and Education which is a considerable barrier. In addition to the Party's agencies, the public security forces also interfere in the press very strongly' (man, Hanoi).

Some social activists shared their observations, arguing that as long as the press is under state regulation, press freedom will definitely be very limited, 'as they can only publish what is suitable with the state's views. Their intervention is seen through articles that are withdrawn after publication. I see articles withdrawn so regularly and don't know the reason behind it, whether correspondents, editors or more senior managers have done it, I don't know, but I am sure about this fact. Usually, articles that get withdrawn are rather sensitive articles which refer to many people, maybe businesspeople, individuals in the judiciary, state agencies or the state itself' (man, central region).

A researcher in Hanoi who regularly writes articles also confirmed that content-cutting is common, and even big newspapers 'cut worthless, odd, and nonsensical things'. This is the 'self-censorship' mechanism that newspapers create for themselves, partly because they attend 'regular' meetings every Tuesday and sometimes receive verbal instructions. An independent activist said, 'in Vietnam, there are verbal instructions. It is said that all those who join the Independent Writers' Association are not allowed to appear in the media or post articles, and also their names should not be mentioned in the media which are all state-owned' (man, Hanoi).

However, some people said that there is a 'silent effort' of the media to expand their own free space. Some newspapers apply 'trial' strategies, i.e. they carry sensitive articles and then explore attitudes around. In case of no warnings, the articles are kept; otherwise they are withdrawn. Newspapers also watch each other to run sensitive topics, not completely depending on instructions from the Commission for Propaganda and Education or the Ministry of Information and Communication.

Another way to promote press freedom, especially with online newspapers, is to strengthen the voice of readers. 'Thanks to technology, online newspapers add a variety of items, such as "The people writing newspapers", "Writing newspapers with us", "Readers' views", "Investigations requested by readers", and "Consumer protection". This encourages readers to express their views proactively, which is also a way to promote press freedom. This is particularly effective thanks to comment systems from online newspapers, enabling readers to express views. When readers see their comments posted, they become inspired to write more. This has a positive impact as it expands involvement in the media's activities as well as controversial issues' (man, HCMC).

Like the Law on Access to Information, the Press Law is being discussed for amendments, under the lead of the Ministry of Information and Communication. However, controversial contents are considerably 'below' the right to the freedom of press as stated in Article 25 of the Constitution. For instance, in the section of the scope of adjustment, 'the Press Law stipulates organisation and operations of the press; rights and obligations of agencies, organisations, and individuals which are involved in press activities and state regulation of the press'. Thus, the perspective of the Law comes from the aspect of press management, rather than from citizens' right to freedom of the press. A freelance activist said that the draft law should assert, 'This law stipulates citizens' right to freedom of the press, rights and obligations in practising press freedom, the sequence and procedures of establishing press agencies and responsibilities of state agencies for ensuring citizens' right to freedom of the press'. Only then will it

be compatible with the right to freedom of the press protected by the Constitution and international commitments made by Vietnam, especially the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Vietnam is a signatory.

In addition, the following key functions of the press have not been reinforced in the draft Press Law: (i) Being a forum for enforcing the people's right to freedom of speech: The press provides information, knowledge and views on economic, social, and political issues from different perspectives; and (ii) Being a tool to investigate plots, tricks, corruption, tortuousness or collusion among interest groups which may undermine the national economic, social, and political system. Especially, the draft has not allowed private press or stipulated a mechanism to protect journalists, especially investigative ones. Therefore, the right to the press of freedom will definitely remain limited, and the press system will continue to be unbalanced and unhealthy as it has to compete with 'kill, rob, rape' news on social media, thus eroding the quality and role of the press¹⁶.

4.4.3.5. The extent of civil society's freedom in fund-raising (2.93 points)

According to respondents, fund-raising is rather popular in Vietnam. During floods, storms and natural disasters, state agencies raise funds by setting levels of expected contributions and subtracting this amount from their employees' salaries. The Fatherland Front and mass organisations collect contributions from the people through neighbourhood committees. In parallel with the authorities, various individuals and civil groups also mobilise resources. In general, the spirit of 'healthy leaves wrapping torn ones' is promoted widely in emergencies. Everyone volunteers and faces no barriers from the authorities.

¹⁶ A draft media release distributed at the consultative meeting held by VUSTA on July 1, 2015.

For the time being, it is fairly common that an individual or a group raises funds for charitable activities or an artistic and educational project. They only prepare specific projects, advertising and calling for the people to contribute money according to their capacity and interests. A group has mobilised 300 million dong for a cartoon story project from crowd-funding over the Internet. Other groups have collected billions of dong through selling sponsored paintings or raised funds directly to build flood-proof houses for people in Ha Tinh and Nghe An provinces. A common interest group collected hundreds of millions of dong from its members to build schools for children in ethnic minority areas in Ha Giang and Son La. These activities are mainly implemented by unregistered civil groups, chiefly on a voluntary basis. They do not request permission, and their activities are not prevented by the authorities.

However, fundraising from the public and businesses for NGOs' activities is not really popular. One pioneering NGO in Ho Chi Minh City campaigns to raise funds for various purposes, such as education, the environment, and children. An officer from this organisation met with authorities to ask for permission to raise funds. However, the latter replied, 'there have not been any specific regulations on fundraising'. This means that no one prevents this NGO from fund-raising but does not mean that the organisation is allowed to do it. This is a gray area of the law, and many people interpret it that 'doing small things is OK, charity is OK, but if you are doing big things or raising funds for sensitive issues, then a permit will be required. And then the question is about whether raised funds should be taxable. It's so complicated!' (man, HCMC).

A study on charity conducted by iSEE in 2014 shows that it is not easy to raise funds directly from the public for several reasons. Firstly, an organisation that wants to raise funds in an area is required to go through the local authorities, which play a role of 'gate-keeper'. It is

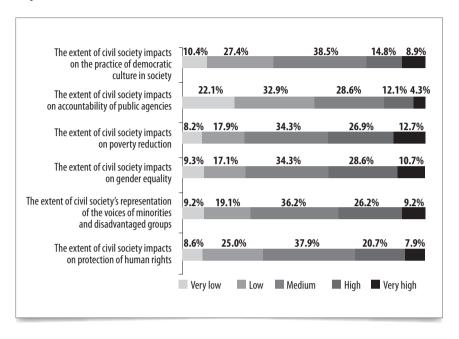
not easy to obtain a permit for implementing activities, especially in a context of no clear legal framework for fund-raising. Furthermore, the authorities have maintained a reserved attitude toward civil society. Secondly, the public themselves are also reserved towards NGOs due to propaganda they have heard about 'peaceful evolution', 'colour revolutions', and 'overthrow'. The public are not willing to donate to an organisation which they do not know or issues which they are not familiar with. Thirdly, information on negative issues and corruption relating to donated money is published considerably in the media. Although corruption takes place within state agencies or mass organisations, it still affects the people's willingness to donate.

Although raising funds directly from the community is not promising for NGOs, there is still an open door which is the Internet and the middle class in urban areas. According to iSEE's study, people who use the Internet regularly and the middle class in urban areas tend to donate more to NGOs. Using this channel, NGOs may not have to go through the 'gate-keeper' in the local authorities. Experience shows that fund-raising for charitable purposes faces no problems from local authorities. However, the situation may be different if more sensitive activities are expanded, such as those relating to human rights, or supporting groups and organisations not accepted by the state. Anyway, NGOs have to test by themselves and try to explore the limits of freedom in fund-raising.

4.4.4. Civil society impacts (2.92 points)

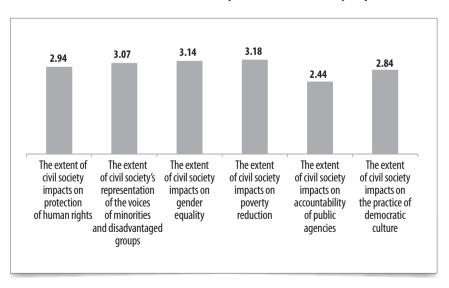
As many as 120 respondents answered all indicators of this component. There is no statistical difference in assessing the impact indicators of civil society according to the place of residence, education, age groups, and types of organisation. The rate of non-response to each indicator on civil society impacts ranged from 4.6% to 7.3%, and the rate of 'no idea' response ranged from 0.7% to 5.9%.

Chart 11: Distribution of assessing indicators in the component on civil society impacts



Results of these indicators are presented in the diagram below

Chart 12: Scores for indicators in the component on civil society impacts



The average score of the component on civil society impacts is 2.92. There are no differences in scores according to social demographic characteristics. Three indicators scored above the mean with the highest being on the impact on poverty reduction (3.18 points), followed by gender equality (3.14 points) and communication of minority groups' voices (3.07 points).

Details of the indicators relating to civil society impacts are discussed below.

4.4.4.1. The extent of civil society impacts on protection of human rights (2.94)

Protection of human rights is considered one of CSOs' most important missions. However, in the Vietnamese political context, this work is relatively new and hard for both NGOs and independent civil groups. When asked, most respondents admitted that their jobs were confined to raising awareness of human rights, providing inputs to amending the Constitution and writing shadow reports on some of the UN's mechanisms for human rights protection, such as UPR and CEDAW. Meanwhile, very few organisations directly protect people whose human rights are violated.

Though scoring below the mean, the roles of CSOs in protecting human rights is undeniable. Respondents questioned who would be able to raise their voice on human rights, if not CSOs. Despite limited numbers, more NGOs, unregistered groups and individuals have become interested in promoting human rights over recent years. The rights-based approach has been applied in preparing projects. The rights of women, ethnic minorities, people affected by HIV, persons with disabilities, migrants, and homosexuals have been mentioned more regularly, contributing to normalising the concepts of 'human rights' in Vietnam. Some courses on human rights have been organised and independent reports on the human rights situation in Vietnam prepared. NGOs' inputs to laws and policies have usually been focussed on protecting the vulnerable, disadvantaged and minority groups.

In the Vietnamese context, it is widely accepted that mandates to protect civil and political rights are still very sensitive, and such activities remain controlled by the state. Nevertheless, there exists a view that not many CSOs have protected rights even in less sensitive cases. 'When a child is forced to work at a noodle restaurant or at a tailor's, his or her rights are violated, but over many years no NGOs or CSOs have taken action. The people only lobby, and conduct policy advocacy and research without building relationships with the community so that people can come to them for help in case their rights are violated' (woman, Hanoi).

This view was also shared by people working in the media. They said, 'when a voice is needed to protect children whose labour is abused, no CSO has ever raised its voice. Even no information has been provided to interviews to be carried in newspapers to cause pressure. Only lawyers are open to doing this, while organisations, as we perceive, only work on projects until their funds are spent up' (man, Hanoi). A person in Ho Chi Minh City also said, 'regarding the case of child violence exposed by the press and then involving the public ... at that time I wondered why child rights organisations kept silent or raised a voice which was not loud enough to be heard. I feel most of them hide, and only the public raise loud voices' (man, HCMC).

Therefore, the absence of NGOs and CSOs in more outstanding cases, such as Nhã Thuyên's right to academic freedom¹⁷ or Nguyễn Văn Chấn and Hồ Duy Hải's cases of injustice, is completely understandable. In such serious cases, social media, U&I groups and lawyers can make a greater impact as they dare to confront. When they raise their voice, engaging the press and the public, then a chance to protect human rights for these people seems higher.

In addition to reasons relating to the political context, respondents also cited CSOs' capacities in working on human rights. 'Many NGOs are

¹⁷ Nhã Thuyên is a graduate student whose master's thesis was rejected because it researched the 'Mở Miệng' (Open Mouths) group, which is perceived to be 'anti-government'.

influenced by propaganda, considering human rights simply the rights to eat, to study and to live but slighting political and civil rights. Many people find it too luxurious to talk about the freedom of expression, human dignity or respect for diversity. Even NGO people seem to be doing a favour in a manner that "I struggle for you, I help you". Actually, that's not the case; we go together, hand in hand, with nobody being above anybody else. This is because people don't really understand the rights-based approach. They neither understand nor attach importance to political rights, thus their approaches are very much in the form of doing a favour' (woman, central region).

Sharing this view, a director of an NGO specialising in youth issues said, 'some programmes relating to LGBT have effectively linked human rights to LGBT. Otherwise, even regarding gender and children's issues, many CSOs have not been successful' (woman, Hanoi). With the same perspective, an independent activist said that he didn't see any impacts of CSOs on the protection of human rights, 'except for LGBT programmes which have produced tangible impacts, I slightly wonder about the impacts on women's rights and cannot see any impacts on child rights' (woman, Hanoi).

One of the gaps in NGOs' work lies with judicial reform, as stated by some independent activists. The judicial system plays an important role in protecting human rights. Nevertheless, to fulfil its functions, the judiciary should be independent, which is 'utopian in the current Vietnamese context'. Many Vietnamese are reluctant to involve with the court system due to their prejudice that this means being 'in trouble'. In addition to the fact that the court system remains so 'closed', there exists the belief that it is useless to bring a case to the court. Few NGOs have sufficient legal capacity to carry out these areas of work, for example supervising the court or bringing violations of citizens' rights and benefits to the court. Therefore, the role of NGOs in the direct protection of human rights is rare.

These views are usually based on the deep-rooted nature of the issue which is the imbalance of power between minorities, disadvantaged and vulnerable groups on the one hand, and majority groups and those with power on the other. In protecting human rights, it is impossible to avoid 'sensitive' issues, and this depends on the courage and talent of CSOs. It is utopian that NGOs want their activities to be supported by everyone, from the authorities, the public and the disadvantaged groups. Without opposition from certain groups, especially the advantaged and powerful ones, their activities might be only superficial and ineffective.

Therefore, the extent of civil society impacts on the protection of human rights was scored below the mean. To overcome this, apart from desensitising the work of human rights protection, CSOs should enhance their capacity, focussing resources in judicial activities and especially building capacity and trust of minorities and disadvantaged groups or those whose rights are violated so that they can raise their voices to protect their own rights.

4.4.4.2. The extent of civil society's representation of the voices of minorities and disadvantaged groups (3.07)

In development, one of the traps that all CSOs want to avoid is to speak on behalf of others. Therefore, how to communicate the needs, concerns and rights of minorities and disadvantaged groups to society and the state is extremely important. In an ideal environment, members of these groups would be strong enough to raise their voice and protect their rights. They and their organisations form a critical part of civil society, or at least are the focus of civil society.

However, many people are concerned about this issue. The director of an NGO said, 'I think a lot about current programmes in Vietnam. NGOs become an intermediary that sometimes doesn't reach the essence or the heart the job. I accept that the LGBT movement reflects the voices of insiders, attracting all the voices of LGBT people. However, let's see whether farmer-related organisations really communicate the voice of farmers, and gender-related organisations really communicate the voice of women. We work with youth, so we try to communicate their voice' (woman, Hanoi).

It is argued that CSOs give themselves a 'mission to save the world', that is helping others rather than solving our own problems. Many organisations support a particular target group but employ no members of that group. For example, one organisation works on ethnic minority issues, but all of its staff members are from the majority group. In addition, 'NGOs don't have locally based offices; they implement a project for few years and then withdraw. That means, no sooner have they become familiar with the community and understand its issues, then the project finishes' (woman, central region). As a consequence, it is very difficult for these organisations to communicate the voice of the minorities and disadvantaged people. A person involved in a youth movement admitted that in many cases he doesn't know how to communicate the voices of ethnic minority communities or people with disabilities, since he is not one of them. He said that organisations may 'invest in, raise funds and build a toilet for them but their voice should be raised by themselves, I think I can't speak on their behalf' (man, Hanoi).

However, some more optimistic people believed that although NGOs play an intermediary role, they have made the public better aware of new social issues. 'Previously, people didn't know what LGBT was but now they do, thanks to CSOs. The same can be said about gender equality. CSOs are more involved in gender equality than state organisations... The laws on preventing and fighting HIV and violence, the Law on People with Disabilities, and the revised Law on Marriage and Family have come from the voices of civil society... For example, the law on HIV Prevention and Control includes some provisions regarding anti-discrimination against HIV infected people. The same for the article on non-discrimination against people with disabilities, which had been advocated by CSOs. Inclusion of such an article in the law is very important' (man, HCMC).

To address this issue, some people argue that NGOs should strengthen their use of anthropological methods, listening in good faith and promoting the participation of insiders in research, communication, and policy advocacy. NGOs may not represent ethnic minorities, but can be a channel through which the latter can have a chance to raise their voices by themselves in the way they want. Some programmes, such as those on PhotoVoice, co-research, and training of community leaders, have ensured the participation of ethnic minorities in policy advocacy workshops or prepared for them to speak out. These are efforts currently made by many NGOs, which cannot be denied.

But in the long run, the community groups of minorities and disadvantaged people and organisations for people with the same interests, identities, ideologies, and objectives must become key players in bringing their voices to society and the state. If they are unable or have no chance to make themselves and their issues as normal as other people and issues, prejudice and discrimination will remain constant barriers preventing their voices from reaching the public and the state. In other words, removing discrimination and prejudice, promoting the values of tolerance, equality, respectfulness, and non-discrimination is a long-term approach, creating a friendly environment where everyone can raise their voices no matter who they are.

4.4.4.3. The extent of civil society impacts on gender equality (3.14)

In general, respondents believed that civil society's contributions to gender equality is are significant and scored this indicator above the mean. This is partly because many NGOs work in this field and partly because gender is not a sensitive area, with considerable attention from many donors, and more importantly, the state gives priority to it.

Some respondents argued that NGOs are involved in both policy advocacy and service delivery for disadvantaged women. Laws on Gender Equality and Domestic Violence Prevention have been adopted thanks to the significant contributions of NGOs. Many NGO leaders are invited to be members of gender advisory boards to National Assembly committees or to provide inputs on gender equality issues in various law-making projects. Many NGOs organise training courses on gender equality not only for women but also for state agencies, supporting women to take part in politics or addressing sexist comments in the

media. Many organisations provide loans to women, help them with employment, or provide shelters for women victims of domestic violence. Arguably, gender equality is one of the most vibrant, diverse and relatively successful areas of Vietnamese NGOs' work.

Nevertheless, some respondents expected more in the role of civil society in gender equality activities. One of them said, 'I feel organisations working on gender equality in Vietnam seem rather old. It's like they get stuck within the walls of gender equality built by the state. State organisations keep saying that women and men are equal, but the way they educate the people about men or women, exemplary cases of Vietnamese heroic mothers, Women's Day on March 8th and female teachers are so strong that CSOs in Vietnam cannot go beyond these preconceived shadows' (man, HCMC).

An independent observer said, 'the biggest impacts on gender equality have been made by social trends rather than CSOs, as a result of self-growth and self-development of women. It is different from the past, owing to the media, in the way that everyone starts to raise their voices about what they find unreasonable, not thanks to CSOs' efforts, or limited efforts, if any' (woman, Hanoi).

Many people believed that civil society impacts on gender equality can be greater if CSOs genuinely cooperate to solve root causes of the issues. Many organisations used to work only with women on gender equality issues, hence gender equality is normally seen as women's work, and men stay outside. Only in case of failure, do they start shifting to activities that include men. However, many organisations work in an 'intimidating' way or do not mention much about inequalities that men face as a result of a patriarchal society. They have to shoulder the work that not all men want to or can take up. In addition, there have not been many initiatives for both men and women to realise benefits of gender equality, as a training expert said: 'For example, in a training course on gender equality for leaders of a big corporation, men talked about gender equality "from their throats", as they saw it as women's issues, unrelated to the former. When I asked, "does anyone here

have a daughter?" Many raised their hands. I continued, "do you really want your daughters to suffer from prejudice and discrimination?" I saw many people stop suddenly and turn silent. They started to think seriously about gender equality so that their daughters can be treated fairly' (woman, Hanoi).

It may be that solving issues of gender equality requires a focus not only on relations between women and men, but also a broader context. Some people suggested combining three factors that need stressing in a discussion on gender equality. The first is to promote the value of equality. Equality should be for everyone, regardless of gender, ethnicity, region, religion, sexual preference, as well as economic, social and educational conditions. This is a core value, and once equality is recognised, then men and women will be treated equally. The second is to emphasise the agency of women. A human being is capable of thinking independently, making her own decisions, and participating in social community activities. It is essential not to victimise women as they may then victimise themselves and be content with arrangements or orders imposed by others. The third is the fact that women are human beings with dignity. Those who encroach on women's dignity, for instance conducting violent acts against them, limiting their opportunities to study and taking away their chance to be promoted are actually losing their own dignity. When both men and women respect dignity, being aware that their dignity should be guarded, then respect and equality can be practiced.

As a result, civil society has made significant contributions to gender equality and issues of women's interests that are included in the official agenda of the state. This involvement can be seen through support to women who are victims of gender-based violence and inclusion of gender equality in laws. However, to create a qualitative breakthrough and make more contributions, future movements on women's rights should change their approach and, first and foremost, have pioneering women. Women subject to violence, marginalised women and women who suffer injustice should stand up on their own to act for their own right to equality.

4.4.4.4. The extent of civil society impacts on poverty reduction (3.18 points)

Civil society impacts on poverty reduction were considered the strongest of the indicators in this section, but are only slightly above the median score of 3. Although civil society organisations have contributed to poverty reduction, most poverty reduction in Vietnam may been attributed to economic growth, coordination of the state's resources, and citizens' efforts.

CSOs contribute to poverty reduction through projects on agriculture, credit, and job creation. Some projects on clean water supply, health, and education also contribute to the socio-economic development of poor communities. Some respondents argued that NGOs often implement projects in distant and remote areas inhabited by ethnic minorities, and some NGOs are mandated to work with the poorest of the poor. NGO development models normally begin with direct support and capacity building but, importantly, they eventually develop models to advocate the state for more effective approaches to poverty reduction. This is typically implemented through policy advocacy activities with the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, the Committee for Ethnic Minority Affairs (Programme 135), and the Ministry of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs.

However, some respondents said that civil society's contributions to poverty reduction are limited in absolute terms. An economist explained, 'poverty reduction is attributed to economic growth, and civil society cannot claim it. Civil society can claim it only if poverty is reduced in a context of low economic growth and slow improvement of incomes, in this case the difference could be attributed to civil society's efforts. But civil society can't claim it in the case of an eight-percent economic growth rate with rapid poverty reduction. So, I only give two points, I believe that the main impacts come from economic growth' (man, Hanoi).

A NGO manager believed that the role of the state 'is very significant, CSOs' contribution is only partial or arguably even less. Success in

poverty reduction partly is partly attributed to resources coordinated by the state. Except for corruption problems, in general, poverty reduction efforts are effective. In some other countries, NGOs may be everywhere in a village, but no changes can be made. It is because there are no resources coordinated' (man, Hanoi).

Another view was that 'civil society impacts on poverty reduction are limited. Reduced poverty may be attributed to the state's policies, or maybe not, but rather to citizens' efforts. The state may have created an environment for the people to utilise or improve their conditions. So I believe that civil society makes limited contributions in poverty reduction' (man, Hanoi).

Over the recent years, many NGOs have implemented development projects in poor villages in rural and mountainous areas, and youth and charity groups have made efforts to tackle hunger and give away clothes and food to the people in ethnic minority areas. In terms of absolute value, these activities represent a very modest part in the overall poverty reduction level in Vietnam over the past years. It does not mean that civil society's activities are not important. Its importance is that civil society is helping specific people who are the poorest and most abandoned, those who have not benefitted from the processes of reform and economic development.

In order to strengthen civil society impacts on poverty reduction, the increase of resources for civil society is only one part, while the more important part is to change its advocacy priorities. A fact that cannot be ignored is that the poor are using their 'poverty status' as a livelihood strategy leading to competition to remain on the poverty list. It is the state's approach that has resulted in the mindset of dependence. The 'ask–give' mechanism has also eroded citizens' dignity, not to mention corruption, wastefulness, and wrong investments. This is the space where CSOs can function if they genuinely want to raise their voices and influence on poverty reduction, according to some respondents.

4.4.4.5. The extent of civil society impacts on accountability of public agencies (2.44 points)

Many respondents said that due to the imbalance of power, it is difficult for civil society to put pressure on the authorities for accountability. First and foremost, CSOs do not have the right to monitor the implementation of policies and mechanisms. A researcher said, 'There is nowhere civil society has the right to monitor, even in terms of legitimacy. The only agency which has the right to monitor is the Fatherland Front. They can't and don't want to do it, neither do they have money or capacity to do it. Except for the Fatherland Front, no organisation can monitor anything; no one can monitor the tree cutting scandal here. Any who dared to monitor will be arrested immediately. Yesterday, while taking photos of trees to post on maps, some young volunteers were questioned by public security. Some people who just took photos to upload in their software were questioned and then brought to the police station? How could they monitor anything?' (man, Hanoi).

As a result of no policies or mechanisms, NGOs are also unable to monitor the state. Due to being 'controlled' by state agencies through the system for registering and approving projects, 'NGOs do not dare to knock on the door of the authorities asking why they make this policy, approve this or provide information on that project, for example. Furthermore, state agencies themselves are very closed, in terms of accountability. They never say that they welcome civil society's separate and independent oversight' (woman, central region).

A respondent shared his experience in monitoring trips in northern provinces, 'many provinces reported our monitoring work at the local level to the ministry level. In the past, on the subject of the rubber plantations, officials in Hà Giang province hated it when we monitored lower levels. Often, we could go via the National Assembly's channel, that is joining its working missions as technical assistants, or via media channels. Then provincial officials had to accept it, though they didn't like it. When we accompany journalists, especially those from important media services, we are not required to prepare reference letters or any

paperwork, they would still receive and take us where we need to go. If we went alone suddenly, no one would receive us' (man, Hanoi).

If CSOs want to put pressure on state agencies to make them accountable, civil society must go together with the public, as suggested by a respondent. He said, 'in the tree cutting scandal in Hanoi, since the public condemned it so fiercely, then CSOs could tackle it successfully. If only CSOs had risen up to "make noise", they couldn't have done it successfully. People were so angry, then changes could be made' (man, HCMC).

Many respondents argued that social media and independent civil groups are producing certain impacts on accountability of public agencies. Take the Ministry of Health as evidence for civil society impacts on accountability. 'In the past, the concealing of the measles epidemic, mortality and many other things led to movements in the social media. Pages that requested the resignation of the Minister of Health got hundreds of thousands of "likes". When such a huge number of people are seen to participate, changes will be made. And now, Madame Minister even set up a fan page to communicate with the public. When something is posted on Facebook, she immediately issues official letters to address it. What a speedy change, 180 degrees' (man, Hanoi).

Like the story of the Ministry of Health, the tree cutting scandal in Hanoi is another typical example of civil society's pressure on the authorities to provide information and explain their project on replacing trees. An activist working on social criticism said, 'without such pressure, the Hanoi leaders and the Commission for Propaganda and Education would never have been held accountable or made any changes. Sorry, from now on, with other things relating to the environment, sanitation or public space, even their own fathers wouldn't dare do it straight away, and that is a good thing' (man, Hanoi).

Although there are not yet many successful cases such as those relating to the health sector and trees, they start to create precedents for state agencies to be held accountable to the public regarding their work. Using available tools such as smart phones with built-in cameras, the people can record cases of wrongdoing to post in the social media, which may create a 'storm', become 'social debates' and then be reported in the official media. A respondent said, 'now many video clips are produced by the public about the public security forces, denouncing them in various ways, this is the simplest approach but extremely important... When bloggers and Facebookers keep making noise online, the media services start to produce stories saying 'there is such information online, some people say it'. The media reflect public opinion, thus forcing the authorities to speak out. The authorities can explain and justify their acts, but it does make impacts' (man, Hanoi).

Sharing the view, an independent activist took an example from the case of 'opinion formers' causing disorder at the event that commemorated Gac Ma war martyrs at the Ly Thai To statue in Hanoi on March 14, 2015 as evidence of civil society's pressure on the authorities for accountability. According to him, 'this is a very noticeable phenomenon. Though now the authorities provide nonsense explanations, they lie but still they have to explain, and actually it is not what the people want. In fact, the democratic space has been enlarged, so has the civil space, that is one point. But it is too slow and its foundation isn't firm yet, since the people's awareness of freedom remains very limited, and they don't yet feel that they are really in control' (man, central region).

As a consequence of fears of confrontation, pressure on the authorities from registered organisations such as NGOs remains very limited. Typical cases have been initiated by the social media and independent individuals and groups. Despite NGOs' participation in some specific events and support from the press, the foundation for making the authorities accountable is 'the people's anger'. This is the key factor that the people who work in civil society, regardless of which segments they come from, can consider in appropriate ways.

4.4.4.6. The extent of civil society impacts on the practice of democratic culture in society (2.84 points)

Civil society impacts on the practice of democratic culture were rated low. According to an independent observer, 'CSOs don't fully understand the culture of democracy. Democracy is very often seen as voting, but actually it isn't the case. It includes many things, such as a process of listening, respect for pluralism, empowerment of others and respect for the minimal rights of others, not only voting to determine who would be the majority to win. Usually it doesn't matter much, but you can see whether an environment is democratic or not in the way the people respond in cases of shocks, confrontation or conflicts' (woman, Hanoi).

In another aspect, how NGOs work with their target groups, which are usually disadvantaged, also affects the culture of democracy in general. Many NGOs do not have a culture of democracy, hence their practice and promotion of democratic values remains superficial, resulting in a top-down approach. A founder or a director are like fathers and mothers within an organisation, therefore its staff, especially younger ones, dare not raise their voices, to think differently or make challenges. 'In a hierarchical environment, if the concept "together" is lost, then how can the culture of democracy be shaped? How we treat each other internally will be seen by society, project people, partners and the public. I don't believe that there we have so-called democracy, I mean it's very limited. As long as our "top-down" culture still exists, the culture of democracy remains limited within local NGOs' (woman, central region).

Outside of NGOs, many people argued that the culture of democracy is more pronounced among youth and community groups where this culture can be nurtured. 'Many informal groups do not accomplish much except organising some joint activities, and I think it's good enough. Some groups that are larger are very good too, such as the Saturday Café run by Mr. Dương Thụ. They discuss all sorts of things, and it's very good. Even some groups that comprise university students and even secondary school students are also active... But there are not many of them, and

they cannot reach the majority of young people' (man, Hanoi).

An independent activist believed that the culture of democracy is something that cannot be taken for granted but should be learned and practised. According to her, civil society is also learning and adjusting itself. One of the first characteristics of a culture of democracy is a culture of criticism, which means one uses arguments to debate, listening but not imposing or using personal feelings and rude words to bully others. 'Some extremist groups are gradually isolated and have thus become ineffective. Opposing sides start to provide fairly moderate and polite messages, which are no longer offensive like "fire at the communists' heads". For instance, those who talked about 'f**king communists' caused setbacks for themselves and were boycotted. Obviously, the culture of politeness has been shaped. So I believe there are some impacts on the culture of democracy. However, no impacts have been made on decision makers, as officials have not practiced it. The culture of democracy only exists among the public, while decision makers amongst officials still act in a rather totalitarian manner' (woman, Hanoi).

The way CSOs practice democratic values is very crucial because they themselves advocate for a culture of democracy and democratic institutions. If they do not practice a culture of democracy, they will lose their prestige. To practice a culture of democracy here refers to the ways to conduct processes of making decisions, implementing activities and organising dialogues with stakeholders. It also means ceasing to say that one's own objectives are necessary while others' are not; one's approaches are correct while others' are not; and one truly represents civil society while others do not. The first point is that members of civil society should recognise and respect each other, practising a culture of democracy amongst themselves before making any positive impacts on society.

4.5. THE EXTENT OF EXPANSION OF CIVIL SOCIETY SPACE IN VIETNAM

In general, most respondents believe that the current civil society space remains relatively narrow. Civil society activities still encounter difficulties, especially for groups that focus on promoting democracy, human rights, transparency, anti-corruption or social movements. Even registered groups such as NGOs also face barriers in having projects approved and organising activities within public space or events concerning human rights. Those groups which choose to confront, resist, and criticise the state are controlled or even suppressed.

Although the current space is considered to be narrow, 61 percent of respondents believe that this space has been expanded considerably as compared with three years ago. There are many reasons for the expansion of civil society space. The most cited reason is the Internet and social media. The social media, such as Facebook, YouTube and blogs, are also civil society spaces. The establishment of thousands of groups, societies, and forums in the Facebook and the Internet has enlarged civil society space. Furthermore, the social media have also made it easier for the public to express their views, cooperate, and take joint actions. The social media have made considerable contributions to such events as demonstrations against China's provocative actions, protection of trees in Hanoi, the Save Son Doong Cave campaign, or movements to protect LGBT rights. An independent activist admitted, 'although the Internet is firewalled, it still serves as a means, though not a cause, for shortening the democratisation process in Vietnam, since it is an environment that enables people to receive and understand more information' (man, Hanoi).

Nevertheless, why have the voices of civil society become more frequent, braver and more influential? Some people argued that the current socio-economic development model has resulted in daily occurrences of inequality and injustice that many people know about. This model 'has reached its limit. Injustice has become so terrible, driving those wanting to live in peace to raise their voices... those who are

honest to their conscience have to speak out' (woman, central region). The Internet and social media share information and connect various civil society groups that used to work independently in a unified flow. 'In the tree cutting scandal, for example, everyone was discontented with its irrationality, thus raising their voices, no matter whether they are from the environmental sector, gender equality, anti-corruption, media, youth issues, agriculture, children, or LGBT issues. Their joint voice is like a combination of small spaces into a larger one' (man, HCMC).

The second most cited reason is the courage and proactiveness of civil society in expanding its own space. It is the 'self-push' from civil society that has led the state conduct 'dialogues' and accept to 'enlarge its boundary'. There are many ways to explain the openness of the authorities. Some people believed that the government has to implement its commitments, under the pressure of international integration. Bilateral dialogues on human rights, the signing of trade agreements such as TPP and the EU FTA, and international conventions have caused external pressures. An independent observer said, 'I don't know whether the change has resulted from the failure to control the situation or the willingness to reform. For example, amending the Constitution showed a very strong willingness to reform, although not as much as expected. And there are other things have led to the gradual expansion of the social framework. But it cannot keep pace with the reality, as demanded by more radical people. Anyway, the reform is real' (woman, Hanoi).

However, most respondents argued that civil society space has expanded as a result of internal push factors, not the state's efforts. Some civil society groups have pioneered to expand the boundary. For example, Group 72 proposed a draft Constitution concerning taboo issues, such as the leading role of the Communist Party, the role of the Army and the three divisions of powers (executive, legislative and judiciary). The critiques on the bauxite scandal in the Central Highlands, anti-China demonstrations, the marches for tree protection in Hanoi, and blogs such as Ba Sàm and Quê Choa have expanded the boundary. In this process, the state is required to face opposing critiques and

unprecedented collective civic actions. Also, in this process, the state familiarises itself with, learns, and accepts a wider boundary for civil society activities.

In parallel with this process, as some people argued, NGOs have recently expanded their activities to other areas, such as research, policy advocacy, social mobilisation, community linkages and promotion of communication. The activities which take place in the National Assembly, offices of governmental agencies and the state media have also created new spaces and expanded existing ones. The processes concerning human rights, such as advising on the Constitution, the Law on Access to Information, the Law on Associations, and the laws relating to HIV, gender equality, family and marriage, and people with disabilities, have also contributed to this process. Particularly, NGOs' preparation of shadow reports for the UN's human right mechanisms, such as UPR and CEDAW, has enhanced the status and working space of Vietnamese civil society.

A group which was mentioned frequently is young volunteers working on a wide range of issues, such as poverty reduction, environmental protection, education for children in mountainous areas, and academic freedom. 'Free and charitable groups will continue to grow and may have independent social actions. For instance, one group has built playgrounds for children and then slightly criticised the shortage of recreational space for children' (woman, Hanoi). Groups which create space in the community and society are a foundation for 'endogenous' civil society in Vietnam. In addition to youth groups, there are forums on specific topics, such as otofun and webtretho, and charities such as 'Rice with Meat' and 'Restaurant 2000', which make civil life in Vietnam more vibrant. The establishment and operation of these community organisations has expanded civil society space significantly.

The third reason cited is the coordination, though still emerging, among civil society groups and between CSOs and the public. Despite differences and occasional conflicts, U&I groups and NGOs perceive the need to respect each other's status and working approaches. Each

group has its own strengths and weaknesses. Despite no specific cooperation, the mutual understanding between groups has been increased thanks to the social media and some 'swing' factors. Some movements, such as the Hanoi tree campaign and Save Son Doong, have raised CSOs' awareness of the need to go beyond a 'project-based approach' or 'their own working areas' to join hands to solve bigger common issues.

In addition, some people argued that civil society movements have strengthened as CSOs become more familiar to a part of the public, especially the middle class and intellectuals in urban areas. Society 'has "professional" groups like NGOs and independent groups which are focussed on building the foundation. They conduct research, policy advocacy and communication activities to change society so that in case of need, such as the tree cutting scandal, "temporary" groups can take part to organise movements to put pressure on the authorities to change. After these movements end, the "temporary" people come back to their daily jobs as engineers, doctors, and workers', said one person in Hanoi. This is the result of the 'enlightenment of the public' by the Internet, and is a strategic direction for CSOs in Vietnam.

Nevertheless, some other people are less optimistic about the expansion of civil society space over the past years, especially in comparison with 10 years ago when Vietnam joined WTO and ASEAN. 'In fact, from a long-term perspective the space has expanded, but from a short-term one, after the arrests of Ba Sàm and Quê Choa, it has certainly contracted. There now exists a gap that no one can fill, thus it is being narrowed down. It will expand again, but with some fluctuations' (man, Hanoi).

Sharing the view, the director of an NGO said that 10 years ago, civil society was like 'a hundred flowers blooming', but it has slowed down for four or five years. The current space seems narrowed, or frozen, without the dynamics that were seen in the past. 'It seems that CSOs are working less vigorously, and fewer new organisations are established. So, I feel that it has slowed down, it seems contracted, the existing

organisations seem to be contracting their activities, no longer as active as before due to less funding. More organisations can't be established due to a lack of money, not to mention that some organisations receive no more funding so they have to close down, which creates a feeling of an emerging problem' (woman, HCMC).

In this study, despite different views, there is a clear hope for the continued expansion of civil society space. The hope comes from the rapid and fresh development of youth groups, community organisations and online forums. The hope also comes from the greater recognition and respect for each other's roles among a range of civil groups, from U&I groups to NGOs and community groups. But more important are initial and specific 'victories' of some collective activities of social criticism, such as 'Save Son Doong', '6,700 trees' and LGBT rights, leading to some changes in public policies. However, this process remains fragile and is only at the start. To make it substantive and sustainable, civil society should continue to be nurtured, develop, and learn more to become a healthy and knowledgeable force which can be beneficial to the democratisation process and social development.

5 CONCLUSION

This is the first research in Vietnam using quantitative methods to directly measure the perceptions of civil society space by those who create and use it. The following conclusions can be drawn from the research.

- 1. A measurement scale for civil society space has been developed and tested, consisting of three components: (i) socio-cultural values (five indicators); (ii) capacity of civil society (nine indicators) and (iii) state regulation (five indicators). The fourth component, civil society impacts (six indicators), has a verifying role. This scale can be used to measure civil society space in the coming time, possibly in three years as recommended by many people to quantify changes of civil society space over time and to verify indicators of each component.
- 2. Vietnamese civil society space is considered to be rather narrow by most participants, and this finding is confirmed by the research results. All components scored below the mean (3), with the component on state regulation having the lowest score (only 2.24 points). The component on social and cultural values has the highest score (2.94 points), followed by those on civil society impacts (2.92 points) and civil society capacity (2.91).
- 3. The component on civil society capacity has a highly positive correlation with civil society space overall (0.86), which reflects that the existing civil society space is determined chiefly thanks to civil society capacity. Similarly, the correlation between civil society capacity and the impacts of civil society is also strong (0.63); hence civil society capacity determines not only the extent of civil space but also its impacts on society. The correlation between state regulation and civil society space is very low (0.36), which makes it more evident that the extent of civil space depends more

- on capacity than on state regulation. As a result, investment in civil society capacity is an efficient and smart choice in expanding civil society space as well as overall social impacts.
- 4. Among the indicators in the component on social and cultural values, the indicators on 'public contributions to charitable activities' and 'the extent of interest in injustice' have relatively high scores, above the mean, with 3.12 and 3.65 points, respectively. However, the public's support for independent criticism and acceptance of ideological differences is very low, with only 2.63 and 2.64 points. Negative statements about civil society and civil activities such as social criticism, demonstrations, freedom of association and assembly have hindered people from participating in and supporting activities of civil society. Some people argue that this issue can only be tackled when the public has higher knowledge and awareness of policies and better understands deep-rooted causes of injustice and the socio-economic and cultural issues that they are facing.
- 5. Civil society capacity is shown through various indicators and remains rather low. Over the recent years, the composition and activities of civil society have been increasingly diversified despite some gaps, particularly the roles of think-tanks, religious organisations, and universities. These are important links that can make impacts on the capacity and quality of civil society. The human resources of civil society are considered strong in technical aspects but weak in civic activism. Financial capacity either depends on external sources, as with many registered NGOs, or is very limited, in cases of unregistered and independent (U&I) groups. Limited financial resources result in constraints in implementing broad and deep activities. Opportunities to mobilise resources from enterprises and the public have not yet opened, as most Vietnamese businesses are either closely linked to the government or keep their distance from it, and the public is not yet familiar with civil society activities. Cooperation among CSOs has improved recently despite many remaining challenges as a result of internal factors (lack of genuine respect and understanding of each other's roles) and external ones (restrictions from authorities). The relationship of civil society and

- the State is very weak as a consequence of unequal relations, the 'ask-give' mechanism and the position of the State as controlling rather than supporting civil society. Relationships with the media and international civil society have improved, especially thanks to social media and the Internet, but remain limited.
- The state has controlled civil society very strictly, even impeding 6. some human rights groups or dissenting groups. Freedom of association (2.16 points) has not been protected, and it is more difficult to establish NGOs and associations in Ho Chi Minh City and southern provinces. Access to the Internet has expanded in Vietnam, but freedom of information (2.05 points) and freedom of expression on the Internet remain very limited. The publishing sector (2.37 points) is a 'leopard-spotted' picture, as freedom of publication has not been officially institutionalised, but the reality is relatively relaxed with partnership between private stakeholders and state publishers. Freedom of the press is considered limited (2.27 points) as censorship and self-censorship still linger. The Press Law, which is being revised, has not recognised private media, with no mechanism to protect journalists, especially investigative ones. Freedom of fund-raising was evaluated as the highest indicator in this component, but remains below the mean (2.93 points) as there is a lack of a clear legal framework, and fundraising organisations and individuals are operating in a gray zone, without state intervention.
- 7. The impacts of civil society on protecting human rights have not been appreciated (2.94 points) as a consequence of NGOs' self-censorship, the State's impediments and limited capacity of CSOs. CSOs have not effectively and fully communicated the voice of minority groups (3.07 points), primarily due to a lack of CSOs with members from these groups and a lack of civil society's understanding of and sensitivity to their needs and rights. Impacts on the state's accountability are also limited (2.44 points) due to the lack of a legal framework to protect these rights. However, in combination with the mass media and the public, social networks and civil society groups have created precedents. For instance, the Health Minister has used Facebook to 'explain' her positions, and the Hanoi People's Committee

stopped the tree-cutting scandal. Civil society impacts on gender inequality (3.14 points) and poverty reduction (3.18 points) are appreciated more highly, but breakthrough approaches are needed to produce stronger impacts. In particular, it is necessary to tackle deep-rooted causes of gender inequality (the power relationship between men and women) and poverty (corruption, wastefulness, and dependence-generating policies). Finally, civil society's impact on a culture of democracy remains weak (2.84 points), chiefly as a consequence of limited capacity and knowledge, as well as the fact that many CSOs have not yet implemented democratic practices, either internally, among different organisations, or between them and society.

- As many as 61 percent of the research respondents believe that 8. despite remaining narrow, civil society space has expanded over the last three years, and respondents hope that this space will further expand in the future. One of the main causes is that the wide use of the Internet and social media have made people more knowledgeable, thus giving them better chances to express their voices and connect with each other. In addition, the establishment of new free-standing groups, even antagonistic ones, has pushed the boundaries, thus expanding the civil space. The transformation of NGOs through policy advocacy, social movements, and especially the development of volunteer youth and charity groups has created much new space. The transformation in cooperation, coordination and mutual respect amongst civil society groups has increased operational effectiveness and formed the conditions for civil society space to be expanded further.
- 9. Vietnamese civil society is now at an important stage of development due to the ongoing expansion of space, established cooperation, and a series of new laws being prepared by the state, such as the Law on Association, the Law on Access to Information, the Law on Demonstrations, and the Press Law. Arguably, the impacts of civil society on social, political and economic life have increased in the direction of democracy, transparency and liberalisation. However, Vietnamese civil society remains at a stage of learning, experimenting and developing. Civil society has not yet coalesced

and does not yet have sufficient human, financial and influencing resources to become an important pillar in society. Civil society should continue to be nurtured and promoted for at least an additional 5-10 years so that NGOs become more independent financially and stronger in social mobilisation skills, non-registered groups become stronger in civil activism, and new civil agents such as think-tanks, religious organisations and universities become engaged more proactively in civil activism. Especially, youth and student groups have now grown up and become a major force in civil society networks, possessing not only knowledge and skills but also values of equality, freedom and tolerance.

APPENDIX 1: SELECTED INTERNATIONAL TOOLS FOR CIVIL SOCIETY MEASUREMENT AND ASSESSMENT

The **CNP Index** (Johns Hopkins Comparative Non-profit Sector Project)¹⁸: This index measures the scope of the non-profit sector and budget sources used in this sector. The CNP project defines the non-profit sector and develops an international categorisation set for non-profit organisations. CNP is implemented based on secondary data (available statistics) and primary data (data collected through surveys). The index's key coefficients include: operational cost, full-time personnel, volunteers, revenues (taxes, fees and incomes of the public sector, including Government aid) and private contributions. Thus, the CNP is mainly focused on the economic aspect of the non-profit sector. Beginning in 1991, the CNP project has now covered 45 countries, excluding Vietnam.

The **WGA Index** (World Governance Assessment) is developed by the Overseas Development Institute¹⁹. WGA data are collected from surveys conducted with at least 100 persons of various groups (at least 10 people in each group): parliamentarians, civil servants, Government officials, entrepreneurs, scholars, NGOs, mass media, law/justice, religious groups and international organisations. The WGA index is implemented on six dimensions: civil society, political society, the Government, bureaucracy, economic society and the justice apparatus based on six governance criteria: participation, equality, decency, accountability, transparency and efficiency. Thirty-six indicators will connect these six areas and six governance criteria. It can be seen that the WGA has overall assessment on

^{18 &#}x27;Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project Methodology,' (Center for Civil Society Studies, Johns Hopkins University, 2004). http://ccss.jhu.edu/publications-findings/?did=105.

^{19 &#}x27;Mapping Political Context: World Governance Assessment (Toolkits),'(Overseas Development Institute 2009). http://www.odi.org/publications/5531-world-governance-assessment.

governance rather than focus on civil society. However, the WGA is expected to enable CSOs to have better understanding of governance circumstances at national and regional levels, through which they will chart out operational directions for their own. Between 1995 and 2005, the WGA was implemented in 16 countries, including Togo, Pakistan, Russia, Kyrgyzstan, the Philippines, Indonesia, China, Peru, Argentina, Bulgaria, Mongolia, Tanzania, Jordan, India, Chile and Thailand.

The **USAID Index** assesses the sustainability of civil society²⁰: This index is designed to measure the sustainability of the non-governmental sector in post-Communist countries, through which it assesses the state of democratisation in these countries. The assessment is implemented through the following process: establish a team of experts comprising at least eight representatives of civil society and stakeholders (including CSOs; CSO support centres; religious groups involved in the advocacy and delivery of services; academic-research organisations related to civil society; and donors). Using the principle of consensus, the expert team gives scores on each indicator from 1 (highest) to 7 (lowest) and provides evidence and justification for their scoring. The USAID indicators cover seven areas, including the legal environment, institutional capacity, financial capacity, and public reception (the Government, mass media and population). After all indicators are scored, an average score is calculated for each area and finally for the national index.

The **CIVICUS Civil Society Index** (CSI): CSI surpasses the ordinary measures of civil society (analysis of CSO form, scope and capacity) and therefore, it is regarded as the most comprehensive international civil society index. The CSI reflects the view that has been strengthened since the early 2000s that civil society is not only a group of organisations but a sphere or arena of participation. The study and attempts to change

^{20 &#}x27;CSO Sustainability Index Methodology, USAID, http://www.usaid.gov/what-we-do/democracy-human-rights-and-governance/cso-sustainability-index-methodology.

this sphere will lead to important change in the socio-political life. The CSI defines civil society as 'the arena, outside of the family, the State, and the market created by individual and collective actions, organisations and institutions to advance common interests.' With this definition, the CSI has shifted the focus of civil society research from the listing of non-governmental and non-profit organisations to the assessment of collective action space.²¹ The CSI is implemented on a scoring scale of 0-3. There are 74 indicators grouped into four dimensions: structure, environment (political context, socio-economic context, cultural context, legal environment, etc.), principles and values committed by civil society to practice and promote, and impacts of civil society.

The principal steps involved in implementing the CSI are below:

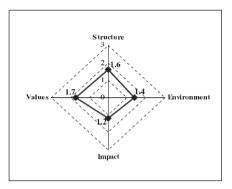
- i. Identify a National Index Team NIT made up of: a National Coordinating Organisation, which is responsible for the overall coordination and management of the project, undertaking the secondary data review and preparing the preliminary overview report; a Civil Society Expert, who is responsible for drafting the report in collaboration with other members of the coordinating team; a Participatory Researcher, who is responsible for conducting and facilitating stakeholder consultations, and community-level research and workshops.
- The NIT carries out stakeholder analysis and identifies a twelveperson in-country National Advisory Group (NAG), representing civil society.
- iii. A review of secondary data is conducted by NIT and a draft overview report is prepared and distributed to NAG and CIVICUS for comments and inputs.
- iv. NAG reviews the overview report; discussing the project methodology, the concept and definition of 'civil society' in the country; conducting social forces analysis; mapping civil society,

²¹ Lorenzo Fioramonti, 'Methodological Note on the Civicus's Civil Society Enabling Environment Index,' (CIVICUS). http://civicus.org/eei/downloads/Methodological%20note%20on%20the%20CIVICUS%20Civil%20Society%20Enabling%20Environment%20 Index.doc.

- and; assisting in identifying participants for consultation.
- v. Primary research is carried out: Stakeholder consultations are conducted in different locations in the country. Participants respond to individual questionnaires and participate in group discussions. Community research is conducted to investigate the value dispositions of community members, their activities within civil society and attitudes towards and engagement with community-level CSOs. A review of media is conducted to gather information on civil society activities, attitudes and values expressed by civil society and other public actors as well as to establish the media image of civil society. Finally, fact finding is carried out to assemble information and data about civil society that already exist but not published or publicly disseminated.
- vi. All findings by the preliminary research are submitted to the civil society expert and drafting team who prepares a country report.
- vii. NAG assigns scores to 74 indicators based on the country report. These scores are aggregated into civil society scores in the four dimensions, namely structure, environment, values and impacts. The four dimensions are graphically represented in the form of a civil society diamond.
- viii. The draft country report is updated to include the results of NAG's scoring results.
- ix. A national workshop, where participants review and validate CSI research findings, analyse strengths and weaknesses of civil society in the future, is organised.
- x. National workshop results are incorporated into the final country report.
- xi. An evaluation of the CSI process is conducted.

In 2005, the Civil Society Index Shortened Assessment Tool (CSI-SAT) was employed in Vietnam. CSI-SAT mainly relies on the materials that exist and are used in the countries where civil society is emerging. However, CSI-SAT sticks to two principal steps of CSI: i) prepare an overview report on the context; and ii) the expert team assigns scores based on the overview report and other available data. On conception, CSI-SAT identifies the structure of Vietnamese civil society

comprising four main groups of organisations: mass organisations; professional organisations, Vietnamese NGOs and community-based organisations. Of them, mass organisations and professional organisations are the two types of 'old' CSOs and have close ties with the State. NGOs and community-based



organisations are the 'new' factors that were developed in the 1990s.²² As Vietnamese civil society composes different types of organisations, official and unofficial, CSI-SAT recognised that the study chiefly analysed the major types of organisations due to limited data about the other organisations. The collection and analysis of these data requires many resources.²³

The National Advisory Group (NAG) who assigned scores to CSI-SAT in Vietnam comprised 12 people, eight of whom are engaged in civil society and four work in institutions outside civil society such as the Government, businesses, donors or research institutes. The different background of NAG members in Vietnam led to the considerable conflict of views. For example, a member said that the Communist Party and mass organisations were the actual representation of the interests of workers and peasants; therefore there was no need to have other organisations. Other members argued that only the new types of organisations such as NGOs were actually the core of civil society. In addition, there was debate about some issues suggested by CSI-SAT that are viewed as 'politically sensitive' and 'hard to talk about' or

²² Irene Norlund et al., 'The Emerging Civil Society: An Initial Assessment of Civil Society in Vietnam,' in CIVICUS Civil Society Index Shortened Assessment Tool, CSI-SAT Vietnam (Hanoi: Vietnam Institute of Development Studies (VIDS), UNDP Vietnam, SNV Vietnam, CIVICUS Civil Society Index, 2006), 17, 32–34, 39.

²³ The Emerging Civil Society: An Initial Assessment of Civil Society in Vietnam, in CIVICUS Civil Society Index Shortened Assessment Tool, CSI-SAT Vietnam (Hanoi: Vietnam Institute of Development Studies (VIDS), UNDP Vietnam, SNV Vietnam, CIVICUS Civil Society Index, 2006), 18.

secondary data sources provided by CSI-SAT that were said to be 'not objective' and 'unacceptable' in Vietnam.²⁴

The EEI (Enabling Environment Index) is also developed by CIVICUS. Prepared in 2013, the EEI was designed to answer the question 'in what conditions can individuals participate in the arena of civil society to achieve their social targets?'. EEI defines an enabling environment for civil society as a 'set of conditions that make impact on the capacity of citizens (whether individually or in an organized fashion) to participate in civil society's arena in a voluntary and continued manner.'25 Based on 71 secondary data sources, EEI assigns scores on a scale of 0 (lowest) to 1 (highest) to 53 indicators in three dimensions: the socio-economic environment (including education, communication, equality, and gender equality), the socio-economic environment (including prosperity to participate, tolerance, trust, and unity), the governance environment (including civil society infrastructure, policy dialogue, corruption, political rights and freedoms, associational rights, the rule of law, individual rights, the NGO legal frame and media freedom). Of these three dimensions, the governance environment is the most critical, making up 50% of the EEI score. The remaining dimensions amount to 25% each.²⁶ In 2013, EEI was used in 109 countries. Vietnam scored 0.48 on the socioeconomic dimension, 0.49 on the socio-cultural dimension and only 0.25 on the governance dimension (among the five countries with the lowest scores on the governance dimension). The mean was 0.37, and Vietnam ranked 100th out of 109 participating countries.²⁷

^{24 &#}x27;The Emerging Civil Society: An Initial Assessment of Civil Society in Vietnam, 20, 21.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ CIVICUS, 'The Civicus 2013 Enabling Environment Index,' (2013), 19, 20, 25. http://civicus.org/eei/downloads/Civicus_EEI%20 REPORT%202013 WEB_FINAL.pdf.

APPENDIX 2: CHARACTERISTICS OF 30 RESPONDENTS TO QUESTIONNAIRES AND IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

Total number of participants	30				
Average age	44.4				
Age range	23 - 83				
Age group	(proportion)	(absolute number)			
Under 30	16.7%	5			
30-39	26.7%	8			
40-49	26.7%	8			
50-59	13.3%	4			
Above 60	16.7%	5			
Sex					
Male	60.0%	18			
Female	40.0%	12			
Others	0.0%	0			
Education					
High school or equivalent	16.7%	5			
College	53.3%	16			
Post graduate	30.0%	9			
Place of residence					
Hanoi	43.3%	13			
Ho Chi Minh City	36.7%	11			
Central Region (Hue, Da Nang, Quang Nam)	20.0%	6			
Type of organisation					
Individual, independent	16.7%	5			
NGO	43.3%	13			
CBO, club, group	23.3%	7			
Foundation	3.3%	1			
Forum, network	3.3%	1			
Independent associations	6.8%	2			
Unidentified	3.3%	1			

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