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A Needs Assessment of PLHA Self-help and Supported Groups in Vietnam

July 2009

Foreword

This assessment was carried out as part of Health Policy Initiative Vietnam (HPI), a five-year Task Order awarded to Abt Associates Inc. by United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in September 2008. The objectives of HPI are to assist the governments of Vietnam and the U.S., as well as civil society organizations, and other stakeholders to develop and implement evidence-based and best practice-driven laws, policies, plans, and programs for HIV/AIDS prevention, care and treatment, and impact mitigation in the country. Among the key HPI tasks is to provide capacity building support to self-help and supported groups (SSGs), including groups of people living with HIV/AIDS. To assess the current organizational capacity of these groups and to identify their needs for further training and technical support, HPI implemented an assessment in the spring of 2009 covering all identified groups in the 7 PEPFAR focus provinces. The assessment also sought insights into the groups' interest in and ability to obtain legal registration and their activities and capabilities to combat HIV/AIDS-related stigma and discrimination.

This report presents recommendations for activities that we believe will help SSGs to develop greater institutional capacity, sustainable and strategic plans, and the ability to secure legal registration. The assessment forms the basis of HPI's SSG capacity building and development plan to provide progressively intensifying capacity building training and technical assistance to selected SSGs over the next three years.

We would like to thank our local partners: Center for Community Health and Development (COHED)- and especially COHED's consultant Nguyen Nguyen Nhu Trang and Vietnam Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS (VNP+)- especially Do Dang Dong for their tremendous contributions to the assessment design, implementation and data analysis. We also especially thank the 120 SSGs participating in the assessment for their valuable time and dedicated response. We hope that this report will be a useful resource to SSGs and those organizations aiming to assist them as they move forward with their highly important role in the response to HIV/AIDS in Vietnam.

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1. Background

Self-help and supported groups for people living with HIV/AIDS have developed rapidly in Vietnam in terms of quantity, capacity and scope and areas of work. As reported in the 2008 UNGASS report, the years 2006 - 2007 have seen a strong improvement in involvement and participation of civil society organizations in all HIV/AIDS-related aspects including prevention, treatment, care and support, behavioral change communication, counseling and testing, reducing stigma and discrimination, promoting harm reduction, economic support, and improving quality of life of PLHA¹. To date, very few self-help and supported groups have been legally established; which is a major barrier that prevents these groups from expanding their activities into policy advocacy and policy development and accessing direct international funding².

Health Policy Initiative (HPI) Vietnam, in collaboration with other international and Vietnamese NGOs (I/VNGOs), is committed to providing capacity building for PLHA self-help groups, faith-based groups, most at risk populations-based groups (e.g. injection drug users (IDUs), female sex workers (FSWs), men who have sex with men (MSM), supported groups and clubs (collectively hereafter termed self-help and supported groups [SSGs]). During April and May 2009, HPI Vietnam and two of its local partners Centre for Community Health and Development (COHED) and Vietnam Network of PLHA (VNP+) conducted a mapping and capacity building needs assessment of the SSGs in the 7 PEPFAR focus provinces of Vietnam.

2. Objectives of the assessment

- To explore existing types of legalization options for SSGs and analyze feasible options to secure legal registration.
- To explore and analyze SSGs' capacity, needs, and gaps in the areas of human resource management, organizational management, financial management, accountability, policy advocacy/policy development, and monitoring and evaluation.
- To identify levels of interest, steps actually taken, and needs for assistance with legal registration.
- To identify the needs of PLHA regarding legal assistance and other support to combat stigma and discrimination.
- To recommend a capacity building plan in coordination with other providers of capacity building support.

3. Description of the assessment

3.1. Study units and recruitment methods

▪ **Self-help groups**

In this assessment, a self-help group is a group that was created by its own members. These groups are managed by themselves, through a selected management team, and thus have autonomy and decision making power over the group's operation and development. Self-help groups are still considered as self-help groups even if they receive technical assistance and financial support from outside organizations, as long as they are self-managed and autonomous.

1. Vietnam 2008 UNGASS Report

2. HIV/AIDS Policy in Vietnam: A Civil Society Perspective.

Public Health Watch-Open Society Institute. New York : November 2007

▪ **Supported groups and clubs established by an agency or a project**

In this assessment, supported groups are those that were established by the Provincial AIDS Center (PAC), or I/VNGOs. These groups are commonly managed by these organizations and do not have decision making power.

122 active SSGs were identified in the 7 PEPFAR focus provinces among the working list of 178 of those groups compiled by HPI with support from VNP+. Province-based members of the VNP+ helped make contact with leaders of these groups to arrange interviews.

▪ **Leaders of active SSGs**

SSGs that have been making progress towards registration or successfully registered were identified for in-depth interviews to learn about their experiences in obtaining their operation permits.

Leaders of the active groups were identified by the assessment team during the structured interviews and in consultation with the local health/AIDS authorities and VNP+ members in their respective provinces.

▪ **Capacity building partners**

Agencies, e.g. UNAIDS, Pact Vietnam, Care International in Vietnam, Institute for Social and Development Studies (ISDS) that host Vietnam Civil Society Partnership Platform on AIDS (VCSPA) and Center for Community Enhancement and Management (CECEM) were identified for their active contribution to providing capacity building to SSGs. These organizations were invited to participate in the assessment by the HPI team and interview arrangements were made by COHED. The interviews of these agencies allowed the team to explore opportunities for their capacity building support for SSGs. Unfortunately, due to the frequent travel of both the assessment team and Pact representatives during May, the assessment team was not able to schedule time to interview a representative from Pact Vietnam.

▪ **Registration concerned agencies**

Agencies such as the Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA) and the Vietnam Union of Scientific and Technology Associations (VUSTA) are the concerned agencies facilitating legal registration to form associations and organizations by the Decree 88 and Decree 81. The Provincial AIDS Centers or HIV/AIDS Associations, Provincial Red Cross and other similar entities can also form groups as their associated members. COHED helped to make arrangement for interviews with these organizations; the interviews provided insight into registration options for SSGs.

3.2. Data collection techniques

The assessment applied both quantitative and qualitative methods as follows:

- Mapping of SSGs and Clubs in the 7 PEPFAR-focus provinces
- Desk review on available legal documents for registration of SSGs
- Structured interviews with leaders of the mapped SSGs using a semi-structured Questionnaire
- In-depth individual interviews with an interview guide
- Leaders of the selected SSGs and Clubs and HIV/AIDS activists
- A representative from each of the registration concerned agencies
- A representative from each of the capacity building agencies

Most in-depth interviews were audio-recorded unless not permitted by the respondents. In such cases, the assessment team took notes. Each interview was approximately 45-60 minutes long.

3.3. Assessment team, data collection and analysis

This assessment was led by COHED. Data collection was conducted concurrently by the two teams (two members for each team) during April 2009; one team conducted interviews in Ha Noi, Quang Ninh, Hai Phong and Nghe An (northern Vietnam) and the other team in HCMC, An Giang and Can Tho (southern Vietnam). The research consultant conducted interviews with the registration concerned agencies and capacity building I/VNGOs in Ha Noi and HCMC.

Quantitative data collected through the questionnaire was processed using EPI-Data by COHED and analyzed by the consultant. One hundred and twenty-two SSGs were interviewed with the questionnaire; however one hundred and twenty questionnaires were found valid during the data analysis. For all in-depth interviews, the hand-written notes were typed in Word and emailed to the consultant for analysis. A draft version of this report was produced in early June 2009 and finalized based on comments by several representatives from different agencies including VNP+, UNAIDS, Pact Vietnam, ISDS, and Care International in Vietnam.

3.4. Ethical considerations

All respondents received complete information regarding the assessment objectives. The respondents participated in the assessment voluntarily after providing written consent to the assessment team member. To secure the confidentiality, all interview notes and questionnaire identification numbers were totally safeguarded and only accessed by the assessment team members or those authorized by COHED. No information identifying the respondents was included in the report unless permitted by the respondents.

3.5. Assessment limitations

The assessment was conducted in the 7 PEPFAR provinces and thus the data and/or information collected in these sites might only be applicable locally. Some leaders of the supported groups might not be PLHA, but this information was not collected during the interviews. Therefore, there may be biased in some of their views, for instance, regarding how they want their groups to operate. Even though the assessment team members emphasized that the interviewed group leaders needed to present their group overall views, some opinions might still be subjective or may have been expressed prior to consulting with the whole group.

4. Findings of the assessment

The findings are presented in accordance with the assessment objectives for convenient references.

4.1. Profiles of the participating groups

The mean number of years since establishment of most groups (n=118) was 3 years and 2 months with the minimum years since establishment being 2 months and the maximum being 17 years (a group operating in HCMC).

Eighty six out of one hundred and twenty groups (71.7%) reported having a group mission. Many group missions are similar and reflect, to some extent, the activities or services the groups are doing or providing.

Some examples of the missions reported by the group leaders:

- Enhance quality of life of PLHA
- Communication on HIV prevention
- Drug relapse prevention
- BCC, support in ART adherence and access to services
- HIV prevention communication for MSM
- Increase knowledge on HIV for community and PLHA
- Share knowledge, information and increase access to ARV and OI treatment
- Care and support for PLHA and OVC
- End of life care for PLHA

(Extracted from responses to Question A08 in the group leaders' questionnaire)

All groups have a management team composed of 2-4 members on average. Each group has 28.71 regular members on average. Ninety one out of one hundred and twenty groups (75.8%) reported being members of a group, an association, an organization, or a network. Seventy out of ninety one groups (76.9%) are members of a provincial and/or national network of PLHA.

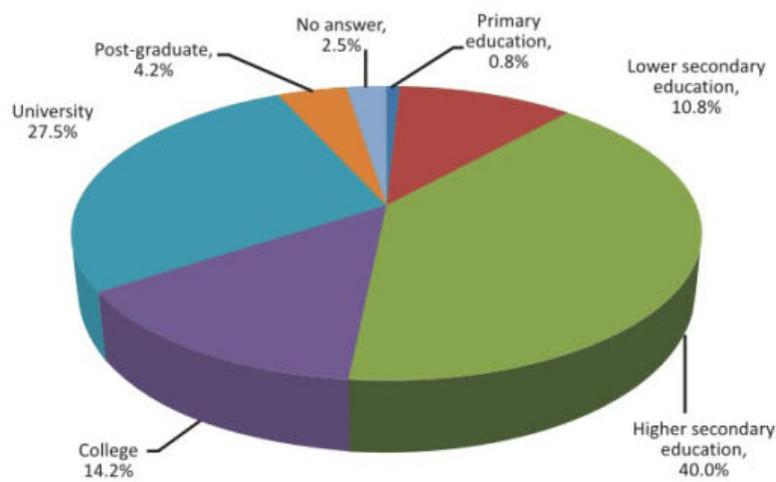
About two-thirds of both groups are currently engaged in HIV/AIDS information-education-communication (IEC) activities, provision of home-based care for PLHA, and referral of PLHA to services (Table 1). These activities are in line with the groups' reported missions.

Table 1. Groups' main activities

Main activities	Self-help groups (n=65)		Supported groups (n=55)	
	Freq	%	Freq	%
HIV/AIDS IEC in general	47	72.3	41	74.5
Provision of home-based care for PLHA	48	73.8	33	60.0
Referral of PLHA to services	38	58.5	35	63.6
Advocacy for PLHA rights	17	26.2	6	10.9
Income generation for PLHA and family	11	16.9	8	14.5
Provision of institution/clinic-based care for PLHA	10	15.4	6	10.9

In order to assess the management and operation capacity of the groups as well as ability to respond to the requirements of the Decree 81 (the Decree that VNP+ uses to pursue their registration), a question regarding the highest education level of the groups' management members was asked. Data analysis showed that 40% of the group leaders have a level of higher secondary education and 41.7% have a university or higher degree (Figure 1). The mean number of the SSGs' management members who have obtained the highest educational level was 3.97 persons, which actually meet the requirement of Decree 81 in which an organization must have at least four members with the university degree).

Figure 1. The highest education level of the group management members



Almost all groups reported that the group members supported one another not only at work, but also in personal matters. However, the members sometimes found that the group consensus was difficult to obtain. Some groups reported tensions among group members regarding training opportunities due to the fact that some members were often sent (or invited) to trainings while others were not.

While the group solidarity has been one of the strengths of many groups, solidarity between groups in the same province was a concern, as shared by a network leader. Additionally, cohesion among groups in some networks was also an issue. Reaching consensus among groups was said to be difficult. Reasons cited included lack of leadership skills and lack of a consultative/decision making mechanism.

“Another issue that we found among our self-help groups is solidarity. Being a leader, I found it very difficult to settle conflicts among the groups in the network, just conflicts of interest. For instance, groups with fewer members certainly do not have equivalent benefits as compared with groups with more members even though their geographic coverage is about the same. Therefore, competition and jealousy among the groups is unavoidable.” (IDI leader of group and network).

Sixty five groups were established by the group members (Table 1). These 'self-help groups' include PLHA groups, faith-based groups (churches or pagodas), and MSM or ex-IDU groups. Some examples are: Green Hope Group in HCMC, Dong Hanh Group in Can Tho, and My Thanh Hope Group in An Giang.

The other 55 groups were established by the government or non-government agencies as part of their projects including PACs (45.5%) and INGOs (47.3%) (Table 2). These were so-called 'supported group' consisting of different target groups such as PLHA, MSM, FSW, and ex-IDU generally working under a project framework, for instance, peer educators doing outreach within their peer population for HIV/AIDS prevention (Table 1). Some examples of groups in this category are Sea Gull Club in Hai Phong, Huu Nghi Club and Ex-Drug Use Club in Quang Ninh, Camellia (Hoa Hai Duong) Club in Hai Phong, Dong Tam Club in Can Tho, and Belief Group in An Giang.

Table 2. Groups and operation mode

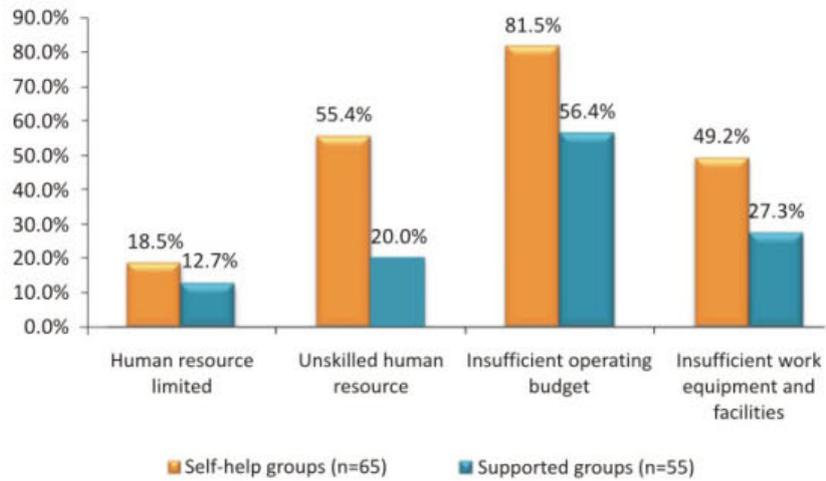
Groups and operation mode	Self-help groups (n=65)		Supported groups (n=55)	
	Freq	%	Freq	%
PLHA self-help groups	55	84.6	8	14.5
Supported groups/Clubs	2	3.1	42	76.4
Faith-based groups	3	4.6	2	3.6
MARPs groups (IDUs, FSW, MSM)	3	4.6	3	5.5
<i>Other</i> : Social protection establishment and local NGO	2	3.1	0	0.0
Total	65	100%	55	100%

Table 3. Percentage of groups established by agencies

	Freq	%
PAC/PHD	25	45.5
International NGO	26	47.3
Local NGO	3	5.5
Mass organizations	3	5.5
Total	65	100%

The self-help groups reported that they were facing more difficulties than the supported groups such as insufficient financial capacity (81.5% versus 56.4%) and unskilled human resources (55.4% versus 20.0%) (Figure 2).

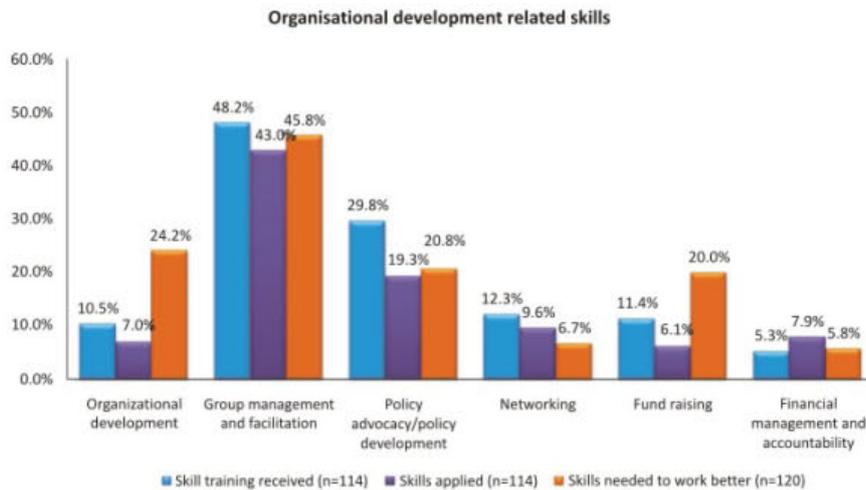
Figure 2. Difficulties in operation faced by groups



4.2. Capacity building gaps and needs

As shown in Figure 3, nearly half of the participating SSGs have received group management and facilitation skills training. A much lower percentage of the groups reported being trained in other skills categorized by the assessment team as organisational development related skills including policy advocacy and development (29.8%); networking (12.3%); and organisational development (10%). Not all acquired skills were applied to the groups' current work. Among all skills trained, group management and facilitation skills were reported as being used the most. However, there was still a high demand for training on further skills in these areas perhaps due to the complexities of group dynamics as discussed earlier. Additionally, the percentage of the groups reporting a need for organisational development and fundraising skills appeared higher than the trainings received in these areas.

Figure 3. Organizational development related skills trained, applied, and still needed to work better



With regard to the project management related skills (Figure 4), although proposal-designing skills have been most frequently provided to the groups, there was still a perceived need for training in this area. While the perceived needs for some skills appeared low, e.g. project management, M&E and planning skills, it does not necessarily mean that the groups do not need these skills. The groups might not yet realize the importance or the necessity of such skills due to lack of information or lack of access to funding.

Figure 4. Project management related skills trained, applied and still needed to work better

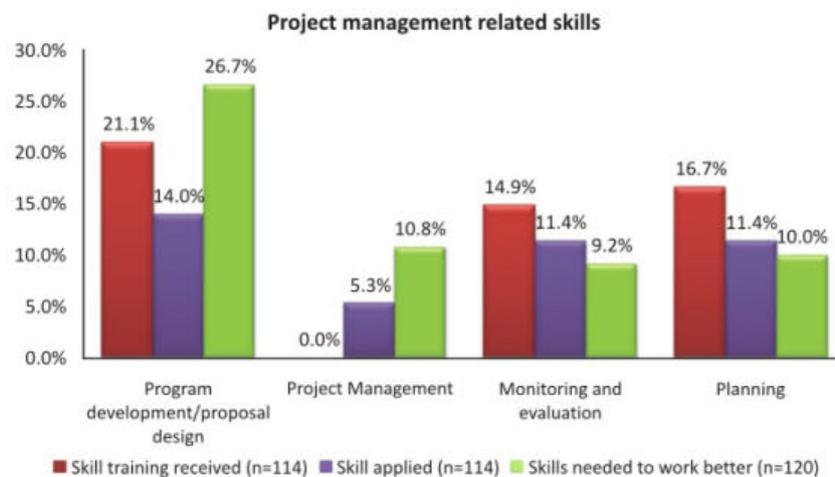
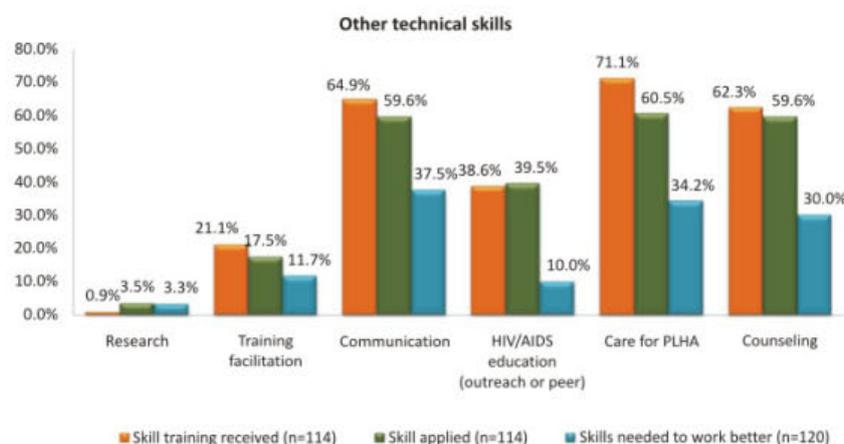


Figure 5 indicates that more than two-thirds of the groups received training on communication, care for PLHA, and counseling skills; while about half of the groups expressed a need for training on skills in these areas. This could be a request from the groups already trained or from groups that have not yet been trained in these areas.

Figure 5. Other technical skills trained, applied and still needed to work better



Reasons for not having applied the acquired skills, as reported by the group leaders on behalf of their groups, were:

- Training courses were usually short and did not allow very much time for practicing the new skills.
- Some training courses were too advanced to comprehend for some participants, e.g. planning skills.
- Skills trained sometimes were not appropriate to the groups' current work or to what the group or the attending group members have been doing. For instance, some group members were trained in outreach to MSM but these members were not working with MSM.
- Many group leaders reported that they understood the basic principles of some skills, e.g. project design, M&E, fund raising, or advocacy, but did not yet feel like they “knew well enough” or were “confident enough” to apply these skills to their work.
- No refresher trainings were organized following the initial training, particularly for “advanced” skills, e.g. advocacy or fund raising skills.
- Some group members were trained on the same skills, e.g. M&E, by different agencies, which led to confusion of the different M&E systems.
- Instructions or suggestions on how to operate or apply the acquired knowledge, e.g. Laws on Prevention and Control of HIV/AIDS were not always available.
- Most self-help groups did not have a budget to carry out activities that their group members were trained on unless these members were “recruited” to work as part time collaborators in a project.

As shared by the representatives of some capacity building agencies at one of the HPI organized workshops when seeking inputs for the group leaders' questionnaire, most group members tended to ask for skills training in new areas though the application of trained skills is usually low. Based on this knowledge, the assessment team did include one question which requested that the group leaders select the *three most necessary skills* that their group needs for its development. Responses to this question are as follows:

Table 4. Three most necessary skills for the group's development

Self-help groups (n=65)	Supported groups (n=55)
- Group management and facilitation: 33.8%	- Care for PLHA: 29.1%
- Proposal design: 18.5%	- Group management and facilitation: 21.8%
- Communication skills: 15.4%	- Communication skills: 20%

4.3. Legal registration experiences and needs

Views of the registration-concerned and capacity building agencies regarding SSG registration

In-depth interviews with representatives of the registration-concerned and related agencies regarding registration of SSGs revealed their views as follows:

- All SSGs have the right to establish an entity with its legal status and these agencies support applications from SSGs if the groups meet the registration requirements. Support can be in the form of reviewing and providing inputs to group strategies, action plans etc.

- Groups should consider which registration option/decreed is more appropriate to their group's mission and activities. For instance, current networks such as VNP+ might consider registering as a PLHA association.
- One representative expressed the concern over registering groups that do not yet have a clear mission or a well thought-out action plan.

All representatives of the capacity building agencies expressed their willingness to provide technical support to SSGs based on their needs and priorities. However, one representative recommended that SSGs should consider what the groups' aim will be, what role they want to play, and that they must define the appropriate and necessary skills required for their groups to carry out their mission and activities.

Views of SSGs regarding SSGs' registration

85.7% of the self-help groups intend to register for legal status. While 30.1% (sixteen out of fifty three groups) of the supported groups want to register their operation, 66.0% intend to remain working under the management of an agency (Table 5). The analysis also showed that a total of 70 groups (figures underlined for readers' convenience) wanted to obtain their legal status regardless of how they currently operate.

Table 5. Group's intention regarding operation mode

Intention for group operation mode (n=116)	Self-help groups (n=63)		Supported groups (n=53)	
	Freq	%	Freq	%
To remain as it is, without registering	4	6.3	2	3.8
To remain self-managed but with a legal status	54	85.7	12	22.6
To remain working under an agency's management, without a legal status	5	7.9	35	66.0
<i>(Other)</i> To have a legal status but still operate with agency/project support	0	0.0	4	7.5

Registration options

The desk review of the existing legal framework revealed five registration options for SSGs:

(1) As a scientific and technological organisation (NGO) (under the Decree 81/2001/ND-CP)

Basic requirements:

- The organization has its operation objectives and directions, organizational regulations and functions.
- At least 4 persons with the university degree in which one is specialized in the registered field(s).
- At least 2 full-time persons.
- The Head of the organization must have a university degree.

(2) As an Association (the Decree 88/2003/ND-CP)

Basic requirements:

- Association has a legal mission, regulations, office, and sufficient number of registered members.
- Founder has to establish an Establishment Mobilization Committee (EMC).
- EMC has to be recognized by a relevant government body and the number of its members must be decided by MOHA. Once approved, EMC will then invite individuals and organizations to complete the application.
- Association must have a sponsoring agency or operate under an umbrella organization (e.g. department level or provincial level People's Committee).

(3) As a Co-operative group (under the Decree 151/2007/ND-CP on Establishment and Operations of Cooperative Groups)

Basic requirements:

- Composed of at least 3 members.
- Has a joint cooperative agreement³ among the group members as regulated by the Decree.
- Cooperative agreement has to be certified by a Commune People's Committee.

(4) As a Social protection establishment (under the Decree 68/2008/ND-CP)

Basic requirements:

- Objectives, functions, establishment activity plan, cost-effectiveness analysis.
- Location with necessary facilities and equipment.
- Application can be approved by the Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA); DOLISA; or a People's Committee at the provincial or district level.

(5) As a Private company or individual business entity (the Enterprise Law 2005)

Basic requirements:

- Type of business, work space, business plan, start up capital.
- Tax compliance.
- Application approved by the Department of Planning and Investment or Ward/Commune People's Committee under the Enterprise Law of 2005.

Registration experience

Thirty two out of the seventy groups wanting to be legally registered reported that they have studied the registration-related information. Among these, 11 groups have made plans to discuss or are currently discussing registration with different organizations. Agencies contacted include PACs, Women's Union, Youth Union, legal aid center, Network of PLHA e.g. Southern Network of PLHA (SPN+), VNP+, Care International in Vietnam, and HCMC HIV/AIDS Association.

³ Literally translated from "Hợp đồng Hợp tác"

Sixteen out of thirty two groups (50%) reported having faced challenges during the information search or registration process. From the open-ended questions in the group leaders' questionnaire, the following challenges were reported:

- Groups were not fully aware of the existing registration policies and options.
- Groups have not been advised, guided, or given suggestions on feasible registration options.
- Registration opportunities were not favorable in some provinces; lack of support from the local government and concerned agencies (e.g. Provincial Health Department or Provincial AIDS Center) when these agencies were approached for advice.
- Unable to find a sponsoring organization or the number of core group members has not been stable (if registering under Decree 88).
- Not having sufficient initial operating capital and not being able to mobilize four management members with the university degree (as required by the Decree 81).
- Not having an office or work station (as required by both the Decree 81 and 88).

"We aim to be registered as a "Centre". The requirements about having a chief accountant and 4 members with university degree are not yet doable for groups like us... We only have two university graduates and are working on attracting more "talent" to our network." (IDI Group leader, Hai Phong)

"We have discussed (options) with some lead members of the national network. However, we still need to reinforce our financial capacity and stabilize our meeting/working place. Then we will decide." (IDI Group leader, Nghe An)

Considering the capacity of most SSGs participating in the assessment, registering as a cooperative group under the Decree 151 seems to be feasible, as opposed to other registration options. To become a cooperative group, the applying group still needs to contribute assets and resources to implementing specific activities, sharing benefits and responsibilities, and being certified by the commune People's Committee.

At the date of the assessment, some SSGs had found a "way out" by applying for "transitional status," i.e. being established as an associated member under an "umbrella" association such as the HCMC HIV/AIDS Association, Vietnam Red Cross at the provincial level, Psychological and Educational Scientific Association of HCMC, etc. With this option, such groups will be able to operate legally; however, they will not yet have a legal status, i.e. with their own stamp and bank account in their name.

Registration case studies

Niem Tin Dat Mui Club in Ca Mau

Niem Tin Dat Mui (NTDM) Club was established in 2006 by Ca Mau City People's Committee. As of the date of this assessment, NTDM is the only group that has a stamp and a bank account by their name. The group leader Mr Tran Minh Khai has put forth enormous effort and time not only on paper work but also in convincing different authorities of the necessity and importance of legalizing the operation of his self-help group. After six months pursuing legalization, NTDM Club was established with 7 key members. As stipulated in the Decision for Establishment, NTDM Club receives technical advice from the Centre for AIDS Prevention, the Preventive Medicine Centre, and the Ca Mau City Health Service. Since its establishment, NTDM has been struggling to sustain its activities by generating income for the group through fish farming and accepting small donations from various sources.

Dong Hanh Group in Can Tho

Dong Hanh Group in Can Tho was "officially acknowledged" by Can Tho City Red Cross in October, 2007, after successfully participating in a project implemented by Care International in Vietnam. The Dong Hanh Group does not yet have a legal stamp and a bank account of its own. Nor does the group have a mission statement, as revealed by the group leader, Ms Duong Thu Trac. To support the group's operation, Can Tho City Red Cross has provided the group with an office space and a small operating budget, in addition to technical support. With 10 members, the Dong Hanh Group works mainly on home-based care and client referral to VCT and health services. However, as shared by Ms Trac, referral to health services has been difficult given that the group cannot write an official introduction (i.e. with a stamp). Without legal status, the Dong Hanh Group has been unable to access funding. Since its establishment, the Dong Hanh Group has been struggling to sustain its activities with limited funding from the HPI Task Order I (led by Constella Futures), equipment support from ISDS (a computer), and monthly support from the Southern Network of PLHA.

Case study: Niem Tin Dat Mui Club Ca Mau

We have 7 key members altogether, 5 peer educators and 2 club facilitators who are all PLHA. These peer educators have been working in a Global Fund project and receiving a monthly allowance for the last three years.

At the club, we do outreach work for harm reduction, particularly collecting used syringes and needles, and distributing leaflets and condoms. We receive patients from everywhere in Ca Mau and then refer them to VCT and local health services. For serious cases, we can even send patients to the Tuberculosis Hospital Pham Ngoc Thach in HCMC. If a PLHA passes away, the local People's Committee calls me and I come to help with the death ceremony and cremation or burial.

The club attracts not only PLHA attendees, but also HIV-negative people. I have mobilized as many people as I can to participate in this mission. People joining us can enjoy benefits such as the fact that they can ride motorcycle-push-carts without being stopped by the police [smiling].

We raise fish to generate an income for PLHA club members. We have rich human resources to work on farming fish, thus we only need capital for further investment. However, we have been struggling to mobilize sufficient funds for our daily operations, particularly the office rental. I am a beggar; I knocked on any doors and begged anyone, so that we could have funds to care for homeless clients, and pay our salaries and other operation costs. Our biggest difficulty is locating an office space. We were constantly driven away by the landlords since the neighbors were too scared when they saw our patients with lesions.

We are now expanding our activities to other geographic areas by allying with other PLHA clubs in Cai Lay Town (Tien Giang Province), Can Tho, District 8 of HCMC and 567 Club in Ba Ria-Vung Tau Province. Our alliance has an office in District 8, HCMC. We will be expanding to Nha Trang (Khanh Hoa Province) soon.

(Excerpt from the IDI with Mr Tran Minh Khai, Group leader of Niem Tin Dat Mui Club)

Support needed by the groups to operate as planned

For the six groups that wished to *remain as they were now and not pursue registration* (Table 5), the following non-technical support needs were shared by their group leaders:

- Need to have small grants to conduct community-based IEC sessions and cover transportation costs to conduct activities.
- IEC materials, condoms and needles/syringes.
- Support in selling products (e.g. handicrafts) produced by group.
- Vocational training for FSW who desire to quit sex work.
- A private meeting place for regular group activities, office equipment, and financial support to maintain group operation
- PAC to issue an introduction letter so that groups are able to conduct IEC sessions in the community or in factories.
- Support to “market” the groups' activities so they can attract donor funding.

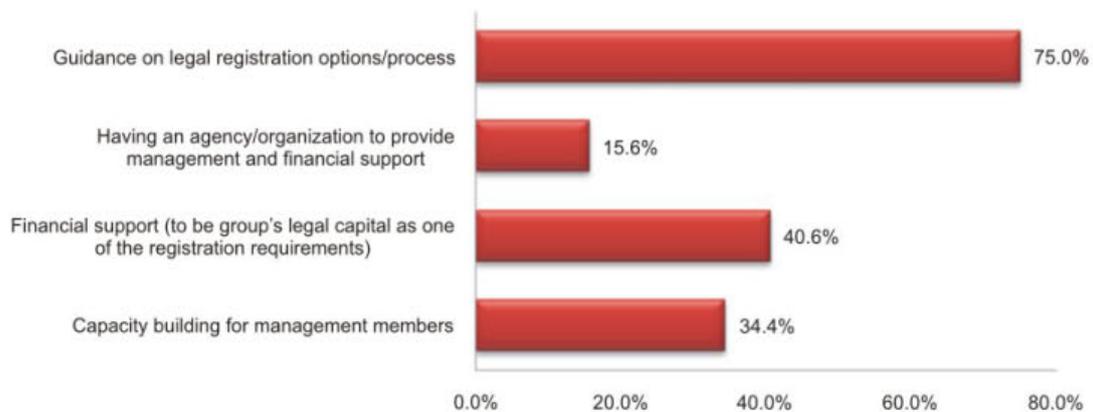
The reason cited for not planning to register the group operation was that the group was too small with only a few group members. These groups need more time to develop before they can register.

For the 42 groups who wished to continue *operating under the management of an agency/project*, the following non-technical support is needed:

- IEC materials, condoms, and needles/syringes
- Increased transport support costs for conducting outreach work
- Income generation/livelihood development for club members
- Develop more clubs to increase access for PLHA who live far away from the current club
- Linking with local government agencies and mass organizations for better coordination and collaboration
- Opportunities to share experience with other groups/clubs currently operating under other agencies/projects

Among thirty two SSGs who have studied registration-related information, all reported that they needed support with registering their operation. Two-thirds need guidance on registration options and processes (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Non-technical support needed to pursue registration



4.4. Legal assistance to PLHA to combat stigma and discrimination

- A small number of SSGs are currently providing legal services to PLHA.
- Peer educators (peer counselors) directly involved in legal advice or referral to provincial legal aid services.
- Training on Laws on HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control has been provided to PLHA members by many groups, though at a very basic/informational level.
- However, there have been some pitfalls with regard to several local legal aid services:
- Most legal services have not yet been highly effective. Many PLHA were refused jobs or were encouraged to carry on with an unsuitable job, but the legal services could not do anything to help improve or reverse their situation.

"I do not want to criticize any organizations but I realize the current legal aid activities have not yet been effective for supporting PLHA to combat stigma and discrimination. For instance, if they are at risk of losing their job, there is nothing that can be done to secure their job. One PLHA member had to resign from his work for being transferred from an office work to an auxiliary work. What can we do in this case? I think we have had some success stories by ensuring OVC to continue schooling but no one can tell what happens to them in the future. Over the last 2-3 years, a number of organizations have engaged in legal aid for PLHA. However, the impact of such work has not yet brought back visible outputs." (IDI group leader, Ha Noi).

- Lawyers have good skills and know HIV/AIDS related laws/policies but do not have good knowledge on HIV/AIDS and issues commonly faced by PLHA.
- PLHA counselors do not have good knowledge of HIV/AIDS Law.
- Some PLHA counselors lack commitment (e.g. they come to work late).
- Study visits or sharing workshops to/with effective legal aid service(s) in Hanoi are thought to be helpful to improve the capacity and professionalism of local legal aid services.

5. Summary of findings and recommendations

5.1. Summary of findings

With regard to legal registration, there has been a considerable level of interest among both self-help and supported groups in exploring registration options. However, there is a lack of information and guidance on which options are feasible given the group's current capacity.

The participating groups expressed a high degree of need for group management skills and skills related to sustainable development of the organization e.g. project design. Priority skills areas are fairly similar between the two groups.

- Priority skills for self-help groups:
 - Group management and facilitation
 - Project design
 - Communication skills
- Priority skills for supported groups:
 - Care for PLHA
 - Group management and facilitation
 - Communication skills

Coordination of capacity building efforts among organizations is deemed necessary. Overlap of training programs was reported and some group members working as peer educators were either over-trained or under-trained.

5.2. Recommendations

Based on the assessment findings the following recommendations are proposed:

General recommendations

- To provide all groups with information on the existing registration policies and advice or consultation on registration options to groups who expressed interest and commitment to registration. Additionally, such groups would need to receive support in organizational (and program) strategic planning. It would be very helpful if HPI could utilize its coordinating capacity to mobilize and/or coordinate with international and national donors for providing some financial support to groups that need funds to secure registration.
- Capacity building should be focused on the set of skills that are considered the most necessary by the groups, as summarized above.
- HPI should coordinate with agencies working with the same SSGs to harmonize or agree upon an improved coordinated capacity building plan overall and/or at the provincial level.

Proposed capacity building plan

Based on the needs of participating groups to develop capacity building skills, and, for those who desire to be registered, to meet the registration requirement, the following capacity building plan is proposed by the assessment team for HPI's consideration (Table 6). It is expected that depending on its program priorities and available human and financial resources, HPI will need to decide what activities should be carried out during its current fiscal year and the following years.

Table 6. Proposed capacity building plan for HPI

WHAT	HOW	WHO	WITH WHOM
Legal registration			
Advocacy to create a supportive environment for self-help groups to operate legally	<p>a. National level: Workshop and follow-up discussion with separate key players as necessary</p> <p>b. Provincial level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Select 2 or 3 priority provinces where 'potential' groups are identified - Meetings with registration related bodies, agencies 	HPI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Registration concerned agencies (MOHA, VUSTA, AIDS P&C Association etc) at national level - City/Provincial PC, AIDS coordinating body and mass organizations
Raising awareness of registration options	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Legal handbook - National level workshops to launch/disseminate handbook - Consider sharing legal handbook at provincial meetings 	HPI, UNAIDS	Local authorities, PAC, SSGs and legal clinics
Assist potential self-help groups (to-be-selected) with planning of registration road map	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identify an agency at the provincial level to be the key contact for registration related advice - Planning meeting with related agencies to develop a capacity building program and develop a road map for those groups -(what to do, how to do, when to do etc.) to meet with requirements and proceed with registration procedure 	HPI	SSGs, registration concerned agencies, capacity building agencies.
Mobilize and/or coordinate with international and national donors for financial support for self-help groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Include the topic of mobilization and coordination of donor's financial support in important national events, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Periodic HIV/AIDS technical group meetings • HPI coordinating meetings • NGO Resource Centre forum • Donor annual consultative meetings 	HPI	Implementing/ coordinating agencies
Capacity building plan			
Identify groups to participate in HPI Year 1 Capacity building program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop criteria for selection of potential groups - Select potential groups in consultation with VNP+ and I/VNGOs that currently have programs in the respective provinces - Conduct a capacity building needs assessment to identify areas of 	HPI	Groups, VNP+, I/VNGOs

WHAT	HOW	WHO	WITH WHOM
	priority specifically for these groups AND plan how to apply the skills on completion		
Work with I/VNGOs to develop a coordinated capacity building plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Map I/VNGOs' HIV/AIDS program in partnership/collaboration with PLHA, MARPs groups and other groups - Planning workshops to discuss how to coordinate/complete one another's capacity building program/activities 	HPI	I/VNGOs or CECEM
Harmonize local partner staff/collaborators' allowance to avoid potential group conflicts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Coordinate among funding agencies working in the same locality: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to share and avoid overlap on recruiting local PLHIV collaborators • to harmonize support/monthly allowance to PLHIV collaborators • to coordinate and complement the programs and schedules in capacity building 	HPI	Groups, VNP+, I/VNGOs
Assist selected groups to implement the capacity building plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Establish a network of group mentors in each province (e.g. 2 mentors per province) - Train mentors in group facilitation, group development, and mentoring principles and skills 	HPI	Groups, VNP+, I/VNGOs
Focused skills areas for self-help groups			
Group management & facilitation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Training of group management team (2 members each group) - Mentors help follow up and support 	HPI	Care International in Vietnam, SSGs, CECEM
Project design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Action-oriented training of group members (identified by the groups themselves) - Draft proposal (as one of the training outputs) to be used for fund-raising 	HPI	Care International in Vietnam, SSGs, CECEM
Communication skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Training of group management team (2 members each group) 	HPI	Care International in Vietnam, CECEM to facilitate training

WHAT	HOW	WHO	WITH WHOM
Focused skills areas for supported groups and clubs			
♦ Care for PLHA	- Coordinate with other I/VNGOs who currently work on care and support for PLHA, ART literacy, methadone literacy	HPI	Care International in Vietnam, COHED and VNP+
♦ Group management & facilitation	- Training of group management team (2 members each group) - Mentors help follow up and support	HPI	Care International in Vietnam, SSGs, CECEM
♦ Communication skills	- Training of group management team (2 members each group)	HPI	Care International in Vietnam, CECEM to facilitate training

ANNEXES

Annex 1. Abbreviation

CECEM	Center for Community Empowerment
COHED	Center for Community Health and Development
FSWs	Female Sex Workers
HCMC	Ho Chi Minh City
HPI	Health Policy Initiative Vietnam
I/VNGOs	International and Vietnamese NGOs
IDUs	Injecting Drug Users
ISDS	Institute for Social Development Studies
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MARPs	Most At Risk Populations
MOHA	Ministry of Home Affairs
MOLISA/DOLISA	Ministry/Department of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs
MSM	Men having Sex with Men
PAC	Provincial AIDS Center
PEPFAR	The U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief
PHD	Provincial Health Department
PLHA	People Living with HIV/AIDS
SPN+	Southern Network of People living with HIV/AIDS
SSGs	Self-help Groups and Supported Groups
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VCSPA	Vietnam Civil Society Partnership Platform on AIDS
VNP+	Vietnam Network of People living with HIV/AIDS
VUSTA	Vietnam Union of Scientific and Technology Associations

Annex 2. An overview of key operation registration policies

	Decree on establishment and operations of Co-operative groups (151/2007/NĐ-CP)	Decree on establishment, operations, and management of associations (88/2003/NĐ-CP)	Decree detailing the implementation of a number of articles of the Law on Science and Technology (81/2002/NĐ-CP)
Eligible entities	Establishment of a co-operative group is based on a co-operative agreement of at least 3 members who are certified by the People's Committee.	Associations are understood as voluntary organizations of citizens, organizations of Vietnamese with the same professions, the same interests, the same gender, for the common purposes of gathering and uniting members, regular activities, are non-self seeking, and aim to protect member's legitimate rights and interests.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Vietnamese organizations and individuals working in the fields of science and technology. ▪ International organizations and individuals and overseas Vietnamese working in the fields of science and technology in Vietnam.
Legal status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A co-operative agreement must be certified by the People's Committee. ▪ Have civil contracts ▪ Have a bank account in their name 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Have their own stamp ▪ Have a bank account in their name 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Have their own stamp ▪ Have a bank account in their name
Work permit license	A co-operative group which is operating in a sector requiring a work permit license or a Certificate of business qualification must comply with business-related requirements.	Associations which are recognized as socio-political organizations, or socio-political and professional organizations or which have their operations associated with the state's tasks, shall be rendered support from the state budget, According to the Prime Minister's regulations.	Registered in the fields of science and technology
Basic requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Composed of at least 3 members ▪ Have a joint co-operative agreement ▪ Co-operative agreement must be certified by the People's Committee 	<p>An association must have a mission not contrary to the law, have a charter, a head office, and an adequate number of members registered for participation (the number of registered members is to be decided by Minister of Home Affairs).</p> <p>The founder must establish boards canvassing for the establishment of the association. These boards shall be recognized by the relevant governmental body. The number of Committee members is to be decided by MOHA. Once</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Have operation objectives and direction in accordance with legal regulations; ▪ Have organizational regulations and functions; ▪ Have required number of members and members with required education level, particularly human resources in the fields of science and technology, as well as sufficient offices and facilities to implement relevant activities in line with the organizational charter.

	Decree on establishment and operations of Co-operative groups (151/2007/NĐ-CP)	Decree on establishment, operations, and management of associations (88/2003/NĐ-CP)	Decree detailing the implementation of a number of articles of the Law on Science and Technology (81/2002/NĐ-CP)
		<p>approved, the association establishment-cavassing boards will mobilize individuals and organizations to join the association and send dossiers of application to the authority concerned.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ At least 4 persons with an education at college or university level or higher, where at least one is specialized in the registered field. Or at least one college/university educated person in the registered field, if the organization operates in an area with difficult or extremely difficult socio-economic conditions. ▪ At least 2 full-time persons. ▪ The head of the organization must have a university education or higher. If the organization operates in an area with difficult or extremely difficult socio-economic conditions, the head of the organization must also, at minimum, have graduated from junior college. ▪ In the case of organizations operating at the national, ministerial, or provincial level, the head of the organization must have at least a doctorate certificate or an associate professor academic title. ▪ Individuals in the group modifying The Ordinance on Civil Servants will not be allowed to establish, jointly establish, manage, or jointly manage any private organizations operating in the fields of science and technology.

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