



Lessons Learned:  
The Evolution of NGO  
Networks in Conflict-Affected  
Environments

Nepal | Nicaragua | Sudan | Vietnam

## A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S

We wish to express our deep appreciation to the organizations studied for their generous cooperation. They provided key documents and information, and their representatives took time to share their insights and opinions during in-depth interviews. The organizations studied were:

- New Sudanese Indigenous Non-Governmental Organization (NESI) Network, Sudan
- SAATHI Network for Women and Children, Nepal
- Institute of Nicaraguan Studies (IEN), Nicaragua
- Vietnamese NGO Network (VNGO), Vietnam

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CAPABLE PARTNERS PROGRAM

# Lessons Learned: The Evolution of NGO Networks in Conflict-Affected Environments

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## I. A Synthesis of Cases of NGOs and their Networks in Sudan, Nepal, Nicaragua and Vietnam

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This synthesis paper presents the results of cases of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and their networks in four countries: Sudan, Nepal, Nicaragua and Vietnam. These studies were conducted in late 2005 and early 2006 by specialists in the four countries.

The USAID-funded Capable Partners Program (CAP) supports activities that strengthen civil society, an ever-growing priority of US foreign assistance, recognizing the critical link between democracy and development. Given current global challenges to development, special attention to civil society—particularly NGOs and networks—in conflict and post-conflict environments is warranted. NGOs and networks have a critical role in effectively delivering services and contributing to governance efforts in countries struggling to transition from crisis and rebuild after conflict.

The benefits to NGOs of networking with like-minded organizations have proven great. Sometimes networks of NGOs form in order to have a stronger voice vis-à-vis government; others form to provide services to disadvantaged populations or in response to political crisis or natural disaster. Through networking, organizations increase their solidarity, impact, visibility and overall credibility. Through collective action, they extend their reach and solidify their advocacy platforms. This sense of collaboration is especially valuable in fragile, post-conflict and transitional environments where often there is active opposition and tension.

The cases presented in this paper were commissioned with the goal of learning from the experiences of organizations in four countries at various stages of post-conflict development in different regions of the world: Sudan, Nepal, Nicaragua and Vietnam. Organizations with which CAP has ongoing relationships were selected for these studies, and local specialists were contracted to carry them out.

This synthesis begins with a brief description of the socio-political environment in each of the four countries, along with an introduction to the organizations studied. A summary of lessons and general conclusions, plus overall recommendations for the support of networks in the future, follows. The individual cases provide a more detailed description of the country context, the experience of the target organizations, and country-specific conclusions and recommendations.

### A. OVERVIEW OF CASE STUDIES

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Each of the four country cases represents a different stage on the conflict to peace continuum and reflects a unique set of challenges for NGOs and their networks. In South Sudan, the new government established as a result of the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement is struggling to organize itself and to articulate its relations with Khartoum, civil society and other key actors. In Nepal, civil unrest with violent overtones continued to escalate as the role of the monarch was questioned by an increasingly large proportion of the population and rejected by Maoist rebels. Nicaragua has chosen its fourth democratically-elected government since the peacetime transition began with the elections of 1990. In Vietnam, while the country has been largely free of conflict since the end of the war in 1975, democratization has been slow, with power concentrated in the executive; the environment for civil society remains restrictive, with NGOs regulated and “managed” by the government.

As countries progress along the path from conflict to peace, uneven though it may be, social and economic conditions evolve and the mix of tasks performed by the government and by non-state actors changes. For NGOs, humanitarian work focusing on relief and survival can give way to their involvement in the delivery of services related to reconstruction and development in areas such as education, health, economic recovery and even security. They may begin also to play advocacy or watchdog roles, as new policies and procedures are put in place.

**Nepal:** After a protracted struggle, in 1990 a multi-party democratic government was formed, replacing rule by an absolute monarchy. However, over the ensuing period, frequent changes of government threatened stability, and the monarchy reassumed full executive powers in 2002. The King formed a Cabinet with himself as Chairman, claiming that this “royal coup,” as it has come to be known, was necessary to reinstate democracy and establish peace. In February 2005, the King seized the whole government, dissolving the House of Representatives. During this autocratic period, Maoist rebels waged a military campaign against the monarchy to establish “a new people’s democracy.” Judging by the number of casualties, this was one of the highest intensity internal conflicts in the world. Individual mobility and goods supply were disrupted, and human rights abuses—including murder, rape and torture of civilians by the state army—were rampant. Extortion, the abduction of students and teachers, and the use of civilians as human shields by the Maoist rebels, coupled with indiscriminate killings, attacks and counter-attacks, were widespread. Women and children were particularly affected as victims of violence at the hands of those on both sides of the conflict. In April 2006, the people’s movement succeeded in overthrowing the King, reforming the House of Representatives, and re-establishing democracy—and, the Maoists have just joined the government. However, the aftermath of the conflict still lingers.

In 1992, a group of eight professional women concerned about the mounting violence against women and children and committed to finding solutions founded a nongovernmental, non-profit and politically neutral organization called SAATHI. They pledged to use their knowledge and skills to eliminate Violence Against Women and Children (VAW/C). In a landmark study in 1994, they identified domestic violence, sexual exploitation and harassment, armed conflict and human trafficking as the most urgent problems facing Nepali women. As a result of its work with local groups and organizations at all levels, by 2004 a network of NGOs working on VAW/C developed organically. At the founding meeting, partner organizations requested that SAATHI serve as network

secretariat—a role it continues to play. The overall goal of the 15-member network is to develop and implement focused campaigns and initiatives against VAW/C by providing a range of services to increase the capacity of local partners, and to provide overall strategic development assistance to help consolidate the anti-VAW/C efforts of individual organizations. The network has a number of specific objectives aimed at providing services for needy women and children, sensitizing the public about the causes and nature of VAW/C, conducting capacity-building programs for member NGOs and advocating for policy directives to address the problem.

**Nicaragua:** The Nicaragua study reveals that, though progress has been made since the 1990 elections, a political, economic and social crisis still exists. The dictatorship that had ruled the country for over 40 years was overthrown in 1979 in a violent coup led by the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN). The 1980s were marked by deep structural and social changes enacted by the FSLN. These changes led increasingly to serious differences among divergent social and economic groups, which were aggravated by the anti-Sandinista contra guerrillas sponsored by the US in reaction to Nicaraguan aid to leftist rebels in the region. Currently, Nicaragua is the poorest country in Latin America after Haiti and is 126th on UNDP’s worldwide Human Development Index. In 2005, the head of the Nicaraguan Central Bank stated that the only reason complete collapse had been avoided was because of international aid and family remittances. He further asserted that the government did not have a national policy to promote development, higher wages or employment, which means that there is no vision or sense of how to proceed or of the possible consequences that this might have on the country’s stagnation.

Convinced that the 1990 elections presented an opportunity for the consolidation of democratic governance, social justice and an end to the armed conflict, three former government officials founded an NGO called the *Instituto de Estudios Nicaraguenses* (IEN, Institute of Nicaraguan Studies). They were committed to supporting the transition from war to peace by



fostering civic participation based on an objective understanding of Nicaraguan social, political and economic dynamics and by generating information to support the process of reaching a national consensus. To accomplish this, IEN organized seminars, published essays and conducted public opinion research on key issues. Other organizations began to call upon IEN for information and technical assistance in social research, making the Institute a credible and valued ally within the development community.

Following a series of major natural disasters that devastated parts of the country, by late 1998, in the aftermath of Hurricane Mitch, IEN adopted an additional goal: to enhance the capacity to respond to the needs of the affected population by deepening local participation and consolidating efforts through networks. In response to that emergency, IEN played a key role in facilitating the creation of the country's largest, broad-based NGO coalition, the *Coordinadora Civil* (CC), which grew quickly and continues to operate today. In 1997, IEN was chosen to participate in the European Union's (EU) Education for Peace, Democracy and Human Rights in Nicaragua Program. Given that experience, and its ongoing work with the CC, a few years later the three other national NGOs selected by the EU to form a consortium representing Nicaragua in its regional Multiyear Program chose IEN to serve as the official representative and secretariat for the group. That initiative involves work with local NGOs and community groups all over the country. In addition to its work at the local level, IEN seeks to generate information designed to strengthen the rule of law and to develop methodologies for social science training and research.

*Sudan:* The Sudan case demonstrates the severe under-development of the southern part of the country. The 36-year civil war that ended only in January 2005 destroyed the region's infrastructure, including transport, communication, medical and educational facilities. During the on-going transition from war to peace, humanitarian interventions are still needed. Both international and local NGOs have been focusing on resettlement, rehabilitation, reconstruction and demobilization.

At the same time, they are careful to promote equity, fairness, human rights and good governance, especially at this embryonic stage of the new and evolving Government of Southern Sudan.

Against this backdrop of continued violence and devastation, in 2000 the New Sudanese Indigenous Non-Governmental Organization (NESI) Network was founded by six NGOs working in Southern Sudan. They sought to strengthen cohesion among themselves and other NGOs working there and to conduct joint actions as advocates for peace. By 2005, membership had grown to 66 organizations, and NESI was actively involved in efforts leading to the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). The Network's mission is to enhance the dignity of the South/New Sudanese people through an efficient, strong and effective civil society and by monitoring human rights abuses. Network objectives are designed to: promote dialogue and collaboration to alleviate poverty and achieve gender equality, peace building, human rights observance and participatory governance; strengthen the organizational capacity of member NGOs; enhance public awareness about the work of the Network; and pool member resources to achieve the Network's goals.

Given the nature of the conflict and the lack of infrastructure in Southern Sudan, NESI and its member organizations found it necessary to operate from offices in nearby Nairobi, Kenya, though a move to the region is now contemplated as conditions improve.

*Vietnam:* Since the end of the war between Northern and Southern Vietnam in 1975, this country has been a one-party communist state, with little tolerance for any non-state activity. All social and community organizations were required to be closely linked to and managed by the state. However, the reforms introduced in 1986 (called renewal or "*doi moi*") led to far-reaching social and economic changes. Both the government and the people of Vietnam value peace and stability very highly. Their common goal is to foster participation in the poverty reduction process, with health care for the poor and sustainable community development. While there have been no major

incidents of conflict in recent years, several violent clashes over land access and use have occurred near Hanoi and in the Central Highlands region, there has been ongoing conflict and several violent protests over land access and religious freedom. Reportedly, drug use, smuggling, prostitution and human trafficking—all factors potentially leading to violent conflict—have been on the rise.

As a result of *doi moi* and the introduction of a new Constitution in 1992, Vietnam now refers to its approach as “a market economy with socialist orientation,” which means that government services and organizations (i.e., schools, hospitals, mass organizations) are required to raise their own funds from nongovernmental sources. The reforms also brought greater opportunities for new forms of social organization, such as local NGOs, on the condition that they raise their own funds. Currently, all NGOs are “managed” by a government entity; however, this is simply a process of registering with an official organization. Government “management” is limited, and NGOs are able to operate quite independently.

In 2001, the directors of two well-established, national NGOs founded the Vietnamese NGO Network for Community Development (VNGO). Having witnessed the emergence of large numbers of local NGOs since the introduction of *doi moi*, network founders saw that those organizations were extremely weak, poorly-funded and did not have opportunities to learn new techniques or share information with one another or with government agencies and international NGOs. They were concerned that, while the government encouraged the creation of small NGOs, it did not support them or fully recognize the important role they were playing in the country’s development. Therefore, it was decided that a network of NGOs would allow all to share their experiences and methodologies and also give them a stronger voice. Now with 44 member NGOs, the purpose of the network is to promote economic development and poverty reduction in densely populated, rural, remote, mountainous regions and among ethnic minorities. It seeks to strengthen the capacity of member organizations through training and technical support, to foster participation in poverty reduction and sustainable community

development and to support grassroots democracy, while broadening VNGO cooperation with government agencies and international NGOs for the implementation of research and rural development programs.

## B. LESSONS FROM THE CASES

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Given that the four networks studied differ widely in terms of the national context, culture and reality within which they were created and continue to operate, a unique set of lessons and conclusions flows from each case. Those conclusions, along with country-specific recommendations, are found in the individual cases that follow this paper.

However, a careful analysis of the four cases also yields a number of overarching or general conclusions, outlined below. These conclusions are intended to offer insights for engaging NGOs and their networks more effectively in future efforts to address development challenges in situations affected by conflict. They also provide a basis for the general recommendations offered in the next section for consideration by NGOs, donors and other interested parties in their planning.

1. In fragile and transitional environments, local leaders dedicated to resolving critical problems are particularly motivated to create NGOs and networks of like-minded organizations. In each of the four countries, a small group of committed individuals recognized a need and took action to address it, motivating others to join them in a collective effort. In the countries affected by armed conflict, Nepal and Southern Sudan, NGO networks were formed by a few individuals in response to the escalation of violence and human rights abuses. In Nicaragua, three individuals with an understanding of the political process and committed to democratic governance seized the opportunity presented by the post-war political transition by creating an organization to defend citizens’ rights and promote civic participation. In Vietnam, two experienced NGO leaders formed a network of national NGOs working to reduce poverty and provide assistance to and a stronger voice for weak, community-based groups.

2. Committed, shared leadership is especially crucial for the consolidation of effective NGO networks in conflict-affected situations. These cases show that, once formed, energetic, committed and participatory leadership was the basic building block of network consolidation and effectiveness. In Sudan, Nepal and Nicaragua, once the organizations were formed, shared leadership and democratic principles became basic tenants for on-going operations. In Vietnam, where networks are a new form of organization, more traditional, hierarchical practices continue to hamper the effectiveness of the network.
3. NGO networks require new capacities and skills, the adoption of which is more readily accepted in crisis situations. CAP's experience shows that effective networks operate through non-hierarchical structures and participatory decision-making processes. This requires skills that are new to traditional NGOs and must be learned. In the networks studied, participatory methodologies and horizontal decision-making practices were adopted quickly by networks in the countries most affected by conflict—Sudan and Nepal. In Vietnam, networking and collaboration are new and difficult concepts; it was recognized at the outset that new capacities and experience-sharing techniques would be needed to ensure the sustainability of the network. In Nicaragua, rather than create their own, separate network, the leaders of the new organization facilitated the founding of a broad coalition of NGOs, while their open and participatory style led to their unanimous election as representatives of an EU-sponsored NGO consortium dedicated to building citizenship from the ground up.
4. External financial support is generally needed for core network operations, while the speed with which it can be obtained may depend on the level of the crisis. Though lack of funding is generally not the main reason why NGOs do not create networks or why they fail, it can be a major barrier to the achievement of their full potential. In the cases studied, outside financial support for core operations was needed to build organizational capacity for managing ongoing activities. Indeed, the level and nature of the crisis appear to have paralleled access to outside funding sources. That is, where the conflict was most violent, as in Sudan or Nepal, or where there were implications of a strategic political nature, such as in Nicaragua, donors interested in those causes provided early core support for NGO efforts.
5. The existence of violent conflict tends to accelerate national NGO efforts to network with community-based groups. In Southern Sudan and Nepal, where armed conflict and human rights abuses prevail, the networks studied were created by NGOs already working at the community level to address critical human needs arising from the ongoing violence. However, in Nicaragua and Vietnam, where violent conflict is no longer prevalent, efforts by those national organizations to connect with local groups did not occur until it became apparent that the need for community-based participation was an important factor in the achievement of overall development goals.
6. Effective communication within NGO networks, and between them and their supporters, is essential for the sustainability of their efforts, but is adversely affected by violent conflict or natural disasters. All four cases noted a weakness in communication strategies. To some degree, this was related to the destruction of physical infrastructure that resulted either from armed conflict (Sudan, Nepal) or natural disasters (Nicaragua). On the other hand, difficulties also arose from the manner in which communication was managed within the network (Vietnam). It is important to recognize that transparency and information-sharing promote a sense of "ownership" and collaboration, not only among members, but also between the network and its donors and allies.
7. Systems for ongoing monitoring and evaluation are often neglected when networks are created in crisis situations. Due to the

emergency nature of the support provided to organizations seeking to address crises caused by armed conflict or natural disasters, mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating performance as a component of project design are often missing and not always required by donors. In such cases, it becomes difficult to assess performance and revise activities in a timely manner as the situation evolves. The creation of monitoring plans and the formulation of appropriate indicators are further complicated for networks of NGOs operating in volatile situations. In addition to keeping abreast of the crisis, to be effective network members need to adopt clearly-articulated expectations and project-related responsibilities. In Nepal, a need was found for the development of process and impact indicators to track current progress and incorporate appropriate revisions. In Sudan, the network also found that there was a need to design a process for monitoring ongoing activities and taking corrective action.

## C. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUPPORTING NGO NETWORKS

The recommendations below emerged from an examination of the four cases and are offered for consideration by national and international NGOs and donors as they seek to address situations marked by crisis or conflict. Though an in-depth assessment of a particular situation is required for adopting specific approaches, two general lessons can be followed. First, committed, like-minded NGOs operate and achieve their goals more effectively when they network together to take action; and second, donors and international organizations should encourage key local NGOs to form networks, providing core support for their development and operations. Recommendations specific to these two general lessons follow:

- In creating and operating networks, NGOs should strive to:
  1. Adopt procedures for shared leadership, with horizontal and participatory planning and decision-making;

2. Ensure the transparency of operations, with full accountability for members, donors and all concerned;
3. Create two-way channels of communication designed to keep members and other key stakeholders informed and to seek their input on an ongoing basis;
4. Assess the institutional needs of the network and of member organizations on a regular basis;
5. Provide organizational capacity-building training and technical assistance for the network and for member NGOs in accordance with their needs;
6. Establish mechanisms for the continual monitoring of both the context within which the network is operating and the impact of the activities undertaken, taking corrective action whenever necessary; and
7. Provide for the periodic evaluation of network performance and revise operations as needed in accordance with results.

- When designing interventions in conflict-affected environments, donors and international organizations should strive to:

1. Identify key indigenous NGOs committed to finding solutions and encourage them to work together, pooling their expertise and resources;
2. Provide early core support for networks created to resolve crisis-related problems;
3. Enhance collaboration with NGOs and their networks by dealing with them as partners, rather than as “projects,” and by helping to facilitate their efforts;
4. In addition to activity-related resources, provide funds for the organizational development of the networks supported through periodic organizational assessments and the provision of capacity-building training and technical assistance to address institutional needs; and
5. Require that appropriate systems for the ongoing monitoring of network impact and periodic performance evaluations are built into the design of the supported activities.

## D. AREAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

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With the backdrop of a renewed emphasis on supporting peace, security and governance through U.S. foreign assistance in countries transitioning from crisis and rebuilding after conflict<sup>1</sup>, the cases reviewed suggest the following potential areas for further research:

- How to strengthen the quality of leadership in NGOs and networks in countries affected by crisis, creating a pool of capable leaders to mentor NGO leaders in similar environments.
- The use of new and improved information sharing, media and technology approaches that bridge communication divides and infrastructure gaps to enhance the impact of NGO networks. For example, options for use of the Internet at the local level to facilitate network exchanges, such as CAP's learning portal and innovative online community, NGOConnect.NET.
- In environments where the level of national, regional or community cohesion is low, how to incorporate conflict management approaches through greater dialogue and tolerance into network operations in order to build consensus among a diversity of NGO members. Whether training techniques for mediating opposing views among network members in a fair manner produce positive outcomes.
- Approaches for building skills in strategic planning that are participatory and forward-looking, particularly in the area of resource mobilization which is critical to transition situations where donor funding declines after the emergency and post-crisis periods, posing a threat to long-term organizational financial sustainability.

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<sup>1</sup> *New Direction in U.S. Foreign Assistance*, <http://www.state.gov/f/direction/> (January 2006).



## II. SAATHI in Nepal

### COUNTRY CONTEXT

#### A. POLITICAL AND SOCIAL

In 2004, UNDP reported that Nepal ranked 140th out of 177 countries in the composite Human Development Index (HDI). It had an annual per capita income of US\$246. The joint World Bank-CBS/NPC study determined that 31% of Nepal's 23 million people live below the poverty line, with no access to basic needs such as food, health and education (CBS, 2005). Poverty is related directly to caste, ethnicity, religion, and region and disparity among the different groups is the core issue of development in Nepal (Bhattarai, 2004a). The poor face the exploitation and marginalization that stem from a lack of voice, power and independence (Bhattarai, 2004b). Low caste means low life expectancy, literacy rate, years of schooling and per capita income. Women are the most deprived, and dependent upon the higher castes and men. More importantly, they have marginal existence in the spheres of politics and other public domains of decision-making (Bhattarai, 2002).

In 1990, after a long struggle, Nepalese were able to form a multi-party democratic system. Prior to that, it was an absolute monarchy. However, after 1990, frequent changes of government threatened stability and the monarchy reassumed full executive powers in 2002. On February 1, 2005, the Nepalese King fired the government—the third he had appointed since 2002—and formed a Cabinet with himself as Chairman for a period of three years. The King claimed that this royal coup was necessary to reinstate democracy and establish peace, threatened by the Maoist insurgency. However, in April, the “people’s movement” successfully overthrew the King, reinstated the House of Representatives; the Maoists recently have joined the government.

From 1996 to 2006, Maoist rebels waged a military campaign against the constitutional monarchy, in order to establish a “new people’s democracy” or republican state. The so-called “People’s War” started first in the Mid-West hill districts in 1996,

and spread out across the country. Only two (Manang and Mustang) of 75 districts did not experienced direct armed confrontation between the state security forces and the Maoist guerrillas. The Maoists claimed that they had captured the rural areas, leaving to the “old regime” (the state) only the capital and district headquarters (Kumar, 2004). Some reports claimed that 80% of Nepal were strongly influenced by the Maoist movement (Kobek and Thapa, 2005). In late 1998, the Maoists began to establish “base areas” and form their own village-level governments; by 2005 the Maoist government has four tiers: central (United Revolutionary People’s Council), regional (nine autonomous regional governments), district, and village/city people’s governments (Kattle, 2004).

Judging by the number of casualties<sup>1</sup>, this conflict was one of the highest intensity in the world (Murchshed and Gates, 2003). By January 2005, Nepal had counted 12,320 conflict-related deaths. Of those, 8,008 were caused by the state, and 4,312 were caused by the Maoists. Individual mobility and goods supplies were disrupted. The armed conflict also has led to human rights abuses, including the murder, rape, and torture of civilians by the state army and extortion, the abduction of students and teachers and the use of civilians as human shields by the Maoists. In most villages, only women, children, the elderly and helpless are left behind. Local people, particularly in rural areas, were compelled secretly to provide food, cash donations, and shelter to the insurgents.

Since early 1996, Nepal also witnessed an increasing number of orphans, widows and internally displaced persons (IDPs), the majority of whom are women and children (Syrup). The armed conflict left more than 4,000 women as widows, and these

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*1 Wallensteen and Sollenberg (2000) have categorized three levels of intensity of conflict in terms of number of casualties. Low intensity armed conflict: at least 25 battle-related deaths per year and fewer than 1000 battle-related deaths during the course of the conflict. Medium intensity armed conflict: at least 25 battle-related deaths per year and an accumulated total of at least 1000 deaths, but fewer than 1000 deaths per year. High intensity armed conflict: at least 1000 battle-related deaths per year.*

women find themselves in an insecure situation due to traditional beliefs and customs, thus increasing the risk of becoming involved in sex work or trafficking. In addition, the forceful recruitment of young women by the Maoists was another serious issue in Nepal. In 2003, the National Women's Commission reported that women accounted for roughly 33% of the Maoist militia in some districts, while in others the figure is as high as 50%. Many young women have been displaced from their homes and forced to stay away because of this threat in their villages.

Worldwide, Violence against Women (VAW) is exacerbated during armed conflict (Rehn and Johnson Sirleaf 2002), and women from marginalized groups are particularly at risk. Increased incidences of depression, rape and early marriages amongst women in conflict areas have been reported (<http://www.saathi.org.np>). A Nepali daily reported that women were being forced to carry guns and satisfy the sexual appetites of the insurgents. Nepalese women have suffered the loss of family and homes, and they have faced extreme poverty. Women and children constitute the majority of internal refugees.

## B. IMPACT ON NGOS

NGOs are not a recent phenomenon<sup>2</sup> in Nepal and, despite the ongoing armed conflict, have expanded phenomenally during the last decade. Nepal had only one formal NGO in 1927, four in 1951, 22 in 1973, and 193 in 1989-1990. By 2001-2002, Nepal had 13,686. Today, there could be as many as 50,000 (Bhattachan, 2004). This recent surge resulted largely from the 1990 restoration of democracy which brought a neo-liberal regime friendly to bilateral and multilateral NGO international assistance. The neo-liberalism, which promoted Nepal's minimalist state, and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) which channeled international development assistance through INGOs active in Nepal,

*2 Indigenous and traditional groups are old and well-established phenomena. They began with a variety of community service oriented, voluntary, informal organizations typically based on neighborhood or temple membership, frequently reflecting shared ethnic or caste identities and kinship ( Shrestha, 1997, Biggs et al, 2004).*

Internal displacement and cross-border migration of women and children due to ongoing armed conflict have now become the key factors leading to VAW&C. Since women are displaced forcefully they are moving to intermediary sites where they are vulnerable to trafficking, sexual abuse and exploitation.

*Ms. Trishna Sharma, Ekta Kendra,  
Rupandehi*

also encouraged this expansion. Furthermore, financially and politically powerful multilateral organizations, which have a significant presence, increasingly have favored NGOs and the private sector over the state (NESAC, 2002).

Although the number of NGOs has increased so phenomenally, their growth patterns are noteworthy. In the first half of the nineties, Kathmandu-based national NGOs grew rapidly. In the second half of the nineties, the rising Maoist insurgency stifled the national NGOs, and local-level or district-level NGOs mushroomed. Similarly, most NGOs and INGOs initially focused on service delivery activities, directly targeting community-level participation but not involving local NGOs and Community Based Organizations (CBOs). In the second half of the nineties, a number of NGOs and INGOs shifted their attention to advocacy, focusing on human rights, women's rights and empowerment, Dalit<sup>3</sup> rights, rights of indigenous people and emancipation of the Kamaiyas<sup>4</sup>. By late 2001, when violence escalated after the

*3 Dalits are defined as those castes of people of Nepal who were categorized as "untouchables" in the Old Civil Code of 1853 until the promulgation of New Civil Code of 1962. The Caste System was abolished in 1962 but Dalits face caste based discriminations in their public life even today.*

*4 A form of bonded labor system commonly practiced in the mid-western and far-western parts of the Tarai region of Nepal until 2000. The Kamaiya System was officially abolished in July 17, 2000 after a series of demonstrations and activism of human right activists, civil societies and (I) NGOs working in Nepal.*



peace talks failed and the government deployed the army to quell the Maoist insurgency, NGOs and INGOs shifted to conflict transformation and peacebuilding.

In essence, this democratization and the state's increasing dependence on the bilateral and multi-lateral assistance policies and strategies have been the key platforms for the expansion of the NGO regime in Nepal. Discussions about enhanced "development" and poverty-alleviation funding have led to new state policies on NGOs. The 1990 Constitution and the 1992 Social Welfare Act (the principal legal instrument for NGO promotion and regulation) mandated freedom of political and social organization, which provided the substantive legal-political basis for the national-level NGO expansion. The Ninth Plan (1997-2002) and Tenth Plan (2003-2007) recognized NGOs as being "complementary to the government's efforts." The Ninth Plan stated both that "policies and programs for poverty-alleviation and socio-economic development will be formulated by involving the NGOs," and that NGOs can "specialize" in development programs normally under the jurisdiction of the central or local governments, such as agriculture, health, nutrition, environment, forestry, micro-hydro electricity, drinking water, sanitation, education, strengthening of local government bodies and savings and credit (HMG/NPC, 1997). NGOs also have been asked to work with local governments in a coordinated manner. The Tenth Plan states, "civil society and non-governmental organizations of local and national level play an important role in the implementation of Tenth Plan, like women's education and empowerment, disabled, mainstreaming of ethnic and indigenous people, population management, income generation and environment protection through effective public participation" (HMG/NPC, 2003). However, the Tenth Plan does not spell out explicitly the role of NGOs and civil society in conflict transformation and peacebuilding.

Despite the "NGO-friendly" policy and socio-political environment, relations between Nepalese NGOs and the state are characterized by dependency and mistrust. Officially, NGOs are considered to be complimentary to the state. They

can deliver services efficiently and reach remote areas. However, both state and NGOs are heavily dependent on international aid and so compete for donor resources. Recent estimates show that the annual budget of the NGO sector is about one fifth the state's total annual budget (Bhattachan, 2003). As a result, the state is trying to control NGOs by requesting that they obtain state approval before receiving foreign donor funding. The Royal Government stipulated this in the Social Welfare Council<sup>5</sup> Ordinance, enacted July 28, 2005. Officials claim that the Ordinance offers NGOs a Code of Conduct and does not constrict them, but NGOs protest that the Ordinance will eliminate their independence.

In addition, the continued armed conflict has placed Nepalese NGOs in a difficult position. The state military falsely suspects that NGOs are allied with the Maoists and so limits their efforts. The Maoists generally have accepted NGOs, except for those supported by American funding. However, since mid-2004 the Maoists have required that NGOs in the districts which they control satisfy nine demands, most of which are consistent with good development work: that operations be transparent; that the organization have good governance and no corruption; that programs be focused on poverty, driven by community needs, and implemented with community help.

However, the Maoists also require that NGOs register with and pay taxes to the local Maoist authority, which NGOs cannot do, ethically, legally or practically. Gopal Yogi, SAATHI Executive Committee member and Mid-western Regional Chief of the Nepal NGO Federation, states "Registration of NGOs with the insurgents has emerged as a pressing issue and serious concern for all member NGOs, specifically in the districts of the Mid-western Development Region, as it poses a threat to their very existence, as well as to program implementation. If the NGOs comply with insurgents'

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*5 A government department responsible for granting affiliation and regulating the NGOs and INGOs in the country. It is also responsible for providing policy advice to the government.*

demand, the government or the security forces might go to the extent of closing them down or at least harass them so much that they cannot work any longer... As the government's presence is limited only to the district headquarters and major towns, NGOs have all the more important role to play to deliver services to the poor and disadvantaged communities in most parts of the country." Yet, many NGOs are under pressure to withdraw programs, especially from those rural areas where the poorest live. Frequent strikes and blockades, initiated by the Maoists, have prevented NGO workers from accessing remote areas where programs are being implemented. Community members also have been constrained, fearful of abductions and forced to obtain permission from both government and rebel forces before implementing project activities. Organizing community meetings is difficult, which has hampered communication, social mobilization, monitoring and evaluation. Nevertheless, NGOs reportedly are under less pressure to register with the Maoist People's Government than they were in the recent past.

## An Overview of SAATHI: Genesis and Evolution

### A. FIRST STEPS

SAATHI was established in December 1992 by professional women committed to women's issues. It was created very informally and not even registered with the government. It had no official mission statement or vision and no strategic plan or monitoring systems. Dr. Arzu Rana-Deuba, a social psychologist, led the process of choosing the founding members, carefully selecting women who were likeminded, acquainted and dedicated to and enthusiastic about voluntarily contributing their knowledge, skills and expertise to addressing the problems Nepali women face. As with many other institutions in Nepal, SAATHI was controlled by upper castes and dominant Hindu groups. Even today it is known to be an organization of influential women, mostly from upper class families.

Under the leadership of Ms. Madhuri Singh, and with the unanimous consent of SAATHI members,

a nine-member Executive Committee (EC) was established with six key posts (President, Senior Vice-President, Vice-President, Member-Secretary, Joint-Secretary and Treasurer) and three executive members. Then, as now, the EC served for three years. It manages the organization and implements programs, with the Senior Vice-President heading Program Planning and Development, Vice-President heading Program Implementation, and an executive member heading Communication and Networking. SAATHI operated primarily through its members' volunteer efforts, and created three types of memberships (see Annex 3): life, general and honorary. Honorary members have no voting rights and pay no fee, but the President can nominate honorary members to the Executive Committee (EC). Life members must make a one-time payment of Rs 5,000.00, while general members pay Rs.100.00 annually. SAATHI's current President, Ms. Pramada Shah, spoke of the organization's structure: "These early structures and guidelines will periodically be reviewed, and it is envisaged that they will be revised and developed as SAATHI evolves."

The founders were dedicated and unanimously agreed to work for the betterment of women, to advocate to protect women's human rights and to provide various support activities to empower women in general. They believed that women can realize their potential only by knowing their abilities and the opportunities that are available. They conducted a pioneering study (SAATHI, 1994) and identified VAW/C—defined as domestic violence, sexual exploitation and harassment, armed conflict and human trafficking—as the most urgent problem facing Nepali women.

SAATHI was focused on breaking the silence around VAW/C by generating awareness at all levels of society through trainings, orientations, workshops, symposiums, social mobilization campaigns and the production and distribution of Information, Education and Communication (IEC) materials. SAATHI's working approach has been to network with policy groups and grassroots women's groups to exchange ideas and information. Initially, SAATHI conducted a number of key

studies<sup>6</sup> of gender discrimination and VAW/C in Nepal—studies that have been crucial to drawing attention to the extent of VAW/C in Nepal and to pushing for change. SAATHI adopted a strong advocacy strategy in its early years, actively lobbying for the implementation of existing laws and the formation of new laws to protect women and children against violence and exploitation. At the grassroots level, SAATHI pressed local governments to implement programs that favored women.

SAATHI also offered a wide range of support programs, establishing a rehabilitation centre for battered and sexually abused women and children and a drop-in centre for street children. To a large extent, these activities were implemented through branch offices, which also focused on community development, in the Banke, Bardiya and Kanchanpur districts of the Mid-western Development Region. According to SAATHI's Constitution (1992), an EC member from a rural area, able to commit long-term, may open a branch office in her home, with the consent of the EC. In the future, this decision must be approved by the General Assembly (GA). The branch offices derive most of their funding from local charity, membership fees, and income generating activities. When the head office implements a program through its branch offices, the funding is shared. Branch offices also are allowed to seek funding from other donors, independently.

## B. INITIAL DEVELOPMENT

SAATHI worked continuously on VAW/C issues, particularly domestic violence, and established itself as a pioneer organization in this sector with the following achievements: immediate relief provided to victims of domestic violence; attention drawn to VAW/C at the grassroots and national levels; domestic violence issues introduced at the

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<sup>6</sup> These studies include: *Sexual Exploitation in the Streets of Kathmandu* (1994/2000); *A Situational Analysis of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAW/G) in Nepal* (1997) and *A Study on the Psycho-Social Impacts of Violence Against Women and Girls with Special Focus on Rape, Incest and Polygamy* (2001)

policy level. SAATHI developed a vision statement: "the empowerment of women and children through promotion of gender equality and equality-based development" and four mission statements:

- To collect factual data through research and the identification of social issues related to urban and rural women of Nepal;
- To build the capacity of women through awareness raising and skill training;
- To develop and implement plans of action in order to improve the present status of Nepali women and children; and
- To work as a pressure group to lobby and pressurize concerned authorities to take the required steps for the advancement of women and children.

SAATHI has institutionalized its standards of operation. In accordance with Article 13 of its Constitution of 1992, (first amendment 2061 of 2004), SAATHI formed a GA which is responsible for electing the EC, setting goals, formulating policies and strategies and approving annual and other plans. The EC executes the annual plans, policies and strategies; obtains and incorporates information from stakeholders into program development; and manages the organization. SAATHI's Constitution stipulates that the GA meet once a year and the EC once every three months, although the EC meeting usually is held only when necessary.

In accordance with the Constitution of 1992, SAATHI runs its programs through an Operational Manual (2000), which describes personnel, financial, and administrative policies and procedure. The Planning, Monitoring, Reporting and Review Guidelines (2000) explain those processes. And the Policy related to Membership, Branch and Affiliation of Local Groups provides criteria and procedures for the enrollment of new members and related tasks. For hiring personnel, SAATHI follows a standard practice of recruitment, selection and appointment, which includes advertising in the public media, screening potential candidates and conducting a panel interview for the final selection. SAATHI adopted the generally-accepted accounting system which Nepalese NGOs use. Accounting practices are transparent and

the organization maintains a separate budget for each project. It prepares an annual budget based on each year's programs. A registered auditor is involved in the yearly audit, and the Financial Report included a balance sheet together with attachments detailing the expenditures and income. SAATHI has tried to incorporate the main suggestions and comments for Financial Reporting during the forthcoming planning and budgeting exercise.

The Planning, Monitoring, Reporting and Review Guidelines (2000) explain SAATHI's system, process, and instruments for those operations. SAATHI found it was necessary to gather information from all employees and stakeholders, usually through needs assessments, to design programs that correspond to its strategic direction. A monitoring system is developed for each program to collect information from stakeholders and beneficiaries. Also, local fundraising activities now are launched to guarantee the long-term sustainability of programs.

The policy related to Membership, Branch and Affiliation of Local Groups provides criteria and procedures for enrolling new members, opening branch offices and managing affiliations with local groups. Some of the criteria for the affiliation of local groups include:

1. Local groups should have worked with SAATHI on at least three previous occasions;
2. They should have registered with an appropriate government body as a legal entity;
3. The groups should have a minimum of seven members who are local residents, and include an executive board; and
4. The membership of the local organization shall be comprised of people who represent diverse backgrounds; are not active members of a political party; firmly believe in the mission and objective of SAATHI; and are working on women's right or on VAW.

The affiliation of local groups is granted by the EC after thorough deliberations and scrutiny of the applications received from interested local organizations. The following procedures are followed:

1. Collection of applications from local groups, containing the following information: name and address of the local group; name and ad-

dress of executive board and general members; objectives of the organization; description of current activities; achievements of the organization to date; future plans; statement of purpose for seeking affiliation with SAATHI; a copy of its constitution and certification of registration; statement certifying that the decision to seek affiliation with SAATHI was taken by the organization's board;

2. Review of the application by the SAATHI EC and, if necessary, appointment of one of its members to visit and assess the local organization;
3. Acquainting the local organization with SAATHI's policies and procedures, the support SAATHI provides its affiliates and its own role and responsibilities as a SAATHI affiliate; and
4. Finally, a Certificate of Affiliation is granted to the local group during the SAATHI's Annual General Assembly.

SAATHI adopted different modes to communicate with its affiliates, program participants and network members: regular and special meetings, workshops, seminars, press briefings, publication/dissemination of information bulletins, regular email, internet and telephone. SAATHI also communicates with its target population and the public through Street Theatre, Talk Programs and public demonstrations. It communicates with the government by working closely with concerned Ministries and government agencies in drafting legislation, submitting petitions for legal and administrative reform on women's issues, submitting annual progress reports to concerned government authorities and training local government representatives and officials in dealing with VAW/C issues. In communicating with donors, SAATHI regularly arranges meetings to share program information and progress reports, and to review reports. From time to time, SAATHI meets with the media to share its research findings and project activities. Also, members occasionally participate in TV programs related to women in order to communicate with a wider audience.

Through its work, SAATHI realized that VAW emanates from and is perpetuated by a patriarchal and sexist political structure and so is a serious

societal and political problem, not just a problem for female victims. It defined VAW as “violation of women’s personhood, mental or physical integrity, or freedom of movement. VAW is a result of unequal power relations between women and men or women and women. Underlying this power relation is patriarchy or male domination, which is the social structure that ensures that men by virtue of gender have power and control over women and children” (SAATHI 1997). Because the factors contributing to VAW pervade Nepali society, SAATHI assumed that VAW cannot be eliminated without a joint effort by government, civil society, media, and the general public. Consequently, SAATHI worked with three different target populations:

- Victims are the core target population for support, training and awareness raising programs;
- Government officials at different levels, representatives of local bodies, policy makers, NGOs and civil society groups, and the media are the targets of SAATHI’s advocacy and training programs; and
- The general public, youth, school teachers and students are the target population for awareness-raising, community mobilization and other training programs.

*Layers of Target Population of SAATHI Program Activities*

Women & Children Victims  
(Support Program)

Government Officials, Policy Makers NGOs & Civil Societies, Media etc. (Advocacy Program)

General Public, Youth, School Children & Teacher (Community Mobilization & Awareness Raising)

SAATHI’s support programs for victims have changed from its first focus on providing legal and other kinds of support. The organization realized that there were no established systems to shelter or rehabilitate the victims. When victims of VAW gather the courage to report a crime, neither the law nor the government can provide real help or relief. Consequently, SAATHI built a shelter, with 15-bed capacity, in the Banke district for victims. The women and children can stay up to six months. They are provided with food, shelter, security, medical treatment, legal advice and the support of the police department as required. Since its establishment, more than 300 women and children have been given refuge at this shelter.

SAATHI began training victims in income generation, based on their backgrounds and interests. SAATHI has established links with local skills training organizations and provides Rs.5000 (US\$72.00) as seed money to victims who want to begin a business. Having recently established a small cottage industry that manufactures handmade paper goods, SAATHI also can provide in-house training for this purpose. In addition, SAATHI has been running the Cabin Restaurant Support Program to eliminate exploitation of waitresses and provide educational scholarships for child victims of violence, as well as working with local communities for awareness-raising about women’s issues.

The organization began collaborating with both central and local governments and with local NGOs and community-based groups. The resultant policy advocacy work led to the drafting of pioneering legislation on Domestic Violence in Nepal and the formation of the Strategic Alliance to Combat Violence Against Women and Girls in Nepal, which functioned for a few years but could not be sustained because it was a national-level alliance with little or no base in grassroots organizations. It was felt that networking ultimately is the loss of ego; people who are very committed to being in a network have to lose their own identify and that of their organization. But Alliance members could not do this, and thus remained inactive.

In February 1997, SAATHI conducted a National Workshop specifically to help rural and urban groups share their perspectives on VAW/C, especially domestic violence. Discovering the similarities among their goals, participating groups suggested that they should coordinate somehow to share experiences and expertise and identify measures for eliminating VAW. Accordingly, SAATHI formed a National Coalition for Violence against Women with 31 other organizations, including the police, media, health personnel and NGOs. It was hoped that each member organization would incorporate VAW issues in their work in a coordinated way, but the coalition faltered because many organizations could not attend meetings and implemented activities at different times. Consequently, the Coalition was not able to develop a feeling of ownership among its members, and remained unsuccessful in achieving its perceived goals.

### C. THE PRESENT

Currently, SAATHI is led by the EC, which is formed by consensus among its 15 general members. There are seven core staff (four female, three male), 58 project staff (45 female, 13 male) and five volunteers (three female, two male). Every three years, SAATHI conducts regular elections for the EC and there have been three changes of leadership by consensus, which SAATHI considers an election process. When no consensus is possible among the members, the leadership is selected through a free and fair election. All other decisions also are made by consensus, including the formation of temporary committees and sub-committees, as needed.

SAATHI's activities are tied closely to the existing political, social and economic circumstances of the country. Recently, new VAW/C issues, associated with the ongoing armed conflict and requiring immediate action and intervention, have emerged. Women have been involved as combatants, nurses, cooks, sex workers, caregivers, organizers, managers and protectors of men and children. The media report sexual violations by both the state army and the rebels. The conflict has displaced women from their homes, indiscriminately exposing them to violence. Accordingly, SAATHI

SAATHI has been a leader in bringing together grassroots people, central level policy makers, locally elected officials, the media and human rights activists to learn from each other about what they can do to end violence against women and children in Nepal.

*Ms. Bimal Ghimire, President  
Janahitaisi Sanstha*

is mobilizing communities, youth and civil society groups to prevent VAW/C during armed conflict and initiating a more intense counseling program for victims. It operates a Cross-Border Program to combat trafficking of women and children and to rehabilitate at-risk and rescued women. It also mobilizes women's organizations and builds the capacity of women and civil society at large to resist any form of violence, including by the Maoist insurgency. Through training, awareness raising and capacity building programs, SAATHI empowers Nepalese women, at least at the local level, to affect decision-making and recognize their role in peacekeeping, peacebuilding, reconciliation and reconstruction. SAATHI also builds the capacity of NGOs and government agencies, and facilitates networking and linkages among individuals and organizations working on VAW/C issues.

The organization works at all levels of Nepali society, from the government to the grassroots, networking with national, regional and international NGOs (see Annex 2). The modern concept of NGO networks is rather new in Nepal. As discussed in the previous section, through the early 1990s, several attempts were made to improve networking among women's groups and to establish an information center on women's issues. In the late 1980s, USAID provided substantial support for the Center for Women and Development (CWD). The Women's Pressure Group, an advocacy network of 84 NGOs and women's political organizations, has been active, despite the serious political differences between Nepal Mahila Sang (Nepali Congress allied) and Akhil Nepal Mahila

Sangathan (UML allied). Other large NGO networks have been the SAFE motherhood group, a loose confederation of 62 family and community support groups working particularly on health issues; the National Network called Against Girl Trafficking (NNAGT), formed in 1990; and the Alliance Against Trafficking in Women and Children in Nepal (AATWIN) formed in 1997. The Network Against AIDS (40 NGOs) works to eliminate HIV/AIDS. Gender Watch Professional Interest Group (GWPIG), begun in the pre-Beijing period, remains active, particularly in disseminating information about the U.N. Beijing Conference and its Platform for Action (ADB, 1999). SAATHI is an active member of NNAGT, AATWIN, the NGO Federation of Nepal (NFN), Safe Motherhood Federation (SMF), Street Net and Women's Pressure Group.

The formation of SAATHI's own Network of VAW/C is one step forward towards effective NGO networking in Nepal, as it developed organically from SAATHI's work. As mentioned, SAATHI operates in collaboration with local NGOs and community-based groups throughout Nepal. In 1999, it first began to work with local groups and develop them into network partners through its effective Social and Community Mobilization Training program. Ms. Madhuri Singh, former SAATHI president and founding member, trained influential community members, including: elected leaders, school teachers, community health workers and leaders, lawyers, media personnel, housewives and others in 11 of Nepal's 75 districts. That three-day training covered the concepts of gender and gender discrimination; the causes and effects of violence on the individual, family and community; existing legal provisions for women victims of domestic violence in Nepal; safety planning to support victims; formulation of intervention programs on VAW within the community; and advocating for change. Simultaneously, SAATHI conducted a national-level Social and Community Mobilization Training of Trainers (TOT) for community leaders. These trainings, which were conducted continuously from 1999 to 2004, were designed to acquaint community leaders with VAW/C issues in order to create a cadre of professional trainers and curb VAW/C through social and community action.

It's important to form local groups and work jointly on VAW&C. We can't just go into a community and raise awareness about dangers of VAW&C and leave. We need to activate the target group themselves for effective awareness-raising. It should be local people working on the issue and local communities involved, giving input and getting organized. Our role should be as facilitator.

*Ms. Sangeeta R. Thapa, UNIFEM*

After the trainings, participants organized local groups in their communities to initiate activities related to VAW/C and to empower rural women by training them on VAW issues. As a result, these communities have experienced a massive increase in awareness of VAW issues. Since 2000, SAATHI has been partnering with these groups, which have asked SAATHI to support small follow-on programs for sharing their training with other parts of their districts. Later, as a part of the advocacy and public awareness-raising programs conducted in various districts, SAATHI selected a number of these local groups to conduct dialogues, meetings, border campaigns, workshops, rallies and street dramas. Some groups also partner with SAATHI to advocate for the Domestic Violence Bill and other related efforts. Some of these groups have become competent local organizations, registered as NGOs in their respective districts. In developing its resource mobilization and volunteer management strategy, SAATHI has institutionalized these ad-hoc partnerships with grassroots organizations into a network. SAATHI decided to create a formal network from these loose partnerships in order to provide a coordinated response (from "watchdog groups" in individual communities to national-level advocacy campaigns) to the increased incidence of VAW/C which has resulted from the armed conflict.

SAATHI selected its network partners during the May 2004 Social & Community Mobilization Program, which was attended by 13 participants from partner organizations in various districts (Jhapa,

Ilam, Rupendehi, Jajarkot, Lalitpur, Banke, Kailali and Doti), representing all five Development Regions of Nepal. At the end of the workshop, SAATHI proposed that all partners create a formal network to curb VAW/C at the community level. The partners agreed and proposed that SAATHI take the lead. As discussed above, SAATHI then developed criteria and procedures for the affiliation of local groups. For example, network partners must: pay an annual affiliation fee of Rs 150 (US\$2.17) to SAATHI; provide copy of annual progress reports, as well as copy of proposals submitted to donors; participate in advocacy campaigns and other related activities organized by SAATHI. All network partners have agreed to respect the mandate, function and autonomy of each organization and its constituents at the local, district and national levels.

SAATHI ensures that all network members have optimal access to the same level of information by:

- Establishing a yearly calendar of regular meetings and high-profile events, such as on Women's Day and Democracy Day, around which SAATHI coordinates work on women's issues;
- Publishing and distributing occasional information bulletins which ensure that all SAATHI participants are aware of and can engage in the ongoing work of the network;
- Developing and utilizing email networks, and supplementing information dissemination through traditional (non-electronic) systems to ensure that all SAATHI participants are kept informed of significant developments relating to VAW/C;
- Building the capacity of all SAATHI affiliates for electronic network participation;
- Communicating the voice of the people—i.e., enhancing the capacity of communities and grassroots NGOs to gather and disseminate information on VAW&C from the field; and
- Raising the profile of projects operated by NGOs to tackle the increasing incidence of domestic violence due to ongoing armed conflict.

The network's overall goal is to develop and implement particular campaigns and initiatives against VAW/C by providing a range of services

to increase the capacity of local partners and to provide overall strategic development assistance to help make the anti-VAW/C efforts of individual organizations cohesive. The network has the following specific objectives:

- To support the organizations working on VAW/C by contributing resources and expertise as possible/appropriate and by promoting dialogue about ethical practices that respect women's rights with as many people as possible, particularly those whose work impacts women's rights: representatives of local, district, regional and central government;
- To continue developing relationships and partnerships with likeminded organizations working on VAW/C. To the extent possible, formal partnerships should respect women's and children's right to work and issues that affect them and be based on joint planning and mutual agreement between partners about project objectives and partners' responsibilities;
- To remain vigilant about legal and ethical issues that impact marginalized groups, particularly victims of VAW, and to address these issues;
- To address women's and children's issues and other related topics proactively by offering support and expertise to likeminded organizations about legal, ethical, and human rights issues related to VAW/C, as possible and appropriate;
- To explore options for conducting skills-building workshops and projects related to empowering women and children and for applying for funding of such workshops/projects, if required; and
- To work with government to the extent possible to develop appropriate policies and policy directives on education, awareness, advocacy, promotion and programming priorities that address issues which impact on marginalized groups, especially victims of VAW/C.

The network has been conducting trainings at the community level to educate rural citizens about existing legal provisions for victims of VAW/C. Participants are able to help victims through safety planning, conducting VAW/C interventions within their communities and advocating for change.



Similarly, in April 200, while envisioning a new youth movement marked by equality, enlightened coexistence, and accommodation, the network launched a nationwide youth mobilization program. More than 200 participants representing 52 districts attended youth camps. As a result, local youth groups have been formed all over the country, and SAATHI works with these groups to mobilize local resources to organize other camps. Such camps are used to disseminate information, hold intensive discussions, collect youth viewpoints and motivate youth to join the movement.

SAATHI also has been mobilizing network partners for particular campaigns or initiatives by:

- Facilitating the launch of “sub-campaigns” around specific policy objectives, as needed;
- Encouraging partnerships between organizations around Nepal on specific VAW/C issues;
- Supporting ongoing national and regional consultations to develop/coordinate appropriate advocacy strategies and campaigns that can be carried forward and into the national mainstream;
- Utilizing opportunities to raise women’s concerns within other important issues, such as conflict prevention and community development;
- Building the capacity of partner organizations to respond quickly, effectively, and in a coordinated fashion;
- Mobilizing national opinion to support actions where local NGOs are able to influence domestic policy;
- Identifying/expanding the pool of financial and human resources required for particular campaigns or initiatives; and
- Building solidarity within/between groups, and initiatives to assist groups at risk due to their work.

In addition, the national network has been working with local governments to implement grassroots-level programs which favor women. SAATHI has designed manuals specifically to train local government representatives and others in authority to deal with VAW/C issues. These trainings have resulted in the formation of SAATHI networks in all five Development Regions of Nepal. SAATHI

Networking of NGOs and civil societies could be a vital approach to resist all forms of violence, including the ongoing armed conflict against women and children in Nepal. Networking provides a forum where NGOs can exchange views and information on the matter and issues of common interest and develop appropriate strategic plans for further action. Networking is an effective approach to mobilize, energize, organize and synergize its member organizations to fight against any forms of social problems.

*Andrew S. Pryce, USAID/Nepal*

has been working to link its regional network partners to the national network by involving them in national-level activities and occasionally assigning the regional networks specific responsibilities for implementing national activities. National network members always have been willing to help regional network partners by providing materials, information on programs and donors, assistance in program development and opportunities to participate in SAATHI training programs. These networks are encouraged and strengthened to lobby for necessary, local-level changes. SAATHI raises these issues at the national level, ensuring that grassroots voices are heard.

At present, SAATHI’s own EC acts as the national network Secretariat, and is responsible for overall management, governance and program objectives. SAATHI has not formed a separate network secretariat or umbrella structure in the form of a Governing Board in order to run the network. Rather, EC members are assigned network tasks and responsibilities based on their individual technical and organizational expertise, knowledge of advocacy, grassroots campaign experience and research ability. The EC works within guidelines set by the network’s Memorandum of Understanding between SAATHI and its partners (see Annex 4). EC management responsibilities include:

- Consolidating/expanding the network to include groups from all desired constituencies and regions;
- Ensuring that the desired SAATHI services/functions are developed and maintained, including associated fundraising; and
- Identifying and pursuing strategic opportunities to develop the network and promote its goals.

Other functions of the EC as the network Secretariat include:

- Disseminating information on VAW/C policy issues;
- Facilitating the development of campaigns involving network participants from different regions;
- Maintaining links and building bridges between/among network participants;
- Matching participants' affinities with the building of coalitions on specific issues; and
- Supporting the fundraising actions of SAATHI participants.

The EC also monitors all network programs and activities. Although there is no established monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system, SAATHI evaluates program impact to identify any gaps in service delivery and other program outputs. Recently, SAATHI formed a three-member committee (the Program Coordinator and two Board members) to evaluate network activities. Selected beneficiaries, EC members, and other stakeholders agreed to be evaluated and information was collected mainly through personal interviews and focus group discussions. The evaluation findings were scrutinized during the subsequent program development exercise.

Funding for network activities comes from various donors. USAID's CAP Program has provided funds to institutionalize SAATHI's loose network of grassroot organizations. Asia Foundation, Planete Enfants France, UNIFEM, Global Fund for Women, Quarriers Scotland, and Match International Canada are some of the other major donors. At present, SAATHI's income-generation initiatives are not a viable source of future income, but the organization is trying to generate funds by mobilizing locally-available resources through activities

such as cottage industries and consultancies to other organizations and firms.

## D. VISION FOR THE FUTURE

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The network was established on an underlying principle of mutual respect, involving: recognizing each member's constituency and interests, meeting commitments responsibly, sharing information, and building each other's capacities through the exchange of organizational experience and expertise. The network aims to continue working under this principle, which clearly demands that it address questions of sustainability, resources, communication and the coordination of future program activities. SAATHI and its network partners have agreed that when disputes and conflicting views arise among members, they will be settled by a process of mutual consent involving open discussion to clarify misunderstandings (if any) and reach a logical solution through negotiation.

Considering long-term sustainability, network partners pay an annual fee, administered by SAATHI through a network bank account, in order to cover logistical expenses. Partners are encouraged to mobilize local resources independently. One of the network's tasks is to advocate for, establish and strengthen grassroots charity. This effort is seen as one way to get local funds and support. The network will continue to emphasize a high level of community involvement in all programs, hoping ultimately to transfer program ownership to local constituents, which will ensure that network programs and activities are sustained.

SAATHI and the network are committed to continuing activities even more efficiently in the future. The repeated demand for similar programs by local communities throughout Nepal and their willingness to be involved demonstrates a common need. The ongoing conflict has increased the incidence of VAW/C, demanding more focused and rigorous efforts. SAATHI currently is working to expand programs and services and developing appropriate proposals to do so. It is expected that future programs will include:

- *Expansion of SAATHI Shelter Services:* Women and children displaced by the conflict have approached SAATHI/Banke asking for a shelter and other necessary support. SAATHI is seeking additional funds to run a special program for women and children in conflict situations.
- *Expansion of Programs within Existing Shelters:* It has been observed that, in addition to shelter services, victims need core funds for income-generation activities and skills training for their future rehabilitation.
- *Production/Marketing of Handmade Paper Products Nationally and Internationally:* SAATHI has established a cottage industry, run primarily by victims, for the production of handmade paper goods. SAATHI wants to promote the industry by marketing its products nationally and internationally. This effort will help expand its resource base.
- *Expansion of Scholarship Programs:* SAATHI has been providing scholarships for poor and marginalized girls in the Bardiya district and wants to expand the program to include girls who are victims of or displaced by the conflict.
- *Continuation of Community and Social Mobilization Programs:* In response to the increased incidence of VAW/C after the initiation of Maoist insurgency, SAATHI wants to continue the programs to mobilize communities to fight against VAW/C.
- *National level Awareness-Raising Campaign on VAW/C:* SAATHI considers that VAW/C is endemic at all levels and across all ethnic and socio-economic classes. Accordingly, it is working to launch national-level awareness raising campaigns in the future.
- *Awareness Raising on Women's Legal Rights and the UN Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW):* SAATHI has produced a number of training manuals on awareness raising and will help with trainings held throughout Nepal

by local groups that have participated in SAATHI's TOT. It is felt that all districts need similar programs in order to make participants aware of women's legal rights and the CEDAW provisions and to develop skills and strategies to exercise those rights.

- *Social Mobilization on Children's Rights:* SAATHI will expand its activities to advocate for children's rights.
- *Research on Domestic Violence:* There is a lack of accurate, specific research on the link between armed conflict and VAW/C in Nepal. Therefore, such a study is necessary.

## Conclusions

Nepal's current situation of rampant armed conflict, political crisis and absence of government authorities in rural areas demands that NGOs participate effectively in socioeconomic development and peacebuilding, helping the government to ensure that the restoration of peace balances economic development and social justice. NGOs need to become more flexible, open and less bureaucratic to reach remote communities which have been left out of state development priorities.

SAATHI's experience leads to the conclusion that, in such situations, implementing development programs through a network of local NGOs, CBOs, or user groups is the most effective way to reach the intended population. Despite the conflict, SAATHI has not suffered direct or severe problems, mainly because it works in collaboration with local groups, as the Maoists know, who support pro-poor, women-focused, locally-centered projects and activities. Networking brings the strength of collective action and builds the capacity of grassroots organizations, helping them to manage projects efficiently. In an environment marked by armed conflict, the ability of local NGOs and CBOs to mobilize community support and transfer program ownership to local communities is crucial for network survival. It is also crucial that network partners target the neediest groups, while maintaining their political neutrality, and that the network ensures transparency, good governance and

community participation. The network also needs trained staff on location who know how to deal with conflicting views and can mediate in a transparent manner. Most important for project success in this situation is the network's ability to garner positive public response and active local support.

Disseminating clear, detailed program information to all community members and other stakeholders is essential to allay doubts from both sides of the armed conflict – in this case, the state army and the Maoist rebels. Increasingly, all local organizations partnered with SAATHI involve local communities in program activities and improve their transparency and accountability by publishing information on budgets and expenditures, conducting public hearings and undergoing regular audits.

SAATHI's experience also leads to the conclusion that networking among NGOs and CBOs in a conflict situation produces the following benefits, which might be useful to other networks:

- *Institutional Sustainability and Knowledge Exchange with Local Groups Are Strengthened:* By implementing network programs, local groups (registered NGOs, CBOs, user-groups, or local government bodies) gain the experience necessary to carry out similar programs in the future, creating a more sustainable institutional capacity and resource base for resisting and surviving in conflict situations.
- *Members' Own Capacity Strengthened:* Working with others results in the increased expertise of all partner organizations. For example, SAATHI is developing considerable experience in advocacy and training on VAW/C, which can benefit others, even the Maoists whose agenda includes female empowerment.
- *Community Needs Addressed:* Partnering with local groups can help any project directly address felt community needs. For example, SAATHI's technical knowledge and expertise in VAW/C compliments the expertise of partner NGOs in specific sectors, such as

trafficking. The Maoists also look favorably on programs that address community needs.

- *Multiplier Effect Promoted:* By partnering with local organizations, SAATHI not only reaches direct beneficiaries, but also impacts intermediary organizations and populations. To some extent, such multiplier effects discourage local people from joining the insurgency.
- *Cooperation and Collaboration Facilitated:* When several groups seek to achieve a similar goal (e.g., empowerment of women and gender equity), it makes sense to pool know-how, experience and resources. Such collective efforts can provide the strength necessary to fight against any form of violence, whatever the cause.

## Recommendations

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Based on the conclusions reached as a result of SAATHI's experience, the following recommendations are offered for consideration by donors and others working with NGOs and networks in Nepal:

1. Donors should provide more resources for building the organizational capacity of NGO networks at all levels, including staff training and the ability to identify indigenous partners and local leaders. These networks can play a key role in resolving conflicts and restoring peace, and they can help form well-knit peace constituencies among different civil society sectors dedicated to sustainable peace and long-term efforts. They can also act as mediators to create consensus among conflicting groups.
2. To reach the target population, programs should be implemented through local groups. Such collaboration also will enhance the institutional capacity of those groups, as well as their ability to access resources from government agencies and other sources. In addition, this also will foster sustainability by encouraging networking with other entities and by mobilizing internal resources.

3. Development efforts should be “indigenized” by providing funds for the development of partnerships and networks, which encourages sustainability, ensures active participation of target groups, and promotes optimal use of limited resources. If target groups have a strong sense of ownership, they will defend program activities and prevent disturbances by the Maoists.
4. The main program focus should be on conflict transformation and peacebuilding by supporting NGO projects focused specifically on the root causes of the conflict and by strengthening weaker/poorer groups.
5. Transparency and political neutrality should be maintained regarding project activities and budgets. Transparency has become an important concern both for the Maoists and for the general public, and local organizations have learned that transparency is crucial for avoiding suspicion and misunderstandings, and for ensuring the smooth implementation of development activities. Information related to the donor or partner organization, its development activities and budget should be made public through hearings, audits, notices and so forth. Donors also should encourage the government and its agencies to adopt transparent approaches to development.
6. Local partners that listen to beneficiaries and base their programs on those issues should be chosen. Donor should not fear the present situation. They should stick to their positions and help grassroots organizations speak out against atrocities, injustice and human rights violations.
7. Program activities should be flexible in order to address any needs that may arise as identified by community members. Besides advocacy and awareness-raising, poor and marginalized communities, such as Dalit women, require core funds for income-generation activities.
8. Donors should support communication

strategies that strengthen the skills of NGO network members and target groups in how to communicate simply and convincingly, how to use which media for whom, and how to negotiate and build rapport with friends and potential foes. Because network effectiveness depends largely on how members share information among themselves and with others, proper communication encourages cooperation and helps minimize misunderstandings and suspicions regarding the activities of partner organizations.

## Annex 1: List of Respondents

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1. Ms. Pramada Shah, President, SAATHI Central Office (CO)
2. Ms. Sajani Amatya, General Secretary, SAATHI CO
3. Ms. Bijaya K.C. Treasurer, SAATHI CO
4. Mr. Pukar Shah, Program Officer, SAATHI CO
5. Ms. Trishna Sharma, President, Ekta Kendra, Rupandehi
6. Mr. Birendra Bum, EC Member, Creation of Creative Society (CCS) Kailali
7. Ms. Bimala Ghimire, President, Janahitaisi Sanstha, Lalitpur
8. MS. Sarita Sharma, Vice President, SAATHI Branch Office, Banke
9. Ms. Pabitra Bohara, Board Member, SAATHI Branch Office, Banke
10. Mr. Purna Lal Chuke, President, NGO Federation, Banke
11. Mr. Gopal Nath Yogi, EC Member, Nepal NGO Federation
12. Mr. Madhav Pradhan, Program Coordinator, CWIN Central Office
13. Mr. Narayan K.C., Program Officer, National Network Against Girls Trafficking (NNAGT), Kathmandu
14. Ms. Haripriya Pandey, EC Member, National Network Against Girls Trafficking (NNAGT), Kathmandu
15. Mr. Bhola Bhattarai, General Secretary, Federation of Community Forestry User Groups of Nepal (FECOFUN) Central Office
16. Mr. Andrew S. Pryce, USAID/Nepal
17. Ms. Sangeeta R. Thapa, UNIFEM
18. Mr. Nabin Rawal, Researcher, Tribhuvan University
19. Ms. Bimal Gayali, Alliance Against Trafficking in Women and Children in Nepal (ATWIN), Kathmandu
20. Dr. Om Gurung, General Secretary, Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN), Kathmandu.

## Annex 2: List of SAATHI's Partners, Networks, and Alliances

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### SAATHI IN PARTNERSHIP (LOCAL LEVEL ORGANIZATION)

1. NTAG, Saptari
2. Mahila Sashaktikaran Abhiyan (Women Empowerment Campaign)
3. Rural Women Development and Unity Center, Dadeldhura
4. Mahila Kalyan Bachat Manch, Doti,
5. Lumbini Nari Kalyan Samaj, Siddartha Nagar,
6. Ekta Kendra, Siddartha Nagar
7. Siddartha Mahila Jaycees
8. Mahila Bikash Sewa Kendra, Janakpur
9. Mahila Shakti Nepal, Dhanusa
10. Nari Seep Srijana Kendra, Makwanpur
11. HUCUDUC Nepal, Panchthar
12. Sungava Club, Ilam
13. Nepal Community Development Center, Bhadrapur
14. Nepal Mahila Udhyami Sangh, Taplegunj
15. Nepal Srijanseel Samudaik Sewa Kendra, Morang
16. Creation of Creative Society, Kailali
17. Human Resource Development Center, Kailali
18. Five Star Youth Guardians Forum, Jajarjot
19. Jana Hitaisi, Lalitpur
20. SAATHI, Banke Branch

### SAATHI IN PARTNERSHIP (NATIONAL LEVEL ORGANIZATION)

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1. National Network Against Girls Trafficking (NNAGT)
2. Safe motherhood Federation
3. Street Net (for Children)
4. NGO Federation
5. Alliance Against Trafficking in Women and Children in Nepal (ATWIN)
6. Women's Pressure Group

### SAATHI IN PARTNERSHIP (INTERNATIONAL LEVEL ORGANIZATION)

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1. Economic Social Cultural Rights (ESCR)
2. Asian Caucus
3. Beijing Platform for Action
4. Planete Enfants, France
5. UNIFEM
6. Asia Foundation
7. Global Fund for Women
8. Quarriers, Scotland
9. Match International, Canada

## Annex 3: SAATHI Membership Policies

### 1. MEMBERSHIP CRITERIA

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In addition to the eligibility criteria for membership prescribed in Section 3: Article 7 of SAATHI Constitution 2049 (1992), the following criteria will be apply to individuals who wish to be members of SAATHI:

- Executive members should not hold an active party position.
- Must have a belief in the mission and objectives of SAATHI.
- Must be interested to work on issues related to VAW& G and women's right.
- Must not hold any criminal record.

In the recruitment of members, SAATHI will try to enlist members representing diverse background within the community.

### 2. PROCESS

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1. Individuals who fulfill the above qualification and are interested in joining SAATHI will have to work with SAATHI as a volunteer for six months. The assignment and schedule for volunteer work will be mutually agreed between the applicant and SAATHI.
2. Membership application will have to be recommended by three members of SAATHI Executive Committee.
3. Membership will be granted only after the successful completion of the volunteer assignment. Membership will be awarded during the Annual General Assembly of SAATHI.

### 3. ELECTION

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1. Members are not eligible to contest election for any position of the Executive Committee for the first three years of their joining SAATHI.
2. After three years, a new member is eligible to contest election for membership of the Executive Committee but not for the key position such as President, Vice-President, General Secretary and Treasurer.
3. Members who have completed one term of three years (as defined in the constitution) as member of Executive Committee will be eligible to contest election for the key posts or office bearer (President, Vice-President, General Secretary and Treasurer).

## Annex 4: Memorandum of Understanding between SAATHI and Network Partners (2005)

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SAATHI, Represented by the duly-elected President, Ms. Shah, and:

1. Rural Women's Development and Unity Center (RUWDUC), represented by the duly-elected President
2. SAATHI Banke, represented by the duly elected President
3. Nepal Community Development Center (NCDC), represented by the duly elected President
4. Five Star Youth Forum (FSYF), represented by the duly elected President
5. Ekta Kendra, represented by the duly elected President
6. Jana Hitaisi, represented by the duly elected President



WHEREAS SAATHI (Hereinafter referred to as "SAATHI") and the Rural Women's Development and Unity Center, SAATHI Banke, Nepal Community Development Center, Five Star Youth Forum, Ekta Kendra, Jana Hitaisi (hereinafter referred to jointly as the "Network Partners") have indicated a desire to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding for Institutionalization of the Network for Women and Children;

AND WHEREAS SAATHI and the Network Partners have expressed their desire to work together in aspects of violence against women and children, including the rights of women and children to access services, empowerment and to maintain a quality of life in a appropriate manner;

To support those organizations and those working in the field of violence against women and children by contributing its resources and expertise when possible and where appropriate, and by promoting a dialogue about ethical practices that respects women's rights with as many people as possible, particularly those whose work has an impact on women's right, including representatives of local, district and regional and central government;

To continue to develop relationships and partnerships with likeminded organizations working in the field of violence against women and children. To the extent possible, formal partnerships should respect the women and children's right to work and issues that affect them, and be based on:

- (1) Joint planning from the outset; and
- (2) Joint agreement between the partners about the goals and objectives of the work and about the responsibilities of the partners;

To remain vigilant about legal and ethical issues that impact marginalized groups, particularly victims (both women and children) of domestic and other forms of violence, and to address these issues;

While recognizing that partnerships are preferable, to act proactively in addressing Women and Children issues in its papers and other work related to comprehensive topics, by advising likeminded organizations about legal and ethical issues related to violence against women and children as they arise, and by offering support and expertise regarding legal, ethical, and human rights issues related to violence against women and children to likeminded organizations when possible and where appropriate;

To seek funding and, if funding is obtained, to conduct workshops and projects in due course on the discussion papers and info sheets on violence against women and children;

To explore options to conduct skills-building workshops and projects and for issues related to empowerment of women and children, and apply for funding of such workshops and projects, if required; and

AND WHEREAS SAATHI and the Network Partners wish to work together to the extent possible to develop policy and policy directives on education, awareness, advocacy, promotion and programming priorities, that address violence against women and children issues which impact on marginalized groups specially the victims, including women and children affected by violence and conflict;

AND WHEREAS SAATHI and the Network Partners agree to fully respect the mandate and function of each organization, by recognizing and respecting the autonomous role of each organization and constituent members at the local, district and national levels;

AND WHEREAS this agreement will cover the relationship between SAATHI and the Network Partners

in the areas in which the organizations choose to undertake joint activities, such as follow-up on the discussion papers and info sheets on violence issues, skills building issues, income generation activities, advocacy etc;

AND WHEREAS SAATHI and the Network Partners' acknowledgment that SAATHI is the network's secretariat and that SAATHI's programs are separate from its responsibility as the secretariat;

AND WHEREAS SAATHI and the Network Partners acknowledge that by sheer human nature there will be a possibility of disagreement between parties, however these disagreements should not and will not lead to the collapse of the network; they will be settled in a fair and mature matter within the network itself;

AND WHEREAS SAATHI and the Network Partners agree on annual fee that will be administered by SAATHI, through a network established bank account. Such a fee will pay for the network's logistical expenses;

**BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED THAT SAATHI and the Network Partners enter into this Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).**

## **1. PURPOSE:**

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The purpose of this MOU is to set out the ways in which the organizations will work together in such areas as communications, programming, policy review and development, and organizational support and representation.

## **2. SCOPE:**

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The agreement covers the relationship between SAATHI and the Network Partners. SAATHI acts in the capacity of expert advisor/lead organization on issues relating to violence against women and children, while the Network Partners acts in the capacity of implementers in the issues of violence against women and children. Together they will act as partners to ensure that communications, programming, policy review and development, and organizational support and representation, are mutually beneficial.

## **3. PRINCIPLES:**

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The underlying principles will be mutual respect; recognition of each other's constituencies and interests; responsibility in carrying out commitments, sharing information; and capacity building in the exchange of organizational experience and expertise.

## **4. ACTIVITIES:**

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- A. *Communications*. SAATHI and the Network Partners will collaborate on sharing information between each other and with the constituencies' common to the two organizations.
- B. *Programming*. In recognition of each organization's experience and expertise, SAATHI and the Network Partners will develop joint projects in areas of mutual interest.
- C. *Promotion*. In recognition of each organization's experience and expertise, SAATHI and the Network Partners will deliver and delineate issues related to violence against women and children promotion activities at national conferences, assemblies and meetings.

- D. *Policy Review and Development*. In recognition of each organization's experience and expertise, SAATHI and the Network Partners will collaborate on issues relating to new and existing legislation and governmental policy impacting women and child rights in Nepal.
- E. *Organizational Support and Representation*. Wherever possible, each organization will support representations to the government, letters of support for grant or contribution applications, and other significant activities in which both parties will ensure that each is involved in a meaningful way.

On a case-by-case basis, each organization will appoint its respective members to serve on joint committees of the Network to be chaired by SAATHI on mutual consent by the Network Partners.

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### III. Instituto de Estudios Nicaragüenses (IEN) in Nicaragua

#### FOUNDING AND EARLY DEVELOPMENT

##### A. COUNTRY CONTEXT<sup>1</sup>

The Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) came to power in 1979, following the violent overthrow of a 40-year dictatorship—an overthrow characterized by broad-based participation and multi-sector support. The FSLN brought profound structural and social changes, which unfortunately led to serious contradictions among different social groups due to their divergent economic and political interests. This was aggravated by anti-Sandinista contra guerrillas sponsored by the US in reaction to Nicaraguan aid to leftist rebels in the region.

In 1990, a period of political and social transition began with the presidential election that brought to power the *Union Nacional Opositora* (UNO) candidate Violeta Barrios de Chamorro, who became the first female president in Nicaraguan history. Her six-year term was marked by her dedication to the achievement of peace and democratic governance, beginning with Nicaragua's first peaceful transfer of power, from the Sandinista regime to UNO. The trade relations, developed during the 1980s by the FSLN with Western Europe and the East European block, became less important when the US market was reopened following the lifting of the economic sanctions imposed during the Sandinista regime. That embargo, plus the mistakes made by the Sandinista administration, and its commitment to free welfare services for the entire population, had led to hyperinflation and a \$16 billion external debt.

Beginning in the 1990s Nicaragua embarked on a period of economic dependency, characterized by the typical pattern of Latin American underde-

velopment: linkages to the international economy based on the export of coffee, beef, and bananas; an incipient industrial sector; and in-bond manufacturing or *maquilas*. The *maquila* industry began to expand in 1991 and has grown dramatically since 1998, due to the government's strategy of promoting foreign investment,<sup>2</sup> which garnered more than \$100 million.<sup>3</sup> Increased *maquila* manufacturing also has led to advances in workplace relations and in Nicaragua's social and economic dynamic.

The transition from war to peace, from a centralized, planned economy to a free market economy was consolidated after the 1990 election. It was a slow process that lasted for most of the ensuing decade, particularly as related to democratic governance. Studies conducted by IEN in 1995 showed the clear presence of two major political cultures: the traditional authoritarian culture, led by a strongman or *caudillo* (as in the two main political parties, the FSLN and the PLC), and the democratic and participatory culture in which, rather than simply following the leader, citizens are responsible for considering available options and making their own choices. During most of the 1990s, peace was jeopardized continually. Armed groups persisted in rural areas, adding to the generalized violence resulting from deteriorating social conditions as a consequence of the economic and political crises.

In 1996, following the Chamorro administration, Arnoldo Aleman, leader of an alliance of several liberal parties, was elected president. In general terms, his administration continued the macroeconomic strategies of the Chamorro government and was characterized by making short-term investments to gain popular approval and support. The political positions of the Sandinistas and the liberals became polarized. At the same

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<sup>1</sup> The research for this case was conducted before the 2006 presidential elections which returned the FSLN to power.

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<sup>2</sup> Among other actions, the Nicaraguan government participated in the development of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (ALCA) and has signed nine bilateral agreements in order to promote and protect foreign investments.

<sup>3</sup> MEC (2002): *Diagnóstico de Avances y Retrocesos: Mujeres en las Maquilas de Nicaragua*. Managua, Nicaragua.

time, corruption became widespread. Despite this situation, the peace process moved forward and citizen security improved. Macroeconomic stability increased, as reflected in the control of inflation, stable exchange rates, and the reduction of the fiscal deficit. However, the social policies of both the Chamorro and Aleman administrations increased inequities between the richest and poorest. Unemployment and underemployment rose to approximately 55% of the working age population. Labor rights, working conditions and quality of life remained limited or even deteriorated. In addition, during the 1990s Nicaragua suffered a series of natural disasters: three hurricanes, three tropical storms, two volcanic eruptions, one seaquake (*tsunami*) and several floods. Hurricane Mitch in October 1998 affected 72 of the 153 municipalities in the country, some 20% of the entire population. Almost 4,000 people were killed and around 400,000 were left homeless. In the health sector alone, more than \$77,244 million were needed for the system to reach levels existing before the hurricane.<sup>4</sup>

In 2000, another transition period began. The war finally ended and peace was achieved. The Nicaraguan army became a truly national force, brought under civilian control without political orientation. The Nicaraguan Resistance (contra guerrillas) was demobilized, which contributed to national reconciliation. Freedom of assembly, freedom of speech, and increased autonomy of the different branches of government were achieved. Democratic procedures were consolidated and macroeconomic management was improved.

## B. FOUNDING OF THE INSTITUTO DE ESTUDIOS NICARAGÜENSES (IEN)

It was within the context described above that the IEN was created in 1990 as an NGO. From the outset, IEN has been committed to democratic governance in Nicaragua, specifically the consolidation of peace and human rights and the devel-

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<sup>4</sup> AHO (1999): *Nicaragua con profundo daño social. Los efectos del Mitch*. MASICA Project, PAHO, San José, Costa Rica.

opment of policies that promote equal opportunities and social justice. The Institute played an important role in the formal transition from war to peace. The Sandinista Defense Committees (CDS)<sup>5</sup> had been ready to organize communities in times of war, but not in times of peace. That made it difficult to initiate a dialogue between the former opponents. The IEN collaborated in increasing the capacity for consensus and dialogue among the parties.

## INITIAL PHASE

IEN was founded by Paul Oquist and Rodolfo Delgado, former officials in the Sandinista administration, and Sergio Ramirez Mercado, former vice president in that administration. The 1990 election had reflected the political polarization of the country, and a transformation from confrontation to peace through concerted action was clearly needed. The three IEN founders were dedicated to that goal and felt that, with their experience in government and training as social scientists, they could contribute to that transformation through public opinion research (surveys, interviews) and by publishing papers designed to create a National Proposal as a potential program for government. Believing that a more objective, systematic view would contribute to the building of a more democratic, participatory and equitable society, IEN founders hoped this approach would help overcome Nicaragua's lack of democratic avocation, which was exacerbated by a militaristic culture.

For IEN's first meeting in 1990, Sergio Ramirez, then Chairman of the Board, sent invitations to a number of NGOs. Those who attended agreed on a work plan based on the founders' proposal for a division of labor among the different NGOs. In addition, Board members defined IEN's vision and mission, and worked to ensure that the majority's

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<sup>5</sup> CDS: *Comité de Defensa Sandinista*. These committees were present in virtually every urban area in the country. At the end of the 1980s, these groups developed autonomy from the FSLN, and eventually became the Community Movement or *Movimiento Comunal (MC)*.



views were part of the national agenda and that IEN had the tools needed to conduct an objective analysis of the new administration and to reach consensus on a National Proposal. Since that first meeting, the draft strategic plan and work plan have been reviewed and adjusted periodically in accordance with Nicaragua's socio-political and economic circumstances and available financing (whether from external donors or the sale of services).

The original goals set by the IEN in 1990 were:

1. To contribute to an objective understanding of Nicaragua's social, political and economic dynamics, considering the historical circumstances in which they developed, generating information to support the process of reaching a national consensus.
2. To contribute to the consolidation of democracy and democratic governance by organizing seminars, publishing essays and conducting public opinion research on political, economic, social and institutional issues.
3. To contribute to strengthening the rule of law, the full exercise of human rights, democratic political culture and the promotion of justice by generating essays, seminars and information on public opinion related to those issues.

Two years after IEN was created, three new objectives were added, mainly as a result of increased activity designed to broaden participation (called "learning by doing" or *aprendizaje-accion*):

4. To contribute to citizen participation in national and local life through research, seminars and support for national and local consensus-building processes.
5. To contribute to the methodological development of social science in Nicaragua, specifically in the areas of integrated qualitative and quantitative research, training and the dissemination of information.
6. To conduct research or specialized consultancies.

## DEVELOPMENT PHASE

IEN members recognized that their experiences could be useful in achieving positive change in

citizen participation and improved governance and so should be shared more broadly. Despite its small permanent staff, IEN has achieved substantial impact due largely to the coordination and trust developed with other NGOs. It is important to point out that, rather than incorporating or displacing other organizations in an effort to expand, IEN chose to develop horizontal relationships with other NGOs based on dialogue and collaboration (something it is still doing today). The Institute did not seek to institutionalize itself geographically, so as not to compete with other NGOs for work at different levels, but rather to seek the support of those that had a presence and experience at different national and local levels. Other NGOs considered IEN to be a resource for advice and support, an institution that fosters joint activities, especially workshops and meetings.

Beginning in 1990, IEN started to use a "research-action" approach and develop methodologies in collaboration with the following organizations:

- Instituto de Promoción de la Democracia (IPADE): Joint research on citizen training which was used by IPADE to design a citizen education campaign for the 1996 elections.
- Centro de Derecho Constitucional (CDC): Joint research on women's rights which CDC used to develop an education campaign.
- Instituto Nicaragüense de Promoción Humana (INPRUH): IEN began to channel knowledge and experience to the grassroots through INPRUH, which has extensive local-level experience.
- Movimiento Comunal (CM): IEN supported CM in defining its own methodological and research proposals, increasing the capacity for reflection and socio-anthropological research, helping to deepen CM's development of autonomy and self-management, especially after the 1990 election.
- Coordinadora Nicaragüenses de ONGs que trabajan con la Niñez (CODENI): CODENI began to make use of IEN studies in 1994, especially in public policy which was vital for the

formulation of the children's code and policies related to holistic attention.

- With local governments, IEN developed working relations at the local level.

At IEN's initiative, research results were presented at workshops attended by decision-makers from the government, political parties and civil society. The information was presented in an unbiased manner, covering all perspectives, which made it possible to identify problems objectively vis-à-vis the sectors mentioned.<sup>6</sup> Results also were presented at international fora and congresses, published in newspapers and broadcast on national and international television. They have been used by government officials and international organizations and development agencies, such as SIDA, the EU, UNDP, and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation.

## NETWORK CONSOLIDATION PHASE

In 1993, IEN helped found the network Red Nicaragüense por la Democracia y el Desarrollo Local (RNDDL, Nicaraguan Network for Democracy and Local Development), which began with 25 NGOs and now has 62 members. RNDDL's goals, objectives and mission were decided through a participatory process involving all members and based on the need to support practical solutions to existing problems, especially through citizen participation and coming together as a network.

RNDDL was founded largely because the various organizations realized that their disparate efforts reduced the desired impact. Their forming a network was possible because a spirit of trust, tolerance and support for one another's autonomy had been generated among participating NGOs, along with the capacity for dialogue and consensus. At the same time, these NGOs realized that

government policies were not adequate to solve the needs of the vast majority of the population. Unemployment and social inequality were on the rise and social polarization was a fact of life, creating the conditions for violence and conflict which RNDDL members were determined to avoid by promoting citizen participation and strengthening the democratic process.

Until 1995, RNDDL's work was carried out only in Departmental capitals and sought to incorporate strategic actors as determined by the local organizations. Then, network activities began to incorporate relations with other actors, particularly with local government officials, in an effort to bring together government and civil society, whether organized or not. IEN and IPADE contributed to the vision, objectives and strategies, especially by providing information and data that lent credence to and strengthened decision-making and action. In 1995, IEN began to add the "training by doing" component (the previous methodology was known as "research by doing"). IEN started working with local NGOs in an effort to build citizenship. The "Training Kit" developed for this effort represented a significant step forward in training materials. It contained a substantive document on democracy-building and human rights and another methodological document on approaches to "learning by doing."

To work through networks at the community level, IEN identified local organizations that shared its goals and objectives. At first, relations were based on good will and without financial support. Through sharing responsibilities, more formalized working relations were created. Over time, IEN began to contract these same organizations, so that together they might develop projects that supported IEN strategies. In this new approach, IEN was responsible for guaranteeing compliance and accountability before the donor (the EU). Through these activities, partner organizations made contributions to the content and methodologies employed, which were incorporated into those originally used. Operational plans were adapted to the local context, where those organizations had greater influence and identity. This participatory practice increased the adaptation of IEN's plans, based on feedback at the local level.

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*6 As examples, their studies showed that 70% of Nicaraguans agreed with the concept of claiming their rights, but that 90% were opposed to violent means. In other studies, the mistakes of the UNO administration became evident, as well as denunciations of corruption in the Alemán government.*

In 1997, efforts were broadened to the municipalities, both rural and urban, based on population size and level of conflict. During that same year, IEN began to establish a more structured and systematic working relationship with the EU, through the development of the "Education for Peace, Democracy and Human Rights in Nicaragua Program." IEN shared this experience with other NGOs, taking care to ensure that this experience reinforced the autonomy of local organizations, especially with regard to financial matters. The partisan polarization that existed at the time also pervaded the communities, which was one of the first considerations taken into account by IEN and the local organizations as they organized their work. That led them to strengthen the training of candidates from all political parties for local office, so that, once installed in municipal government or other institutions, they would govern on behalf of all citizens, not just party members.

IEN saw the RNDDL as an appropriate space for sharing these results more broadly. IEN worked systematically on developing education methodologies designed to disseminate information about citizenship building, governance, transparency, decentralization and democracy. Beginning in 2000, IEN's role increased and gained praise from network members. According to several interviewees, IEN's collaboration with and feedback from network members contributed to the development of the country's social and political sciences. With the Instituto Mujer y Comunidad (IMC), IEN worked on local development issues and jointly designed a program to monitor the stratification of poverty reduction. The IEN served as the methodological advisor for that process.

#### Leadership Through Networks Phase

The cordial relations between the government and the NGOs built during the UNO administration took a turn for the worse in 1996 when the Liberal Alliance took office. The new administration began to discredit NGOs and block their work, eliminating spaces for participation and efforts by citizens considered to be political rivals, all of which made it difficult to generate an environment for consensus and participation.

There is evidence that networks form or consolidate in situations of conflict with crises of political leadership and with the presence of NGOs. The willingness and organizational experience generated during great social change facilitate network organization and operation.

*Vida Luz Meneses, former Coordinator,  
Coordinadora Civil*

As mentioned earlier, the many social and political problems faced by Nicaraguans were aggravated in 1998 by Hurricane Mitch. Confronting that tragedy, the RNDDL, the NGO Federation (FONG), and other NGOs convened the different organizations to see how to respond in an orderly and coordinated manner to the situation (which was downplayed by the government). They organized the Civil Coordinator for Emergency and Reconstruction (CCER), whose first action was to organize for rescue and survival, working directly with the municipalities to deal with the emergency. These efforts provoked a negative reaction by the Aleman government, especially because the international community saw that organized civil society was responding to the emergency, which increased confidence in those organizations as an option for channeling funds. One of the steps taken by the government was to try to modify Law 147 (the NGO law) in order to have greater control over the NGOs.

The government's aggression provoked an even greater commitment to networking. NGOs reacted in defense of their right to participate, taking steps to make their finances more transparent, which was one of the government's demands. In the process, civil society became stronger and, once the emergency was over (a period of six months), NGOs began analyzing the government's position and lessons learned from their coordination during the Hurricane Mitch crisis. They proposed an alternative as organized civil society in support of the integrated transformation that the country demanded.

This process led to the definition of a group vision (while respecting the individual nature of each organization) and its strategic role began to be consolidated, resulting in the formation of the Coordinadora Civil (CC), for which IEN played a key role. From then on, NGOs began to formulate proposals of a strategic nature, such as:

- The Nicaragua We Want (for which IEN played a key methodological and research role);
- For a Vision of the Country, proposed by the government through CONADES (National Council on Sustainable Development) and CONPES (National Council of Economic and Social Policies). The CC gave its points of view, but as a formality, as its substantive comments were not taken into account;
- Monitoring and social audits of the use of resources (civil society programs as related to the national budget and the execution of the poverty reduction strategy); and
- Processes of communication, training and citizen mobilization around rights and obligations.

According to all the organizations interviewed, IEN's involvement in the CC, in the working groups on the economy and governance, and later as a member of the coordinating commission, resulted in the following contributions:

- Increased knowledge of CC members regarding citizen participation and skill building;
- Development of theoretical frameworks and practice concerning governance;
- Presentation of alternatives for action by the CC as related to society;
- Methodological support for formulating indicators to monitor the government's Poverty Reduction Strategic Plan, through a participatory process involving local actors and activities in seven municipalities, which demonstrated that the government's implementation was not producing sufficient impact;

- Everyone benefited from IEN's professionalism, solid approach, objectivity and promotion of processes of reflection, as well as the design of proposals aimed at increasing equality and human development;
- Tolerance and consensus building when working with groups with which there is little affinity, while being able to develop joint actions, as in promoting the Law on Access to Public Information, led by the Violeta B. de Chamorro Foundation (not a CC member) and the Citizen Participation Law; and
- Strengthened horizontal relations among CC members.

## Consolidation of Work with NGO Partners

### A. COUNTRY CONTEXT

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Following the deep changes that took place in Nicaraguan society, and after two elected governments (1990 and 1996), municipal elections were held in 2000 and presidential and legislative elections in 2001. Irregularities were denounced in these last elections, which were reviewed and corrected by the national and international monitoring organizations that supervised the process. It is important to mention that at this point in time Nicaraguans saw voting as the only way to access political power, overcoming in large measure the historical means of achieving power from the last century: coup d'états, fraudulent elections, political pacts among the party elite, interventions, revolutions and counterrevolutions. Nevertheless, electoral and constitutional reforms led to the consolidation of political bipolarity (an outcome of the pact between the PLC and the FSLN), and a setback for democratic governance that called for an in-depth review. Accordingly, from 1999 to 2000, IEN conducted research to analyze and compare the situation before and after this pact as part of the biannual project on governance supported by the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA).

The winners of the 2001 elections were Enrique Bolaños and José Rizo, PLC presidential and vice presidential candidates respectively. One of their campaign promises was to fight institutionalized corruption, widespread during all former governments but most aggressively practiced during the Alemán administration. Corruption in one way or another involved the entire political class and all official institutions, distracting attention from other crucial problems. Public perceptions were slanted, largely due to the disproportionate degree of importance assigned by the media to this topic.

Beginning in 2001 the new government strengthened its efforts to promote trade, actively participating in negotiations related to the contentious Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the US. The government also advanced free trade negotiations with Canada (CA4-Canada) and participated in the Caribbean Initiative (CBTPI). With the negotiation of the FTA, the production of textiles and apparel began to awaken greater interest among some investors.

## B. IEN AND NETWORKS

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Based on its experience with the EU since 1997 through the Education for Peace, Democracy and Human Rights in Nicaragua Program, and its on-going work with NGOs in the CC, IEN took an important step forward in the type of working relations developed with national and local partners, with the latter becoming the main target of its efforts.<sup>7</sup> This type of project activity reinforces IEN's objectives 4, 5, and 6. One such project was the Multiyear Program, a regional EU initiative formulated with the participation of national counterparts selected by the EU based on vari-

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*7 IEN has basic criteria for identifying the local NGOs with which to work: their credibility with the population with which they work, the development of participatory activities, and the level of their direct contact with the population in terms of work on governance, democracy, human rights, the building of a political culture, and citizenship.*

ous criteria.<sup>8</sup> IEN, CDC, FUNDEMOS, and Violeta B. de Chamorro Foundation were chosen for this initiative. Members of the first two organizations had broad experience from the 1980s, while the experience of those in the other two organizations was more closely tied to the governments that had taken power in the 1990s. The first three organizations are currently CC members.

The selection process was new for the EU, since the issues to be dealt with were very sensitive politically and were to be developed in a polarized country. From the start, the four organizations adopted a horizontal working relationship, based on tolerance, respect, professionalism and commitment. Once the project got started, and due to administrative requirements, the EU realized the need to interact with a single interlocutor, which presented a problem due to the horizontal working style the NGOs had developed. However, they unanimously chose IEN as their intermediary.

The consortium partners appreciated the experience and conciliatory attitude shown by IEN. They did not see the Institute as a threat, but rather they saw that it continued to promote collective decision-making (e.g., by consensus) and served more as a channel of communication with the EU. The successful experience of these partners was a gain for the EU, which thereupon used this as a model for the other countries in the region. This mature attitude on the part of the four organizations was an added benefit that the EU did not expect, and served as an example of the future potential of the Multiyear Program.

The work of the program was organized by geographic areas of influence, where each of the

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*8 Some of the EU criteria for the selection of organizations for the Multiyear Program were: technical competency related to the subject; favorable image and legitimacy among peers; balanced political projection. Subjective criteria were added by the EU when determining the feasibility of groups with different political leanings working together (capacity for dialogue, consensus-building and tolerance).*

Fourteen years ago, the Foundation worked in 22 municipalities, developing the 12 priorities identified by the local populations, which were the starting point for the agendas that they presented to candidates for local office. This process promoted citizen empowerment and training on the Municipal Law. The political orientation of the new authorities made for differences in the process, and with the intervention of the Foundation and our local allies we were able to equalize the process by using the “Substantive Education and Methodological Package,” regardless of whether the authorities were from rural or urban areas.

*Member*

*Violeta B. de Chamorro Foundation*

organizations had been working with local counterparts. This took precedence over the content of the work. The local counterparts served as facilitators of the organizing process, especially with the municipal development committees that had been created as an expression of community participation in the development of municipal plans. Currently, the Multiyear Program is implementing a five-year strategic plan (2002-2006) with annual evaluations at the end of the calendar year. Based on these evaluations, the plan is revised. The program is monitored by a committee, made up of one member from each of the four NGOs, that looks at operational and administrative issues. The National Director represents the management unit and is under the responsibility of IEN, the only intermediary between the Program and the donors (EU and SIDA). Program responsibilities and activities are divided equally among the four organizations based on the General Operational Plan and according to geographic distribution. The potential and experience of the four NGOs are taken advantage of for programming and the exchange of experiences, and accomplished through joint workshops. For instance, in one session, the research methodology is defined, and this is coordinated by IEN, while for dissemination and the media, the Violeta B. de Chamorro Foundation

coordinates, and so on. The instruments or methodologies to be applied are developed jointly.

The planning of the Multiyear Program was done by the four NGOs, with IEN's methodological orientation. However, a single methodology consisting of two modules, called the “Substantive Educational and Methodological Package,” was used as a standard by all of the organizations and was applied uniformly throughout the country. The four NGOs realized that they did not all have counterparts that met the established criteria in the municipalities where they worked, so they opted to work with the local counterparts of partner organizations, or with another local organization they knew. Sharing local partners did not change the four NGOs' supervisory or monitoring role. This harmonious working relationship was achieved because all local partners were trained in the Substantive Educational and Methodological Package. The fact that the local NGOs are paid by the IEN and its consortium partners to implement the Multiyear Program (that is, a contractual relationship exists) has not altered the horizontal working relations that had been established in the RNDDL and in the CC.

The NGOs working with IEN at the community level point out that they have achieved an increase in local citizen participation, strengthened the capacity of local organizations, and generated greater interaction between civil society and local government. IEN's experience and methodologies also have been used successfully in places where this would have been impossible without the efforts of local partners (e.g., IPADE is implementing components of the Multiyear Program in Nicaragua's Caribbean coast). There is consensus among the NGOs that communities have increased their capacity to advocate for their rights and have strengthened their ability to carry out social audits and use new technologies (the internet, for instance), which is particularly relevant in the poorest communities. Nevertheless, even this type of participation is subject to the collaboration of outside entities, which denotes dependency on the part of local actors.

As a further example of the local-level impact of this type of coalition work, the experience of INPRHU in three communities in the department of Ocotal is presented. Through the coordination and complementary working relations developed between IEN and INPRHU, in 2003 INPRHU began implementing the Multiyear Program in Totogalpa, Telpaneca and Somoto, which extended the impact of the Program to those three highly vulnerable areas. The use and adaptation of the methodologies developed under IEN's supervision were paramount in this process. The NGOs were able to identify vulnerable sectors and to formulate possible solutions by creating spaces for reflection forums and consensus-building working groups. Three groups were created in each municipality: population and development; economy, production, and environment; and democratic governance.

IEN's methodology has allowed participants to identify problems, develop projects, negotiate for their implementation with local entities and organize themselves to carry out actions in accordance with issues of interest. The Methodological Package helped both local government and civil society transcend partisan commitments in favor of the population they serve. Two of the three municipalities were administered by Sandinistas and one by the PLC. However, since similar participatory processes were adopted in each municipality, a start has been made for implementing the practice of tolerance and the promotion of dialogue, and consensus. The political conflict with government, provoked among other things by the pact between the FSLN and the PLC (to the benefit of their parties and not the country), has not influenced these local administrations, even though the mayors have paid a political price within party structures. The fact that these local officials are actually from the municipalities has helped to strengthen their commitment to the community.

## 2005 and Beyond

### A. COUNTRY CONTEXT

A political, economic and social crisis still exists in Nicaragua, which jeopardizes peace, democracy,

human rights and, as a consequence, human development. Among the general population, a "verticalist" attitude still exists, which affects all social relations: man/woman; parents/children; political leaders/followers. According to a 2004 UNDP study, half of the Nicaraguans surveyed would accept an authoritarian regime and be willing to set aside the democratic process in order to improve their economic situation and living conditions.

Nicaragua is the poorest country in Latin America, after Haiti. According to UNDP, the Human Development Index is 0.547, 126th place worldwide. 70% of households live in poverty, measured as being unable to cover two basic food baskets with the median family income (IEN-ASDI, 71%; UNDP 70% as reported in 1999). Recent figures from UNDP and CEPAL indicate that 72% of the population lives in poverty on US\$2.00/day or less, while 48% lives on US\$1.00/day. The Nicaraguan labor force is known for its strength, flexibility, high productivity, good working habits and for taking good advantage of the training provided. Performance standards are usually rated second only to Costa Ricans in terms of high productivity. However, the minimum wage is the lowest of the region (US\$0.37/hour,<sup>9</sup> and the market wage is US\$0.67/hour). At present, 56% of the population is under 25 years of age; 36.5% is of working age. According to official figures, unemployment is 9.8% and underemployment is at 12.1%.<sup>10</sup> These figures are heavily influenced by the permanent and seasonal migrations of workers to the US and Costa Rica.

In June 2005, the General Secretary of the Organization of American State (OAS) visited Nicaragua. [Article 18 of Inter-American Democratic Charter establishes that the OAS may send a mission to a country when "situations arise in a member state that may affect the development of its institutional

<sup>9</sup> This minimum salary figure is net, which means that the benefits provided in the law are not included. Source: Free Trade Zone Statistics Department, Nicaragua.

<sup>10</sup> Nicaraguan Central Bank web site (<http://www.bcn.gob.ni/estadisticas/indicadores/1003/3-1.htm>). Information updated to 2001. The underemployment rate is measured in units equivalent to open unemployment.

political process” produced by a crisis between the different branches of government.] The situation worsened in the second week of June 2005, when the courts ordered the president to cede control of public enterprises to the individuals designated by the legislature without having permitted the administration to comment on or take part in their appointments. The president refused to obey the ruling on grounds of unconstitutionality. In addition, voting on ratification of the CAFTA trade agreement was in the final phase, which caused intense polarization. At the same time Nicaragua was preparing to sign an agreement with the USG to receive funds from the Millennium Challenge Account.

The current situation is the result of the damage caused during the insurrection against the Somoza dictatorship, the war economy of the 1980s (including an economic embargo) and the corruption and misuse of public funds by two successive governments during the past 15 years of peace, which triggered massive emigration, unemployment, and poverty. On the other hand, it reduced the multimillionaire elite and left the middle class poorer and smaller.

If complete collapse has been avoided up to now, it is for two reasons: international aid and family remittances. From 1990 to the present, Nicaragua has moved from being a Banana Republic under the control of foreign enterprises to a 21st century Maquila Republic under transnational control.<sup>11</sup> The maquila sector is growing stronger, in terms of the number of people and businesses involved and the volume of exports (43.9% of total exports in December 2004). At the same time, compliance with labor laws is decreasing, and the pressure caused among this mass of workers is causing serious damage to their health, quality of life, and to the environment. Violations of labor rights proliferate, whether because of the dynamic growth of the sector, cultural differences between workers and foreign supervisors, or lack of the country’s

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<sup>11</sup> Dr. Antonio Jarquín (2005): Presentation during the “Diálogo de la Ciudadanía” forum, convened by the Coordinadora Civil and other networks. Managua, Nicaragua, July 28, 2005.

institutional capacity to carry out inspections and correct infractions in a timely manner (notwithstanding a well-structured legal framework).

The Nicaraguan government does not have a national policy to promote development and employment,<sup>12</sup> which means that there is no medium- and long-term vision, no sense of how to proceed, and no perception of possible consequences. Sincere, constructive dialogue among business, workers and government needs to be deepened with a common agenda to face the challenges of globalization. The business sector participates least in being trained in the legal framework that protects workers’ human rights and, even more importantly, in its implementation.

Within this context, to move the country forward, stability and governance are vital. Demands for the formulation and implementation of a sustainable human development strategy with a long-term vision should be based on the principles of equity, transparency, social justice, ethics, rule of law, decentralization and citizen participation. The current development strategy states that “the maquilas are a solution to deal with the poverty of the country,” but does not say is that this is a temporary alternative. The maquilas are not helping to solve the health, education or development problems and, in addition, they are dismantling the economy, thus deepening underdevelopment and dependence. If the situation continues as it is, the saying that “maquilas are directly proportional to pauperism and inversely proportional to progress”<sup>13</sup> will come true.

## B. IEN INTO THE FUTURE

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Considering its networking and partnership experience and the current situation in Nicaragua, IEN is strengthening its activities at the local level. It promotes Citizen Dialogue Forums, at which

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<sup>12</sup> The current administration is formulating a National Development Plan (PND) but has not consulted with the main political and social actors, so the PND generally is considered a governmental, rather than national, program.

<sup>13</sup> Rodolfo Delgado: National Coordinator for the Multi-year Program and member of the IEN Board of Directors.



community members discuss the current political situation, governance issues, citizen participation, access to public information, the need for electoral reforms that stress inclusion, the Water Law, and other topics. A key issue is citizen participation in planning and monitoring the funds that will be added to the national treasury now that Nicaragua has been designated a HIPC<sup>14</sup> country, and so has therefore had much external debt forgiven. The goal is to ensure a balance in the use of these funds for investments in the national interest for the short, medium, and long term.

The CC is going through a strategic planning process, based on activities that are in the national interest and that strengthen the autonomy and capacities of its individual members. Within that network and within IEN itself, it is assumed that these processes bring change and so there is a permanent need to revise methodological and relational mechanisms among the various members. Funding sources will continue to determine the type of work the NGOs carry out, since self-sustainability has not yet been achieved. They continue to operate on a project basis, trying as much as possible to align those activities with the missions and visions of their members. IEN constantly presents proposals to international donors and participates in international/national competitive bidding processes. All planning and proposed activities are based on its objectives and on-going programs. Given the positive results of the Multiyear Program, it is expected that the EU will continue to support that initiative from 2007 to 2010. Although that Program is regional, most of IEN's activity, and that of the other consortium members, is in Nicaragua. However, IEN now is seeking to expand activities both regionally and to other countries. For that reason, within the CC, IEN participates in an initiative titled "Central America for Dialogue."

With funding from the Irish government through the Center for International Studies at Dublin City University, IEN undertook research on the "Role and Effectiveness of Civil Society in Poverty

Reduction in Central America" and how this is conditioned by relations between civil society and government and between civil society and international donors. The study is based on bibliographical sources and primary research on 143 CSOs in all five Central American countries. As part of this project, IEN organized a seminar with leaders from 22 CSOs to discuss preliminary findings and presented final results at an international seminar in Dublin, Ireland in November 2005. IEN is also developing the Human Security International project with funding from Japan and Canada. Under the CAP program, IEN was awarded a grant for an activity called DECIPODER (Democracy, Citizenship, and Empowerment Building Network) to promote citizen participation. Through this activity, IEN hopes to strengthen its work through networks and partnerships and its formal relations with universities.

IEN and the other NGOs also realize that their actions are intimately associated with and influenced by relations among the different sectors of the power structure (the executive, legislative, and judicial branches, political parties, etc.). Therefore, they seek to maintain an independent role by presenting policy alternatives proposed by civil society itself, particularly through the "Citizen Dialogue Forums," in order to encourage citizens to offer solutions to the country's problems instead of waiting for the government or the political parties to set the agenda. At the same time, local-level partnerships should be deepened to enable greater impact, moving beyond building citizenship to the construction of local political and economic processes.

Some interviewees mentioned the need to work on ways to develop more effective citizen participation, and effort which has been left to some NGO working at the local level. In the final analysis, this simply reproduces the dependency model. As one interviewee asserted, political culture shows that the lower the level of social segregation, the higher the sense of identity, which can become an incentive to promote local solutions. Most of a community's wealth is produced locally, but unfortunately local capacity is not fully utilized. Interviewees also expressed a need for

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<sup>14</sup> HIPC: *Highly Indebted Poor Countries.*

integration rather than displacement at both the local and national level. To exchange positions and visions, IEN, as well as the CC and RNDDL, hope to continue to strengthen existing communication and experience-sharing mechanisms and to ensure that information is more timely and adequate. IEN and its partners also plan to increase their efforts to share and publicize best practices that can be replicated at the local level to promote local decision-making. In addition, many interviewees thought that IEN needs to develop a more audacious dissemination policy, ceasing to be a creator of information and facilitator of action and trying to move to where results of its work are more widely known and used. It is important for IEN to become more of an “impact” organization, which could be done with an adequate communication strategy.

## IENT’s Structure and Sources of Support

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From its founding IEN has had a Board of Directors, composed of a President, Vice President and a Secretary-Treasurer, whose main responsibilities are research and administration. Since Board members were the only IEN members, they were not elected. One of them acted as Executive Director, coordinating all technical, research and administrative matters. Internally, leadership has remained in place, since two of the three original members are still on the Board, though two additional positions were added in 1997. Beginning in 1995, personnel were added to meet research requirements and linked to projects. Those with management responsibilities are paid not on the basis of their positions, but in relation to the projects in which they are involved.

Legal decisions are taken by the Board by consensus or majority vote in accordance with the initial bylaws, which still are in force. Technical decisions are made by the project director. Debate is encouraged in an effort to reach consensus. Ordinary meetings are held every week and other meetings are convened when necessary. The Multiyear Program meets once a month. Members are kept informed through telephone, e-mail and meetings.

IEN maintains relations and coordinates with various NGOs in the networks in which it participates. Depending on project needs, IEN seeks ways to work with them at the local level. The fact that alliances have been built with local organizations, rather than competing with them for the same activities, has resulted in greater efficiency and the opportunity to strengthen the networks.

From the start, IEN has supported itself through both self-generated and demand-driven projects, all with external funding. After the first three years, the percentage of funding obtained for self-generated projects has risen. For the first two years, 70% of IEN’s work was funded mainly by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation of Germany. From 1996-2000, SIDA financed projects related to the Biannual and Triennial Governance Program. For the last five years, IEN has managed the Multiyear Program with EU and SIDA funds.

## Conclusions

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According to the persons interviewed, IEN’s experience to date has produced lessons on which to base the following conclusions:

- IEN’s ability to systematize its research and turn results into action with local organizations promoted the democratic use of information;
- The information IEN provided has been a milestone for many important studies in Nicaragua;
- In constructing a national dialogue on governance, democracy, citizenship and human rights and creating methodological and training materials used to develop standard local level trainings, IEN contributed to developing greater dialogue, consensus and tolerance. However, the diversity of networks involved means that dialogue and consensus are a continuous challenge;
- Networking became a way for IEN’s research to have an impact;
- IEN’s ability to facilitate work among organizations with different skills promoted the

exchange of information, mutual support, and complementary initiatives which increased efficiency and trust among all partners. Competition and tense situations thus were avoided;

- IEN was careful to develop partnerships with NGOs respected by the communities in which they worked and had been shown to be honest, transparent, and democratic. As part of this process, it was important to verify the quality not only of the organizations, but also of the people that worked in them;
- Because IEN was very active in the consolidation of the CC, it became a natural vehicle for communication and feedback for IEN and over 800 other organizations;
- In networking, it is important to cultivate the identity of each member, which means that a balance must be struck between the network's identity and that of its members. Diversity and differences of opinion/purpose must be respected and the autonomy of each group promoted;
- IEN's work could have much greater impact if a more aggressive media or broadcasting activity were conducted at all levels;
- Through the Multiyear Program, IEN learned how to work with other groups despite ideological differences by making dialogue, tolerance and consensus the modes of operation and the needs of the nation the main focus, rather than the needs of member organizations; and
- The capacity of donors and partners to promote team work is vital to a successful program. IEN has demonstrated that using a standard methodology nationwide produces results, which has motivated other international donors to support this type of coordination and joint venture.

## Recommendations

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Based on the lessons learned and conclusions drawn, the following recommendations are offered for consideration by donors and NGOs as they plan future activities in Nicaragua:

1. Efforts should be made to develop a more effective strategy for communication and information exchange with local groups, as this continues to be a serious issue.
2. As part of this strategy, additional local-level exchanges and communication (meetings and workshops) should be conducted. The provision or use of internet facilities at the local level should be explored in order to provide technical support for this.
3. Process and impact indicators should be developed to measure current activities, especially those surrounding the elections. These should be formulated jointly by national NGOs, local communities and organizations that finance and support these activities.
4. For work with civil society in Nicaragua, existing networks should be supported, rather than funding efforts to form new ones.

## Annex 1: List of Persons Interviewed

No.	Contact	Organization	Telephone	E-mail
1	Henry Chávez	IPADE	2760217	Direccion@ipade.org.ni
2	Georgina Muñoz	Coordinadora Civil	2666711 2662033	Propuestas@ibw.comni
3	Violeta Delgado	Coordinadora Civil	2666711 2662033	Enlace@ibw.com.ni
4	Enrique Picado	Mov. Comunal Nica- ragüense	2912316	Epicado@ibw.com.ni
5	Marlene Álvarez	Sec. Ejec. Red Democra- cia Y Desarrollo Local	2545363 2664174	Secretaria@redlocal.org.ni
6	Maria Luisa Molina	Coord. Nic. De La Niñez		Funprode@gmail.com
7	Vida Luz Meneses	Ex Coordinadora Civil	8805045	Vidaluz@ibw.com.ni
8	Ariana Peralta	Consultora Independiente	2440554 8843038	Apante@ibw.com.ni
9	Patricia Mayorga	FUNDEMOS	2666578	Proyectos@grupofundemos.org
10	Auxiliadora Chiong	Inst De La Mujer, Estelí	7132964	Imc@ibw.com.ni
11	Absalón González Arauz	INPRUH, Somoto	7222031	Prosac@inprhu.com
12	Julio López Miranda	INPRUH Nacional	2666165	Inprhu@snnic.org.ni
13	Adolfo Acevedo Vogl	Coordinadora Civil, Comisión Económica Y De Gobernabilidad	2442229	Acevedo@ibw.com.ni
14	Patricio Oquist	IEN	2668523-24	Ien@ibw.com.ni
15	Rodolfo Delgado	IEN	2668523-24	Ien@ibw.com.ni
16	Rigoberto Sampson	IEN	3114262	Ien@ibw.com.ni
17	Enrique Saenz	Movimiento Renovador Sandinista	2704499	Enrique.saez@cec.eu.int

## Acronyms

<b>CAP</b>	Capable Partners Program
<b>CC</b>	Coordinadora Civil
<b>CCER</b>	Coordinadora Civil para la Emergencia y la Reconstrucción
<b>CDC</b>	Centro de Derecho Constitucional
<b>CCODENI</b>	Coordinadora Nicaragüenses de ONG's que trabajan con la Niñez
<b>CDS</b>	Comité de Defensa Sandinista
<b>CM</b>	Community Movement.
<b>CONADES</b>	Consejo Nacional de Desarrollo Sostenible
<b>CONPES</b>	Consejo Nacional de Políticas Económicas y Sociales
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>FONG</b>	Federación de ONG's
<b>FSLN</b>	Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional
<b>HIPC</b>	Highly Indebted Poor Countries.
<b>IEN</b>	Instituto de Estudios Nicaragüenses
<b>IMC</b>	Instituto Mujer y Comunidad
<b>INPRHU</b>	Instituto de Promoción Humana
<b>IPADE</b>	Instituto de Promoción de la Democracia
<b>PLC</b>	Partido Liberal Constitucionalista
<b>RNDDL</b>	Red Nicaragüense por la Democracia y el Desarrollo Local
<b>SIDA</b>	Swedish International Development Agency
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Program



## IV. New Sudanese Indigenous Non-Governmental Organizations (NESI) Network in Sudan

### COUNTRY CONTEXT

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Sudan gained its independence 47 years ago. For 36 of those years, civil war has raged. The conflict and issues surrounding it have been the central focus of the nation's political life. Two million people have lost their lives and over four million have been displaced. The country's economy is in shambles and its capacity to develop as a nation has been severely hindered.<sup>1</sup>

South Sudan in particular lacks any form of development. The Government of Sudan (GOS) has committed gross human rights violations against civilians in South Sudan, including aerial bombings, abductions and slavery. People's means of livelihood and the region's infrastructure, including transport, communications, medical and educational facilities, were destroyed. Discrimination continued to block women from participating in economic activities. Therefore, communities whose men either were fighting or had been killed grew dismally poor. The tireless efforts of the population of South Sudan to negotiate for equal citizenship, fair distribution of natural resources and wealth and equitable power-sharing were met with military action and further economic and political marginalization, which resulted in the continuation of the war against the GOS.

Several steps towards peace were taken, which brought relative security to South Sudan. A few vulnerable communities have been able to stabilize, even though militia attacks and inter-tribal conflict have continued in some areas.<sup>2</sup> In early 2002, a US-brokered ceasefire agreement between the GOS and Sudan Peoples' Liberation Army (SPLA) was signed to protect civilians from

all types of military operations.<sup>3</sup> Although this agreement was violated on several occasions, it was a first step. In November 2002, the Machakos Protocol,<sup>4</sup> a peace initiative, was signed under the auspices of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in Machakos, Kenya. This Protocol initiated discussions which culminated in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), signed on January 9, 2005.

With the CPA signed, new development challenges emerged. INGOs shifted from providing relief to facilitating community development. Local communities needed assistance designed to help them re-establish the ability to earn their own livelihood, which had been adversely affected both by the destruction caused by the prolonged civil war and by the entrenched dependency that resulted from protracted reliance on international relief. During the transition from war to peace, humanitarian interventions still are still needed, and INGOs have been focusing on resettlement, rehabilitation, reconstruction and demobilization. However, INGOs, local NGOs, and other civil society organizations (CSOs) must ensure that they follow and promote the fundamental tenets of democracy—equity, fairness, human rights and good governance—especially at this embryonic stage of the evolving Government of Southern Sudan (GOSS).

## Genesis and Evolution of NESI

### A. FIRST STEPS

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Given the prevailing national socio-political context, the New Sudanese Indigenous Non-Governmental Organization (NESI) Network was formed against a backdrop of uncertainty and apathy, as well as hope. It was founded in March 2000 to support CSOs dedicated to helping the South Sudanese and to safeguard civilian rights by performing a watchdog function. Two factors provided the prime impetus for NESI's creation: the absence of CSOs from the peace talks and the

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<sup>1</sup> USAID, *Interim Strategic Plan for South Sudan 2004-2006, 2004.*

<sup>2</sup> OCHA, *Briefing Pack August 2004*

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<sup>3</sup> OCHA, *Briefing Pack August 2004*

<sup>4</sup> ICG, *Power and Wealth Sharing: Make or Break Time in Peace Process, December 2002.*

lack of representation of the people of Southern Sudan. NESI members felt a strong need to work together for better and more effective results. They had witnessed the daily repercussions of the civil war but, with limited resources, were unable to be very effective as individual organizations. Forming a network enabled them to pool resources, learn from one another and stand as a united front for monitoring human rights abuses and other issues.

NESI was founded by the combined efforts of Suzanne Jambo, Network Coordinator, and six indigenous NGOs—Mundri Relief and Development Association (MRDA), Women Orphans and Disabled Relief Association of New Sudan (WODRANS), Nuba Relief, Rehabilitation and Development (NRRDO), Sudan Medical Care (SMC), New Sudan Women’s Federation (NSWF), and Hope Agency for Relief and Development (HARD)—and a Dutch funding agency, NOVIB. Because the GOS believed that the organizations which NESI was founded to support promoted the ideals and interests of the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM), NESI was unable to open offices in Southern Sudan. For that reason, it was founded, registered and operated from Nairobi, Kenya.

Initially, NESI’s goals had not crystallized and were not articulated clearly, though the founding members held common perceptions, ideas and vision of what NESI should do: ensure collective efforts in addressing political and humanitarian problems in Southern Sudan; appeal for international support for the resolution of the political crisis; advocate against GOS human rights violations; and portray the Southern Sudanese as a dignified people, despite the manifold discriminations.

NESI’s first meeting was informal but fruitful. The six founding organizations and Suzanne Jambo attended and NOVIB facilitated. The meeting focused on establishing structures and systems. Participating organizations were assigned different tasks: developing a vision and mission statement, brainstorming possible network names, and so forth. Since then, the Network’s vision and mission have changed in response to the unfolding political, social and economic environment.

To align itself strategically and remain relevant in light of the political developments that unfolded through 2005, the Network adopted its current vision and mission. The following table depicts the transformation of the Network’s vision and mission over time.

	Original	Current
Vision	Improve the cohesion of members of the NESI-Network in their endeavor to safeguard the dignity of the Sudanese people.	Empowering civil society institutions that serve as a means for sustainable peace, socio-economic reconstruction and community development initiatives.
Mission	To enhance the dignity of the South/ New Sudanese people through the realization of an efficient, strong and effective civil society. The member NGOs have come together to form a nucleus that has a weight and strength to enhance the social changes, build peace, human rights and sustainable development to preserve the dignity of New Sudan People.	Facilitate effective coordinated mobilization of resources and service delivery for sustainable peace, socio-economic reconstruction and community development initiatives for civil society organizations.



The shift in the organizational vision and mission clearly indicates NESI's efforts to become more relevant in the new context of Southern Sudan. The emerging new concerns include human rights, good governance, fairness and justice, which justify NESI's focus on advocacy for good governance and sustainable peace in Southern Sudan. At the same time, NESI's core objectives have remained the same since its inception. They include:

- Building lasting partnerships to forge a strong, effective and democratic civil society;
- Providing a forum for building effective networks to promote dialogue, collaboration, information exchange and learning;
- Focusing CSOs in the South/New Sudan on integrated efforts for poverty alleviation, gender equity, peacebuilding, human rights and participatory governance;
- Strengthening NESI's members to enable them to perform their duties efficiently and effectively for the benefit of the needy people, especially women, children and disabled groups;
- To work hand-in-hand with constituent members, representing them locally, nationally and internationally so that the voiceless are heard worldwide;
- Enhancing public awareness about NESI's role and responsibilities towards ensuring self-reliance and improving the quality of life; and
- Pooling human and financial resources to achieve members' objectives.

For the first two years, NESI had no governance or leadership structures, although the General Assembly (made up of all NESI members) was involved in decision-making. Accordingly, the Coordinator led operations, and NESI made deliberate, proactive efforts to market itself to potential donors. However, its embryonic status made mobilizing funds difficult, and the Coordinator worked as a volunteer for one year. Having submitted a

continuous stream of proposals, eventually NOVIB became NESI's first funder. With those resources, NESI developed a work plan with objectives and activities for two years (2000-2002).

## B. INITIAL DEVELOPMENT

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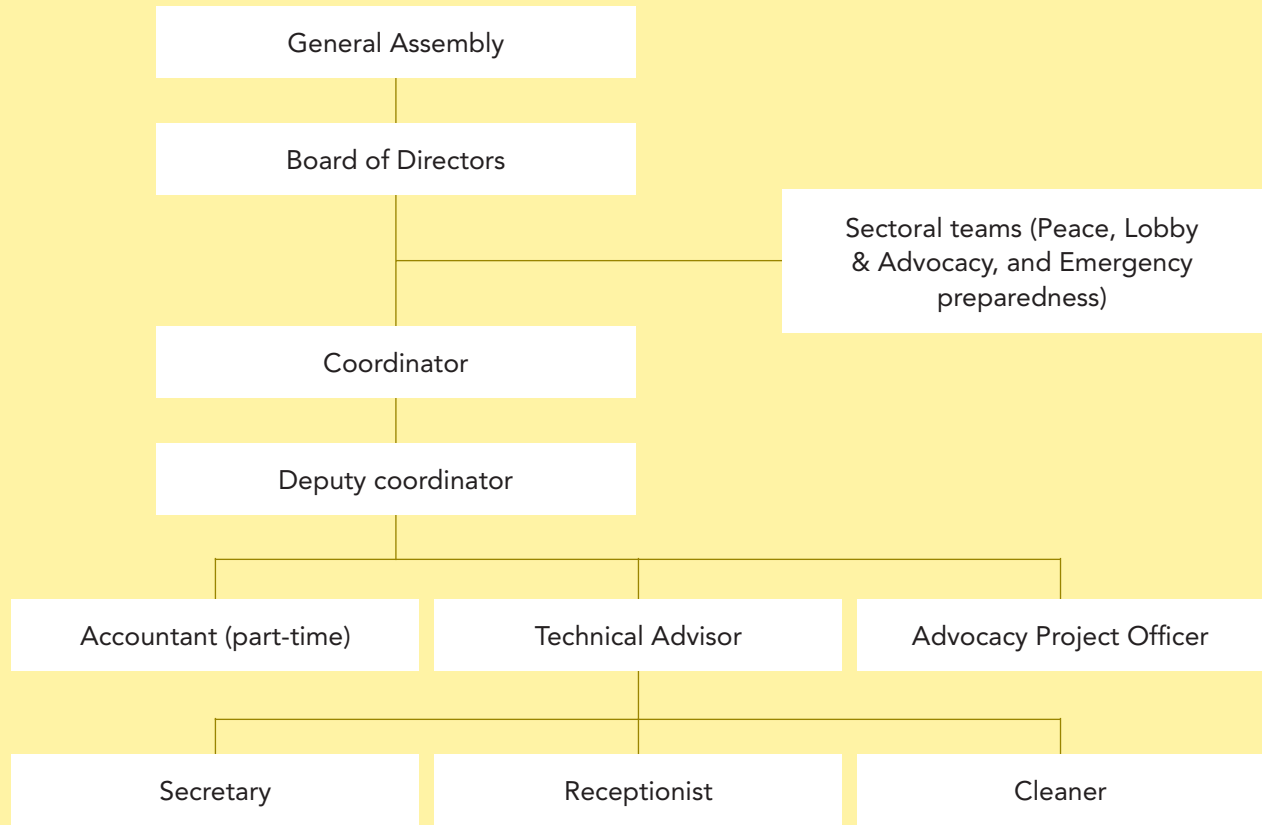
Since 2000, NESI has expanded into all five regions of Southern Sudan: Bahr El Ghazal, Equatoria, Upper Nile, Nuba Mountains, and Southern Blue Nile. As of December 2005, its membership had grown from six to 66 organizations. NESI initially had an open door membership policy, but measures were put in place to safeguard integrity. Prospective members are required to be Sudanese indigenous NGOs with a grassroots presence, registered under Kenyan law. Members must pay an annual fee of US\$500 and be cleared by the Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Association (SRRA).<sup>5</sup>

The immense rise in NESI membership has been attributed to the perception that NESI had great potential. Many local NGOs saw NESI as a vehicle through which to demand a just peace, expose human rights violations, politicize humanitarian issues and depict the people of South Sudan as resolute, but not hopeless. New members also were motivated by high expectations for funding, a need for exposure and capacity building (including training and organizational development), as well as NESI's commitment to organizations despite their cultural or ethnic allegiance, the credibility of its leadership, the transparency and good governance evident in its own affairs and goodwill from the SPLM. This phenomenal growth led to profound infrastructure, administrative, and capability challenges, which required the expansion of the secretariat (from two in March 2000 to 15 in December 2005) in order to respond efficiently and effectively to emerging needs. The Secretariat's space and facilities (staff offices, a Board room, desk top computers, laptops, fax, telephones, internet connection, etc.) also expanded.

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<sup>5</sup> SRRA was founded in 1999 by the SPLM to coordinate relief and development activities in SPLM-administered areas of South Sudan.

Figure 1: First NESI Organigram, 2003

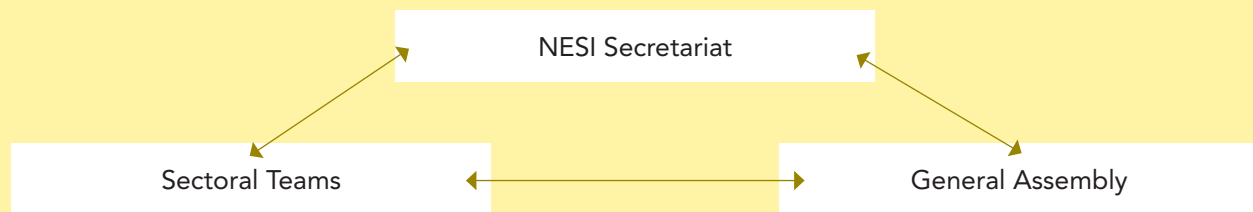


To cope with the immediate need for rules and regulations owing to the increase in membership, NESI established clear norms of operations as envisaged in its Constitution (drafted, approved and disseminated in 2004) and in its Code of Conduct, which clearly defined NESI’s name, vision, mission, objectives, activities and membership. It also stipulated financial systems, the frequency and conduct of meetings, accountability and teamwork, and respect for all. A more complex organizational structure was developed, as shown in Figure 1 above. An 11-member Board was established in 2003. As called for in the Constitution, Board members must be elected openly and democratically, be fully paid up, have belonged to NESI for at least two years, be active in the area identified by their NGO, and be committed to NESI’s work. Board members serve a three-year term and may be re-elected only once. The Constitution also provides guidelines for the removal

of Board members, if necessary. Soon after its formation, the Board elected an Executive Committee, including a chairperson, vice-chairperson and secretary. Member organizations are divided into eight Sectoral teams: capacity building, funds management, advocacy and lobbying, emergency preparedness, gender equality mainstreaming, food security, health and education.

Figure 2 on the next page shows how the network’s communication works. The Secretariat and Sectoral Teams communicate regularly through e-mails, telephone calls and scheduled meetings. The Secretariat meets with members of the General Assembly monthly. The Sectoral Teams and wider membership also have mechanisms for interaction designed to share experiences and opportunities: e-mails, Sectoral and monthly meetings. However, many members—especially newer NGOs—have no internet access or access only in

Figure 2: NESI Communications System



Nairobi. Board, Sectoral, and monthly meetings have been held only in Nairobi. NESI also has established systems for communicating with donors, who have been very instrumental in supporting the Network's ideals and programs. Regular financial and progress reports are submitted and consultative meetings are held with donors.

In 2004, the UN Security Council met in Nairobi to pressure the SPLM and GOS to sign the CPA—resulting in the CPA's six Protocols, which provide a six-year interim period. During the negotiations for the peace agreement, NESI highlighted gaps in the Machakos protocol and subsequent protocols and offered solid recommendations on how such inadequacies should be equitably addressed. NESI used Kenyan, regional, and international media to inform the world about the atrocities committed by the GOS. NESI's contributions to the peace process resulted in the SPLM's recognition of the strength and potential of CSOs, and in increasing NESI's membership. The SPLM perceived NESI as an ally in advocating for the rights and dignity of the Southern Sudanese. NESI always has shared information about its efforts and concerns with the SPLM, which now constitutes the majority of GOSS officials. Consequently, the relationship between NESI and the newly-formed GOSS is cordial, constructive and productive.

In anticipation of the CPA and an end to the many years of armed struggle, in October 2004 NESI developed a strategic plan for the next seven years (2005-2012). First, each Sectoral team developed its own initial strategic plan, and NESI's comprehensive plan was taken from these. The plan helped NESI rationalize its focus areas and future operations and establish resource requirements. It also helped donors establish areas for support and

enabled NESI to play a pivotal role in the unfolding socio-economic and political process.

### C. THE PRESENT

NESI's connection to local needs and dependence on local involvement and support is unique. It focuses on rebuilding Southern Sudan from within, which ensures the continuity and sustainability of its programs. With members from all five regions of Southern Sudan and the three disputed states of Abyei, Funj, and Nuba Mountains, NESI prides itself on having a wider constituency than any other local or international organization in Southern Sudan. Although local NGOs from North Sudan have expressed interest in joining NESI, this has not been approved, though including Northern Sudanese organizations could provide NESI an opportunity to further legitimize its mandate for peacebuilding by having a national identity.

NESI seeks to recruit new members who can add value. In considering membership applications, special consideration is given to organizations that implement gender and HIV/AIDS programs, come from marginalized regions, and have technical expertise in areas such as health. To ensure that its vision and mission are internalized by all affiliates, new members receive orientation and have a good understanding of NESI's mandate. One of the Network's primary objectives is capacity building and NESI has offered members organizational capacity assessments, trainings, fundraising guidance, information sharing and linkage building and exposed local NGO leaders to the efforts of regional and international organizations.

NESI's current organizational structure is shown in Figure 3 on the next page. There are four levels of decision-making: the Board, General Assembly, Sectoral Committees, and the Secretariat. At all levels, decisions are reached first through consultation to build consensus and then voting if necessary. The General Assembly is the overall supervisory body. The Board acts as an advisory and policy formulating body to the Secretariat and member NGOs. Member organizations are divided into eight Sectoral teams. Each sector, with the exception of capacity building, has a project officer. The Coordinator, also NESI's chief executive officer, is overseen by the Board. The Secretariat has 15 staff, supervised by the Coordinator, including a program officer, project officers, administrator, accountant, secretary, receptionist, cleaner and guards. All personnel are paid monthly.

NESI's Secretariat, still based in Nairobi, facilitates members' monthly and Sectoral meetings, monitors network activities, provides technical support, initiates partnerships with other networks and informs members about general and specific socio-economic and political developments in Southern Sudan. The Coordinator directs all activities and the Program Officer/Project Officers implement them through the Sectoral teams. Although the General Assembly and Board are the highest-level organs, and so informed of all network matters, their role and responsibilities, and those of the Executive Committee, are not clearly defined. Many Board members appear to be dormant, a possible explanation of why the Coordinator carries much of the workload.

NESI projects are informed by member needs, and members play a significant role in deciding what projects NESI designs and implements. Each sector implements the projects that fall within its area. Of NESI's eight Sectoral teams, only Lobbying and Advocacy so far has developed its own seven-year strategic plan. The other sectors develop yearly work plans based on NESI's comprehensive strategic plan. Sectoral teams, with the assistance of project officers, hold meetings to draft, review, and approve these work plans.

Members display a high level of commitment through their Sectoral teams, although most do not pay their US\$500 yearly membership dues. Membership support is an important commitment for the future of the network, but it is not clear whether the non-payment stems from the amount of the fee or some other cause. NESI relies heavily on donor funding for its programs and is still highly dependent on NOVIB for support (83%), which makes it vulnerable should NOVIB change its funding policies or priorities. Additional funding comes from Intermón Oxfam (7%), Mercy Corps International (10%), ACORD, Mama Cash, Trocaire and the World Bank.

All NESI programs have a built-in M&E mechanism which involves gathering regular feedback from member organizations and periodic assessments by external consultants. The Board also performs M&E functions, although on an ad-hoc basis. Regular M&E systems and structures in NESI appear weak, with no specific tools in place to assess project progress.

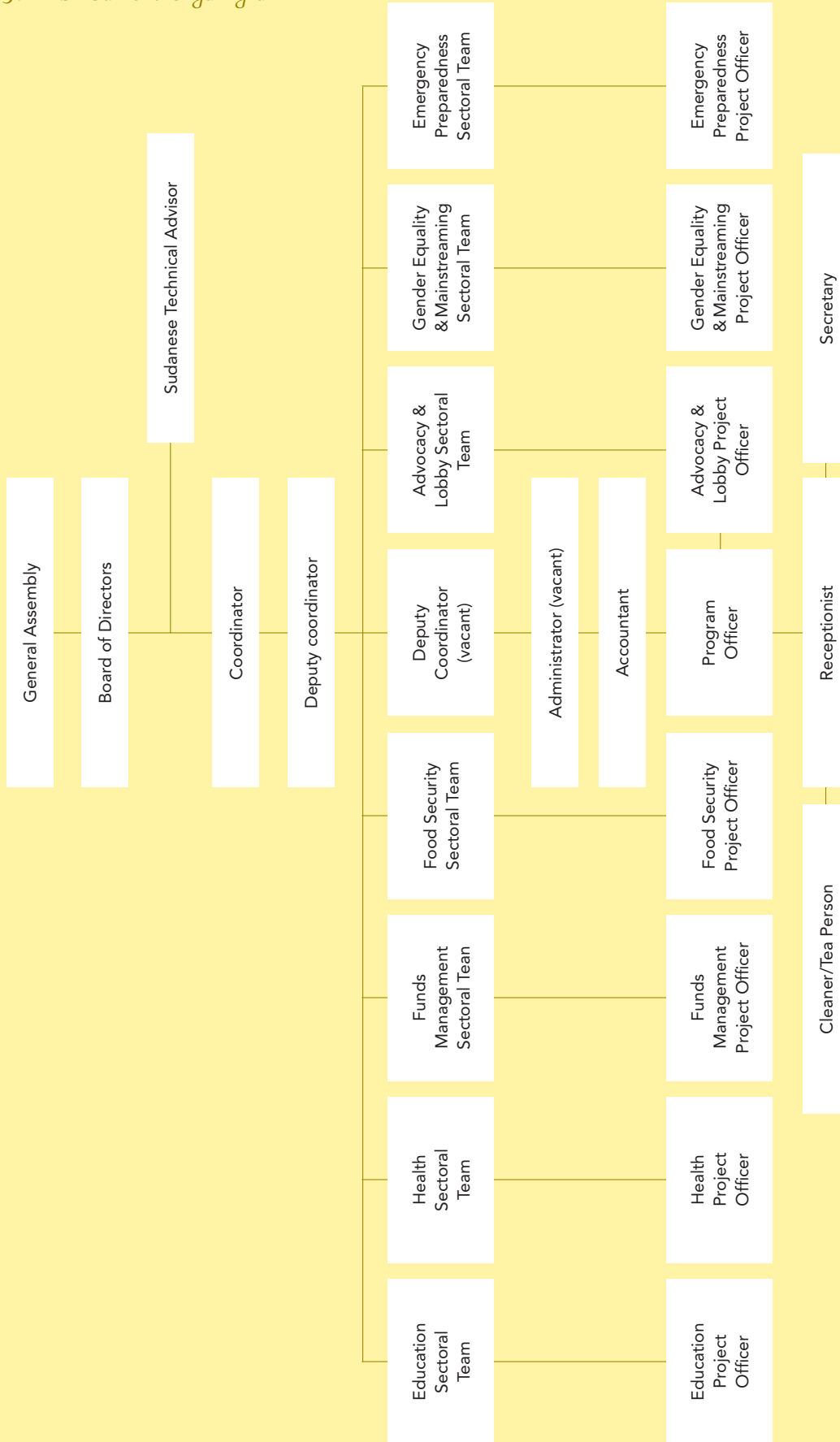
Thanks to the culture of openness, equity and fairness adopted for dealing with Network affairs, internal conflicts have been largely prevented. Nonetheless, efforts are underway to establish built-in conflict resolution mechanisms. In the absence of such mechanisms, the Board and Sectoral Committees customarily have addressed any conflicts that have arisen. The most common sources of conflict have been competition over opportunities such as overseas trips, participating in training workshops, and approval by Sectoral committees of proposals for funding by external partners. For that reason, financial policies, including the issuance of grants to members, are being drafted for ratification by members.

## D. VISION FOR THE FUTURE

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NESI's growth—both in membership and program scope—will demand enhanced leadership, governance and skills related to management and community mobilization for participatory development. Leadership and management structures will be in accordance with the Constitution. The General Assembly will continue to be the supreme

Figure 3: NESI Current Organigram



appointing authority for the Board. The Board, in turn, will ensure implementation of policies and will provide overall leadership. The Coordinator, appointed by the Board, will perform the day-to-day management of the Secretariat and oversee the entire Network. Some members think NESI should shift its focus to building alliances with like-minded partners locally and internationally, thus positioning itself to become a capacity-building and political think-tank. However, most members think NESI should retain its current vision and mission until such time as internal and external forces necessitate a revision.

NESI will continue to use its seven-year strategic plan as a basis for the development of yearly action plans with input from the Sectoral teams and the approval of the General Assembly. Mechanisms for on-going monitoring will be incorporated in all network programs through regular assessments and the review of plans and reports by program officers, Sectoral teams and local representatives. As in the past, NESI's Board, Sectoral teams and project officers will continue to document all activities and experiences through meeting minutes, quarterly reports, and project reports.

With the signing of the CPA, most members are now relocating to Southern Sudan, so NESI will need to develop an appropriate mechanism to ensure that they stay informed. No concrete strategy has yet been developed, but it is hoped that most NGOs will establish offices in Juba, where NESI also intends to open an office, assuming that the necessary funds, staff and equipment can be obtained. Although the Coordinator will remain in Nairobi, significant decision-making responsibilities will be delegated to the Juba office, allowing new leaders to emerge. If NESI accomplishes this change, it will be able to organize Sectoral and monthly meetings in Juba. When the use of internet technology becomes widespread in Juba, it will be a clear choice for communication. In addition, NESI may seek funds to purchase High Frequency (HF) radios for all members.

Like most organizations, NESI is concerned about the sustainability of its activities. With that in mind, NESI has recruited Sudanese staff, increased efforts to collect membership fees, and enhanced

the leadership and management skills of member NGOs. Currently, NESI is considering other innovative sustainability ideas to tap into post-CPA economic opportunities. These include the establishment of income-generating activities in Southern Sudan, such as a computer center and language institute or a business center in Juba with conference facilities and information communication technology (ICT) services.

Both internal and external forces may jeopardize NESI's sustainability. The movement of member organizations into Southern Sudan, where most will be disconnected from network activities due to poor communication and transport system, will pose new challenges. Connections among members, fostered through regular meetings and e-mails, could be weakened significantly. However, as the new government of Southern Sudan emerges, NGOs will be needed as watchdogs. Therefore, NESI will remain relevant and will serve as a pivotal focal point for nurturing local NGOs. Also, since the international community needs a vibrant network of NGOs in Southern Sudan, the perception of NESI by its international partners is critical to the success of its fundraising efforts. Finally, the greatest threat to NESI's sustainability would be a recurrence of war in Southern Sudan.

## Conclusions

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Having analyzed NESI's experience to date and its insights for the future, the following conclusions were drawn with regard to the factors that have helped or hindered the organization's ability to meet the challenges that have arisen during periods of conflict and contributed to its sustainability over time.

### A. FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO NESI'S SUSTAINABILITY:

- a. *Internal impetus for formation*: Though an external agency encouraged NESI's creation, the idea was nurtured by the founding local NGOs, making its vision and mission organic and attuned to the needs and aspirations of members. As a result, members have a high sense of belonging to the network.

- b. *Proper visioning and planning* permitted NESI to focus on producing expected results within a given timeframe, to assess progress and to take corrective measures when necessary.
- c. *Locating the Secretariat* in Nairobi, the regional hub of economic and political activities, enabled NESI to establish linkages with like-minded international and regional organizations and access experienced, skilled staff. Also, since most members have liaison offices in Nairobi, it was easy to hold meetings there.
- d. *Invaluable support from member organizations*. Members attend meetings, contribute ideas, serve on the Board and Sectoral Committees and participate in national/regional/international fora and training workshops. Members are motivated to participate actively through capacity-building opportunities, funding prospects and access to useful information.
- e. *Support from like-minded partners, albeit limited*. Donor financial support has enabled NESI to make progress despite conflict-related challenges. Donor recognition of NESI as worthy of funding has enabled it to hire professional personnel to oversee project implementation.
- f. *A well-defined, documented code of ethics and Constitution* have provided guidance for the conduct of network affairs related to areas such as administration, human resources, financial resources, and so forth, which has enhanced the effectiveness of the Secretariat.
- g. *Inspirational leadership* from the Coordinator and support from the Board and General Assembly have resulted in a shared vision and strong bonding among members. The Coordinator's professionalism and personality have earned NESI respect in political and donor circles.
- h. *Transparency and accountability* have been practiced in NESI operations at the General Assembly, Board, Sectoral and Secretariat

levels. These practices have nurtured and promoted democratic decision-making processes within the organization.

- i. *Political goodwill*. Because NESI and the SPLM have a shared vision, NESI is recognized as legitimate in Southern Sudan, which facilitates work with local NGOs, most of which are headed by leaders with political ambitions or connections. In short, local NGOs were willing to be associated with an entity that had SPLM approval.

## B. FACTORS HINDERING NESI'S SUSTAINABILITY:

- a. *Inadequate capacity of Secretariat and members*, including leadership, management and financial aspects. The Coordinator's leadership and management skills are unquestioned, but the Secretariat's work level required additional experienced staff. Efforts were made to recruit competent project officers, and much decision-making responsibility has been delegated to them, but more are needed. Members struggle even more to manage their NGOs, which is understandable since the war negatively affected the education level of a majority of South Sudanese. NESI has organized training workshops for members, but more will be needed to impart all the requisite leadership and management skills.
- b. *Limited funding base*. Inadequate funding for the Secretariat, Sectoral teams and members has resulted in failure to fully implement projects in a timely manner. However, there has been a significant increase in the number of donors over the last two years.
- c. *Underdeveloped personnel, administrative, and financial systems*. With poorly developed policies, NESI struggled to legitimize decisions regarding personnel and finances. Staff had no guidelines on employment practices, remuneration and channels for airing grievances. To remedy this, NESI has now developed human resource, administration and financial policy manuals, which members are to use as a point of reference for developing their own.

- d. *Volatile political environment.* Even during the period of the cease-fire agreement, South Sudan experienced sporadic violence between the SPLM and the GOS, as well as clashes between different ethnic communities. Members had to cope with the resulting humanitarian crises, which disrupted NESI's other activities. As a result, in 2001 NESI developed an Emergency Preparedness Sectoral Team to mitigate disaster and emergency situations by educating communities on emergency preparedness and by sharing information on preparedness and response activities with relevant stakeholders. NGOs are tasked with monitoring the socio-economic and political environment to identify and report potential emergencies, such as floods and tribal conflicts. The Team tracks and analyses all emergencies during its monthly meetings, and identifies appropriate actions.
- e. *Most of the leaders of NESI member organizations have been recruited by the new government.* With the signing of the CPA and formation of the GOSS, Southern Sudanese NGOs have been weakened because many of their leaders have joined the government. While there is a need for a strong, capable GOSS, a vibrant civil society is equally important as a government watchdog with regard to human rights, corruption and democracy.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations are offered for consideration by NGO networks and by USAID and other donors that provide support for networks, especially those operating in Southern Sudan and other areas affected by conflict:

- *Use networks as peacebuilders and promoters:* As NESI has demonstrated, NGO networks with broad constituencies and local outreach are appropriate vehicles for promoting peace in societies affected by conflict. To enhance the effectiveness of their peacebuilding capability, donors should support activities designed to strengthen the capabilities of key network personnel in the areas of conflict mitigation and management.
- *Provide support for secretariat operations:* Since a network requires a central place for coordinating its operations, when supporting network activities, donors should provide core funds for office space, administration and personnel to ensure effective and efficient operations.
- *Enhance skills, knowledge and abilities:* Deliberate efforts should be made by networks and their supporters to improve the skills and capabilities of personnel at the secretariat and within member NGOs, particularly in the areas of strategic planning, leadership, management, resource mobilization, advocacy, monitoring and evaluation. On-going capacity-building programs should be conducted, rather than short, one-off workshops.
- *Develop systems and structures for network governance and management:* Networks should have constitutions to guide decision-making, as well as policies for financial management, human resources and overall operations. In terms of organizational structures, board development should be considered a priority.
- *Initiate a mentoring program for NGO leaders:* Donors and networks should collaborate on developing training, coaching and back-stopping packages for the leaders of member NGOs, so that a pool of capable leaders is created.
- *Use networks as focal funding points:* Because indigenous NGO networks have in-depth knowledge of the local context, donors should use them as mechanisms for funding member organizations, while ensuring the fair and effective distribution of resources, minimizing duplication of efforts and maximizing efficient monitoring of the use of funds. This may also require enhancing the network's capacity to manage large sums of money.



- *Organize and facilitate platforms for networks operating in countries marked by conflicts to share experiences:* Donors working with NGO networks in countries affected by conflict should create opportunities to expose those organizations to different strategies employed in different contexts, for sharing ideas, success stories, challenges, coping mechanisms and best practices.

## References

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## Acronyms

<b>ACORD</b>	Agency for Co-operation and Research in Development
<b>AED</b>	Academy for Educational Development
<b>CAP</b>	Capable Partners Program
<b>CPA</b>	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organizations
<b>GOS</b>	Government of Sudan
<b>GOSS</b>	Government of South Sudan
<b>HARD</b>	Hope Agency for Relief and Development
<b>ICG</b>	International Crisis Group
<b>ICT</b>	Information Communication Technology
<b>IGAD</b>	Inter-Governmental Authority on Development
<b>IGA</b>	Income Generating Activity
<b>MSI</b>	Management Systems International
<b>M&amp;E</b>	Monitoring and Evaluation
<b>MRDA</b>	Mundri Relief and Development Association
<b>NESI</b>	New Sudanese Indigenous Non-Governmental Organizations
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organization
<b>NOVIB</b>	Netherlands Organization for Development
<b>NSWF</b>	New Sudan Women's Federation
<b>NRRDO</b>	Nuba Relief, Rehabilitation and Development
<b>OCHA</b>	Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
<b>PVC</b>	Private Voluntary Cooperation
<b>SMC</b>	Sudan Medical Care
<b>SPLM</b>	Sudan Peoples' Liberation Movement
<b>SPLA</b>	Sudan Peoples' Liberation Army
<b>SRRA</b>	Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Association
<b>USAID</b>	United States Agency for International Development
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>WODRANS</b>	Women Orphans and Disabled Relief Association of New Sudan



## V. The Vietnamese NGO Network for Community Development (VNGO) in Vietnam

### COUNTRY CONTEXT

#### A. OVERVIEW

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Vietnam has a long history of conflict with neighbors and other foreign armies. The Vietnamese people have been protecting their country from foreign invasion and colonization since 208 BCE. China regularly invaded Vietnam and colonized a large part of what is now northern Vietnam for almost a thousand years (Karrow, 1984). More recently, Vietnam conducted a protracted struggle against French colonialism, forming the Vietnamese Communist Party which took over Hanoi during the “August Revolution” of 1945. French colonial rule formally ended in 1954 with the signing of the Geneva Agreement, which also divided the country into North and South. This separation was not intended to be permanent, but the 1956 elections never were held and the Vietnamese Communist Party launched a military campaign to reunify the country (Karrow, 1984). The Southern government received military support from the United States of America. Known as the “American War” in Vietnam, fighting continued until 1976, when the country was re-unified as the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. The Khmer Rouge’s encroachments into Vietnam led to military action in 1979 and the Vietnamese army remained in Cambodia until 1989. China, then an ally of the Khmer Rouge, retaliated with a Northern border invasion in 1979, which was rapidly contained by the Vietnamese army and local militias.

However, since 1979, Vietnam has experienced very little conflict. Both government and people value peace and stability very highly (Norland, 2005). Several violent clashes over land access and use have occurred, such as between protesters at the groundbreaking ceremony of a new golf course near Hanoi (Vietnam News, December 2004). In the Central Highlands region, there also have been ongoing conflict and several violent

protests over land access and religious freedom (Human Rights Watch V12, No1). In addition, drug use, smuggling, prostitution and human trafficking—which can lead to violent conflict—also have been increasing (Norland, 2005). Nevertheless, Vietnam’s economic growth and development since 1990 have been remarkable, despite the continuation of the American trade embargo until 1994, the impact of the Asian financial crisis of 1997-98 and a number of serious flood- and typhoon-related disasters (Dixon, 2003). Poverty has come down—from over 60% in 1990 to 32% in 2002—and almost all other Human Development Indicators have shown significant improvement.<sup>1</sup>

#### B. CIVIL SOCIETY IN VIETNAM

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Since the end of “American War,” Vietnam has been a one-party, Communist State with low tolerance for any non-State activities. All social and community organizations are required to be closely linked to and managed by the State. However, the recent period of political stability and economic growth and development has created a positive environment and many citizens are keen to join the fight against poverty, contribute to assist disabled or orphaned children, or work to protect the environment. Increasingly, the Vietnamese government recognizes the contribution that small, dynamic NGOs can make to Vietnam’s development.

In addition, the 1986 doi moi (renewal) reforms led to far-reaching social and economic changes and opened more space for civil society (Penderon, 2001). Doi moi formalized the end of collectivization, opened Vietnam to the international economic community, loosened State control over the economy and society and led to a large program of legislative reform and the introduction of a new constitution in 1992. Vietnam now refers to its economic approach as “a market economy with socialist orientation,” which means that government services and organizations now are able, and in many cases (schools, hospitals, mass organiza-

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations Development Program, Vietnam, *Poverty Reduction and Rural Development Website*, viewed at <http://www.undp.org.vn/themes/poverty/> on 10 November 2005.

tions) are required, to raise funding from other sources. In addition, the doi moi brought greater opportunities for new forms of social organization such as local NGOs, on the condition that they can raise their own budgets. Most local NGOs were established after 1990, post doi moi and during a time of rapid economic growth.

Currently, Vietnamese NGOs face a rather complex mix of legal and regulatory systems and relationships with government agencies. Broadly, there are five main decrees/laws, which govern different elements of CSOs in Vietnam:

1. The Grassroots Democracy Decree 79 (2003) institutionalizes the participation of local communities/CBOs/organizations of the poor in development activities at the commune level.
2. The Law on Cooperatives recognizes cooperatives as voluntary organizations functioning as independent economic entities.
3. The Law on Science and Technology recognizes professional associations as independent service organizations.
4. Decree 177 recognizes charity and social funds.
5. The Law on Associations currently is under revision by the NGO Department of the Ministry of Home Affairs. It is hoped that the law, which is in its 10th draft, will define the concept of NGOs along with their role, function and management arrangements (Sabharwal, G. and Than Thi Thien Huong, 2005).

Both the Law on Science and Technology and the Law on Associations require that NGOs be independently funded, which means that NGOs cannot receive core funding from the government, only project funding through partnering with a government Ministry or organization on a particular project. Every organization has an official government organization “umbrella,” such as a Ministry or mass organization. In many cases, this is simply a process of registering with an official organization but the “management” is limited and the local NGO is able to operate quite independently. Local NGOs—including the majority of members of the Vietnamese Non-Governmental Organization Network for Community Development (VNGO Network) in this study—must be registered under the Law on Science and Technology, which means they must justify and link their existence and operation

to those subjects. NGOs registered under this law are “managed” by the Ministry of Science, Technology, and the Environment, or the province-level equivalent. Most members of the VNGO Network are registered under the Department of Science, Technology, and the Environment of the Hanoi People’s Committee. Most NGOs registered under this law, particularly the early ones, were allowed because they were established by ex-government employees with good government and Party connections (Norlund, 2005).

According to the Government of Vietnam (GOV), NGOs include “all social organizations established by the people, such as people’s organizations, associations, unions, clubs, federations, societies, interest groups, social support groups, charity organizations, funds, and centers” (Nguyen Ngoc Lam, 2005). The official view of the GOV and the Party is that NGOs are “not-for-profit organizations committed to the common cause of development in the country” (Nguyen Vi Khai, 2005). More detailed descriptions of various Vietnamese organizations are given below.

*Mass Organizations:* The Party established mass organizations in 1933. Prior to 1988, they were the primary form of social organization. Mass organizations have a national mandate, core budgetary support from the government, and branches from the national to commune level. The national branches are closely linked to the Party and have political goals, although local branches have more room for independence. Since 1990, they have been encouraged to be more independent and to find funding from sources other than government. In fact, the Women’s Union (WU) has become the partner of choice for a large number of international development projects (Norlund, 2005). In a practical sense, mass organizations are similar to government Ministries in that the staff enjoy benefits and regulations similar to public servants.<sup>2</sup> These organizations are managed under the Vietnam Fatherland Front (VFLF), which is part of

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<sup>2</sup> Mr. Nguyen Ngoc Lam, 10 September 2004, “Report on the JICA Seminar ‘The current situation of Local NGOs / Amendments and Preparation for the Regulations for NGOs of Vietnam Government’”. Hanoi, Vietnam from [http://www.jica.go.jp/partner/ngo/support/japandesk/detail/pdf/vie\\_03.pdf](http://www.jica.go.jp/partner/ngo/support/japandesk/detail/pdf/vie_03.pdf) p5

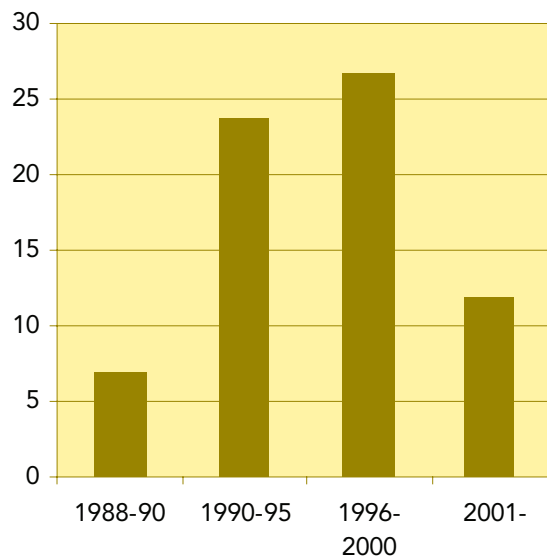
the political system and the Vietnamese Communist Party. In fact, the VFLF President and Vice-President are important leaders of the Central Committee of the Communist Party.<sup>3</sup> "The VFLF is a political coalition organization, a voluntary union of political organizations, socio-political organizations, social organizations and individuals representing all classes, social strata, ethnic groups, religions and overseas Vietnamese."<sup>4</sup> The government's official view is "the VFLF is the base of people's power,"<sup>5</sup> and until 1988 additional CSOs were not deemed necessary. There are six mass organizations including the Vietnam Women's Union (WU), the Ho Chi Minh Youth Union (YU), the Farmers' (Peasants) Association, the War Veterans' Association, the Vietnam General Confederation of Labor (VGCL) and the Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VCCI); no VNGO members are in this category.

**National Professional Associations:** The national-level professional associations aim to promote cooperation and communication among people in the same profession. In 1989 the Government Commission for Organization and Personnel (now Ministry of Home Affairs) introduced special regulations for the National Professional Associations (Norlund et al, 2005). Some of these large associations also have been established by the government, receive a core budget from the government, operate in close cooperation with the Party and government, and are managed by the VFLF. However, staff are not treated as public servants. Over 320 national professional associations are operating in various fields of social, professional and technical interest. The largest are the Vietnam Union for Science and Technology Associations (VUSTA), Vietnam Writers and Artists Associations (VWAA), Vietnam Union for Peace, Solidarity and Friendship Associations (VUPSFO, later VUFO). Several of the VNGO network members are linked to or registered with these professional associations. For example, the Center for Training and

Transferring of Vietnamese Agricultural Technology (VACVINA) is a member of VUSTA, since it can provide the necessary legal "umbrella."

**Local Association:** Local associations are registered with local authorities in provinces and work in a limited area. In mid-1995 the exact number was unknown but estimated from 600-1000, not including grassroots organizations. In 2001, the number was 1400; by 2005, there were 2,150 (Norlund, 2005). For example, VNGO Network member, the Hanoi Association of Small and Medium Enterprises (HASMEA), is registered under the Hanoi Peoples' Committee as an Association for Hanoi-based enterprises.

#### *Year of Formation of Vietnamese NGO*



Source: VNGO Directories, 2002, based on 70 organizations for which information is available (including the 44 members of the VNGO Network)<sup>6</sup>

#### *Science and Technology Development and Research Organizations:*

Very few of these organizations existed prior to 1992, but the decree on non-profit science and technology organizations allowed new forms of organizations. Most were established between 1992 and 2000. By the early 2000s, there were around 300. The same legal framework allowed Local Centers to be established with the approval of the provincial People's Committee if

3 *Philanthropy and the Third Sector, Vietnam Country Profile*, viewed at <http://www.asianphilanthropy.org/countries/vietnam/definition.html>

4 Article 1, *Law on the Vietnam Fatherland Front*, June 12, 1999

5 [http://www.vietnamconsulate-sf.org/political\\_systeme.html](http://www.vietnamconsulate-sf.org/political_systeme.html)

6 Norlund, et al, 2005, p21

the founder works at a university, National Institute, or Local Association, or is a retired government employee (Norlund et al, 2005). Most VNGO Network members are established according to the laws and regulations governing science and technology organizations.

**Informal groups:** Other informal groups exist mostly at the local level, including groups for the aged, cultural clubs, educational groups, teaching groups, groups to help street children or disabled

people, interest groups such as credit and savings clubs, water users groups or faith based groups. They are allowed by local authorities if they are registered with an “umbrella” organization, but are officially “illegal” and so have difficulty receiving funding from local or international donors. They cannot open a bank account, have an office or employ staff. There are no figures on the prevalence of these groups, and no VNGO members fall into this category.

*Civil Society in Vietnam: Relation to the State and Membership (Norlund 2005)*

Organization	State Management Body	Level of Activities	Membership
Vietnam Fatherland Front	Party Central Committee	National to local	Umbrella for 29 organizations, including mass organizations, national professional organizations, religious organizations and some local associations.
Women’s Union	Fatherland Front	National to local	12 million <sup>a</sup>
Farmers’ Association	Fatherland Front	National to local	8 million <sup>b</sup>
Trade Union - VGCL	Fatherland Front	National to local	4.25 million <sup>c</sup>
HCMC Communist Youth Union	Fatherland Front	National to local	5.1 million <sup>d</sup>
Veteran’s Association	Fatherland Front	National to local	1.92 million <sup>e</sup>
Red Cross	Fatherland Front	National to local	4.85 million members 3.5 million Red Cross youths and pioneers 14,800 Red Cross ward and commune organizations 12,700 schools have Red Cross organizations 1,900 offices and enterprises have Red Cross organizations <sup>g</sup>
VUSTA-Union for science and technology	Fatherland Front	Mainly cities, but some organizations working also in rural Areas	Central associations: 56 in various disciplines Cities and provinces: 37 local VUSTA associations with 540 membership organizations and 350,000 members. Total 1.15 million members in the whole country <sup>h</sup>
Business associations	Chamber of Commerce which is under the Fatherland Front	Mainly city based	200 associations 6700 members <sup>i</sup>
VUAL-Union of arts and literature	Fatherland Front	Cities mainly	10 central associations and 60 at provincial level <sup>j</sup>

Organization	State Management Body	Level of Activities	Membership
Old Age Association	Fatherland Front	National to local	6.4 million <sup>k</sup>
VUFO - Union of Friendship Organizations	Fatherland Front	Cities	47 member associations <sup>l</sup>
Vietnam Cooperative Alliance	Fatherland Front	All levels, mainly based in rural areas	300,000 cooperative groups; 17,000 cooperatives. Total 10.5 million members <sup>m</sup>
Informal groupings (agricultural activities, neighborhood, sports, festivals and celebrations)	Not-registered but known to administration	Mostly local operations throughout the country	Millions – no data
Professional organizations; business organizations; and other informal organizations (this category overlaps some of the others)	Ministries, VUSTA and People's Committees, some not registered.	Different levels	280 nationwide and 1800 association in 2004, other data informs 300 nationwide and 2000 local associations <sup>n</sup>
VNGOs or issues based organizations; Funds for support of the poor, handicapped, ill persons	VUSTA, Ministries, provincial People's Committees, mass organizations	City based, but many work in rural areas	322 organizations identified in 2000 survey in Hanoi and HCMC <sup>o</sup> 200 social funds <sup>p</sup>
Faith based organizations	Fatherland Front Some local groups not registered	National to local	Buddhist: ca 9 million Catholics: 5.7 million Hoa Hao: 1.5 million Cao Dai: 1.1 million Protestant 600,000 <sup>q</sup>
Micro-credit, credit cooperatives, credit and saving's groups	Various organizations; Women's and Farmers' Unions		About 100.000 credit cooperatives <sup>r</sup> 11,6 million borrowers from all credit schemes <sup>s</sup>
INGOs	PACCOM (government agency to coordinate foreign aid and International NGOs)		530 INGOs operating in Vietnam, 150 have offices. (excluding International and multi-lateral organizations) <sup>t</sup>

### Notes

a Women' Union

b Farmers' Association

c VCGL

d HCM Youth Union

e People's Army, 17 March 2005

f Viet Nam News 10 July 2005

g Chu Dung 2005

h VUSTA

i Stromseth 2003

j Philanthropy in Vietnam

k B T Cuong 2005 (2)

l Philanthropy in Vietnam 2001

m Bui The Cuong, 2005, 'Social Organizations in Vietnam'

n Party Civil Affairs Committee 2004; Nguyen Ngoc Lam, MOHA 2002

o Wischermann, NQVinh, BTCuong

p Philanthropy 2001

q Data on Population 2005

r Viet Nam News 8 July 2005-09-19

s Danida 2005

t INGO Directory 2003-05, Payne 2004

**Non Governmental Organizations:** The term ‘non-government organization’ (*tổ chức phi chính phủ*) is somewhat controversial, as the ‘*phi*’ connotes opposition to government. The term recently has become more accepted and many Vietnamese organizations are adopting it, not least because it is popular with international organizations and donors. As a result, not everything that is called “NGO” matches the NGO definition as it is understood in most countries. For example, VNGO Network member HASMEA is a membership-based association representing private enterprises in Hanoi. It probably would be termed a business association in most Western countries but HAMSEA uses “NGO” because it was established independently of any government directive and does not receive a core budget from the government.

Nevertheless, most VNGO Network members share many characteristics. Most are small in terms of staff (only a Director and 2-3 staff) and capital and were established by one or two individuals who remain the driving force. Executive Committee members are more well-established and financially secure. The smaller NGOs use volunteers, both young graduates trying to gain experience and retired professionals. The Legal Advice Centre, for example, has a network of 12 volunteer lawyers, both retired and new graduates, on whom they can call to provide free legal advice for clients.<sup>7</sup> The Poor Rural Family and Children Assistance Centre has been operating since its establishment in May 2003 with completely volunteer labor; none of the four staff members receives a salary.<sup>8</sup> Several VNGO members do have Boards, although neither the Decree on Associations nor the Law of Science and Technology Organizations require it. In many instances the Board plays an advisory role, provides credibility for the NGO,<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Mrs Duong Thanh Mai, Director, Legal Advice Centre, pers comm., 13 October, 2005.

<sup>8</sup> Mrs Nguyen Thi Hong Thap, Director, Poor Rural Family, Children, Assistance and Consulting Centre, pers. comm. 17 October, 2005.

<sup>9</sup> A number of the VNGO Network members have Boards with prominent government officials and ex-officials. These well-respected individuals are important to lend credibility with the Vietnamese government.

or assists with fundraising, but has little direct influence on day-to-day operations. Many VNGO members demonstrate a certain level of patronage and a traditional, top-down management approach, which is partly cultural and partly because most were established by highly-skilled professionals and, due to financial constraints, staffed by young graduates or volunteers (Norlund, 2005).

A recent study found that most Vietnamese CSOs—including mass organizations, NGOs, community based organizations and informal groups and clubs—have activities directed towards poverty reduction, humanitarian relief and professional development, but only a few towards advocacy (Norlund, 2005). VNGO members are mostly involved in poverty reduction, community development and professional development. The Civicus Shortened Index Study concludes that civil society, including NGOs, is increasingly important to Vietnam’s “market socialist” economy and society, but is immature and lacks vitality and depth, particularly concerning advocacy. As shown below, the evolution of civil society can be viewed along a continuum where advocacy is at the most evolved end and the sharing of experience is at the other. Vietnamese NGOs are operating on the right of this continuum, partly because the government still is not entirely comfortable with the idea of organizations operating outside of official structures, particularly if these organizations are involved in advocacy or monitoring the government.



**NGO Networks:** There is no legal framework for NGO networks in Vietnam. However, a number of networks exist and are recognized by the government, although they are officially “illegal.” The most well-known is the NGO Resource Centre, established under the Vietnam Union of Friendship Organizations (VUFO). The Centre is a network of 130 international NGOs operating in Vietnam. Although it is 13 years old, with a full-time staff, office, and library, it has no official legal status. Having the “umbrella” of VUFO has allowed the



Centre to operate, but all activities must be approved by VUFO. Networks of local NGOs are newer and somewhat more controversial. Because they are informal, there is no information on exactly how many exist. Through this research at least five were uncovered, in addition to the VNGO Network. Most of these LNGO networks have at least tacit government approval for operation. Several are operating with an “umbrella” such as VUSTA.

The membership of these different networks overlaps significantly, which is probably due to the newness of the networks. A number of NGOs are represented in two or more networks, even holding positions on the Executive Committee of several networks.<sup>11</sup> Networks have had little time to expand their membership, consolidate their activities and build broad leadership from within. At the time of this study, only CDG was charging membership fees. However, several others, includ-

### LNGO Networks in Vietnam

Name of Network	Est. Date	Relationship to State	No. of NGO members
Community Development Group (CDG)	1998 (main activities since 2000)	Registered with VUSTA	15 members
VNGO Network for Community Development	2001	No formal legal status. Acknowledged by MoHA.	44 members
Anti-Poverty Policy Study Group (APPS)	Oct. 2003	Registered with VUSTA	13 members
Gender and Community Development Network (Gencomnet)	Aug. 2005	No formal legal status	4 members
Civil Inclusion for Food Security and Poverty Elimination Network (CIFSPEN)	Mid-2005	No formal legal status	Approx 40 members
HIV/AIDS Vietnam Action Group (HAVAG)	2005	No formal legal status	7 members

Most of these NGO Networks were initiated and have been supported by INGOs. For example, the APPS network is part of a project between VUSTA and Oxfam Great Britain; the coordinator position, capacity building, and networking activities are supported by Oxfam. CDG was supported financially by the Inter-Church Organization for Community Development (ICCO) and is now concerned about ongoing operations and sustainability because this support finished at the end of 2005.<sup>10</sup> The CIFSPEN network was established as part of two INGO projects on food security and poverty alleviation, supported by Action Aid Vietnam and Care International. Because these networks were initiated at least partly by donors and continue because of donor support, it is not clear to what extent they will be able to maintain their relevance and activities once INGO support has been completed.

ing the VNGO Network, are considering this in order to help cover costs of activities. CDG charges their 15 members a fee of 100,000VND (approx US\$6.40) per month. This fee goes to support the full-time coordinator.

## Genesis and Evolution of the VNGO Network

### A. FIRST STEPS

The organization that is the subject of this case study is the VNGO Network for Community Development (VNGO), which is a network of 44 local NGOs based in Hanoi, but with a national mandate. It was founded in 2001 by Dr. Nguyen Thi Hoai Duc of the Centre for Reproductive and Family Health (RaFH) and Dr. Vuong Thi Hanh of

<sup>10</sup> Mr Le Quoc Hung, President of CDG, ‘The Community Development Group (CDG) and some issues affecting the activities of LNGOs’, Presentation at the PPWG meeting, 28 November, 2005, Hanoi, Vietnam.

<sup>11</sup> For example, CEPEW is on the Executive Committee of both the VNGO Network and the CDG and is a member of APPS and Gencomnet

the Centre for Education Promotion and Empowerment of Women (CEPEW). Dr. Hoai Duc and Dr. Hanh had witnessed the emergence of large numbers of local NGOs working at the community level in various sectors since the introduction of doi moi. They also saw that many of these NGOs were very weak and poorly-funded and did not have opportunities to learn new techniques or share information with each other, nor with government agencies and INGOs. They were concerned that the government encouraged the formation of these small NGOs, but did not support them or fully recognize the important role they were playing in Vietnam's development. Dr. Hanh and Dr. Hoai Duc discussed these issues among themselves and with others who also had established NGOs in Hanoi. They decided that a network of NGOs would allow them to share their experiences and methodologies and also give them a stronger voice.

Dr. Hanh and Dr. Hoai Duc together were aware of 36 local NGOs working on poverty reduction. In January 2001, they invited all these NGOs to attend a meeting to discuss the establishment of a network. The meeting was held at the offices of RaFH and 16 NGOs attended. Dr Hoai Duc chaired and explained to participants the idea of creating a network to help build the capacity of local NGOs and give them a greater impact on the government. The participants agreed on the establishment of a network and the name "The VNGO Network for Poverty Reduction." All participants registered as members at the meeting. It also was decided to form a three-member Executive Committee. Dr. Hoai Duc, Dr. Hanh, and Mr. Nguyen Dac Hy, Director of the Environment and Ecology Institute (EEI), were unanimously elected to form the Executive Committee for a term of three years. It was agreed at the meeting that the network would be based on principles of voluntarism. That is, membership would be voluntary, the Executive Committee would be volunteers selected by the membership, and all activities and participation in the network would be voluntary. The meeting also agreed on the VNGO Network's objectives:

- To strengthen the capacity of VNGO;

- To share experiences with each other; and
- To support each other.

Following the meeting, the Executive Committee sent out the minutes to all 36 NGOs who had been invited to attend. All of these local NGOs agreed to become members.

## B. INITIAL DEVELOPMENT

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During 2001, the VNGO Network held five meetings to provide an opportunity for members to get to know each other, to share their experiences of poverty reduction work, and to learn from each other. The Executive Committee realized that the Network would benefit from workshops and capacity-building training, as many of the member NGOs were very small and new, and none had experience operating as a network. The Executive Committee thus developed and sent a proposal for capacity building to the Canadian Centre for Human Rights and Democracy. The proposal was funded and RaFH, on behalf of the network, received US\$6,000 to support meetings and workshops, as well as a salary for a secretary for the year 2002-03; the purchase of a computer, bookshelf, and printer; and the printing of a Directory of VNGO members which could be used for promoting the Network and recruiting new members.

In 2004, the Network held an important meeting on the participation of local NGOs in the government's program on Hunger Elimination and Poverty Reduction (HEPR). Representatives from the Ministry of Planning and Investment, the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Committee on Social Affairs attended. This meeting signaled an improvement in relations between the government and local NGOs. As a direct result, a number of VNGO members became more involved in official government poverty reduction programs. In addition, this meeting indicated acceptance of the VNGO's existence by the two key Ministries that had attended.

The first term of the initial Executive Committee expired at the end of December 2004. At the annual meeting, the Network decided that it was

necessary to expand the Executive Committee, as all NGOs were very busy with their own work and it was difficult for the three members to devote enough time to Network activities. It was agreed to expand the Committee to five members. At the same time, it also was agreed to change the network's name to "The VNGO Network for Community Development." With the expanding membership and resulting increase in the range of activities, it was seen necessary to broaden the Network's focus. Members agreed that "community development" was a broader term that more accurately reflected the range of Network activities. In Vietnam, "poverty reduction" often is viewed as primarily an economic activity, while "community development" includes the social and human development with which many VNGO Network members are involved.

Capacity building continued to be a concern. Networks are a new form of organization in Vietnam and the Executive Committee was aware of the need for training and skill-building workshops in order to help members understand and develop networking skills and improve their efficiency. However, because the VNGO Network has no legal status and no paid staff, it is difficult to carry out such workshops or access financial assistance for capacity building. However, the VNGO Network has received two grants, in addition to the one mentioned above, specifically for capacity building. In 2005, the Environment and Ecology Institute (EEI), a member of the Executive Committee, was awarded over US\$10,000 from Care International, Danida and Sustainability Watch<sup>12</sup> in order to prepare a report on the role of NGOs in pursuit of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals. This included workshops with local NGOs to collect comments to improve the final version of the report. Also in 2005, CEPEW, on behalf of VNGO members, received a grant of US\$20,854 from the Capable Partners Program (CAP), the sponsor of this case study, for capacity building. Three training workshops on orga-

nizational development, project management, and gender and development have been held. In addition, a workshop and field trip were organized for members to share experiences and learn more about project implementation, and a one-day workshop was held with Network members and key government authorities, including representatives from the Ministry of Planning and Investment, the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education and Training, the Committee of Social Affairs of the National Assembly, the National Committee for the Advancement of Women and the Committee for People's Mobilization.

### C. THE PRESENT

The VNGO Network now has 44 members. The complete membership list is attached as Appendix A. Most NGOs discovered its existence through direct contact with a member. Network members participate in a number of government and non-government meetings and workshops related to poverty reduction. At these meetings they would often promote the Network and encourage NGOs to join. Any NGO that wishes to join simply contacts a member of the Executive Committee and registers. Although the Network is considering a fee, currently there is none.

#### *Sector of operation of VNGO Members*

Environment protection and/or research  
10 NGOs

Rural development/uplands and ethnic minorities  
9 NGOs

Entrepreneurship/small business development  
7 NGOs

Gender and Reproductive Health  
5 NGOs

Child welfare/children with disabilities  
4 NGOs

Training or non-formal education  
3 NGOs

<sup>12</sup> Sustainability Watch is a network of southern civil society organization. For more information see [http://www.suswatch.org/index.php?version\\_id=135&a=show&doc\\_id=151](http://www.suswatch.org/index.php?version_id=135&a=show&doc_id=151)

Social science/social development

3 NGOs

HIV Prevention/Education

2 NGOs

Legal counsel

1 NGO

*Year of formation of VNGO Network members—*  
from 31 members for which information is  
available

1988-90	4 NGOs
1991-95	10 NGOs
1996-2000	10 NGOs
2001-2005	7 NGOs

The goal of the VNGO Network for Community Development is to promote economic development and poverty reduction in densely populated, rural, remote, mountainous regions and ethnic minority populations. The objectives of the Network are:

- To strengthen the capacity and efficient operation of member organizations through training courses, workshops, experience-sharing, technical support and alliances among members;
- To foster the participation of civil society organizations in the process of poverty reduction, health care for the poor and sustainable community development;
- To assist with the implementation of grass roots democracy; and
- To broaden VNGO cooperation with relevant government agencies and international NGOs, facilitating partnerships among VNGOs to implement research and rural development programs.

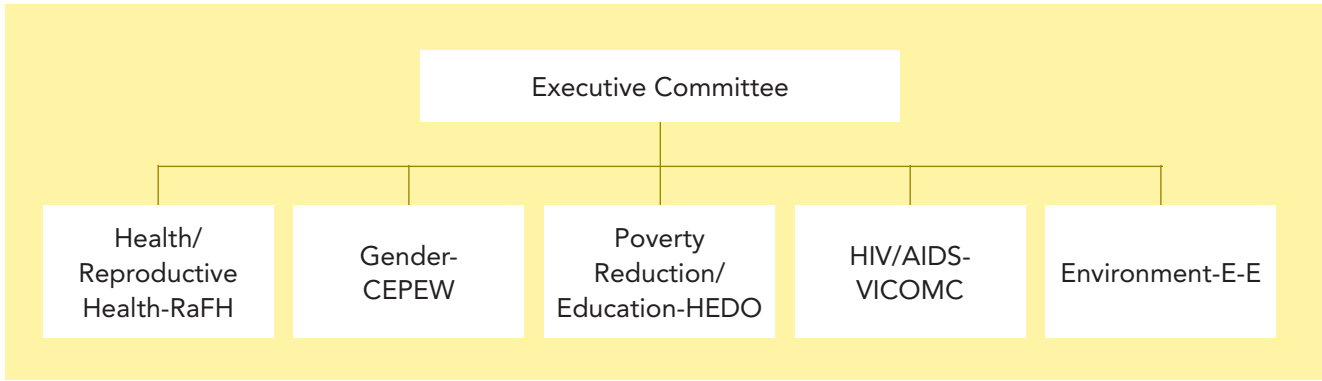
Currently, the Network has an Executive Committee of five members, including a Chair and a Secretary, elected by members for a three-year term. The Executive Committee meets quarterly. The full membership of the Network meets twice a year. Secretariat functions (convening meetings,

recording minutes, etc.) are performed by a staff member from the Chairperson's NGO. The Executive Committee is responsible for annual planning, collecting and distributing relevant information to members, organizing and hosting meetings, representing the Network to government and other stakeholders and advocating on behalf of NGOs and NGO development. The Executive Committee for 2005-2007 (as of November 2005) includes:

1. Dr. Nguyen Thi Hoai Duc—Chairperson  
The Centre for Reproductive and Family Health (RaFH)
2. Dr. Vuong Thi Hanh  
Centre for Education Promotion and Empowerment of Women (CEPEW)
3. Prof. Trinh Ngoc Trinh  
Highland Education Development Organization (HEDO)
4. Ms. Nguyen Thi Van  
UNESCO Centre for Non-Formal Education of Vietnam (UCNEV)
5. Mr. Nguyen Dac Hy  
Environment and Ecology Institute (EEI)

One Executive Committee member was not aware that the Committee met regularly. He believed that it met only on an as-needed basis, not by on a regular schedule, which indicates that the quarterly meetings may not be held as regularly as the by-laws would suggest. As the Committee is completely voluntary and all members are busy with their own NGOs, this is not surprising.

The Network also has five sub-groups based on sector of activity: health, environment, poverty reduction and education, gender and HIV/AIDs. These sub-groups were formed to encourage collaborative learning among NGOs who work on the same issues. Network members are free to join sub-groups if they wish, and some join several. Sub-groups meet as necessary and meetings are called by the leading organization (shown on the chart below), although any sub-group member may request a meeting. The activities and meetings of sub-groups have been limited because the leaders are very busy with their own NGOs. The Executive Committee is encouraging sub-groups to put together joint projects that could be taken to a donor. So far, no joint projects have been funded.



The members interviewed for this case study generally were not aware of the Network’s management arrangements and structure. None (except Committee members) knew about the roles and responsibilities of Executive Committee members or the structure of the sub-groups. Interviewees tended to know only one Executive Committee member, usually the one who had recruited them or with whom they had most communication. One person interviewed thought that the gender sub-group was the Network.

The Network has not had any core funding to hire a coordinator for communication and administration, although an RaFH staff member has been assisting with these functions. Nor is there funding for Network meetings, which are held at RaFH and paid for with RaFH operational funds.

External communication is very important for Vietnamese NGOs, which are new and still gaining acceptance by the Vietnamese government, international NGOs and donors, as well as the community. The VNGO Network also is new and needs to build its role and reputation and ensure good relations with the government and donors. It has invested a lot of time and energy in building good working relationships with VUSTA and with key Ministries such as the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Ministry of Planning and Investment, which are invited to attend all activities to ensure transparency and open communication. In return, Network members regularly are invited to attend relevant conferences and workshops held by Ministries, mass organizations, and socio-political organizations.

Most internal communication is via email and regular meetings. Executive Committee members

are responsible for finding and sending out relevant information, such as information about small grants programs, legislative and policy changes, or member projects. However, members have little or no communication other than in meetings and workshops or between members who know each other. NGOs working in similar sectors (i.e., on gender issues, reproductive health, HIV or environment) have more regular communication both through the sub-groups and more informally, since they tend to meet more often at issue-related workshops and conferences. More than 60% of the members attend such Network activities as workshops and meetings. However, some were not aware of the meetings. They knew that the Network had organized meetings and workshops in 2002-03, but believed there had been no meetings recently. Many of the interviewees said they were disappointed that meetings were not as regular as they were when the Network first started. Members value face-to-face communication highly and all indicated that they would like to have the opportunity to meet more often in person. New members and newly-formed NGOs were particularly eager for opportunities to get to know other NGOs, share experiences and learn from their peers.

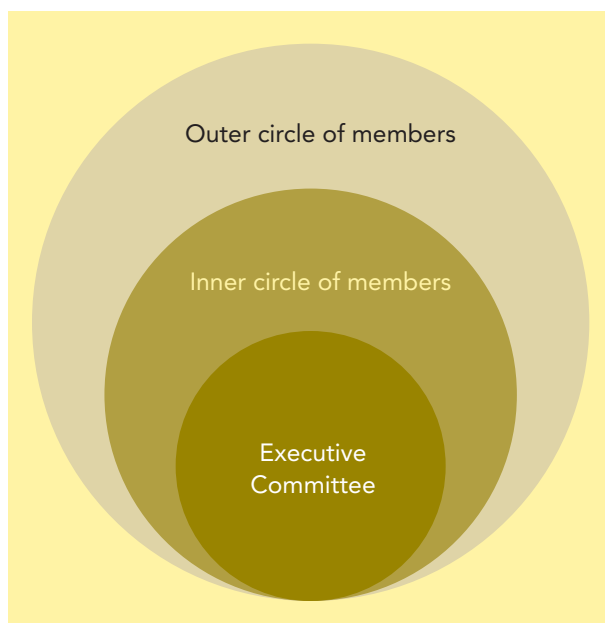
The VNGO Network has had little difficulty with conflict. Members explained that because most activities involved sharing information and experiences, there was no opportunity for conflict to arise. The Executive Committee has discussed how to manage conflict if and when it does arise, and agreed that they would all try to work in harmony. The Executive Committee believes that if members keep the Network’s goal in mind, then conflicts can be managed. The Executive Committee is aware that members compete for funding,

but they stress that all members are committed to community development, thus any one member receiving funding and working for the community, benefits all Network members.

The Network develops annual activity plans, drafted by the Executive Committee and presented to the members at the annual meeting. Comments and suggestions then are incorporated by the Executive Committee and the final plan is circulated to members via email. However, none of the members interviewed, other than the Executive Committee, were aware of any discussions about an action plan or that they had received a copy of it. It is easy for email communication to get lost in the daily workload of a small NGO. Many of those NGOs have only one computer and one email address, so messages may not be read by the appropriate person and thus not recorded or filed. It also seems that members are not as interested in the formalities, such as management, action plans, etc., as in networking with their peers and getting practical information about methodologies, funding, and so forth. Many of the NGOs are struggling to obtain sufficient funding and to conduct effective community development projects. Therefore, being concerned about network management is not a priority. It is highly likely that information about the Network action plan was received but, as a low priority, has not been noted or acted upon. This lack of information and attention indicates that the Network could benefit from placing greater emphasis on making sure that members fully understand their roles and responsibilities, as well as the responsibilities of the Executive Committee.

It may be said that the VNGO Network in 2005 has three levels of members: Executive Committee members, who are very well informed and at the centre of all Network activities; an "inner circle" of members (approx 60%) who are fairly well engaged with the Network, participate regularly in Network activities, and are linked into the Network communications; and a small group of members who really are not engaged with the Network at all. These NGOs either are not receiving or are not registering Network communications and rarely participate in Network activities.

Members are disengaged for many reasons. Some do not have the human or financial resources or the time, or are unable to manage e-mail messages. Others do not see the need for active participation in the Network. It is to their benefit to be on a list, and in a printed NGO Directory, but they do not see sufficient benefit in actively contributing. The Executive Committee and other members of the Network have some responsibility to try to ensure that all members receive communications and are engaged. However, despite their best efforts, there will likely always be some who are not engaged, especially in a network with open membership and no membership fees.



Since the VNGO Network has been operating only since 2001, it has not sponsored a large number of activities, nor does it have a systematic M&E process. Specific activities funded by grants have been monitored, and reports have been sent to the donor organization, with copies to the Executive Committee. The Network wishes to be able to undertake more evaluations, in particular to assess its impact on community development and the government. Several proposals for funding to support M&E have been submitted, but none yet has been successful.

## D. VISION FOR THE FUTURE

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All members interviewed believed that the Network plays an important role and should continue, but had many different ideas as to how it should develop. The Chair, Dr. Hoai Duc, believes that the organization should become stronger and obtain legal status to allow it to operate as a kind of umbrella organization, similar to VUSTA. It could then receive donor funds on behalf of individual organizations or groups of NGOs for project implementation and to help build the capacity of member NGOs through training, experience-sharing workshops, etc. Dr. Duc believes that as the member NGOs grow stronger and more financially secure, they would no longer need this umbrella and could act alone. Others believe that the Network can be successful only if it has a small number of strong and independent NGOs able to volunteer their time and resources to make the Network function. The smaller, newer NGOs have difficulty contributing to the Network, as their primary concern is how to raise funds to implement projects and how the Network can help.

Most of the non-Executive Committee members wanted the Network to become stronger and would like to see it implement joint projects. One member suggested that it should survey poor communities to identify their development needs, formulate proposals for donor funding and coordinate implementation by members with relevant expertise. Most members believed that capacity building was important, particularly in terms of how to cooperate and operate effectively as a Network. Some members were concerned about how the Network would maintain its relevance and usefulness. Currently there are very few NGO Networks, but there likely will be more. Members were concerned that NGOs will join a network only if it has something to offer and can prove its benefit to the individual NGO. Several members felt that simply sharing experiences would not be sufficient and that the Network would have to offer more services such as joint projects and assistance with obtaining donor funding.

The Executive Committee intends to formulate a strategy for the Network's future development

with two main priorities: capacity building and the development of joint projects for groups of members that could be funded by donors. Committee members are very aware that the Network will not develop unless the individual members can become strong and financially stable and that, therefore, conducting joint projects is very important.

In order to become more financially stable, the Network aims to seek funding to support its administrative and networking activities, either through charging membership fees of 50,000VND per month (approx US\$3) or finding core funding from different donors. Even if membership fees were charged and were sufficient to support basic expenses, the Network still would require donor funds for specific activities such as capacity building training or impact evaluation.

The Network also aims to gain a more formal legal status. Currently, no difficulties are encountered in organizing meetings or activities, largely because of the good working relationship that has been established with the appropriate Ministries, particularly the Ministry of Home Affairs. However, if the Network wishes to expand its activities, charge membership fees, or obtain funding, it will need official legal status. Some members believe that the Network should expand activities first and demonstrate capacity in order to gain government recognition. Other members feel that it is important to obtain legal status first.

Neither affiliated NGOs nor the Executive Committee agree about the ideal size of the membership. Some believe that the Network is already too large and diverse, which they see as a weakness that makes cooperation and communication difficult. Some also feel that having small, new NGOs is a liability, as they are not stable or financially secure enough to fully participate and contribute. On the other hand, several members believe that a large, diverse membership increases the Network's impact, allowing it to draw upon a wide range of expertise to implement community development projects and speak with greater authority. With 44 members, the VNGO Network is already the largest in Vietnam. Though there has been no

discussion about trying to recruit new members with needed skills and experience, as activities expand and the Network undertakes more joint initiatives, it may become necessary to recruit new organizations with specific skills.

A major challenge for the Network in the future will be the “changing of the guard.” The founders cannot continue indefinitely. The challenge will be to nurture new leaders with the vision and passion demonstrated by Dr Hanh and Dr Hoai Duc to guide the Network to the next stage of development. Since 2004, some new members have been brought into the Executive Committee as a way to build their skills and develop leadership. It was suggested that it might also be possible to encourage new NGOs to take on the responsibility of chairing sub-groups. This could help hone their skills and “train” them to take on important leadership roles within the Executive Committee.

## Conclusions

The VNGO Network for Community Development was formed to improve the capacity of member organizations and promote NGOs and their networks to a wary government. Based on experience to date, conclusions may be drawn with regard to the Network’s achievements, as well as the challenges that lie ahead.

### A. NETWORK ACHIEVEMENTS TO DATE

- a. The fact that the Network was established without external assistance and that it has grown to 44 members, while gaining credibility with the government, is a significant achievement, particularly in the relatively hostile environment of Vietnam.
- b. The Network has influenced the government’s view of NGOs and also has improved the credibility of NGOs with international donors. By working closely with the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Ministry of Planning and Investment, the Network has been able to promote the value of local NGO efforts in community development and poverty reduction. Clearly, the Network and its members

are a significant voice that is contributing to greater confidence in and support for local NGOs by the GOV.

- c. Many Network members already implement projects in partnership with government or mass organizations and these partnerships are likely to increase as the credibility of the Network and its members grows. Members now have greater confidence and ability to liaise with government and donors and to promote their approaches to community development. They are proud of their independence from government and of their ability to work closely with the community, while being more responsive than government is able to be, and to introduce new technologies and methodologies for community development.
- d. The fact that the VNGO Network is attempting a new and difficult task by promoting cooperation, open information sharing and communication in a culture in which people find close collaboration and cooperation difficult may also be viewed as an achievement. Networking and working in a group is a new skill for many NGO Directors.<sup>13</sup> As various interviewees asserted, “Vietnamese people don’t have good networking skills” or “Vietnamese people are bad at cooperating.”<sup>14</sup> Traditionally, families, government and businesses in Vietnam are very hierarchical. Open communication and collaboration between “equal” organizations is not a normal way of working.
- e. The Network has achieved acceptance and is viewed as valuable by its members, even those who were not well aware of its structure and activities. Most members believe that the Network is benefiting them by providing increased access to information—technical in-

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<sup>13</sup> This conclusion that networking is difficult for Vietnamese was also discussed at the Peoples’ Participation Working Group, 28 November, 2005. See also Norlund, et al, 2005, p46

<sup>14</sup> Mrs Nguyen Van Anh, pers comm., 7 October, 2005 and various members, PPWG meeting, 28 November, 2005.



formation to improve their community development activities, and other relevant information. A number of members also mentioned that they value the increased peer support they gained through membership, and that they are eager to build trust and friendship within the Network.

## B. FUTURE CHALLENGES

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- a. The sustainability and future success of the Network will depend as much on close cooperation with the government as on financial stability or legal status. If the Network can continue to play an important role in community development and be seen as enhancing those efforts and not threatening the legitimacy of the GOV, then it is likely to be supported by the government, and its legal status will be less important.
  - b. The Network has not yet achieved truly open and effective communication, and will need to continue working toward that end. This is not surprising, given existing cultural realities and the lack of time and resources. Members are concerned that the Network does not communicate enough with them. They would like more information about community development, donors, and legislative changes that affect them. Members of the Executive Committee and others are well aware of this and are trying to foster open communication among the members. If the VNGO Network is able to do so effectively, it will lead the way for other CSOs.
  - c. The Network aims to operate as an open and inclusive organization, but has not yet reached that goal. The current leadership style is hierarchical, which limits its effectiveness. The required skills of inclusive, democratic leadership are very difficult and will need to be developed actively over time. Traditional concepts of leadership focus on one charismatic or powerful individual. Shared leadership and inclusive decision-making are not simple concepts, as they conflict with values rooted in the Vietnamese culture, which is
- d. To ensure longer-term sustainability, the Network will need to improve its financial situation in order to conduct regular meetings, improve communications and sponsor network activities. It is very difficult for a network to operate successfully without a coordinator or secretariat to handle communications and administrative tasks. This position will need to be funded, if only on a part-time basis, as it is unrealistic to expect that a volunteer Executive Committee made up of NGO Directors will continue to collect and distribute information, or to organize the meetings, events, study tours and other activities that characterize an effective network. It is recognized, however, that merely funding such a position does not necessarily result in increased effectiveness. For example, the APPS Network has funds from Oxfam for one member to serve as coordinator, but struggles to find people willing to serve the six-month term. One interviewee suggested that even if the funding were doubled, members still would not have the necessary time or commitment.<sup>15</sup> The CDG has had core funding from ICCO since it began in 1998, but has not built the requisite commitment and trust; it expressed concern about maintaining activities after funding ends at the end of 2005.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ms Ho Thuy Linh, Project Assistant, VUSTA, pers comm., 16 December, 2005, Hanoi Vietnam.

<sup>16</sup> Mr Le Quoc Hung, 22 December 2005, pers comm., Hanoi Vietnam. Ms Ho Thuy Linh, Project Assistant, VUSTA, pers comm., 16 December 2005, Hanoi, Vietnam.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations are addressed to USAID and other donors as they design activities to expand and deepen democracy and social service delivery in Vietnam by strengthening civil society and key actors in both the public and private sector.

1. *Provide core funding for networks*: To create a more vibrant civil society, while enhancing poverty reduction and community development efforts, funding for core operations should be provided to the VNGO Network and other reliable networks that can demonstrate member commitment and trust. Such financial assistance should include support for administrative and coordination functions, such as meetings, capacity-building training and technical assistance, study tours, communications and other related tasks.
2. *Support network capacity building*: Capacity building training and technical assistance for target networks should be provided and should focus primarily on new forms of leadership, collaborative decision-making, information-sharing techniques, conflict management and other concepts that are new to Vietnam. A second priority is to build network technical skills in areas such as participatory strategic planning, proposal writing, project management, and M&E.
3. *Find ways to support the network, rather than an individual NGO*: Donors should ensure that financial support for the activities of an NGO network is actually used for the network itself, rather than for one of its affiliates. This means that the aims and objectives of the support need to be clear to all members and that measures are adopted to ensure transparency and accountability. In Vietnam, providing funding to a network can be a capacity building activity in and of itself, as it creates a sense of collective responsibility vis-à-vis the members and the donor. It is not possible to award funds directly to a network because

the legal framework, which is required to set up a bank account, is lacking. Accounts may be established only for an individual NGO. Therefore, donors should consider ways to achieve the developmental benefits of joint responsibility for a grant, even though officially the funding is provided to a single member organization. For example, donors could require networks to demonstrate that member organizations participated in designing the activity and preparing the proposal, that they will be involved in the implementation phase and that a participatory monitoring mechanism is incorporated in the activity.

4. *Provide longer-term, rather than project-based funding*: Support for core network functions, such as administration and coordination, and for capacity-building activities should be provided for a period of four to five years. This will allow the network to establish a solid foundation, build needed systems and procedures, develop the necessary leadership skills and plan for future sustainability. A stable organizational infrastructure also helps to ensure the success of project-based funding initiatives.
5. *Network the networks*: Donors planning to support the strengthening of civil society through NGO networks should encourage exchanges among existing organizations, both nationally and regionally. In Vietnam there are at least five NGO networks based in Hanoi. However, there is very little collaboration and communication among them,<sup>17</sup> despite significant overlapping membership. While there is much to be learned from the experiences of different organizations, both in the same country and from different countries, few Vietnamese networks are in contact with networks in other countries. Donors should consider support for national and regional cross-networking activities, such as meetings and workshops involving multiple networks and communication between the leaders of differ-

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17 Ho Thuy Linh, pers comm., 16 December 2005.

ent networks. For example, Oxfam recently supported a study tour to Thailand for the APPS Network to learn from the experiences of a very large NGO network in that country. This was valued highly by participants, who shared what they had learned beyond their own network by making a presentation at a meeting of the Peoples' Participation Working Group.<sup>18</sup>

Norlund, I (ed), Dang Ngoc Dinh, Bach Tan Sinh, Chu Dung, Dang Ngoc Quang, Do Bich Diem, Nguyen Manh Cuong, Dang The Cuong, Vu Chi Ma, November 2005 (Draft), 'The Emerging Civil Society. An Initial Assessment of Civil Society in Vietnam, CIVICUS Civil Society Index Shortened Assessment Tool, CSI-SAT Vietnam', Vietnam Institute of Development Studies (VIDS), UNDP Vietnam, SNV Vietnam, CIVICUS Civil Society Index.

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*18 Mr Luyen Duc Tru, Hai Duong Provincial Union of Friendship Organizations, 'Report on the Results of a Study Tour to Thailand', Peoples Participation Working Group meeting, Hanoi, 28 November, 2005.*

## Annex 1: VNGO Network Members

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1. RaFH - Center for Reproductive and Family Health.
2. CEPEW - Center for Education Promotion and Empowerment for Women.
3. HEDO-Highland Education Development Organization.
4. Center for Ecology and Environment.
5. ECO - Institute of Ecological Economy.
6. CERACOMD - Center of Research and Cooperation for Mountainous Area Development.
7. RDAC - Rural Development Assistance Center.
8. The Morning Star Center (Center for the Early Detection, Counseling, Care of disabled Children Morning Star.
9. CRD - Center for Rural development in Central Vietnam.
10. CPSE - Research and Development Center on Population, Social and Environment Affairs.
11. CRP - Center for Rural Progress.
12. Center to Support Talent Development.
13. Craftlink Business. Craftlink development.
14. CRES - Center for Natural Resources and Environment Studies.
15. GENDCEN- Gender Environment and Sustainable Development Center.
16. UCNEV - UNESCO Center for Non-formal Education of Vietnam.
17. SDRC - Center for Social Work and Community Development Research & Consultancy.
18. HCWF - Ho Chi Minh City Child Welfare Foundation.
19. LMF - Center for Love, Marriage and Family.
20. MDRC - Market and development Research Center.
21. SUCECON - Supporting Center for HIV/AIDS/STDs.
22. RESCARD - Research and Support Center for Agriculture and Rural Development.
23. CESS - Center for Economic and Social Studies.
24. NEDCEN - The Non State Economic Development Center.
25. HN Small and Medium Enterprise Council (HASMEA).
26. Material Medical Development Research and Consultation Center.
27. VICOMC - Vietnamese Community Mobilization Center for HIV/AIDS.
28. Research Center for Child Psychology and Psycho Pathology (N-T Foundation).
29. ENV - Education for Nature - Vietnam.
30. CSAGA - Center for Studies and Applied Sciences in Gender, Family, Women, and Adolescents.
31. VACVINA - Center for Training and Transferring of V.A.C Technology.
32. SCDC - Supporting Center for Disabled Children.
33. RCAICE - Research Center for Architectural Indoor Climatology and Environment.
34. CESDER - Center for Social & Development Research.
35. CSDS - Center for Social Development Studies.
36. CECM - Center for Community Empowerment.
37. RTCCD - Hanoi Research and Training Center for Community Development.
38. PED - Population, Environment and Development Center.
39. CETD - Center for Environment, Tourist and Development.
40. VNPPA - Vietnam National Parks and Protected Areas Association.
41. YESC - Young Entrepreneur Support Center.
42. CERPA - Counseling Center for Environment, Natural Resources and agricultural poverty reduction.
43. CERDA - Center of Research and Development in Upland Area.
44. Legal Aid Center.

## Annex 2: Individuals Interviewed for this Case Study

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### MEMBERS OF THE VNGO NETWORK

1. Mr Nguyen Thinh  
Director  
Rural Development Assistance Centre (RDAC)  
28 Phan Phu Tien Street  
Dong Da District, Hanoi  
(04) 823 5007  
rdac@hn.vnn.vn
2. Mr Nguyen Hoang Luu,  
Vice Standing Chairman/General Secretary  
Hanoi Small and Medium Enterprises Association (HASMEA)  
119 Le Duan St  
Dong Da District, Hanoi  
(04) 942 5664  
hasmea@hn.vnn.vn
3. Dr Nguyen Thi Hoai Duc  
Director/ Chair of the VNGO Network  
The Centre for Reproductive and Family Health (RaFH)  
No 63, Lane 35 Cat Linh St  
Dong Da District, Hanoi  
(04) 733 3613  
0912 357 361  
rafh@hn.vnn.vn
4. Ms Nguyen Van Anh  
Director  
Centre for Studies and Applied Sciences in Gender, Family, Women and Adolescents (CSAGA)  
Room 801, B3 Thang Long International Village  
Cau Giay District, Hanoi  
(04) 756 9547  
0913 213 807  
csaga@fpt.vn
5. Prof. Trinh Ngoc Trinh  
Director/Member of Executive Committee of VNGO Network  
Highland Education Development Organization (HEDO)  
Lane 651- Minh Khai Street  
Hanoi  
(04) 987 3497  
hedo@fpt.vn

6. Ms Duong Thanh Mai,  
Director  
Legal Aid Centre  
4 Nguyen Thuong Hien Street  
Hai Ba Trung District, Hanoi  
(04) 942 7071  
lacvietnam@gmail.com
7. Ms Nguyen Thi Hong Thap,  
Director  
Poor Rural Family, Children, Assistance and Consulting Centre  
103 Quan Thanh, Hanoi  
(04) 843 4105  
0953 307 159
8. Mr Duong Duc Chien  
Director  
Supporting Centre for HIV/AIDS/STDs Control (SUCECON)  
No 51, Lane 61/26/1 Tran Duy Hung Road  
Cau Giay District, Hanoi  
(04) 5566 917  
0912397 715  
sucecon@fpt.vn
9. Dr Vuong Thi Hanh  
Director/Member of Executive Committee of VNGO Network  
Centre for Education Promotion and Empowerment of Women (CEPEW)  
Room 113, Building D1, Trung Tu  
Dong Da District, Hanoi  
(04) 572 6789  
cepew@fmail.vnn.vn

## OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

10. Katrine Pedersen  
Programme Officer  
United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)  
Governance Cluster  
P(84-4) 942-1495, ext. #168  
Fax: (84-4) 942-2267/822-3579  
katrine.pedersen@undp.org
11. Irene Norlund  
Senior Researcher  
12B, The Giao street  
Hanoi  
phone (84 4) 974 4739  
Mobile 0912 250 600  
Irene-anders@hn.vnn.vn

12. David Payne  
Co- Director  
VUFO-NGO Resource Centre  
La Thanh hotel, 218 Doi Can, Hanoi  
Tel. +84 (0)4 832 8570  
Fax. +84 (0)4 832 8611  
info@ngocentre.org.vn
13. Nguyen Thi Le Hoa  
Program Coordinator  
Oxfam Great Britain  
Chair of Peoples' Participation Working Group  
Floor 7-9, 16 Mai Hac De  
Ha Noi, Vietnam  
Tel: +844-9454362/115  
Fax: +844-9454365  
Cellphone: 0904191157  
Email: nlhoa@oxfam.org.uk
14. Ms Ho Thuy Linh  
Project Assistant  
Anti-Poverty Policies Studies Group (APPS)  
Office for Social Evaluation and Consultancy  
VUSTA  
53 Nguyen Du  
Hanoi  
Tel +84 4 943 7884  
Fax: +84 4 943 7885  
hothuylinh@vnn.vn
15. Mr Le Quoc Hung  
President, Cooperation Development Group (CDG)  
Executive Director, Centre for Support of Social Development Programs  
No 2, Lane 45, Hao Nam St  
Hanoi  
Tel/fax: +84 4 512 1690  
htptvn@hn.vnn.vn
16. Ms Tran Thi Hai  
Program Officer  
Care International in Vietnam  
25 Hang Bun  
Hanoi  
Tel: +84 4 7161 930  
tthai@care.org.au

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## Acronyms

<b>AED</b>	Academy for Educational Development
<b>CAP</b>	Capable Partners Program
<b>CPRGS</b>	The Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy (Vietnam's PRSP)
<b>CPV</b>	Communist Party of Vietnam
<b>CRES</b>	Centre for Research on Environment and Sustainability
<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organizations
<b>ENV</b>	Education for Nature
<b>HASMEA</b>	Hanoi Association of Small and Medium Enterprises
<b>HEPR</b>	Hunger Eradication and Poverty Reduction
<b>INGO</b>	International Non-governmental Organization
<b>ICCO</b>	Inter-Church Organization for Development Cooperation (A Dutch INGO)
<b>MOHA</b>	Ministry of Home Affairs
<b>MPI</b>	Ministry of Planning and Investment
<b>MSI</b>	Management Systems International
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental Organization
<b>NISTPASS</b>	National Institute for Science and Technology Policy and Strategy Studies
<b>PACCOM</b>	People's Aid Coordinating Committee
<b>PAR</b>	Public Administration Reform
<b>PRSP</b>	Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers
<b>SRV</b>	Socialist Republic of Vietnam
<b>USAID</b>	United States Agency for International Development
<b>VACVINA</b>	Center for Training and Transferring VAC Technology
<b>VCCI</b>	Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry
<b>VGCL</b>	Vietnam General Confederation of Labor
<b>VND</b>	Vietnam dong (15,800 dong to 1 USD, 2005)
<b>VNGO</b>	Vietnamese Non-governmental Organizations
<b>VUFO</b>	Vietnam Union of Friendship Organizations
<b>VUPSFO</b>	Vietnam Union for Peace, Solidarity and Friendship Associations, later called VUFO
<b>VUSTA</b>	Vietnam Union of Science and Technology Associations
<b>VWAA</b>	Vietnam Writers and Artists Associations







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**E-MAIL** [NGOConnect@aed.org](mailto:NGOConnect@aed.org)  
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