Project Title: STRENGTHENING THE CAPACITY OF THE ECONOMIC COMMITTEE OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF VIETNAM
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FINAL TECHNICAL REPORT

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I- Project summary

Project title: Strengthening the Capacity of the Economic Committee of the National Assembly, Vietnam

The project ‘Strengthening the Capacity of the Economic Committee of the National Assembly, Vietnam”, which started from February 2010 was designed to respond to request from the Economic Committee of the National Assembly to enhance research and research uptake skills for both members of the ECNA and their supporting staff.

Project duration: 18 months
Project funding: 100,000 CAD
Project beneficiary: Economic Committee of the National Assembly of Vietnam
Project implementation agency: Center for Analysis and Forecasting, Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences

Project rationale

The National Assembly (NA) of Vietnam is the highest legislative body of the country; it has the ultimate role in making laws and other legal documents as well as making decision over critical issues of the country. In addition, the NA also has the power to approve policies, plans and to oversee their implementation by the government thereof. In order to effectively handle their tasks, members of the National Assembly (MPs) need more than just pure statistics or aggregate data on the country’s socio-economic situation. What they need is credible research-based evidence generated from sound analytical work; without such information, it would be very difficult for the NA to make good decisions.

The Economic Committee of the National Assembly (ECNA) of the XII legislature (2007-2011) had 36 members, of whom about one third were full time MPs. Within the NA’s structure, ECNA can rely on support from two subordinate organs: the Economic Department and the Center of Information, Library and Research Service under the Office of the NA. However, the support from the latter, whose function is to support all MPs not only the ECNA, has been minimal due to limited financial and human resources.

The Economic Department, on the other hand, is designed to support the ECNA in both administrative and professional matters. In other words, the Economic Department is the main body responsible for collecting, analyzing and synthesizing socio-economic information for submission to the ECNA. As a matter of fact, the Economic Department was established in 2007 with just 12 staff members. Later on, the Department has recruited a number of young staff members who graduated from recognized overseas universities but had little experience and skills in doing analytical work on policy issues. Therefore, the ECNA’s demand for enhancing research skills for young staff of Economic Department is high. In the long run, improving research capacity for staff from the Economic Department is crucial because it will improve not
only the quality of information and policy analysis prepared by the Economic Department but also its ability to better evaluate external policy submissions.

The Knowledge to Policy component of VERN II (Vietnam Economic Network) originally included training for MPs on how to use research results. However, due to conflict of schedules between MPs and the international expert, this activity was not carried out. Many people share the view that lacking skills to understand research and research findings among MPs limits the potential use of research evidence.

In this context, the project for Strengthening the Capacity of the Economic Committee of the National Assembly of Vietnam was approved by IDRC in order to improve both research capacity for the staff of the Economic Department of the Office of the National Assembly and skills to use research information and evidence for members of the National Assembly.

II- Objectives

The overall objective of the project was to strengthen the provision and utilization of high quality information and credible research-based evidence for the Economic Committee of the National Assembly.

Specific objectives:

- To strengthen in-house research capacity by upgrading research skills for staff members of the Economic Department of the Office of the National Assembly
- To strengthen the linkages between the Economic Committee of the National Assembly and the research community inside and outside Viet Nam
- To help improving the uptake of research-based evidence for members of the Economic Committee in particular and selected members of the National Assembly in general.

III - Project activities

To achieve the above objectives, following activities were carried out:

3.1- Research activities

Five topics were selected for doing research based on the working agenda of the National Assembly for 2010, including:

1. Assessment of the Implementation of Vietnam’s WTO Commitments on Distribution and Services
2. Study into Model/Mechanism/Policy for the Development of Economic Zone, Border-Gate Economic Zone and Open Economic Zone
4. Evaluation of the efficacy and impact of Viet Nam’s Economic Stimulus Package
5. Evaluation of Prospect for Global Economic Recovery and Policy Implications for Viet Nam

The learning-by-doing approach was employed to build research capacity for young staff members of the Economic Department of the Office of the National Assembly (EDONA). This is presumably the best approach for the busy staff of the EDONA because it allowed their young members to have first hand research experience in such an on-the-job training on topics of direct relevance to their policy work. Furthermore, experienced researchers from outside were mobilized to support these young staff members of the EDONA with the guidance and comments on draft papers they prepared.

By the end of January 2011, the first three out of the five planned studies (Assessment of the Implementation of Vietnam’s WTO Commitments on Distribution Service; Study into Model/Mechanism/Policy for the Development of Economic Zone, Border-Gate Economic Zone and Open Economic Zone; and Research on the Model and Reform of the Cooperative Sector in Vietnam) had been completed and presented at the workshop on February 15, 2011 in Hanoi. The last two papers (Evaluation of the efficacy and impact of Viet Nam’s Economic Stimulus Package; and Evaluation of Prospect for Global Economic Recovery and Policy Implications for Viet Nam) were completed in the middle of July 2011 and presented at the workshop on July 27, 2011. Upon completion of the project, a final workshop was held with the attendance of representatives of IDRC and CIDA. This workshop attracted attention from a wide community of policy makers and researchers.

3.2- Study visits
To foster the uptake of research evidence, the project aims at improving both the quality of evidence through strengthening research capacity for the EDONA and skills of using research evidence for members of the ECNA. Given extensive experience of parliaments in other countries in terms of using research to inform decision making and the time constraint facing members of the ECNA, two study visits were arranged to improve skills of using research from demand side.

- **Study visit to Singapore:** The study visit to Singapore was held from 21 to 27 July, 2010. The delegation was headed by one Vice Chairman of the ECNA. During the visit to Singapore, the delegation worked with Industrial, Commercial and Financial Committee of the Singaporean Parliament, Singaporean National Statistics Office, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy under Singaporean National University and 3
research institutes (Asia Competitiveness Institute, Policy Research Institute, South East Asia Research Institute).

The original plan of Asia’s study tour included Singapore and Malaysia. But the conflict in time schedule for meetings in Malaysia and Singapore, which required the delegation traveling back and forth between the two countries and therefore was not feasible given the budget constraint, resulted in the cancellation of proposed meetings in Malaysia.

➢ Study visit to Canada: The study visit to Canada was held from 30 Nov to 7 Dec 2010. The delegation to Canada was headed by HE. Hon. Mr. Ha Van Hien, member of the Standing Committee of the National Assembly, Chairman of the Economic Committee. Other members of the Delegation included members of the Economic Committee and officials of the Economic Department of the Office of the National Assembly of Vietnam. During this study visit, the delegation visited Financial Committee of the House of Commons of Canada’s Parliament; Legislative Assembly of Ontario; Library of Parliament; Conference Board of Canada; International Development Research Center (IDRC), and C.D. Howe Institute.

There was technical difficulty in coordination for the study visit to Canada. Because this was a high level visit, the ECNA had to rely on the Embassy of Vietnam to Canada for arrangement of all meetings. On the other hand, being dependent on the working agenda of the National Assembly’s session in November, the final decision for the study visit to take place in December 2010 was made just shortly before the visit actually took place, causing pressure for the Embassy to set up all meetings at such a short notice. As a consequence, although the key institutions planned for this study visit were included in the program, some meetings with research institutes did not actually occur.

3.3- Workshops

Two workshops were organized in February and July 2011 to present findings of the five research papers. Participants of these two workshops included members of ECNA, Ministry of Planning and Investment, National Financial Supervisory Commission, Institute of Economic Development under the National Economic University, University of Commerce, VASS. Feedbacks received at the workshops were very useful for the research teams. They were used to strengthen policy implications to meet expectation from ECNA, improve the quality of the papers and effectively disseminate them among relevant members of the National Assembly.

A final workshop took place on August 24, 2011 and was chaired by Mr. Nguyen Van Phuc, Vice Chairman of the ECNA. Dr. Rosalia Sciortino, Regional Director, and Dr. Evan Due, Senior Program Specialist, of IDRC’s South East and East Asia Office also joined the workshop. Of 40 workshop participants, about a half came from ministries and leading research institutions. In general, all participants of the workshops agreed that the quality of the papers was higher than
expectation and this is a right direction for improving the quality of input information for the ECNA.

IV- Project output
The project was implemented from February 2010 to August 2011. During this period, the project has achieved the following key outputs/outcomes:

4.1- Improving research skills for staff of the Economic Department

In general, the project has achieved its targets in the capacity building component for staff of the Economic Department of the Office of the National Assembly. The proportion of researchers under 30 years of age is 33 per cent compared with its target of 30 per cent. The project was quite gender balanced, with about 42 per cent of female researchers in the total of 22 researchers.

Five research papers were completed on time by five teams consisted of 21 staffs from the Economic Department and 1 researcher from CAF under mentoring of three senior researchers Dr. Nguyen Thang (Centre for Analysis and Forecasting - CAF); Dr. To Trung Thanh (Hanoi National Economics University); and Dr. Nguyen Ngoc Anh (Centre for Policy and Development - DEPOCEN). Experiences acquired through doing research resulted in advancing skills in doing research and writing policy brief for staff from the Economic Department. Particularly, all team members are now able to better structure a research; better able to present evidence in the research paper in the form of graphs, tables, boxes; better able to prepare PPTs presentation using visualized instruments and bullet points;

Table 1. Monitorable indicators in capacity building component.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Targeted</th>
<th>Implemented</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of researchers being under 30 years of age</td>
<td>30 %</td>
<td>33 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of female researchers</td>
<td>30 %</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of research papers</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of research paper published in the leading domestic journal</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 paper has been submitted</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One paper (Model and Reform of the Cooperative Sector in Vietnam) was submitted to the Journal of Economic Research - one of the leading domestic journals on economic issues. However, given the commonly long review process, it is expected that the paper will be published next year.
During the project, efforts were also exerted to encourage young researchers to produce good policy briefs. As a result, skills in writing policy brief have been improved through the production of five policy briefs developed based on the five research papers.

4.2- Capacity to take up research evidence by members of the National Assembly

The project initially identified study visit overseas as the main way of building skills in research evidence uptake for busy members of the National Assembly. However, it was subsequently revealed that attending workshop is also very effective way for members of the National Assembly to understand how research is made and used to inform policy making. Overall, as compared to the initial plan of having 2 workshops and 2 study visits, the project met the target but with small deviation. Specifically, 3 workshops were organized, but the regional study visit was held for single country of Singapore as compared to two countries of Singapore and Malaysia as initially planned. Details of participation of members of the ECNA in each activity are as follow:

- 25 members of the ECNA attended two policy workshops. The first workshop was on February 15, 2011 and the second on July 21, 2011. Other participants of the workshops included representatives from Ministries; National Financial Supervisory Commission; Economic Department of the Office of the National Assembly, Institute of Economic Development under the National Economic University; University of Commerce; Vietnam Institute of Economics; CAF.
- 10 members of the ECNA attended the final workshop with broad research community and donors, which was organized on August 24, 2011.
- 3 members of the ECNA joined the study tour to Canada which was organized from 30 November to 7 December 2010. The Delegation was headed by HE. Hon. Mr. Ha Van Hien, member of the Standing Committee of the National Assembly, Chairman of the Economic Committee. Other members of the Delegation included 2 members of the Economic Committee and 4 officials of the Economic Department of the Office of the National Assembly of Vietnam.
- 2 members of the ECNA joined the study tour to Singapore which was organized from 21 July 2010 to 28 July 2010. The delegation was headed by Mr. Mai Xuan Hung, Deputy Chairman of the ECNA.

4.3- Policy and practice

- Findings from the study on Model/Mechanism/Policy for the Development of Economic Zone, Border-Gate Economic Zone and Open Economic Zone were used justify the importance of this issue, which was subsequently included in the oversight program of the ECNA in 2011. The revised report was used as an important input into the formulation of the oversight program of the ECNA in 2011.
Findings from the study on *Evaluation of the efficacy and impact of Viet Nam’s Economic Stimulus Package* were used as inputs into ECNA’s oversight work on the implementation of the stimulus package.

Findings from the study on the *Model and Reform of the Cooperative Sector in Vietnam* provide very important inputs for the ECNA’s work on amending the Law on Cooperative to reflect the role of new style cooperatives in modern society.

Findings from the study on *Evaluation of Prospect for Global Economic Recovery and Policy Implications for Viet Nam* provide important evidence for the ECNA to assess impacts of the global crisis.

Findings from the research on distribution services provided important information for ECNA to engage in discussion on relevant issues at the NA’s session.

V- Project outcomes

The project has generated a number of outcomes:

1- The first important outcome is the close relationship between CAF, particularly CAF’s researcher who works with the research teams and the project management staff, and officials of the Economic Department. In the longer term, this relationship will be a very good foundation for connecting research to policy making process in general and legislative process in particular. On the one hand, staff members of the Economic Department, who collect and compose reports for the ECNA, can gather information and get connected with other researchers from the wider research community through CAF’s staffs. On the other hand, for CAF, the Economic Department is and will be a good entry point to strengthen its policy engagement with the ECNA.

2- The second outcome is the establishment of links between the ECNA with Parliaments in Canada and Singapore. Impact of this project, thus, is not limited to capacity building for the ECNA and its connection to research communities in and outside the country.

3- The third outcome is the possibility of cooperation in the future between the ECNA with research institutions in the region. Research institutions in Singapore are willing to support the Economic Committee of Vietnam’s National Assembly in a number of ways including setting up association a network between research agencies of Singapore and the ECNA and providing training. Specifically the Asia Competitiveness Institute has made clear that they are willing to cooperate with the ECNA by attending workshops on macroeconomics hosted by the ECNA and/or coordinated a study on “Early warnings system on macroeconomics” for the National Assembly of Vietnam.
VI – Overall assessment and recommendations

In general, the project has achieved all, or even more, of its targets, although it is not easy to measure the project’s policy impact. The fact all the five research papers produced under this project were used by the ECNA in some way or another shows that the project has made a contribution to strengthening evidence-based policy making within ECNA.

Lessons learnt:

The *first* lesson is the role of CAF in effective coordination of the project whose direct beneficiary is an important decision making agency in Vietnam. CAF has long experience in managing numerous IDRC projects, including VERN I and VERN II, and therefore CAF helped to run the project smoothly and in a cost-effective manner. In particular, the involvement of CAF allowed ECNA and EDON to concentrate on research and other capacity building activities.

The *second* lesson is project timing. Initially, the project was planned to be implemented from February 2010 until February 2011, meaning that the project’s end almost coincided with the end of XII legislature’s tenure of the National Assembly. The last months of the project, therefore, were the busiest months for all staff of the Economic Department because they need to support not only the last session of the NA but also do all preparations for the election of the new National Assembly. This was the reason why the project had to extend for another 6 months.

Recommendations

The project proved to be very useful for ECNA in terms of both capacity building and enhancing evidence for performing ECNA’s function. To maintain and further improve research skills of the supporting staff for the ECNA, it is recommended that this kind of project should be continued.

However, timing for a new one should be carefully considered. The ideal duration would be three years and falls within one term of the NA, which normally last for five years.