

SUMMARY

This report is the result of a two-year investigation work jointly conducted by French and Vietnamese teams. Its focus has been on activities of foreign technical consulting/engineering firms involved in urban infrastructure projects in Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City and Phnom Penh. Most of investigations have concentrated on Vietnam, including projects in secondary cities; Analysis of the Cambodian context has therefore taken a limited place in this research. Infrastructure sectors encompassed were essentially water and waste water, urban solid wastes, transportation and related infrastructure. A large number of interviews were conducted with local and foreign experts (including 27 high ranked Vietnamese officials from central and local administrations); A recording process has been organised to register involvement of foreign consultants in urban infrastructure projects – with related financial from international donors - since the early 90's.

As for results, more than 130 foreign consulting companies were identified as involved in more than 250 missions. This has paved the way for a retrospective analysis according to nationalities, sectors and size / characteristics of companies concerned. It has also led to better clarify their motivations, and to highlight hopes and problems related to partnerships with local consultants, made compulsory by international aid procedures. To this respect, investigations have permitted a classification of Vietnamese "urban" engineering sector companies according to their status and origin. Effective mechanisms of transfers of skills and know-how between foreign consultants and their local colleagues have also been considered. In Cambodia, which represents a much more limited market than Vietnam, most study

works are made by foreign experts since 1993 and the local consulting sector is still in infancy. This should not dispense to encourage future changes in next ten years the strengthening of the Cambodian consulting sector. The research, and particularly results of interviews with stakeholders, also sharply questions the bridge made by some scholars between international consultants and transfers of urban infrastructure models to developing countries. To this regard, the Vietnamese context reveals rather that consultants limit their role to formulating technical options with a poor influence on local decision processes. Actually, relations between foreign experts and Vietnamese authorities are sometimes much more harsh than initially expected by the parties. This does not mean that foreign recommendations are not followed, but only after a real re-appropriation of reports outcomes by Vietnamese authorities. The ability of consultants to transfer their skills (compliance with international professional standards, analytic methods, use of modelling, etc.) to local experts is strongly expressed by the Vietnamese authorities. Hence, this does not only depend on foreign consultants since clear procedures related to international aid projects are still lacking to make such transfers easier.

One major stake in the next decade being capacities of Vietnam and Cambodia to develop a consulting sector capable to match with urban stakes, foreign aid agencies could usefully co-ordinate their efforts to better analyse the efficiency of all engineering activities in these countries; would they do so, they will opportunely meet with the growing concerns of Vietnamese and Cambodian authorities about the future of their national knowledge-based intensive sector in urban management.