

## SUMMARY

International development agencies promote public participation in development projects and support mobilization of civil society organizations in urban environmental management. The World Bank plays a major role in this approach also known as « good urban environmental governance ». The main principles of this approach are: decentralization of responsibilities to local authorities; public participation; partnerships between local authorities and the private sector, local associations and community based organizations. These principles assume that local civil society organizations exist and that they have quite a large autonomy and capacities.

This PRUD research project aimed at assessing the role of Vietnamese civil society organizations in real urban environmental projects and community development programs. We looked at three different types of possible mobilizations of local organizations and the projects were chosen accordingly: participation in urban environmental planning and management projects; participation in urban environmental service delivery; and participation in urban environmental conflict management.

In Vietnam, in the Lao PDR and in many former USSR republics, civil society organizations do not correspond to what we call NGOs in the western developed world. But these countries and regimes have put in place their own mechanisms to mobilize and have the public participate with governmental authorities in development. Public participation is promoted and organized under the umbrella of large institutions having long vertical lines from the national to the local: People's Committees –mainly under the Communist Party-, Women's Union, Youth's Union, Veterans Union...This research project looked at the participation of these institutions in urban environmental projects and programs to assess their relative autonomy, their capacities and their resources. We assessed also the benefits that they were getting from their participation in these projects and programs.

The full research project report presents: an analysis of the evolution of the concept of civil society; an historical perspective on the role of civil society in environmental management in Vietnam; three case studies on urban environmental projects (the Nam Son waste transfer and landfill station, the Phuc Tan water adduction project, the Nga Tu Vong street interchange project) and two case studies on community rehabilitation and development

programs (Thanh Xuan district and Trieu Khuc urban village) in Hanoi.

For the purpose of this research project, we have worked with the following definition of "civil society": a public space between the State and the people where collective development initiatives are conducted with persons and groups having enough autonomy to act on their own. For all case studies, a common grid of analysis has been used; it was organized around the following main questions: Did the people affected by the project have a fair chance to participate? Has this participation been for real all along the planning and project management process? Where the participants able to develop autonomy in the participatory process? Did they get benefits from their participation? Did their participation bring them new financial resources that they could use for developing other kind of activities on their own?

At the end of this research, we can conclude that, according to our definition, there is a public space between the State and the people in Vietnam in the field of urban environmental management. Essentially, large recognized Unions and local groups of residents fill this public space. If Unions are well known and their role well documented, we know very few about those residents groups except that they represent households, are not necessarily organized by the Party and that participation in those groups is voluntary and based on the place of residence. People's councils and committees as well as local units of the Party since they represent the State and the single political Party organization cannot be considered civil society organizations.

Unions and groups do not represent all components of the local communities: Unions, in which participation is on a voluntary basis, hardly count for not more than 20% of potential members; they do not represent illegal residents, workers of the informal sector, small street merchants but try to police them. Most of the representatives of these Unions and groups, if elected, have to be named by the Party or the People's Committee; this brings a strong bias giving more chance to participate to persons who are closed to the Party. We have not found any religious group, any representative of the folk industry, any representative of minority groups, and any NGO -according to its western meaning- involved in the participatory processes under study.

Unions and groups are quite active in informing the population and in mobilizing volunteers to conduct local initiatives. They hold public meetings in which participation is mostly limited to their members. They can produce information and disseminate it on their own, with permission from the People's Committee. However, their actions are limited to specific fields and they rarely work together in partnership. The Women's Union appears as the most active and did play a leading role in some of the projects and programs. In Than Xuan, the Unions had an occasion to develop small projects on their own in urban environmental management; these small projects were funded by the Danish aid. New capacities developed through those small projects might not be sustained when funding will be over and Unions members return to their normal activities.

Public participation is not systematically organized. Local authorities get information on projects at the very last minute, just before implementation. Public participation comes after, mainly to ease implementation. Unions act then mainly as transmission lines for the Party and the People's committees. Exceptions were encountered in Than Xuan - with the small projects- and in Phuc Tan -with the special fund to help poor households unable to face the cost of connections to the main pipes-, both being considered as experimental in participatory planning and strongly supported by external agencies.

We have not seen any civil society organization participating in environmental impact assessments of projects. Except for the small projects in Thanh Xuan and the water adduction project in Phuc Tan, civil society organizations were not involved in the planning, design, implementation, operation and maintenance working groups of projects. Residents of Nam Son had asked for a joint (company-residents) working group to monitor the operations of the waste station without success. We have not seen any mechanism for environmental conflict resolution, nor for hearing and treating grieves; public meetings in Nam Som aiming at solving operation problems were restricted to representatives of local authorities, meaning of the People's Committee. None of these projects and programs has left behind some

new institutional organizations that could last, reproduce experiences and share acquired new capacities.

Actors and organizations participating in those projects and programs did not have full and easy access to all available information. They had not access to external and neutral experts except for a marginal small project in Nam Son -aiming at bringing the children out of the waste picking activities on the site- and for a training project on chemical uses in agriculture in Nam Son also. Links with foreign NGOs planned in the Thanh Xuan program did not really work out cause of lack of means and capacities to use the new communication technologies, and of course of language problems. The ones participating did not get any new or special funds to participate; they had to rely on their existing resources. None of these projects and programs gave access to new and permanent jobs in the communities; and none has permitted to local organizations and groups to start new revenue raising activities; the special program to give the informal and local waste pickers access to the waste resource at Nam Son brought so many problems that the company is seriously limiting the number of waste traders. The Party and the People's committees networks are tightly knitted. Unions and groups are continuously looked over; their action plans have to be approved, and a good part of the funds they raise goes back up along the vertical line. And there is not that many unions and groups in the public space, not more than between 2 and 4, each one having specific missions and not encouraged to partner with others. However, they represent great potentials: they can be rapidly mobilized; their cadres are considered competent, honest and devoted; they have experiences in informing the public, in raising funds for humanitarian causes.

Still, there are whole parts of civil society that are not included: the entire informal sector, the entire small merchant's world, a good part of the small private industry and services, a growing part of the youth. They also represent great potentials but their participation in urban environmental management is not considered.