

CARE Denmark and CARE International in Vietnam

## **Civil Action for Socio-Economic Inclusion (CASI) Programme Vietnam**

### **Learning & Documentation Review**

**Final Version**  
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## Acronyms

ADC	Agriculture and Forestry Research and Development Centre
AHD	Action for Hmong Development
CASI	Civil Action for Socio-Economic Inclusion
CBO	Community Based Organisation
CCA	Climate Change Adaptation
CCWG	Climate Change Working Group
CEMA	Committee for Ethnic Minority Affairs
CIRUM	Culture Identity and Resources Use Management
CIVICUS	World Alliance for Citizens Participation
CSO	Civil society organisation
DKK	Denmark Kroner
EM	Ethnic Minority
EMWG	Ethnic Minority Working Group
EU	European Union
FLEGT	Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade Action Plan
IK	Indigenous Knowledge
INGO	International non-governmental organisation
iSEE	The Institute for Studies of Society, Economics and Environment
LandNet	Forest People's Land Right Network
LFA	Logical Framework Approach
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay Bi-Sexual and Transgendered
LISO	Livelihood Sovereignty Alliance
MARD	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development
M&E	Monitoring & Evaluation
MTR	Mid Term Review
NTP	National Targeted Sustainable Poverty Reduction Program
OD	Organisation Development
ODA	Overseas Development Assistance
PPWG	People Participation Working Group
SEDP	Socio-Economic Development Plan
SRD	Centre for Sustainable Rural Development
TOR	Terms of Reference
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USD	United States Dollars
VND	Vietnamese Dong
VNGO	Vietnamese non-governmental organisation
VUSTA	Vietnam Union of Science and Technology Association
WEAVE	Women's Economic Empowerment through Agriculture Value Chain Enhancement

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**1. Background:** In Vietnam, the **Civil Action for Socio-Economic Inclusion (CASI) Programme** is one of the pioneering initiatives in the field of strengthening civil society so it is in a position to strive for increased rights and give voice to marginalised people among ethnic minorities in the northern region of the country. The programme objective of CASI is as follows: *Civil society organisations and representatives of those who are at risk of socio-economic exclusion among Northern ethnic minorities are increasingly involved in setting the agenda for more inclusive development approaches and policies.*

There are three main result areas for the CASI programme, each related to one of the main partner groups that the programme will directly support or work to influence:

**Result area 1:** Partner VNGOs are influential and sustainable organisations recognised as effective and legitimate change agents for rights-based ethnic minority inclusion, in line with their strategic plans.

**Result area 2:** Ethnic minority-led civil society groups and networks, in alliance with VNGOs/Networks, are empowered to actively feed information into decision-making processes at different levels and engage with alliance partners in learning and capacity development.

**Result area 3:** Policy-makers and planners engage with civil society to address development effectiveness and rights issues related to ethnic minorities.

In December 2017 CARE decided to field a Review Team (RT) to carry out a “Learning and Documentation Review.” The purpose of the Review was to “*Draw out, synthesize and document some of the major achievements and lessons learned from the CASI programme support.*” In this sense, the review is not a normal evaluation in which DAC criteria are applied, but rather focuses on four core issues that are relevant beyond Vietnam. These are as follows: i) partner-driven approach and advocacy; ii) contribution to civil society strengthening; iii) approaches to support ethnic minorities and iv) lessons learned from the phase-out approach. The Review’s main conclusions are presented below.

### 2. Issue I: Partner-driven approach and advocacy

Internationally, there has been an on-going debate on how to design development programmes so they become more effective and efficient and allow partners a high degree of ownership. Until 2012 the CARE and the CASI programme design was based on components with more than ten (10) partners. An earlier Review (2012) suggested another design based on a partner-driven approach with only a few strategic partners, while stressing the need to be in alignment with and support partners in achieving their organizational mandates/missions and leaving advocacy issues and more of the decision-making to the partners, based on their priorities. This Review (2017) found that the strategic partners involved – and even some of the previous strategic partners – were of the opinion that this approach is an improvement, mainly because it allowed them more flexibility and the support was thus better suited to their needs.

The **advocacy** carried out by the strategic partners has been of high quality. One positive outcome is that the Culture Identity and Resources Use Management (CIRUM) has, also

according to Vietnamese government duty-bearers, proven itself capable of exerting influence on the drafting of the Forestry Law. Further, significant adjustments have been recognised and included, such as the rights of ethnic minority (EM) groups to their customary forests/land. To this end, EMs have equal rights in relation to other stakeholders as regards benefitting from forest protection and management. For its part, the Agriculture and Forestry Research and Development Centre (ADC) has influenced, among others, the Provincial Action Plan for Climate Change in Bac Kan, using models that include indigenous knowledge (IK). Finally, the Institute for Studies of Society, Economics and Environment (iSEE) has exerted influence on the Committee on Ethnic Affairs (CEMA), a state authority, which has now adopted an anthropological approach to its work and is in the process of mainstreaming this to other state institutions.

It is also clear from the material reviewed that CARE has supported and relied upon the partners' own advocacy approach. ADC has been successful in using data, research and examples from the field as evidence-based input for their advocacy. CIRUM has underscored the need for a type of "quiet advocacy," meaning that the organization which carries out advocacy work should focus not only on what it intends to achieve but also on the duty-bearer's need for information and the language they wish to use in the Vietnamese political context. Also, CIRUM did not want to use the media in their effort for advocacy which might be a wise approach if the issue is too sensitive and related to group conflicts. By gaining the trust of key governmental advisers who are interested in the organisation's advocacy topics, the chance for success increases. iSEE agrees with the need to find a "champion" within the state system that is interested in working on the advocacy topics. However, iSEE has also found that "less quiet" advocacy can be effective, such as by issuing publications and using the media to position its advocacy issues. All three ways of doing advocacy work are useful, because they each suit the capacity and style of the respective partner. CARE has respected and supported all the different ways of carrying out advocacy initiatives.

The partner-driven approach has worked well in Vietnam. Since CARE and CASI did not have a substantial budget, the focus on few but strategic partners has been appropriate. CARE had the advantage of having on hand the knowledge garnered from the previous phases of CASI, which contributed to finding the right partners who share CARE values and have the vision to carry out advocacy on key topics relevant to EM groups. It is also a lesson learned that although advocacy has had good results in influencing plans, laws and institutional procedures, implementation will take time. For example, in the case of Bac Kan Province the amount allocated to be spent on the Action Plan for Climate Change has yet to be implemented, although it was approved more than two years ago.

### **3. Issue II: Civil society strengthening**

In general, recent years have seen an increased space for civil society in Vietnam. Many more civil society activities are taking place on the ground, mainly through service delivery and advocacy. However, many observers note that since 2016 there has been more control, regulations, questioning of civil society and delays in approvals from duty-bearers when it comes to civil society activities. In other words, if we look only at the last two years, there would seem to be shrinkage in the space for civil society – although the long-term tendency still indicates the space has increased.

Within this context, the RT noted that the CASI programme contributed by strengthening civil society at three levels. Firstly, CASI has promoted advocacy and networking, not only of the

individual strategic partners but also by supporting key forums such as the Ethnic Minority Working Group, which is co-chaired by CARE and iSEE, as well as the People's Participation Working Group, (PPWG) chaired by iSEE. EMWG has influenced the National Targeted Programmes towards Ethnic Minority (EM) groups, so that their opinion is being taken into account, while PPWG has raised the critical issue of the Law on Association, which has yet to be passed. Secondly, CASI has strengthened the partners' internal capacity on issues such as human resources, strategic vision, financial management, organisational monitoring and evaluation and gender. CASI focused on strengthening the partner's institutional capacity, a process in which each strategic partner actively participated and supported their "own" networks with like-minded CSO partners. For instance, ADC is a chair of NorthNet with 11 province-based CSOs and also an active member of other networks, such as the network on Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade Action Plan (FLEGT); CIRUM is a core member of LISO, with 6 LNGOs; and iSEE is a co-chair of the EM Working Group and key member of the PPWG. Through these networks CASI partners have also contributed to strengthen and promote an enabling environment for CSOs in Vietnam. For two years running, a national annual CSO forum has been organized, in which around one hundred CSOs and researchers have a space to debate and discuss development issues in Vietnam. Thirdly, CASI has promoted the empowerment of Community-Based Organisations (CBOs), such as LandNet and women's groups, as well as national networks such as Tien Phong and AHD.

#### **4. Issue III: CARE's approach to support for Ethnic Minorities (EM)**

Three conclusions stand out regarding CARE's way of working with EMs. First, CARE does not work at the local, provincial or national levels, but rather provides support to strategic partners, who in turn reach CBOs as well as local and national networks. This multi-pronged approach has meant that as concerns advocacy, partners and CARE have been able to benefit from local examples and knowledge at the provincial and national levels. Second, CASI's profile, which emphasises the promotion of social inclusion, self-articulation and giving a voice to EMs has helped many CBOs to strengthen their capacity and supported strategic partners in assisting CBOs. Third, CARE has deliberately – and successfully – selected different types of strategic partners: CIRUM works with forestry issues and EM rights; iSEE works with a cultural/anthropological approach; and ADC has a more socio-economic profile in its support to banana women groups and other EM groups. This has been an advantage in the sense that CARE has been able to demonstrate many different ways of assisting EM groups. Innovative activities have been carried out such as the so-called "co-research" promoted by iSEE, through which members of the community works together with external researchers in defining, analysing problems and presenting them to the authorities. In this process, the voices and viewpoints of all parties are equally respected. The national Women's Union is now considering replicating this model. It has not been possible to *combine* the three different approaches, but they *supplement* each other and little by little the three strategic partners are working more closely together.

It was also noted that there is a high degree of involvement by EMs that conduct key activities, along with an emphasis on promoting equity between men and women. In fact, in the case of ADC, the focus is on women's groups because women have traditionally had little influence at local level, and the support helps them to control more resources.

The EM approach has given voice to pioneers. Thus far, the activities have still involved only a small number of persons and methods are as yet being tested. Some, like co-research, may have to be adjusted in a "light" (and less costly) version, so they can be replicated. There is still a

need to discuss how some of the networks (such as the one in Tien Phong) can be made sustainable, although hopefully donors will continue to support them for some time to come.

#### **5. Issue 4: Phase-out**

A clear exit strategy was prepared, maintaining both the objectives and results area. The strategy included: i) tailor-made support to organisational development in order to prepare each partner; ii) training in fundraising techniques; iii) it was decided not to have a “CASI-platform” once CASI ends; instead it was decided to iv) continue supporting the network. In general, partners have been pleased with the support provided. In fact, the exit strategy has been relevant, especially as regards organisational development (OD).

It seems possible to continue all or most of the activities once CASI comes to a conclusion, since all partners have good donor relations and have already got support to continue part of the CASI work. In fact, CASI is not a crucial part of any of the partners' budgets. Some of the CBOs supported by the partners (and CASI) need support other than “civil support strengthening.” CBOs such as the banana women groups and the forest groups, which intend to sell traditional medicine, need more assistance related to marketing and commercialization, among other things. Other types of programmes or new alliances are needed to supplement a programme like CASI. Partners mentioned that they want CARE to provide specific fundraising support (e.g. donor mapping). CARE has responded by providing contacts to donors and has invited partners to be part of joint fundraising proposals, which is both innovative and interesting.

# 1 INTRODUCTION

In Vietnam, the Civil Action for Social Inclusion (CASI) Programme is one of the pioneering initiatives in the field of strengthening civil society and is therefore in a position to strive for increased rights and give voice to marginalised people among ethnic minorities in the northern region of the country.

The CASI programme is funded by Danida through CARE Danmark. Duration was planned for eight years and it is scheduled to conclude at the end of 2017. It has been decided by the CARE Danmark Board to close down the CASI frame-funded project at that time, and all remaining activities by late 2018.

## Presentation of the CASI Programme

The programme objective of CASI is as follows:

*Civil society organisations and representatives of those who are at risk of socio-economic exclusion among Northern ethnic minorities are increasingly involved in setting the agenda for more inclusive development approaches and policies*

There are three main result areas for the CASI programme, corresponding to the main partner groups that the programme will directly support or work to influence:

**Result area 1:** Partner VNGOs are influential and sustainable organisations recognised as effective and legitimate change agents for rights-based ethnic minority inclusion in line with their strategic plans.

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**Result area 3:** Policy-makers and planners engage with civil society to address development effectiveness and rights issues related to ethnic minorities.

The result areas have changed since the first CASI Programme, but there have been only slight modifications during the last two phases. In this Review we will refer to the results areas mentioned in the foregoing.

For the CASI III (2015-2017), three strategic partners are supported:

- Culture Identity and Resources Use Management (CIRUM)
- Institute for Studies of Society, Economy and Environment (iSEE)
- The Agriculture and Forestry Research & Development Centre (ADC)

Previous partners from the phase 2013-2015 include SRD (Centre for Sustainable Resource Development) and VUSTA (Vietnam Union of Science and Technology Association).

The support to each partner should be related to the results areas presented above. In accordance with the partnership approach, there is considerable flexibility to support key activities within the framework of the partners' own plans.

**Purpose of the learning and documentation review.** The CASI programme has been well documented through comprehensive annual reporting, outcome mapping, studies and external evaluations at an overall level. The purpose of this learning and documentation review is to draw out some examples of the major achievements and lessons learned in the course of the CASI programme support for development of Vietnamese ethnic minority civil society organisations. It will focus on four core issues which are cross-cutting to the CASI approach and will refer to some examples/cases of results. These four core issues are as follows:

- Partner-driven and programme-driven advocacy – lessons learned from the use of diverse approaches to advocacy.
- CASI approach and added value to civil society strengthening, partner networks, working groups; achievement and challenges – major lessons learned.
- Study on different approaches to ethnic minority-led CBOs and networks, and capacity building of networks; achievements, what worked and what did not, major lessons learned.
- Experiences and lessons learned from a planned phase-out from long-term civil society partnership: the case of CASI 2015–2017.

**The methodology** is based on the following instruments: (i) desk review; (ii) semi-structured interviews; (iii) field work, including observation; (iv) debriefing. The field visit in Vietnam took place from November 27 to December 13, 2017. Partners, CASI and CARE programme staff, local and national governmental stakeholders and other key informants, including international organisations have been interviewed.

The **structure** of this Report is as follows: first, we briefly present the context in which the CASI Programme has been carried out. The four next chapters are each dedicated to one of the core issues, as follows: (i) partner-driven advocacy; (ii) strengthening of civil society; (iii) different approaches to ethnic-minority led support; and (iv) the phase-out process. In chapter 7, perspectives are provided regarding civil society strengthening. A last chapter contains “Final Remarks” and summarizes conclusions from all four core issues while describing how the CASI Programme has used CARE International’s overall strategic framework.

The Review Team (RT) would like to thank all the persons who have provided information and facilitated meetings with stakeholders. The opinions expressed herein are those of the RT.

## 2 CONTEXT

Since the year 2000 and until 2015-16, there has been an overall slightly positive trend regarding spaces for civil society in Vietnam. While the concept of civil society was a sensitive issue in the nineties, the contribution made by non-governmental organisations to service delivery has gradually come to be appreciated.<sup>1</sup> Over the years, CSOs have initiated advocacy processes and provided inputs to policies and legislation. Likewise, in recent years the emergence of civil society organisation networks has increased their advocacy activities.

The flow of information among citizens and organisations has grown at a considerable rate: technological changes have further contributed to this, and the extensive use of social media (i.e. Facebook) has made it easy to share comments and information. Likewise, the increased coverage offered by Internet and mobile telephones (i.e. iPhones) means that more citizens gain access to news and thus participate in the debate with others.

While the possibilities for participation and contribution from civil society have become more diverse and acceptance as regards receiving inputs from duty-bearers has grown over the years, some observers also note a tendency in the other direction. Since 2016, a slightly more restrictive environment implies delays in approvals of project applications from NGOs, there are more regulations and more questions are asked regarding CSO activities. . In 2016, the draft Law on Association, which had been discussed for decades, was further debated and attempts were made to make it more restrictive as regards funding to CSOs. Eventually, it was shelved. Likewise, observers expect that a discussion on information security may include suggestions allowing for closer monitoring of the debate taking place in social media. Most recently, the Communist Party issued Regulation Number 102-QĐ/TW (dated 15-11-2017), regarding the behaviour of Party members. In accordance with the new regulation, membership will be withdrawn if a person promotes or is a member of a civil society organisation. This shows that the ruling party does not acknowledge the work of civil society. Notwithstanding the foregoing, most expect the overall, positive tendency towards more CSO participation to continue, although domestic political discussions can affect its pace and strength.

The space for civil society engagement on the rights and **voice of marginalized people** among ethnic minorities has also gradually widened in Vietnam, as international and Vietnamese NGOs have engaged with local stakeholders and planners. Still, ethnic minority-led civil society has been nearly non-existent, as has the concept of constituency-based representation and engagement in local planning processes, despite the government's intentions as set forth in its Grassroots Democracy Decree. Moreover, many of the established VNGOs now face the challenge of shifting from delivering services at community level to engaging more strategically with communities, officials and stakeholders to ensure that sustainable systems for gradual rights fulfilment are left behind, and that evidence and lessons learned are informing national policy. This happens at a moment where international donors, and in some cases precisely those that promoted a rights-based approach, are leaving Vietnam, thus adding another dimension to this challenge.

Government policies and programs intended to improve the situation of remote ethnic minorities have often been inappropriate, adopting a 'one-size fits all' approach to policy and service delivery, often with fragmented roles when it comes to programme delivery. Therefore, the nationwide targeted programmes have only to some degree produced the intended poverty reduction results they were

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<sup>1</sup> The document titled "Benchmark Assessment of Civil Society Space in Vietnam" published by Hong Duc Publishing House and financed by among others, Oxfam in Vietnam, offers interesting details on this discussion.

designed to deliver. In fact, the Government's key strategy for addressing challenges to development in the rural sector and among ethnic minorities has been through the sixteen (16) National Targeted Programs (NTPs), which were implemented during the period from 2011 to 2015. At the community, district and provincial level, there were multiple and competing requirements and processes that led to inefficiencies in resource use and implementation, as well as poor monitoring.

To address these issues, the government of Vietnam in 2015 consolidated the 16 NTPs into only two overarching programmes, to be implemented during the 2016-2020 period. These are the NTP for New Rural Development (NTP-NRD), under the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) and the Sustainable Poverty Reduction Program (NTP-SPR), under the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA). The Committee for Ethnic Minority Affairs (CEMA) manages P135 as a project under the NTP-SPR. Some of the donors who have been supporting P135 are World Bank, Irish Aid, UNDP, OXFAM, CARE and SDC (Switzerland).

Poverty analysis work over the last decades points to a divide in poverty reduction rates between the majority ethnic group and the other 53 ethnic groups in Vietnam. Prevalence and causes have been well documented, but an understanding of non-economic factors regarding social equity and dignity is only just starting to emerge. This was explored during the first part of the CASI programme and has gradually become more accepted.

In March 2017, the World Bank published its appraisal<sup>2</sup> of the new National Target Programmes for New Rural Development and the Sustainable Poverty Reduction Support Programme (NTSPS). Based on the most recent data available, the document states that:

- The concentration of poverty in rural Vietnam, in particular among ethnic minorities living in the midland and mountainous areas, partly reflects restricted access to economic opportunities due to the low level of economic integration.
- Ethnic minorities face additional linguistic and social barriers that limit their opportunities for engaging in the wider economy or fully benefiting from government programs.
- Vietnam has achieved impressive gains in many dimensions of gender equality, but the situation for ethnic minority women remains a development challenge.

The Committee on Ethnic Minority Affairs (CEMA), the main government agency for ethnic minorities, recognises that the VNGOs and representative organisations of ethnic minorities are central players and partners in finding sustainable solutions for ethnic minority inclusion and development.

As mentioned, international donor funding for civil society has been steadily declining in recent years, while no national sources have been able to take over funding for civil society initiatives. On the other hand, the capacity of the VNGOs working with Ethnic Minorities – and the capacity of the EM-led CBOs – has increased, thus providing an opportunity for sustaining many of the activities.

It is in this mixed context of possibilities, marked by both pro- and regress, that the CASI programme is carried out and in general terms has contributed to the construction of civil society in Vietnam.

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<sup>2</sup>World Bank Appraisal, March 2017: NATIONAL TARGET PROGRAMS FOR NEW RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND SUSTAINABLE POVERTY REDUCTION SUPPORT PROGRAM (NTPSP).

### **3 PARTNER-DRIVEN ADVOCACY**

*Abstract: This chapter describes lessons learned in the effort to organise support for civil society advocacy. In the first phases of CASI the partners that were included in the programme made specific contributions to the programme and component objectives – a so-called “programme driven approach.” A major shift took place in 2012, when CASI decided to select core partners and focus on their priorities. The RT suggests that this has accelerated and improved their capacity to carry out advocacy activities. Although the success of the approach depends on the context of the country for civil society, it may still be a lesson for other activities supported by CARE in the various countries in which it has a presence.*

#### **3.1. Approaches to programme building**

Internationally, there has been an on-going debate on how to design development programmes so they become more effective and efficient and allow partners a high degree of ownership. For example, in 2013 Danida (Denmark) – which has been CASI’s main funder – made an important change in the programme design for its development assistance. Previously, Danida supported selected sectors in a country and in relation to each sector a programme document and specific component descriptions were formulated. The partners that best matched the sector goals and component descriptions, which often were many, would be selected. However, since 2013 Danida has opted to select *thematic* programmes under which development engagement documents were formulated with *each partner*. It is the partners who are now at the core of the programme, while their overall number has been reduced. In other words, Danida opted for an approach where the focus is on thematic objectives and the partner’s priorities.

Regarding civil society programme arrangements, the bi- and multilateral donors have sometimes opted for a “calls for proposals” approach, where the programme content is defined, and partners are selected on a competitive basis. Some donors have also tried to promote new networks, but with partners and persons who do not have natural connections.<sup>3</sup> Other bilateral donors have used international NGOs – such as CARE – as implementing partners, thereby benefitting from the international NGO’s expertise, since these often have detailed knowledge regarding national partners and the target group.

Yet other “CARE colleagues” such as Oxfam has opted for an approach in Vietnam where they promote coalition of 7-8 partners and where discussions and advocacy is planned in relation to specific topics (e.g. agriculture, water pollution, forestry and mining). This approach requires that there is a real commitment for all stakeholders to work together regarding the coalition.

This chapter describes CASI’s experience with programme design regarding support to civil society advocacy in Vietnam.

#### **3.2. What is CASI’s partner-driven approach?**

CASI has increasingly shifted its approach towards partner-driven advocacy, with the following characteristics: “*The program’s ‘partner-driven’ approach for the 2013-2015 period has proven to be a strategic way in which to run the program. With this approach, all CASI partners developed plans, which realized their organizations’*

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<sup>3</sup>For example, Andrew Wells-Dang noted in 2012 that: “*Donors and international NGOs have also funded large projects to create new nationwide networks, with international study tours, capacity building training, and all-expenses-paid meetings, among people who had not previously worked together. The results have been disappointing. In one case of a donor-initiated network, an evaluation found that individuals participated in training provided for their own benefit, but there was no sustainable network after the conclusion of the project or observed net effect on civil society development (Desmond et al 2007). Similar counterproductive results have been documented by other NGOs, including CARE and ActionAid.*” Civil Society Networks in China and Vietnam - Informal Pathbreakers in Health and the Environment, Wells-Dang, A., 2012.

*mission and strategic priorities and then put these together as an activity plan by which to guide CASI's support as a whole. CARE Vietnam has accelerated the 'partner-led' approach in programming work since late 2014, which allows more decision-making power to its partners" (2015 Annual Report).*

### **Box 1: Partners vis-à-vis different programme approaches**

The CASI partner-driven approach means	The CASI programme-driven approach means
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Partners take decisions on their programmes and CASI supports them.</li> <li>2. Each CASI partner develop it plan and all partner plans are put together as an activity plan to guide CASI's overall support.</li> <li>3. Partners make decisions on approaches in advocacy or building ethnic minority CBO networks on civil society networking.</li> <li>4. Partners can use CASI funds as a platform to mobilise, leverage additional sources of financial support to implement their programmes.</li> <li>5. CASI focuses on organizational development for partners.</li> <li>6. A stronger horizontal link is forged between partners as they advance towards strengthened rights and a voice for marginalised people among ethnic minorities.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The programme is based on components with many partners.</li> <li>2. Component objectives are more important than the partner's specific interests.</li> <li>3. Programme staff decides approaches on advocacy in consultation with partners.</li> <li>4. Funds are used for specific project activities within the programme.</li> <li>5. Multi-level of management from programme to component level that leads to high cost of human resources.</li> </ol>

### **The evolution of the CASI approach**

CASI has developed its approach since 2010 and it is possible to distinguish between three different phases:

#### *1. 2010-2012: the programme approach*

CASI was formulated as a programme with four separate components and more than ten partners. The partners were selected due to their relevance to the components. Components and key partners included:

### **Box 2: CASI's use of a Programme approach from 2010-2012**

Components during 2010-2012	Some important partners of more than ten
EM Rights over Natural Resource Governance	CIRUM, ADC, Thanh Hoa Union of Science and Technology Association
Sustainable Livelihood	ADC, SRD, Bac Kan Women's Union
Adaptation to Climate Change	Several
CSO Ethnic Minority Rights and Management	iSEE and VUSTA

Support to each partner was based on specific *activities/projects*, and partners were required to follow the specific expected outputs and activities outlined. Each activity/project would then contribute to the component's objective and the overall programme objective. This programme approach ensured that CARE could guarantee that all activities were in accordance with what CASI – and CASI donors – had identified as important. On the other hand, the partners' own priorities were subordinated to the programme. As one informant put it: "*The partners were working for the programme.*"

Regarding *advocacy priorities*, these were also defined as part of the programme but played a lesser role than they do now. While some partners still had little experience with advocacy, others (such as CIRUM and iSEE) had already carried out comprehensive advocacy.

#### *2. 2013-2015: the partner-driven approach emerges*

After a review in 2012, the CASI phase for the years 2013-2015 was changed considerably. It was decided to focus on a few strategic partners who share the same values and work areas as CARE.

Further, strategic partners were to have the capacity to participate in networking at national level, capacity to carry out advocacy work and be engaged in strengthening CBOs at local level. In other words, instead of defining activities according to the programme, the partners became the centre for activities. Apart from shifting the focus towards the partner, CASI also decided that with the relatively modest amount of funds available, it would be necessary to focus on a smaller number of partners, in order to achieve the desired results.

**Box 3: CASI's development of the partner approach 2013-2015**

Selection of a the strategic partner	Some key topics
iSEE	Ethnic minority rights, development approach for CSOs
CIRUM	EM rights over Land and forest use and management
ADC	Indigenous knowledge and climate change
SRD	Sustainable livelihoods

As can be seen, the partner was selected first, and with it the partner's priorities. The partner was to design its own priorities within the overall objective of the CASI programme.

Along the same lines, a learning space for all partners was established. It was coordinated by iSEE and was to ensure that the partners knew what each was doing and in some cases also share activities. For example, CARE promoted that all partners be linked to the Ethnic Minority Working Group (EMWG), a national space for exchange and advocacy on EM – a space that CARE co-chairs.

Hereby *advocacy* would now take place at three levels: first, the advocacy defined by the partners itself in their plans; second, the advocacy that partners promote in supporting CBOs at local and provincial level; and third, the advocacy carried out through national networks. For some partners, the advocacy continued to be carried out mostly at local and provincial levels, but gradually all partners participated in spaces at national level. However, no joint advocacy was carried out between them. .

Advocacy continued to take place in *invited spaces*, but gradually also in *claimed spaces* such as the aforementioned EMWG and in some cases *the closed spaces*, where informal meetings are held with governmental policy makers.

### 3. 2015-17: Partner approach consolidated and exit-phase

During the exit-phase, more emphasis was placed on supporting the partners' organisational development – that is, to strengthen them in those areas that still required improvement. In addition, CASI continued to focus further on EM strengthening and on the partner's participation in networking.

Since this approach was based on following the partner's priorities, they received support in order to collaborate with other like-minded CSOs. This meant that, for instance, CIRUM would work with those interested in the topic of forest, land use rights and management for EMs, while iSEE would work regarding cultural diversity and EM rights and ADC would work with those institutions with agricultural expertise and interested in ethnic/indigenous knowledge. Put differently, the partners were not obliged to work together, but the aforementioned learning spaces and events were continued where they could be informed and learn from each other. There were (and are) horizontal exchanges on a quarterly basis between partners, and these are occasions on which they shared experiences. One partner mentioned the need for more follow-up on the joint learning events. iSEE used to coordinate the learning space but now it takes place through the EMWG, meaning that new persons are in charge of follow-up. It should be mentioned that the reason for other Vietnamese organisations and persons

now being in charge of the learning space is that this has been a deliberate CARE exit strategy as the CASI project wound down, intended to institutionalise the learning events with Vietnamese stakeholders.

### **3.3. Assessment of advocacy results under the partner-based approach**

#### **Improved advocacy capacity**

As regards the CASI Programme's furtherance of development, all main stakeholders consider it to have improved capacity to undertake advocacy activities. Whether the actual impact of the advocacy has improved is beyond the Programme's purview, since it depends on other stakeholders (duty-bearers at different levels). One of the previous partners (SRD) also found that CASI – despite the good partnership – places too much emphasis on the issue of advocacy, which is not an area SRD has historically prioritised

CARE's annual reporting includes indicators related to advocacy work done by its strategic partners, such as “*level of increased ability by partners to undertake advocacy*” and “*number of joint advocacy initiatives coming from strategic alliances/networking/coalition initiatives supported.*” In the 2016 Annual Report (prepared in March 2017), the progress achieved surpassed the targets for the three remaining strategic partners (ADC, CIRUM and iSEE).

On the other hand, the 2016 Annual Report also states that the main advocacy focuses of the program are diverse because “*CASI partner organizations have different mandates and address different issues.*” As mentioned, CIRUM focuses on EM rights over land and forestland use and management respecting values of customary law, ADC on climate change adaptation, and iSEE works on inclusion-related issues and eliminating stigmas against ethnic minorities. CARE facilitates and its staff mentors the partner's development of their advocacy strategy and plans.

#### **Assessment of the partner-driven approach supported by CASI**

All present partners are happy with the current partner-driven approach. Some of the partners (such as ADC and iSEE) find that CASI's partner-driven approach has in fact made it easier to carry out its advocacy work. Also, CIRUM finds that CARE's partnership approach has been very appropriate and allowed for a high degree of flexibility in CIRUM's activities, including advocacy. Those that find the partner-driven approach has improved advocacy state that:

- The activities are naturally aligned to their activities.
- The Programme has been carried out in a flexible manner and adjustments can be made according to partner needs.
- Special, tailor-made needs relevant to advocacy can be attended to (for example, in the case of ADC, the Programme provided support addressed ADC's need to better document results, improve its website for being more visible and improve internal systems), all with the intention of rendering ADC's profile clearer, both internally and externally.
- The partners are more committed to the activities since they themselves have prioritised the areas to work on.
- In general, the CASI staff has closely followed the partners and whenever possible has attended to most of their needs.
- Partners express that trust and respect are important elements of the partnership.

The issue of commitment is particularly important, because it means that partners will continue to follow-up on advocacy and thus make the process more sustainable. Normally, advocacy processes require a persistent, patient and long-term commitment. In most advocacy cases, the CASI programme can support advocacy activities and outputs, but the change – the impact – resulting from advocacy often requires years of activities in the same area. On the other hand, CIRUM finds that it is a persistent organisation regardless of the donor, because it has accumulated a considerable degree of commitment over many years.

It is also true that a partner-driven approach implies that advocacy activities are more diverse and mean working in different areas (e.g. land rights, indigenous knowledge). However, although the areas are different, they are still all important issues for ethnic minorities. The fact that partners share some national spaces (e.g. the Ethnic Minority Working Group) means that the platform for working together is there<sup>4</sup> for those partners that may wish to collaborate.

### **3.4. Illustrative cases of partner advocacy: results and lessons**

The partners and CASI Programme find that there are some cases that illustrate the aforementioned increased capacity to undertake advocacy work. Although it is not possible to say what would have happened if the “old” programme approach had been continued, some partners believe that these cases document the high degree of commitment and specific knowledge of each partner. The partners CIRUM and iSEE have also indicated there are lessons learned from the advocacy work they carried out. The CARE staff is also very much convinced that the redesigned CASI framework, particularly the partner-driven approach, facilitated that partners found strategic directions which allowed them to actively implement their work and reach the expected results based on their potential, knowledge and experiences, while focusing on strengthening alliances and networks as part of the advocacy process they were engaged in.

#### **3.4.1. ADC partner advocacy**

ADC finds that the partner-driven approach has helped it clarify its roles and priorities, thereby increasing its capacity to carry out advocacy, as the examples below illustrate.

#### **Indigenous Knowledge and Climate Change Adaptation**

At a general level, ADC has contributed to promote the concept of “Indigenous Knowledge” (IK) and its importance for climate change adaptation, including that it should be supported and promoted by the authorities. This implies that issues such as diversification of plant and animal systems, intercropping, the application of natural pesticides and natural methods should be promoted as good agricultural practices and are part of adaptation to climate change. It used to be that ADC had little public promotion regarding these topics. During 2017, ADC’s vice-director would appear on television<sup>5</sup> promoting IK together with a representative from CEMA, the main government player with regard to ethnic minorities, who also refers positively to EM needs and ADC approaches. This example illustrate that ADC can thus be considered to have enriched the agenda on how to address EM needs with adding information on indigenous knowledge and climate change.

#### **The case of bananas: indigenous knowledge as a way to increase income**

ADC now has the capacity to link concrete cases on the ground with the national presentations of the concept of IK. CASI funds have served as a platform for ADC to obtain access to other funds, such as

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<sup>4</sup> Not all partners see the EMWG as a strategic forum for advocacy. It is thus more probable that partners will meet on an ad-hoc basis, depending on specific advocacy processes, rather than coordinating on a permanent basis.

<sup>5</sup> Television Programme on channel VTV5/policy story/21:30 Nov 3th 2017.

those made available by WEAVE, of which CARE is also one of the implementing partners.<sup>6</sup> ADC has supported ethnic minorities in Bac Kan, both with agricultural techniques based on IK and savings. More recently, CASI contributed to promote the expansion of banana plants as a form of climate-friendly production<sup>7</sup> and as part of inter-cropping. This has helped to improve the quality of the banana fruits. The Review Team (RT) met EM women who for the first time (2017) have sold their bananas to be processed as banana chips. After having improved the quality of their bananas, they are now able to sell at a higher price, increasing their level of income (from VND 3000 to VND 4500 per kilo). The hope is to one day sell more processed banana chips. While this work is not advocacy, it lays the foundation for presenting such examples at higher levels and gradually increasing the authorities' interest in supporting IK. The RT noted that in one of the communes public funds will also be used to support the promotion of banana<sup>8</sup>. It should be said that the experience with the banana value chain is still very recent and in its initial stages. ADC plans to continue working along these lines after the CASI project comes to an end. ADC recognises that it would benefit from contacts to organisations with knowledge on commercial and business issues.

### **The case of advocacy on the Province Action Plan to climate change response in Bac Kan**

Although the concept of IK has yet to be integrated to governmental policies and programmes, there are signs that ADC has managed to promote some of its ideas.<sup>9</sup> ADC has worked with the Division of Materials, Water and Climate Change (DONRE) in Bac Kan since 2013, using the IK approach as a way of promoting adaptation to climate change. Having worked in several local areas to collect evidence on the benefits of IK, ADC forged an alliance with DONRE staff and presented the findings of the research to the Provincial Implementation Board on the Climate Change Action Plan.<sup>10</sup> The Board was in the process of adjusting the Province Action Plan to Climate Change Response. In November 2014 it in principle allocated VND 1 billion of public funds to implement IK-based Climate Change Adaption modes in the process. However, the funds have yet to be implemented. This is an example of an evidence-based advocacy where ADC used its technical knowledge to influence an agenda. Unfortunately, it is also an example showing that the level of patience must be high when hoping for changes in budgets and actual changes on the ground. An additional advocacy activity will have to be undertaken to promote the actual implementation of the funds.

### **Cases related to networking**

ADC appreciates how CARE has connected the partners through different networks and how it has been observant of different spaces in which partners can participate. As a result of new advocacy capacities, ADC has been active as regards the Access to Information Law. During 2017, the decree leading to implementation of this law has been discussed and ADC held a workshop in Bac Kan where ethnic minority CBOs were invited. They prepared suggestions for changes in the decree (for example the decree does not contain any deadlines for duty bearers to provide the requested information). ADC

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<sup>6</sup> The Women's Economic Empowerment through Agriculture Value Chain Enhancement (WEAVE) project is a collaboration between three international non-governmental organisations — SNV, Oxfam and CARE International — in partnership with the Australian Government. WEAVE supports ethnic minority women's economic empowerment in pork, cinnamon and banana value chains.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/green-living-blog/2010/jul/01/carbon-footprint-banana>

<sup>8</sup> According to a member of the People's Commune Committee in Thanh Láp, the provincial level is promoting a model for cooperatives: 300 million is available for Cooperative Modelling, which will be invested into new or renewed banana farms and mainly for the growing of organic bananas.

<sup>9</sup> In 2017, ADC published a paper titled "Promoting Indigenous Knowledge and Good Agricultural Practices in Climate Change Adaption." However, several observers mentioned that the use of the term "indigenous" by ADC constitutes an obstacle for advocacy, because the most common term (and the one in official use) is "ethnic minority."

<sup>10</sup> DONRE officials were also engaged in collecting evidence of IK in other provinces (Yen Bai, Ha Giang), in order to build the regional foundation for advocacy.

sent the inputs to Hanoi, where organisations such as Oxfam and CARE organised a national workshop in September 2017. The different proposals were submitted to the government by the organisations and they are now waiting to see whether any of these will be approved.

ADC is also a member of the FLEGT network, in which the former strategic CASI member SRD also participates. This network is related to Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade.

ADC has also managed to connect with new donors. However, some of these can also be considered allies in future advocacy. For example, ADC considers that working with UNDP is a good opportunity to promote its image and introduce the Indigenous Knowledge models to create impacts on a larger scale.

### **3.4.2. CIRUM partner advocacy**

As regards **CIRUM**, a high number of advocacy activities have been carried out on forest land management, culminating with those related to the approval of the Forestry Law. Here CIRUM has allied itself with national and local experts that have practical experience and networks such as LandNet, of which CIRUM is the secretary organisation.

#### **Lobbying on the Forestry Law**

The Forestry Law contains recognition of EM rights of over their customary forests. The Forestry Law Revision was passed on 15 November 2017, and CIRUM/LandNet in cooperation with LISO have successfully lobbied for the following new rights:

1. EM communities are legally recognized as forest owners (this was absent in the previous Forestry Law).
2. EM communities now have the legal right to receive government fees for forest protection and payments for environment services (PES), to practice their forest-based beliefs and establish ecotourism business organizations. The government helps to carry out income generating activities derived from forest-related activities and reforestation with local forest species, to own planted trees that have been invested in by communities themselves.
3. Traditional forests belonging to EMs (sacred forests, water source forests) are legally recognized as being for special use and protection forests can be legally allocated to EMs for management and protection. To this end, EMs have full legal rights to access and control their traditional forests.
4. EM communities and households have legal rights to become involved in forestry activities (forest management planning, forest land allocation, etc.) in order to promote transparency and gender equality.
5. Customary law in forest land allocation and forest management is legally recognized.

**Other ground level cases to which CASI – together with other donors - has contributed:** If land conflict resolutions are included, CIRUM has thus far supported 52 poor ethnic minority communities (35,000 persons) in the acquisition of legal rights to forests, land use and management over almost 12,000 ha of forestland. This means they are in a position to legally protect their lands from companies who intend to invade it. Another important achievement is that LandNet has been growing. There are 115 LandNet members based in six (6) provinces of Vietnam in which twenty members exchange information on how to protect their land, as well as on how to introduce specific forest-based income-generating models. It should be said that not all local LandNet groups are equally active. Some LandNet groups need more training and more practice in policy awareness and information for their rights. As mentioned, CASI is only one of the donors, and has in practice only supported a small number of the beneficiaries. The RT met representatives from some of those supported.

## **CIRUM's advocacy lessons**

In relation to the Forestry Law – and based on other advocacy activities – CIRUM has reported the following lessons learned as regards the approach to advocacy:

1. It is necessary to brief supportive policy makers, preferably key advisers to decision-makers. Coordinating with experienced officials and focussing on the policy-maker's needs, in coordination with experienced officials, has been an important strategy for the CIRUM lobby and advocacy work vis-à-vis policy-makers. In addition, selection of functional official organizations to become partners who will sign (stamp) in the official consultation reports/recommendation papers/position papers to be sent to drafting/policy makers. (E.g. The Ethnic Minority Council of National Assembly)
2. In the Vietnamese political context, “quiet” lobbying is effective when matters are sensitive.
3. Evidence and data should be available and ready at the beginning dates of lobby/advocacy efforts, so that consultation reports/recommendation papers can be submitted on time and take into account the needs of policy makers. For this purpose, input from the field is very important. CIRUM keeps a database with information.
4. Full-time staff with practical experience and policy analysis capacity, including writing skills that reflect legal and government policy-makers' language, as well as having a committed working team are all important for lobby/advocacy success.
5. Lobby workshops/dialogues/advisory meetings should involve target groups who are dealing with conflicted issues. NGOs can act as supporting agencies.
6. Flexible funding is needed for lobby/advocacy. This allows a space for the person who does the lobbying to work with policy makers on updated requirements.
7. Inviting ethnic minority women to chair meetings for practice purposes makes them more confident when it comes to speaking out for their demands. The ratio of women to men engaged in the LandNet is still an issue. Women are confident and strong at village level, yet it remains difficult to encourage them to step up when attending meetings in Hanoi with persons with whom they are unfamiliar.
8. Farmer-led activities are important to help them become stronger as concerns both speaking and taking action.

CIRUM also mentions that as regards companies invading community land, it intends to continue to study the situation at local level and select cases/communities to present at national level.

CIRUM has stressed the connection and close cooperation with the local authorities at all levels (provincial, district and commune) when selecting the areas for piloting forest-allocation. The selected areas are where the conflicts on forestland ownership are most serious. For example, in Lao Cai, the community complained a great deal about the inaccuracy of the previous land allocations made by the local authority. The conflict between the community and the state-owned forest management units is harsh. This is why CIRUM and local authorities discussed and agreed that the most challenging areas will be included.

A lesson learnt is that it is important to establish an alliance with the authorities where and when they need support to create influence on national policy, particularly since the CIRUM approach is using the evidence from local experiences for demonstration purposes at the central level. The local authority is the best ally when it comes to telling to telling the story of their own case, since the national authority will listen to them.

As can be seen, flexible funding is one of the elements found to be of importance as regards lobbying efforts. It is also one of the elements of the partnership-based approach applied by CASI. Indeed, the partnership approach may in fact increase the possibility for achieving satisfactory results through advocacy.

### **3.4.3. iSEE partner advocacy**

iSEE is recognised as one of the most proactive civil society organisations in Vietnam, especially regarding advocacy on LGTB and EM. iSEE has carried out advocacy at national level towards the Committee for Ethnic Minority Affairs (CEMA) and at local level where CBOs have been strengthened to present their needs. iSEE is also one of the few NGOs participating in spaces such as the Vietnam Development Partnership Forum in 2013, 2014 and this year under the name Vietnam Development Forum.

In iSEE's view, advocacy involves two domains: advocacy targeted at changes in policy (specific laws, regulations) and advocacy related to social matters. Social advocacy is considered important because if society does not support a change in law, it will not work in practice. "*That is why we work with EM/communities, social movements/social changes. If other people do not recognize the right of the most disadvantaged groups, then rights cannot be respected.*"<sup>11</sup>

### **The case an anthropological approach**

iSEE has for several years built up a relationship with CEMA. Initially, iSEE had indicated that the national policies did not sufficiently take into account EM needs. Critical statements were made both in publications and at public events, something which initially was not well taken by CEMA representatives. iSEE advocated for the use of an anthropological approach. The advantage of using an anthropological approach in policy development is that it provides policy makers with a variety of perspectives regarding EMs, since they are given the opportunity to explain their needs, experiences and the challenges they face in their own words. An anthropological approach which uses multiple methods to gather information from many perspectives creates a more holistic picture of the EM's situation and possibilities for development.

Gradually, CEMA has changed, maybe also because there is certain contribution from those within CEMA who studied Anthropology overseas to regarding its decision to adapt the approach. CEMA has therefore recognised the need to use an approach that will meet the needs for more effective human resource management, using participation of ethnic minorities, securing knowledge-sharing and sustaining EM cultures. CEMA has also prepared a checklist regarding how to use the anthropological approach at each of the ministries. However, this checklist has yet to be approved. The RT also learned from MOLISA staff in charge of the Poverty Reduction Programmes that they do not "like" the term *anthropological approach*, indicating that it is somewhat theoretical. They instead prefer the term "*cultural identification*," which refers to the need for understanding and involving EM groups in the formulation and design of specific projects intended to benefit them. MOLISA stressed the importance of a "practical approach" when EM groups are involved. The RT finds that although the "anthropological approach" is not being implemented using this terminology, it is certainly a change for the better that MOLISA (which is key for attention to EMs) is developing practical approaches to involve them, which is basically what the anthropological approach is about. This marks a change regarding how previous programmes were being carried out. It should also be mentioned that anthropology has been integrated to the curriculum of the Academy of Ethnicity, which has been delivering trainings to

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<sup>11</sup> For the sake of clarity, it should be mentioned that in general in this document the term advocacy is defined as "*a process by an individual or group, which aims to influence public policy and resource allocation decisions within political, economic, and social systems and institutions.*" This means that normally advocacy towards "society" is rather more like a process of awareness-raising..

CEMA staff. This may generate a foundation for nationwide application of the approach in EM supporting activities.

### **The cases of co- research**

iSEE has promoted this approach where co-research teams are set up at the commune level and are guided so that the community's EM women are able to identify different research topics. Examples where other projects have provided support include topics such as: (i) Why children drop schools (Hmong group); (ii) Sustain the Dao traditional customs; (iii) Then and Tinh music instruments (Tay group); (iv) Black pig raising (Tay group) and (v) Environment Pollution (Tay group).

Hereafter, the research groups present their result to the authorities. For example, Bac Kan Provincial Department of Education and Training and Cho Moi District Division of Education and Training after listening to a group presenting their research on why children drop schools, the Department made a follow-up event to discuss with parents on how to attract school girls and get them back to school. This innovative local advocacy seems to be well received by authorities as it presents concrete solutions to concrete problems at the community level.

### **iSEE has also accumulated lessons from its advocacy efforts:**

1. It is possible to use public events and the media to promote an advocacy topic.
2. It is necessary to collaborate with other organisations that have influence. iSEE already collaborates with UNDP because it can influence policies.
3. If you want to advocate for an issue towards a state institution you must try to find a person within that institution that can champion and spearhead the advocacy topic.
4. The process of advocacy may take a long time as evidence cannot be researched, collected and documented within a short period of time. However, when certain policy advocacy opportunity arises, sufficient documents should be ready and well prepared.

As can be seen, the lessons are somewhat different from those collected by CIRUM, first and foremost on the matter of whether to "go public" with an issue or not. However, the two organisations share the importance of finding the "key person" who can be interested in the topic and the importance of "being ready" to contribute with documentation. Whether to go public or not may also depend on the specific topic. In the case of CIRUM, it may be less necessary to go public since the organisation has such good contacts at the relevant institutions that they are able to carry out "quiet" advocacy.

Just as in the case of CIRUM, iSEE's advocacy approach does not seem to depend on whether donor support is programme or partner-based. However, it is mentioned that the flexibility of the partner-based approach facilitates advocacy.

### **Strengths and weaknesses in advocacy efforts**

As can be gleaned from the foregoing, the partners have the following strengths in common as regards advocacy:

- All three partners have exerted significant influence on plans and legislation, and are now working on important pilot experiences.
- All three partners have their own, clear approach toward advocacy work.

On the other hand, the most successful advocacy efforts have focused on plans and legislation, while implementation as such has yet to come. As one of the partners said, "*Change will not come overnight.*" While this is true, it is also true that civil society organisations in many countries focus mainly on legislation and plans, since it is easier to influence these than actual implementation. That said, it will be

important for partners to also focus on implementation in the coming years. It is particularly relevant in a case like ADC's influence on the Action Plan for Climate Change. In 2014 it managed to have a budget allocated to activities which included the IK models. However, to date the budget has not been implemented. Follow-up should be part of any advocacy effort. Also, CIRUM is aware that it will have to promote models for how to implement the new forestry law, while iSEE is considering how to design co-research in a way where it can be used at a much broader scale.

#### **3.4.4. Other partners, joint advocacy and challenges**

The partner **VUSTA**, which was not part of the most recent support, has had a partnership with CARE since 2004. It too appreciates the flexible partner-based approach, which is different from that of other donors. VUSTA received support for training of members in advocacy work and finds that it has actually meant that more members at provincial level now are active in contributing to policy in their respective provinces. VUSTA does not have EM as a priority area, and did not participate in the two last years of the programme. The previous partner **SRD** has also stressed CARE's good involvement of partners, although it found that the promotion of advocacy was too ambitious.

#### **Joint advocacy and planning**

Horizontal sharing has taken place through the learning events that are held on a quarterly basis. The present strategic partners appreciate this, in particular as not all donors follow this procedure, and it has served to learn about what each of them has been doing. Some mentioned, however, that not all meetings were followed up on. The Review Team finds there should be follow-up to learning events; however, at a more general level, CARE – and the Review Team – find that it was a correct decision for CARE not to “force” further collaboration between partners. While this means that there are no direct examples where actual joint advocacy has been carried out, there are many examples where partners are beginning to share their activities on the ground. For example, iSEE shares joint research at local level with ADC; ADC and the former partner SRD work together in the FLEGT network. As mentioned, all partners participate in the EMWG being facilitated by CARE. Since the partnership approach means respect for partners, the sharing of spaces can be considered satisfactory.

#### **Challenges for the partner-driven approach – and opportunities to use the partnership as a flexible platform for fundraising**

On the ground it was observed that some of the target groups were supported by programmes other than CASI (e.g. in Bac Kan, WEAVE supports a group). Interestingly, CARE is one of WEAVE's implementing partners.<sup>12</sup> This means that although CASI works with a partner-driven approach, CARE at the same time supports its partners with other projects – which would seem to blur the partnership approach. CARE has explained that it is the other way around: the partnership approach has been used as a platform for creating contacts to other donors. For example, the connection to WEAVE was the result of a deliberate effort, in which CARE promoted that WEAVE support ADC and the target group they assist with additional funds. This is especially important since CASI's small grants were abolished in 2013. Another challenge for a partner-driven approach is that it requires good knowledge of the partner, as its eventual success depends largely on having selected the right one(s). In other countries it may be necessary to move through a pilot period before engaging with partners on a long-term basis.

The RT team also observed that CARE had used Danida-frame funds as a platform to attract other donors. CIRUM obtained funds from the EU, something which was also promoted by CASI/CARE.

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<sup>12</sup> [https://vietnam.oxfam.org/press\\_release/oxfam-vietnam-celebrates-launch-weave](https://vietnam.oxfam.org/press_release/oxfam-vietnam-celebrates-launch-weave)

Here too CARE has been clear that by using the more flexible Danida funds to attain certain results, it has been possible to gain access to EU resources.

The flexibility of the CASI programme and its capacity to both achieve results and links to other donors is an important asset in the partnership approach. It means the donor and partners should have the same understanding of the program's strategic directions and expected results/ result framework, which also are in alignment with - and support the partner - in achieving their mandates/ missions. Based on the strategic objectives, directions and expected results, the donor and its partners – can show flexibility as regards the process of planning and as regards the specific activities to reach the results. It is also a lesson for other donors: flexibility can still mean that the donor and the partner get good results, and in fact it can (and in this case, has) made it easier for partners to obtain results.

### **What about using “coalition-building” instead of a partner-based approach?**

The coalition-building that Oxfam has applied led to many interesting results. This approach could be considered similar to the programme approach, since 7-8 partners are working within each coalition. Two of the strategic CASI partners have been part of this process but do not find that it is necessarily better than the CASI partner-based approach. One partner indicated that the coalition-building was interesting but also “complicated,” since they had to negotiate advocacy targets with other stakeholders. It turned out that the partner was not able to include important advocacy targets as part of the work. Another partner also found it time-consuming to have to first “make advocacy towards other organisations” in the coalition before being able to carry out advocacy towards the authorities. It should be mentioned though, that in general terms the programme has been considered quite successful by its donors. Still, the information from partners indicates that while the building of coalition in theory makes advocacy stronger, it is also a complicated process that requires longer discussions with more stakeholders and is thus a bit more tiresome.

### **3.5. Lessons learned regarding the partner-driven approach**

While in most cases the actual impact of advocacy has yet to materialise, partners find that the partner-driven approach has been helpful in improving advocacy capacity. They appreciate the learning spaces, as these provide information that is new to them. That said, it is also clear that each partner has its own identity and profile, and the partner-driven approach respects these. Rather than planning joint activities in the meetings, they share information on their activities.

ADC finds that the partner-driven approach has in fact helped the organisations to take the next step and become more visible, better able to document their work and with greater clarity regarding the promotion of the IK approach. It has even made it possible for ADC to move into new areas (e.g. access to information) and national advocacy through networking.

CIRUM has emphasised the importance of flexible support to advocacy, as this is what has made it possible for the organisations to accumulate and apply advocacy to a number of issues. Key outcomes such as the Forestry Law and allocations of forest land on the ground show that changes can take place.

iSEE stresses the unique flexibility of CASI and the constructive attention to the partners' needs and which are part of the partner-based approach.

The main lesson is that *the partner-based approach has worked well*. This leads to the recommendation, then, in this first chapter, that the partner-driven approach could in principle be applied in other contexts where CARE wishes to strengthen civil society. However, while the partnership approach seems

particularly suitable for international NGOs such as CARE, there are issues to consider when implementing it. These are discussed below.

*CARE's knowledge of partners is important to the success of the partnership-based approach.* During the CASI Programme, CARE accumulated a considerable amount of knowledge about each partner, and one may argue that CASI CARE chose the best-suited partners. If the partnership approach is to be used in other countries, CARE offices there must also have sufficient knowledge to be in a position to select the “right partners.” If there is not sufficient knowledge, it would be wise to begin with an initial pilot-phase, during which collaboration with a longer roster of partners can be tested.

*CARE should select the right partner in order to achieve success with the partnership-based approach.* The question then becomes, what constitutes a “right partner”? In the case of CASI, there has been a long partner selection process, based on a number of criteria, which can be summarised as follows:

- The organisation should share CARE values
- The organisation should have a vision regarding how it wishes to contribute to development (in the area that the CARE programme works on; e.g. civil society strengthening; EM minorities)
- The organisation should show its high level of commitment and passion to the development area they are working in.
- It should have some advocacy capacity
- It should be open to change and organisational development
- It should have strong competences in areas relevant to the CARE programme
- It should be willing to participate in learning spaces

*Characteristics for strategic partners may be influenced by context.* The success of the partnership approach depends on the strength of the partners: CARE selects the partners and relies on their decision-making to obtain the desired achievements. While there exist civil society organisations working on advocacy in almost all countries, their strength and the conditions under which they operate vary widely. CASI has been privileged by having strong partners with many years of experience and donor funding. Not all countries have partners with such capacity. If they do not have this, then a period of basic capacity-building of several partners need to be entered into before an actual partner-driven approach can be initiated.

*The amount of funds available may depend on how the partnership approach can be designed*

If CARE is fortunate enough to obtain considerable funding from a donor, it may be there are more funds than a few carefully selected partners can use. In such a case, more strategic partners may be selected or there could be a combination of strategic partners and a small-grants or call-for-proposal mechanism to stimulate new proposals being made by other, small civil society organisations. Yet another recommendable option could be a combination with a programme approach. CARE could also look to the experience of “coalition building” as a possibility to supplement a few strategic partners.

*The partnership-based approach may be flexible funds that can become a platform to connect to other donors.* For the specific interventions, it should be said though, that the partner-based relation in CASI is not the only relationship with partners: they receive support from other donors, and even from other programmes implemented by CARE (e.g. WEAVE), or have results accumulated over the years. These results are shared with many stakeholders and cannot be “credited” only to CASI. On the other hand, CASI has also helped to link up with many other programmes, which is another element in the partnership-based approach.

The matters described in this chapter and in the conclusions (see above) may be summarised as they appear in Box 4:

**Box 4: Characteristics of the partner-driven and programme-driven approach**

Partnership approach areas of importance	Partner-driven approach	Programme driven approach (including call-for-proposal, coalition-building approach)
Strong advocacy results (effectiveness and impact)	There is a strong potential to obtain good results if strategic partners can be selected who are in a position to raise challenges and present innovative advocacy topics.	Flexibility to suggest new challenging advocacy issues and select “new” CSOs, but many different partners will be involved and perhaps not all will have the necessary capacity.
Continuation and sustainability of advocacy results	High – ownership by partners who have possibilities of networking and wish to continue activities.	Low – it is difficult to create networks among organisations who do not know each other.
Efficiency (costs)	Donors must have capacity to select the right partners, but operations can be made with a small team. Typically, a programme with a limited budget can benefit most from a partnership approach. The funds assigned to partners can be used in a flexible manner as a platform for accessing other donor funds.	Calls for proposals normally require a Fund Manager and considerable transaction costs, as well as costs for CSOs, many of which prepare their proposals in vain.
Relevance of advocacy topics	High – partners have a serious commitment to follow their advocacy agenda.	Relatively high, since topics chosen are based on context analysis.
Type of donor this approach would fit	International NGOs such as CARE	Larger (i.e. bilateral) donors
Issues that may affect design: context	Will define whether strategic partners can be chosen immediately or whether a pilot-phase is needed.	Will define which components or topics to focus on.
Donor requirements	May contribute to defining how the partnership approach can be carried out.	Normally it is the larger donors themselves who define requirements and use a programme driven approach.

On the other hand, *donor demands (outside CARE) may influence the partnership-based approach*: CARE has received Danida frame funds to finance CASI. These funds are quite flexible and do not question CARE’s choice of a partnership-based approach. If in another context the partnership approach were to be accepted, it is important that CARE’s donor is in agreement with the approach and its concomitant flexibility. In other words, CARE may not always be able to decide the full design of its programme, in particular when it is acting as an implementing partner for other, larger donors. Sometimes there are specific requests for results which may carry implicit less flexibility. However, CARE can use the evidence of the CASI programme to argue for the relevance of using the partnership approach.

*Horizontal linkages between partners is still a good idea, although it was not much used in the CASI programme.* Since the partner-driven approach has worked well for CASI and the strategic partners in Vietnam it is highly probable that it would do the same for CARE in other countries. In such countries it would be even better if CARE could find strategic partners that were interested in and able to carry out both individual, strong advocacy work and joint advocacy, hereby combining the “partner-driven approach” and the “coalition building.” Horizontal linkages are thus not necessarily guaranteed.

*The partnership-based approach should maintain its focus on impact for target groups.* Also, when carrying out advocacy activities, it is important to focus both on the legal framework and plans (e.g. laws, provincial plans) and on their implementation. The advocacy is only a real success once it has contributed to the positive change of lives for the target group. In fact, the final impact of the advocacy work undertaken has in many cases yet to be produced. There is still a long way to go: for example, regarding the new forestry law, duty-bearers in interviews with the RT encouraged NGOs such as CIRUM to contribute with models and piloting on how EMs can become owners of traditional forests and gain access to sustainable forest-based income-producing activities. . Even when CIRUM – and other NGOs – have gone through their piloting period, there will still be a long stretch to traverse before the experience can be replicated.

*CASI can inspire other CARE programmes.* In addition, the partner-based approach it is not a “blueprint” that is universally applicable to all types of donors, but rather to international NGOs such as CARE. As mentioned earlier, CARE’s design of the partnership approach to CSO support will in each case require careful context analysis, since in some countries there may be a need for a piloting period with partners in order to get to know them better or strengthen their capacity. The experience from CASI should be taken as a positive one that certainly can inspire the design of a partnership approach to CSO support in other countries.

## 4 STRENGTHENING OF CIVIL SOCIETY

*Abstract: As described in the chapter on context, the long-term trend in Vietnam has been a gradual strengthening of civil society organisations, both regarding their internal capacity and their capacities to relate to other organisations and undertake advocacy work. This chapter presents some of the key elements in CAST's approach and how they have contributed to this process, both regarding CSO partner and network's capacity to advocacy, internal strengthening through organisational development and empowerment of local CBOs.*

There are many ways to measure the space for civil society and thus how civil society is being strengthened. For example, CIVICUS used a comprehensive methodology and applied it in Vietnam back in 2005-06. Working with UNDP and SNV, it assessed the environment for CSOs, values promoted by civil society and its impact.<sup>13</sup>

Likewise, different donors, including Oxfam in Vietnam, Irish Aid, iSEE, Norway and DfID supported an independent research team that carried out an assessment of civil society space in 2015, based on a number of indicators. The research was published in 2016 and its conclusion also points in the direction of civil society space having expanded during the years from 2012-2015, as indicated in box 5, below.

### Box 5: Civil society space 2015

Civil society space is not measured directly, but rather through three particular components as follows: 1) Social and cultural values; 2) Civil society capacity; and 3) State regulation.

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Most respondents consider Vietnam's civil society space to be narrow.

As many as 61% of the research respondents believe that despite remaining narrow, civil society space has expanded over the last three years, and respondents hope that this space will further expand in the future. One of the main causes is that the wide use of the Internet and social media have made people more knowledgeable, thus giving them better chances to express their voices and connect with each other. In addition, the establishment of new free-standing groups, even antagonistic ones, has pushed the boundaries, thus expanding the civil space. The transformation of NGOs through policy advocacy, social movements, and especially the development of volunteer youth and charity groups has created much new space. The transformation in cooperation, coordination and mutual respect amongst civil society groups has increased operational effectiveness and formed the conditions for civil society space to be expanded further.

*Source: Benchmark Assessment of Civil Society Space in Vietnam, Hong Duc Publishing House, 2015*

In this assessment of CASI's contribution to civil society strengthening we will used a more narrow approach linked to that of the partners, including the following:

- **Advocacy:** To which extent has CASI promoted engagement of civil society in advocacy activities and networking?

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<sup>13</sup>UNDP. Participatory Civil Society Assessment 2011: The conclusion was: i) The environment is slightly disabling, representing a mixture of conducive and less conducive factors. On the positive side are rapid poverty reduction, strong economic growth, increasing integration into the global economy, political stability, and a fairly high level of trust among people. ii) Civil society practises and promotes positive values to a moderate extent, with strong efforts to alleviate poverty in particular, while its transparency, democracy and environmental sustainability are quite low. iii) The impact of civil society on society at large is relatively limited. It is higher in meeting societal needs and citizen empowerment, especially for those more disadvantaged: the poor, ethnic minorities, poor women or people living with HIV/AIDS. There is little impact in influencing public policies on issues such as human rights, social policy and national budgeting, or holding the state and private sectors accountable.

- **Organisational Development:** To what extent has CASI contributed to strategic partners' internal capacity building, including strategic vision, human resources, fundraising and research, among other things;
- **Empowerment:** To what extent are CBOs and target group members strengthened and able to raise their voices to promote changes at local and national levels.

Below we present CASI's approach to civil society strengthening, including examples of how strategic partners are strengthened; how they and national networks carry out advocacy and how CBO networks are empowered at local level. These are all issues that contribute to the strengthening of civil society.

#### 4.1. Characteristics of CASI's approach to civil society strengthening

CASI's primary focus is on *strengthening civil society actors and networks* that can represent and amplify the voice of ethnic minorities in various social change processes. With the introduction of a partner-driven approach starting in 2012, CASI focuses on selected, strategic partners and through them on finding ways to strengthen the CSOs and networks they work with. During all of its phases, capacity-building of partner VNGOs has played a role. The areas in which CASI has provided support have included (i) organisational and institutional capacity-building; (ii) networking and advocacy (in recent phases especially there has been support to ethnic minority networks); (iii) evidence-based development research and learning events.

CASI has different categories of partners, including strategic partners it has specifically selected, implementing partners, CSO working groups and EM-led networks. They also have relationships with a few partners who do not receive funds but only technical assistance. In this chapter we will mainly focus on the strategic partners, the CSO working group/network and the EM led network (the two last networks include both national organisations and CBOs).

**Box 6: categories of CASI partners and examples**

Category of CSO partners	Examples of partners
Strategic partners (current and previous)	CIRUM, iSEE, ADC and SRD
Implementing partners	VUSTA, ADC
CSO working group/network	Indigenous Minorities Working Group (EMWG), Popular Participation Working Group (PPWG) NorthNet, CCWG, LISO
Ethnic minority lead networks	Land Net + EM leader + others
Unfunded partners	e.g. CCD

Based on the year 2015 External Evaluation, it was decided to support the further development of organisational capacities, especially with a view to preparing partners for the phase-out stage. Partners have also been strengthened regarding gender policies, as will be shown below.

The strengthening of civil society has taken place by putting partners at the core, including their central structures and offices, their engagement in networks at national level and their engagement with CBOs, as shown in the cases described below.

The main strength of CASI's approach is that it has been adapted and tailor-made to the needs of each partner. This flexibility is highlighted by partners as the most important element. Some might argue that it is a weakness that CASI has tried to cover so many levels – from local to national. However, this support can in fact be said to be focused, since it has only been related to the spaces occupied and promoted by the partners themselves.

Furthermore, CASI has not only contributed to its partners through funding. The learning events held among partners has contributed to sharing knowledge. CASI has used CARE's particular modus operandi, as it promotes its general strategy by acting as a knowledge broker and even fellow activist. For example, CARE has offered knowledge to partners concerning human rights, specifically those of women. In addition, in 2016, CARE collected inputs from partners and EM representatives so they could be used for national dialogue events organized by UNW, UNDP, WB and Vietnamese government agencies.

Box 7, below, contains some of the findings related to CARE's added value:

#### **Box 7: CARE's and CASI's added value to the partners**

The strategic partners have confirmed that CARE has provided added value to them beyond the funding. Examples include:

CARE has promoted **access to other donors**. In addition to assisting CASI partners by creating close links among ethnic minority groups across regions in which the project has a presence, CARE also coordinated the participation of ethnic minority CBOs in the CASI project so that in terms of programme activities and through EM networks they interact with other CARE-funded projects (EMWE, WEAVE, Land Rights, Right and Voice of EM women projects). Furthermore, CARE is acting as a fundraiser, since some of these programmes also finance CASI's CBO activities

CARE also engages directly in **joint development of new project ideas** and fundraising together with strategic partners. For example, CASI staff is engaged in preparing a concept paper on EM youth which later will serve as a foundation for the preparation of actual programme support from other donors.

CARE's **organisational development** of partners is unique and helps partners develop themselves.

CARE's **partnership approach** is also considered to be an added value. The **flexibility** that the partnership approach permits and the concomitant on-going dialogue is found to help in strengthening the partner's work.

CARE's function as a "**door opener**" is also seen in relation to its capacity to link up partners to specific networks, first and foremost the Ethnic Minority Working Group. This is also considered to have expanded some of the partners' outreach.

Source: Interviews with partners. See chapter 8 ("Final Remarks") for a comprehensive discussion on "added value".

#### **4.2. Different levels of interventions: the strategic partner's central structures, networks at national level and networks with CBO participation**

##### **1) Organisational development of strategic partners:**

With respect to the three strategic partners (ACD, iSEE and CIRUM), particular efforts have been made to strengthen them by means of an organisational capacity assessment. The most recent evaluation declared that the strategic partners should be prepared for when the CASI project comes to an end. The assessment included nine capacity areas, as follows:

- Vision and mission
- Visibility
- Stakeholder involvement
- Resource mobilisation
- Leadership
- Planning

- HR Management Standards
- Financial management
- Donor compliance

After the assessment, each partner prepared their own organisational development (OD) plan and initiated the adjustments. This latest OD process is of course just one element of strengthening CSOs. Thus far the partners have been very happy with the approach.

### **The case of ADC: Identity, visibility and advocacy**

The Agriculture and Forestry Research and Development Centre for the Mountainous Region (ADC) was established in 1991. The centre is a non-profit Vietnamese non-governmental organization (VNGO) operating under an independent mechanism, with separate offices. Having received support from CASI under previous phases, it became a key partner in 2013. For some years, ADC has been pondering how to define its organisation and become known as a research institute by many partners/local governmental agencies. ADC used the last OD support to clearly define its vision, including that within the next decade it expects to be recognized as a key non-governmental organization in Vietnam working on the enhancement of rights, access and voice of ethnic minorities in the areas of food security and adaptation to climate change.

With support received from CASI during previous phases, ADC increased its visibility, especially in this last phase. It now has a new and clear focus, namely acting to further the rights of EMs, including the promotion of indigenous knowledge and climate change. ADC has disseminated information and documentation through an improved website, research reports and even participation in television programmes at which it sat with the government's CEMA representative to discuss indigenous knowledge issues, meaning ADC is today recognised as a relevant stakeholder by the Vietnamese government. Although there is still a way to go before ADC's proposals are actually reflected in official documents, it is possible to state that ADC has in fact strengthened its position in Vietnamese society.

Through CASI support, this positioning of the organisation is accompanied by an internal strengthening of partner capacity. ADC has been able to update HR Policies (on salary, compensation); finance management; project management guidance; job descriptions and access to internal information.

The other partners have also been happy with the capacity building, including former partner SRD. SRD does mention though, that they found CASI placed too much emphasis on advocacy activities, which SRD does not consider to be essential for its purposes. For its part, CIRUM has been able to expand its activities on advocacy with support from CASI.

**Strengthening of advocacy towards policy makers** has also been a CASI objective. In fact, there are several examples where iSEE has exerted influence on CEMA, the key government stakeholder on EM; ADC has influenced provincial budgets through its specific proposals on climate change; and CIRUM has successfully influenced the Forestry Law for EM rights, to mention only the most important examples (for a detailed description, see the chapter on core issue I, partner-driven advocacy).

### **Strengthening of the gender perspective: all partners**

Over the years, but especially in the most recent phases, all partners have worked systematically on gender-related issues, which are now becoming more visible in the work with CBOs. Some had received support from CARE gender specialists/ advisers, while CIRUM prepared its own gender policy. ADC's activities have contributed to the empowerment of women's groups. In the case of

CIRUM, working on the ground, it has taken more time to raise confidence among female EM leaders, but gradually they are participating more at events and speaking out. Some of the partners have worked in close coordination with the Women's Union.

Box 8 describes some of the interventions related to gender.

#### **Box 8: CASI's emphasis on the gender issue**

CARE has been promoting gender equity in most of its programmes. The first phases of the CASI programmes had assigned programme staff to gender. CARE has a gender specialist for all programmes, and he has contributed in the two latest phases, when a considerable number of activities were carried out. The Review Team noted that ADC has decided to support EM women's groups since they have been at a disadvantage and would participate if they were promoted. The local Women's Union in Bac Kan indicated that before ADC's support women would not speak, and that now they have become much more active. CIRUM has tried to promote gender equity by encouraging women leaders to participate in national and provincial events which otherwise were dominated by men. However, it is still a slow process. iSEE has a broader vision of gender, due to its work with LGBT. iSEE has appreciated the support to introducing staff regulations with better conditions for maternity leave, among others.

Below is an extract from the end-line-Survey carried out in 2015 as part of the Final Evaluation. The information indicates the highlights of support to gender which is still relevant for partners.

*"The CASI design aimed to address gender by ensuring that gender capacities were integrated as a core competence in partner organizations. CARE acted as technical assistance providers to CASI partner VNGOs such as training delivery, sending a gender specialist to work (coaching, mentoring, advising, reviewing) with partners during their development of materials on gender and/or gender mainstreaming. This support was highly appreciated by ADC, CIRUM and SRD. Examples of CARE's gender technical support to partners are: training on gender in forest management and climate change for ADC and CIRUM; training workshop on gender and development of a gender action plan for SRD; support ADC to develop a gender integration plan; support SRD in development of gender-integrated guidelines to be added in their Program Manual; support/coordinate the support for CIRUM in their development of gender policy; support SRD in reviewing its policies to ensure gender responsiveness integrated; support SRD in the development of staff appraisal indicators regarding its capacities regarding gender issues; develop a gender checklist of network operation under SRD; study on barriers toward women's participation in forest management; advocacy on climate change and in the development of a Social and Economic Development Plan; and supporting CIRUM to develop and implement a campaign on "Women to Protect the Forest" which involves men and the community in the promotion of women's roles and status; providing ADC with references on gender and CC and CIRUM on gender in forest management; and documentation of the process of organizational gender mainstreaming in CIRUM processes. As a result, the partners have mainstreamed gender in a variety of their activities such as capacity building, creation of CBOs or sending EM women to participate in a wide ranges of advocacy activities."*

Endline Survey Report, 2015; IRC Consulting, p30.

## **2) Strengthening through support to networks, both national, provincial and with CBO participation**

All partners have joined networks and have increased their activity with support from CASI.

**PPWG:** A key space for civil society is the Popular Participation Working Group. The PPWG is a platform and a working group, so it has no legal standing and is not registered. The members include CARE, Oxfam, World Bank, Irish Aid, other NGOs and researchers who are active members of PPWG. A core group coordinates the planning and strategy development for PPWG. The number of members is 500 (organizations and individuals). The membership is open to anyone who is interested in citizens' participation and the development of civil society. The mandate of the PPWG includes: (1) Advocacy for important/relevant laws and (2) create an open forum for discussion of key issues in Vietnam. Regarding advocacy, the PPWG takes up issues such as the debate on the Law on Association, in which it is suggested to abolish the proposed restrictions on CSO funding.

iSEE has been the coordinating agency for more than two periods (they are in the 3<sup>rd</sup> period). Members trust iSEE and iSEE's vision of how to promote CSOs in Vietnam. The CASI support is very important as together with other funds, it ensures that iSEE can play the role of coordination and host-agency. iSEE's active participation in this working group has helped to strengthen civil society.

### **EMWG**

In the case of EMWG, CARE has ensured the participation of its three main partners (ADC, CIRUM and iSEE, which co-chairs the Working Group together with CARE). iSEE plays a very active role in this group. CARE has promoted that this space, where around eight national VNGOs and four international NGOs share experiences on EMs, has gone from focusing mainly on learning to also carrying out advocacy work. Regarding the National Targeted Programmes, the EMWG has held meetings with governmental representatives and managed to increase the understanding for EM's needs. For example, in 2015, the EMWG presented different observations on the NTP, and suggested that "*The next phase of NTPs should be more people-centred and sensitive to ethnic minorities. In this way, indigenous knowledge and cultural values can be mobilised. We recommend that NTPs apply an anthropological approach; conduct a gender analysis; and develop gender-sensitive and nutrition-sensitive interventions. This will require capacity building to guide localities and the communities themselves in the use of these approaches.*"

As explained in the context description, the NTPs were changed in 2015. From the interview with MOLISA, it appears there is now more emphasis on involving EM groups in the design of project support. Although MOLISA does not "like" the term *anthropological approach* the Ministry has adopted a similar involvement of EM groups, using its own terminology (*cultural identification*). The EMWG is considered important by some partners, while one of the partners consider it to be a forum dominated by outsiders, where ideally more ethnic minority representatives should be included. In fact, CARE's and EMWG's work with EM groups has been noted, and is also referred to in a recent World Bank appraisal (March 2017) of the NTP for New Rural Development and Sustainable Poverty Reduction (NTSPS).

### **LandNet**

The Forest Peoples Land Rights Network (LandNet) is a civil society network that includes different stakeholders in the struggle for forestland, among them forest people, ethnic minority farmers, nongovernmental organizations, mass organizations, researchers, individuals, local authorities, retired officials and the media. It is currently operating in six provinces in Vietnam. LandNet uses rights issues at grassroots level in Vietnamese society. Its main objective is to lobby for forestland use rights and self-management in order to secure the livelihoods of people living in or on the margins of upland forests (from hereon referred to as "forest people"). The growing pressure on natural resources and the increasing amount of stakeholders endangers the capacity of these forest people to jointly govern their land with their neighbours in ecologically sustainable ways, adding a new dimension to the already complex issue of land rights in the Vietnamese context.

The network is facilitated by the local non-governmental organization Culture Identity and Resource Use Management (CIRUM), in cooperation with the Consultancy on Development Institute (CODE) and the Social Policy Ecology Research Institute (SPERI). Together SPERI, CODE, CIRUM, CENDI form the Livelihood Sovereignty Alliance (LISO)<sup>14</sup>, and have over 20 years of experience working with forestland use rights. LandNet was formally established in April 2013, and brings together key

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<sup>14</sup> LISO is the Livelihood Sovereignty Alliance 2013 – 2025. Members share their methods and maximize their efforts and achievements, with the three pillars of 1) Eco-Farming Education, 2) Livelihood Sovereignty and 3) Nurturing Nature interacting to nourish the Civil Society River flowing in order to balance and fertilize its two sides: government and business.

representatives of forest people and other relevant stakeholders that the LISO alliance members built up starting with participants in the land allocation and management models they have operated during the past two decades.

The strengthening of LandNet has been important for promoting legal access to forest and land at local level, as explained in the chapter on the “partnership approach.” According to LandNet representatives from three different communes, the actual degree of activity where LandNet is operating may vary. In one of them, LandNet is working in a structured manner with regular meetings and carrying out advocacy to try to stop specific threats posed by companies, among which a rubber company which has invaded community land. The local LandNet – with support from CIRUM – are still fighting this case, which is further described in the annexes. In two other communes there are individual members of LandNet active. However, for all the communes there are individual leaders who participate in LandNet forums at provincial and national level. These leaders are also active on an individual basis in promoting land forest allocation to EM.

The LandNet foundation existed before CASI initiated its support (CASI started with CIRUM in 2010) – and will continue once CASI finalises its support; still CASI’s support to CIRUM and LandNet can be considered a contribution to the strengthening of an important civil society organisation, since CASI came in with support in a moment where the LandNet is starting to be formalised (which it finally was in 2013). In addition, CASI encouraged or outlined the direction of strengthening/formalization of the EM network. Following this recommendation, CIRUM capitalized on its history of many years working with EM farmers on the ground, so that with support from CASI and other donors, LandNet was officially formed.

### **CBOs working as banana producers**

ADC has promoted the organisation of EM women in Bac Kan, and has promoted the growing of bananas. Likewise, they have – with support from the NGO Northwest – connected the women with a company which buys banana for processing to chips. It is clear that the women are empowered and well organised, with possibilities of obtaining a to higher income. On the other hand, they may also participate in the local planning process to the SEDP – an issue yet to be explored. While ADC has provided the women with many skills on how to cultivate bananas and organise themselves, there are still pending issues on how to maintain the necessary quality of the fruit and develop a commercialisation strategy.

### **NorthNet**

NorthNet was established in 2011 and involves the participation of NGOs, local civil society organizations and agencies/individuals which provide training and consultation services in the northern mountainous provinces of Vietnam for the development of ethnic minorities and other marginalized groups. NorthNet has eleven (11) member organizations in the provinces of Cao Bang, Bac Kan, Thai Nguyen, Phu Tho, Hoa Binh, Yen Bai, Ha Giang, and Dien Bien. Members of NorthNet are working in different areas, but mainly in supporting EMs. For example, some of the members are focusing on finance training for EM women, gender, climate change and livelihoods.

ADC now holds the chairmanship of NorthNet and is active in providing inputs for its activities. Another NorthNet member says that ADC has been very competent, especially regarding coordination and connection with donors. ADC finds that CASI’s contribution has helped it to become more confident in engaging and even leading networks, something that ADC did not do a decade ago.

Several spaces at local and national levels that iSEE works with can also be considered a strengthening of civil society. Tien Phong is the a short-term name for the group “The Pioneers for the voice of Ethnic Minority”, which iSEE has been working closely with, indicating that they are amongst the first to voice out for EM related issues.

Tien Phong originally consisted of 25 core members, with an extended group of 43 people. It initially started as an informal network but has been formalized in 2011 and participated in different forums where they provide the voice of the EM, e.g. on the Consultation on the Constitution (organized by CSOs, 2013), Consultation on Family and Marriage Law (organized by the Legislative Research Institute, 2013), and the Annual Policy Dialogue Forum with CEMA. The team met with several of the members who have also carried out advocacy in their communes. While they are now allowed to present their points of view, there is still not much response from the government. Some of the members also got access to iSEE’s small grants, and learned how to conduct different activities together with their communities while gaining capacity regarding these.

For several years, the network has organized the annual “*I believe I can*” events in Hanoi, Dak Nong and Lao Cai. These cultural events aim at promoting ethnic pride, confidence, and engagement. The network consolidation is one of iSEE’s – and their partner CECEM – major interventions with EM communities. They will strengthen EM’s voice and perspective in the public space. The Pioneers’ connections, credibility, knowledge and capacities are the most valuable resource of this project. However, it must also be admitted that until now advocacy has been about creating a space for EM persons to speak out – but there still seems to be a way to go to promote actual changes and increase numbers of involved EM persons. In other words, initial empowerment processes have been initiated where the EM can now speak out.

iSEE also supports the Action for Hmong Development (AHD) group of seven persons who appear on talk shows and publish information on Facebook about Hmong issues. They do this in order to recover and remind people of their cultural heritage, including the linguistic tradition still extant among the Hmong. The members of the group are concerned because in the course of the development taking place at community level many tend to overlook the indigenous knowledge they still have. The reactions from some of the communities have been encouraging and more than 80 persons have come to their meetings. While these activities are positive, the group is still quite small and sustainability is not guaranteed. It will be important to involve more Hmong.

#### **4.3. Overall balance for civil society strengthening and lessons learned**

The following conclusions can be drawn:

CASI has contributed to new **advocacy** capacities among the partners involved, including their engagement in **networks**.

CASI has promoted the **organisational development** of its partners, both internally and to carry out their functions. In one of the cases observed, the partner received support in order to define a clear mission, increase its visibility and its capacity to document impact. Most partners were also strengthened to deepen knowledge as concerns promoting gender equity in their activities, something which was also observed in the field.

Finally, CASI has promoted **empowerment** at CBO level. The partners have promoted that local leaders be more confident when speaking out both at local level (where most people in the target group are women) and by including the target group in national events and networks.

What worked and can be learned:

- *Changes have been promoted – both networks and CBOs have been strengthened.* CASI has in fact contributed to changes among the partners it supports, mainly by promoting networks and supporting the participation of CBOs in these networks. In general, CASI has been careful to support those networks that are being set up by partners or CBOs, thereby making it possible to work on several levels (local, provincial, national) and with different approaches (that of each partner).
- *Organisational development has been a success but is a long-term process. There is a need for linking up with production/value chain programmes.* Even though CASI has now been implemented for many years, and has strengthened civil society both internally and externally, including its capacity to participate in networking, there are still areas that need strengthening. One area where the partners who work with economic development may need allied is in relation to marketing knowledge. CBOs supported with agricultural models by CIRUM and by ADC get good, new skills. However, there are still challenges related to ensuring the right quality of products, ensuring the sale of products etc.
- *There is a need for moving advocacy beyond the formulation stage (plan, laws) and on to implementation and impact.* Likewise, the capacity to undertake advocacy work is high among some members, but other state they still need more capacity-building. In fact, looking at the results, which include laws passed with input from partners, provincial budgets approved based on partner input and forestland allocated to stakeholders, these are no small feat. Notwithstanding, the actual implementation of the budget is sometimes weak and the same can be said of enforcement of the laws passed, meaning that civil society organisations must prepare themselves to a “second wave of advocacy,” focused on follow-up on approved legislation and plans, which of course will not happen “overnight” but require other long-term efforts. For example, regarding the forestry law, it may be the NGOs who can propose models for how to implement the law.
- *The capacity of CBOs to undertake advocacy work has increased.* The ethnic minority CBOs who are active in the networks have gradually tried to exert influence on local governmental structures. In fact, some of LandNet’s members are also former members of the communal or provincial governments. Still, in several communes the land lost to companies has not been returned and they do not all participate in the local planning processes toward the SEDP. It may still be an area to strengthen so this is done in a systematic manner.
- *“Quiet” and “fairly quiet” approaches to advocacy are needed.* One of the partners talked about the need to carry out “quiet advocacy.” However, in the case of private companies using the communities’ forest land, there may be a need to raise it to “fairly quiet,” for example by continuing to hold hearings based on case studies.
- *CASI has come to an end in an increasing difficult context.* On the other hand, the context during the last couple of years has been less favourable, meaning that it is more important to be focused, technical and contribute whenever possible by making suggestions rather than being confrontational.

What has yet to work:

- *Persistence is needed to achieve an impact.* While there are many CASI results and outcomes, most interviewees state that in the case of advocacy and empowerment processes it is necessary to

persist and be patient before it is possible to talk about important changes – or impact, for that matter.

What did not work:

- *Some partners do not sufficiently share CARE's values.* The basis for cooperation between partners are shared values and approaches. In the case of SRD it turned out that values and approaches to advocacy were not shared. The final evaluation (2015) indicated that SRD, in spite of substantial support, was a good implementer of donor-defined projects but placed less emphasis on its strategic focus. SRD found that CARE had made relevant attempts to increase SRD's advocacy profile but that this was not a success, since SRD did not wish to move in that direction and found the emphasis on advocacy towards EM to be overly ambitious. However, SRD were active in other advocacy processes, for example regarding FLEGT (Forest, Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade)<sup>15</sup>. CARE, for its part, took the consequences of the lack of shared values and vision on civil society development in an open and transparent manner, based on criteria outlined in the Final Evaluation. The Review Team finds that this is a good way to handle situations in which values and approaches become too different.

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<sup>15</sup> <http://vngo-cc.vn/dmt-Gioi-thieu-ve-VNGO-FLEGT-36/>

## 5 ETHNIC MINORITY SUPPORT

It is suggested that the third core issue be “**Approaches to CBOs and networks led by ethnic minorities and capacity building of networks; achievements, what worked – what not, main lessons.**”

CASI has supported both broad-based national ethnic minority networks as well as CBOs. CASI has also supported capacity-building of broader networks such as EMWG, NorthNet, CCWG and LISO. The lesson learned from the partners is that rather than choose among CBOs, strategic partners or networks, it is advisable to maintain support to all levels, while keeping the partners at the centre for most activities.

### 5.1. Strategic partners

Strategic partners are at the “centre” of the activities. This implies that all networks are “coloured” by the three strategic partners’ approach to EM support. Below are some of the values of each of the three partners:

**Box 9: Partner profile regarding support to ethnic minorities**

Partner	CIRUM	ADC	iSEE
Strategic actions and values	Promote solutions to forest and land conflicts, and secure ethnic minority people's rights to access, control and benefit from their forest and land resources. These practical solutions are used for lobby/advocacy as input to close gaps in policies, so that the policies can include the solutions. CIRUM follows land rights and sustainable land use & management respecting values of customary law which maintains local culture and livelihood security.	Support activities for the community in the field of EM empowerment, economic development in the context of climate change, based on the research.	Empowers disadvantaged groups, builds social movements, pushes the expansion of civil society spaces, and advocates for rights-based, including EM rights, and anthropological approach to policy making.

At local level, they are all connected to networks in one way or another. For example, CIRUM is the secretariat for LandNet; ADC supports EM women with banana plantations, among other things; and iSEE organizes co-research and smaller networks with a focus on cultural values. This means that each organization shares provinces (e.g. in Lao Cai both CIRUM and iSEE have contacts to community groups; in Bac Kan ADC also supports groups of women, some of which been involved in iSEE activities).

While it is clear that all organisations have much in common strategically, namely the promotion of EM people's rights, the differences also mean that the three have not undertaken many joint activities, except for the learning sessions. Some activities have been carried out between two organisations (e.g. ADC and iSEE).

Below a few cases are described which show that support to CBOs, partners and national networks is not about how much support goes to each, but rather about how the different links support each other.

## 5.2. CBO involvement in networks

### Land resources

**LandNet:** As described in the chapter on partnership approach, LandNet is based on stakeholders who participate in the struggle for forestland, and these are first and foremost forest people. As was seen in this chapter, some of the forest communities have had land allocated to them, but most still have cases pending with either companies or others who have invaded and used their lands. The LandNet representatives are active at local level, where they try to solve problems as they arise. They also receive assistance from others, including the national secretariat CIRUM, which facilitates local support and encourages organisations to participate and speak out at national level.

The support to LandNet is by definition a clear approach for focusing on the main resource, namely the forestland of EM communities. It is thus not pertinent to “compare” whether for example support to CIRUM is “better” than support to LandNet structures at local level, as they are part of the same body. Also, LandNet’s situation is the result of more than 20 years of work, so CASI is really only a “passenger” offering support at a particular point in time.

### Box 10: The women-led CBO in Lao Cai Province to promote the forest-based livelihood model

Having supported the re-allocation of forestland to communities, CIRUM started its model of forest-based livelihoods. Forty (40) ha of a high income-generating medicine plant (Amomum) have been expanded in SaiDuan village (Phin Ngan Commune, Bat Xat District, Lao Cai Province) since 2014. Forty-two (42) households (115 female members) are ensured an average income of VND 50-60 million per ha from 2017 onward. The community is also well known for producing Amomum seeds, which are provided to producers who then cultivate amomum in neighboring districts and provinces. The SaiDuan community, led by Dzao women, is developing traditional medicine steam bath services with technical and financial support from CIRUM since 2016. The Dzao women’s group initiated this model. The model is based entirely on indigenous knowledge and is expected to generate employment for all Dzao women and men, especially for the young from 42 households in the village. The CBO (led by Dzao women) received support from the commune authority as regards connecting to potential customers.

Dzao women affirmed that, in addition to high-income generation, the community – and particularly the women - obtained various benefits with its engagement in CBO activities, including their understanding of economic activities such as protecting the forest for non-timber products and sustainable cultivation of medicinal plants under forest shade have been enhanced significantly thanks to various capacity building activities delivered by CIRUM. The CBO leader said that *“The most significant change for us is the creation of employment for women. Before the women in our village did not know what to do in order to generate income.”* Moreover, the community was engaging in a value chain analysis, hence learning about production, processing and selling amomum for higher value. Currently the CBO has developed some products from amomum such as wine, which has been sent to the laboratory in Hanoi for testing on food hygiene and safety. Key CBO members were visiting models of medical steamed baths in Hanoi and Sapa district in order to learn how to organize and provide the medical steamed baths services. As stated by a CBOs member: *“Those visits were eye-opening to us, especially for the women. We had never learned anything about forestry-based health care service-provision in the past.”* The practice of Development of the Community Forest Protection Regulations was a process that also enhanced community management of a common resource. Several training sessions were conducted for all villages in PhinNgan commune, including SaiDuan community, on skills to organize the forestry protection activities as collective efforts. The awareness of villagers, particularly women, as concerns livelihoods based on forestry, whose resources need to be managed in a sustainable manner. *“The women are more confident now in their management capacity and ability to generate an income for*

households. Hence their position in families and the community has been strengthened remarkably" said a male-member of the CBOs.

It was observed that the place where they sell the service is still in a quite remote area, and there may be a need to dedicate some resources on marketing and promotion of the products – a skill that is not the core competence of the CBO or of CIRUM.



*The house construction is underway using local labour and materials contributed by 42 households and financially supported by CIRUM.*

*The leaders among CBO women are local health workers who have indigenous knowledge of medical plants collected from forestry.*

*Discussion with the RT on the outcomes of the growth model and the CBO operation.*

Source: Interviews with authorities and CBOs in Lao Cai Province.

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## Culture and values

The **Tienphong Network** receives support from iSEE, although ADC has also connected some of their EM persons to its activities. Starting in 2011, the network has been showcasing the cultural values of different EM groups in Vietnam. It also participates in meetings with the government. At the moment there are 25 core members, but the network is still growing and will be extended to 43 members. A few of the members receive small grants with which they can test if they are capable of running a training session or becoming engaged in local music. The group is best known for the event titled "*I believe I can,*" in which it presents a number of EM cultural manifestations (i.e. dance, music, etc.). While it can be considered a success in that it has presented its positions at some government events, the latter has yet to take any of the issues introduced into account. Therefore, the impact at national level needs more time to ripen.

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moment there are 25 core members, but the network is still growing and will be extended to 43 members. The small grant is a learning opportunity for grantees in Tiên Phong to practice and sharpen their skills on how to work with, organize, and encourage their local communities to find solutions for common issues. A few of the members receive small grants with which they can practice running a training session or become engaged in local music. The topics, whether it is human rights training or preserving traditional music, are totally up to the grantees' communities to decide. The group is most known for the annual event titled "I believe I can," in which it presents a number of EM cultural manifestations (i.e. dance, music, etc.). The core principle regarding "Pride – Confidence - Self determination" regarding has been promoted in the event as Tiên Phong and iSEE's approach. While it can be considered a success that it was able to present its positions at some events with the government, the latter has yet to take any of the issues introduced into account. Therefore, the impact at national level needs more time to ripen.

**Co-research.** iSEE also supports ethnic women who are empowered by the presence of local researchers. Thirty-two researchers, who are women from Tay, Dao and the H'mong ethnic group in the Phuc Loc commune from the Ba Be district in Bac Kan province have been taking training courses on cultural diversity, visual storytelling and participatory research methods. Through access to more knowledge, they have engaged in issues such as children dropping out of school, improvement of domestic pig farming and environmental pollution. A similar group of 34 co-researchers in the Banh Trach commune has carried out work to empower ethnic women. The Bac Kan Women's Union has been very active and highly appreciated the work being done, although they also want iSEE to pass all communication through them. Interestingly, those who participated in the formulation of small projects through co-research will also be prioritized with resources when the local SEDP planning process takes place. The Vietnam Women's Union hopes the co-research methods can be expanded to other provinces, but will need funds to do so.

**The Action for Hmong Development (AHD)** network is a small group of young, urban Hmong, many of whom are students. They are likewise dedicated to rescue the cultural values of the Hmong and have reached hundreds of persons in the general public with their public talk shows and events on Hmong culture, language and behaviour. AHD is very proactive in designing their own programs and applying for funding from many donors (Oxfam, US Embassy, Live and Learn to name a few), with minimal support from iSEE. They distribute information from "mouth-to-mouth" about the events and through Facebook, among others. The group is also capable of presenting information on YouTube. Although the network is not yet very big, it has to start with something and it has already gained a certain projection.

Some of the other informants interviewed by the Review Team mentioned that the students supported by iSEE were not really poor. It is probably true, that this group of young students from EM live in conditions different than those young EM who live in the communities. However, they are considered to be among the poorest of the students. A support to them can serve as an entry point to recover cultural values from the communities that otherwise are in danger of being forgotten

### Economic empowerment

Support to EM women in Bac Kan working on banana plantations has been a key activity for ADC and a way of promoting that EM women in that area earn better incomes. Producers have received support so they increase the quality of their bananas by using IK, thereby making it possible to sell these at a higher price for use in the making of banana chips, as described in chapter 3. This experience is yet in its initial stages and the women are considering whether to form a cooperative or not. There may be a

need for more information on how to run a business. In any case, it shows them a new path to improve income, now based on new IK skills. In this case, the EM approach is the economic emphasis on IK.

It is also true that there is a need to establish alliances with other private sector stakeholders that can work in areas where organisations such as ADC and CARE cannot.

### 5.3. National networks

CARE – and the CASI staff – have been active in promoting the participation of CARE itself as well as the three strategic partners in the Ethnic Minority Working Group forum, where eight national and four international organisations (Oxfam, CARE, PLAN and ActionAid) participate. With its increasing focus on EM, CARE has assumed the position as chair of the WG. This has mainly been a learning space, but CARE and its co-chair iSEE have played a very important role in adding new elements to the EMWG's activities, first and foremost in recent years through a focus on advocacy vis-à-vis governmental institutions such as CEMA, MARD and others. Regarding the National Targeted Programmes, the EMWG has been able to introduce a clearer focus on EM needs, which previously was not there. The EMWG has now increased its space and is being taking into account by the government. Before, EMWG could maybe participate as an observer at a meeting, but now they are invited and can provide input in meetings with the government.

It should be mentioned that not all partners see EMWG as key and therefore may not consider that their participation is required, since they have a rather specific agenda regarding how to address EM needs (e.g. on forestry). Notwithstanding, most stakeholders find that CARE has added important value to its work by assuming responsibility for promoting advocacy within the EMWG framework. It should be mentioned that CASI has promoted **gender equity** at all levels; among CBO leaders and strategic partners. Training has been provided, and support to gender policies for those partners who wanted it (e.g. CIRUM has formulated its own gender policy).

### 5.4. Lessons learned

Based on the foregoing, the following lessons can be drawn:

- *The multipronged strategy has worked well:* The approach to support EM is not about being either local or national, but rather about supporting the link between the two. National advocacy needs inputs from CBOs, and these need national organisations that can support them in reaching the national level. The mix of supporting the “coalitions” of strategic partners and CBOs is commendable.
- *The different approaches supplement each other well:* The three partners' different strategic action areas have meant that they have provided different examples on how EM rights can be promoted. All three approaches can be considered relevant.
- *Joint work between strategic partners cannot be expected, but it is important to promote collaboration:* It has been a challenge for each of the three approaches to include much from any of the other approaches. In another context or space this could have been tried more consistently, as shown by examples of collaboration at local level. On the other hand, it is important to promote collaboration within and among civil society organisations as an integral part of the programme strategy and as part of the effort to break down “silothinking”. CASI has made such attempts, especially during the exit phase, when collaboration was promoted through different working groups (e.g. EMGW) and other forums.
- *Impact is only coming little by little:* It takes time for the EM groups to achieve impact on the ground. ADC's approach may result in a higher income for some of the EM groups, while iSEE's work focuses on other values which may be of importance for other EM groups. CIRUM's work helps

EM to access forestland, which in itself is an outcome. In all areas, the struggle for space, land and income requires patience.

- *Need to connect civil society strengthening among EMs with support to the production/value chain:* In fact, some of the CBOs who are supported in economic development seem to need special marketing skills to promote their activities which may not be part of the partners' expertise. To ensure sustainability the partners may have to strengthen alliances with organisations in that area. This also shows that a CSO support programme such as CASI can only do so much. Once the EM groups gain access to land and are able to organise themselves and raise their voice, there is a need to involve other stakeholders able to work on marketing, commercialisation, fair trade, story-telling about production and other production-related issues.
- *From pilot experience to national policies:* Likewise, considerations may have to be made regarding how to expand some of the activities to other parts of the country. For example, co-research is now being promoted in provinces other than where it has been used now. In this sense, CARE can ensure that more consideration is given to the potential for scaling different initiatives and activities made, if possible during the design phase. Such considerations may include issues such as cost effectiveness as well as the potential for replication in a future where skills and resources from donors may not be available.
- *CARE has opened the doors to national EM advocacy.* CARE has played an extraordinary role within the EMWG and in its collaboration with other organisations and has managed to promote a clear focus on advocacy within the group. CARE is likewise active within key networks such as the PPWG. Other programmes can use this learning experience for investing in similar working groups and also in order to dedicate human resources to promote advocacy. In some countries there may be a tendency to see such working groups as less productive; however, viewed in a longer perspective they can help open doors.

## **6 PHASING OUT**

The CASI programme, funded by Danida through CARE Danmark, has been implemented by CARE International in the mountainous northern region of Vietnam. Duration was planned for eight years and it is scheduled to conclude at the end of 2017. It has been decided by the CARE Danmark Board to close down the CASI frame-funded project at that time, and all remaining activities by late 2018. The sole exception is potential continued activities in Vietnam but that form part of a regional programme or potential business partnership initiatives.

### **6.1. What is the overall content of CASI's phase-out strategy with partners?**

As part of its recommendations, the 2015 External Evaluation laid down the principles based on which CASI's phase-out stage should take place. The most important of these were as follows:

- The overall objective and existing results areas are considered relevant to the exit period, with some modifications, the most important of which are that sustainability should be emphasised at both organisational/partner and institutional level.
- Based on the assessment made by CASI partners it is recommended that the exit strategy not work to sustain CASI as a shared platform.
- The exit strategy is to focus on strengthening partners in positioning themselves as relevant organisations, able to attract funding from traditional funding sources.
- The emphasis on support to Vietnamese networks as lasting entities shall be continued, as these are considered to be an important resource and brokers of contacts for CASI partners wishing to become involved in policy processes.
- CASI small grant support shall be continued, but with a more strategic focus.
- The organisational set-up, potential for sustainable funding and capacity-building mechanism shall be investigated as part of the preparation of CASI IV.
- Tailor-made exit strategies shall be agreed upon with each partner. Recurrent strategic dialogue on progress shall be undertaken, with a focus on organisational and sustainability issues.
- CASI should continue to provide capacity-building support and serve as a broker of contacts with policy processes. However, as part of the exit phase CASI should work on finding ways and means of securing the sustainability of these functions by working to strengthen local capacity and transfer important functions to sustainable Vietnamese structures.

A few of these recommendations were not followed, such as the continuation of the CASI small grant. Due to the limited amount of funds, what remained was distributed to core partners. Also, CASI ascertained that the partners were able to access other, similar small grants. For example, with the EU grant assigned to CIRUM, there are funds available for LandNet activities. iSEE's partner TienPhong Network was able to access small grants through another CARE project, Rights and Voices of Ethnic Minority Women. Finally, ADC was able to access small funds from the WEAVE Programme, in which CARE is one of the implementing partners. In other words, the CASI staff made sure to position all three partners in relation to "small funds" (and grants) from other programmes and projects where CARE was also involved.

Specific recommendations were also made regarding support to each of the partners. These are described below.

In brief, the exit strategy expresses that once CASI ends there is no point in setting up a forum called “CASI,” since this is originally a “CARE programme” and CARE recognises that each of the partners has their own, natural spaces in which they can communicate with each other or additional stakeholders. In any case, CARE and its partners already share space in EMWG, for instance.

The exit strategy also spells out clearly that the partners should receive support so they are prepared, both in organisational and financial terms. CARE followed this recommendation, since an overall framework was prepared for the 2015-17 phase-out period. Each partner prepared their proposal for support during that period. Likewise, an organisational assessment was carried out in order to assess specific areas where partners may need support to be better prepared for the exit. Suggestions were made and based on this, all partners prepared a proposal for organisational development (OD), with specific areas to be financed by CASI, either using external consultants or by developing in-house expertise.

## 6.2. The phase-out experience seen from the perspective of strategic partners

All partners would of course have preferred a continuation of CASI and thus more funding of their organisations. One of the partners stated that donor analysis should have focused on answering the question “What is the context and what support is still needed?” The answers to that question would most likely have pointed toward continued support, especially in a situation where several donors are leaving Vietnam at the same time. That said, and accepting that the decision has been taken, the partners feel in general that the planning of the exit phase has been good, as described below, but that still there are lessons to be learned on how to improve the exit phase.

Another important observation is that CASI has worked with CSOs that have grown to be quite strong and today have sufficient donors, which makes the exit phase less complicated. In 2015, iSEE was not having immediate short or immediate funding challenges and already had a relatively diversified funding base. CIRUM was having some, but relatively few donors and most of the funding was tied to activities with limited organisational support. So CIRUM was more dependent on CASI funds than it is today. In 2015, ADC was having a relatively sound financial basis as a broker of consultancy services, but had few activities with focus on civil society. Today, ADC has more funds for civil society activities.

In other words, although the partners all agree CASI has been important to their organisation, it is no longer so crucial for any of them, let alone a matter of “life-or-death” for the organisations. Rather, CASI counts as an important supplement to the donor portfolio, appreciated because of the flexibility of the support offered and the trust and respect with which CARE staff relate to partners. CARE support may also in some way have allowed partners to show interesting results and attract other, new donors. Although they had been facing challenges related to donor funding, CASI has served as a platform to access other, new partners such as for example WEAVE. It should be mentioned that many of the donations received from the partners’ new donors are small and short-term. With the changing donor pattern in Vietnam, in which many donors are leaving because it is now considered a middle-income country, there is a need to continue to search for new donors.

All exit phase proposals maintain support to the key activities already receiving support under the previous phase, but adds the dimension of strengthening partner capacity in specific priority areas.

**The case of ADC:** ADC decided to use OD support to develop a clearer profile for itself, including more visibility and outreach regarding its key messages. As shown in the chapter on strengthening civil society, ADC has made very good progress – and thus good use of exit phase funding. Thus ADC has

improved its webpage, sharpened its focus on indigenous knowledge and climate change and decided to engage more in advocacy, including at national level and in national spaces such as the EMWG. In addition, ADC has strengthened its human resource policies and financial management. ADC finds that the process has been a very good way to carry out an exit phase, as it served to strengthen some of its weaker areas. ADC also received some training in fundraising, and has been able to make some contacts to new donors (e.g. APN from Japan and Asia Foundation for Research, among others).

**The case of CIRUM:** During the last two project years, CIRUM requested support for fundraising, as well as to improve visibility and documentation. In fact, the organisation carried out a number of additional improvements on how to document and present results, both in the shape of different (small) videos and three documentary films to be used as supporting evidences which has shown at different national and local workshops/training for forestry law revision and through an improved website. Fundraising training was carried out and this is an important step towards being able to finance activities. In principle, the two-year period was good, but the fundraising should perhaps have been more targeted and included identification or mapping of a few key donors.

For CIRUM, funding is important, but not a primary priority. In fact, CIRUM has refused some funds and donors who did not fully understand the issues it works on, especially if CIRUM came to the conclusion that the donor's approach was not really working for the poor EMs on the ground or if it felt there were not enough common interest and concerns. In 2014, CASI funding represented 14% of CIRUM's total budget, but there are other donors who are likely to cover this amount, including the French NGO CCFD, the German Bread for the World and McKnight Foundation. CIRUM is happy that through CARE it was able to access EU funding to support its activities. Land is a "hot issue," CIRUM see, so there are some donors who are interested in the issue.

Fundraising seems to require more than merely technical writing skills. For example, it seems that networking with donors can be important and CIRUM does not have "*close*" relationships with many donors at, say, embassy level. CIRUM finds that sometimes donors claim their criteria for approving funds applications are transparent, but in practice also use other criteria.

The fundraising carried out by CARE in support of partners in 2016 may have been useful for less experienced organisations, but the topics for which funding was sought were very generic.

**The case of iSEE:** CASI has supported the leadership transition at iSEE since 2014, and this is part of preparing the organisation for the future. The organisational strengthening (OS) plan in the exit phase continued some of the previous support from CASI and was provided to areas such as monitoring and evaluation as well as gender and fundraising. As concerns gender, iSEE also used the input from CASI to update its internal staff procedures as regards conditions for maternity leave, among others. In general, iSEE has a different approach to gender than CARE, since iSEE also works with the LGTB community, where a "rainbow-perspective" including many genders is used.

The fundraising training was useful but not sufficient to actually initiate a more intense fundraising effort. iSEE finds that several other ideas should be tested, including a joint application with CARE on different, larger donor programmes. Therefore, iSEE finds that the recommendation which reads "[the] exit strategy shall focus on strengthening partners in positioning themselves as relevant organisations able to attract funding from the traditional funding sources" could have been more closely followed.

With **SRD** and **VUSTA** there were no specific exit plans, since both are well-consolidated structures with sufficient funding from elsewhere. Thus they were in principle comfortable with CASI leaving, although SRD would have liked to continue to be part of the programme.

### **The general recommendation on continuation of Vietnamese networks and spaces**

As regards the focus on networks, CARE and its partners have continued to develop this. Each of the partners continues to participate in the networks they are engaged in or support at local, provincial and national level. Moreover, CARE has complied with the recommendation to place more emphasis on the EMWG and has even invited its key partners to be part of it, as well as being active in defining its advocacy activities.

**The future: phasing in to new project collaboration.** CARE has promoted linkage between CEMA and all three partners with a new project titled P4EM. This is a project (2017 – 2021) funded by Irish Aid, in which CARE plays the role of “door-opener” for a new cooperation process. P4EM aims to build partnerships between Vietnamese governmental agencies, among which CEMA is the largest partner, CSOs and ethnic minorities. The project’s design is based on the outcomes and approaches developed in the CASI program and will provide a forum for open dialogue on EM development among policy makers, civil society organizations and ethnic minorities, giving thorough consideration to EM’s needs and their cultural diversification. CASI partners and especially EM-led CBOs will continue to be involved in the project. Young people among the EMs will be one of the key target groups.

### **6.3. What worked for the three partners and what did not**

To sum up the phase-out experiences with each of the three partners, CARE complied with most the demands that it was agreed would be addressed in the OD process. Most of the OD activities are part of the longer process support coming from CARE.

Overall, iSEE now has a new, consolidated leadership. ADC has improved its profile, as well as its human resource/financial management system, while CIRUM has increased visibility.

Most of the programme activities can be continued with support from other donors. However, some of the activities at CBO level, e.g. models promoted by CIRUM and banana plantation growing promoted by ADC, may still need different skills regarding marketing and commercialisation where both CIRUM and ADC may need to work with other organisations that can provide this specific expertise. Likewise, for the activities of TienPhong and co-research, they may be able to obtain financing from other donors in the short run. However, in the longer term, it should be considered how such activities as e.g. co-research can be replicated to many other provinces.

However, all partners also mentioned that while fundraising training was provided, more efforts may have been needed to actually test it in practice and try to identify specific donors that could be of interest to each of the respective partners. The fundraising learning event was in fact appreciated by partners, but they need closer coaching-mentoring. As iSEE recommended, CARE could include one criteria of decision-making on proposal selection for their own fund-raising. The criteria is “if the proposal is supporting the strategic partner to sustain the fund for future operation/impacts, then CARE should prioritise presenting it to other donors.”

Some of the CBOs supported by ADC and CIRUM struggle with challenges related to commercialization. While the two partners ADC and CIRUM can support certain aspects of

commercialisation, there may be a need to further intensify support with allied who can provide such support.

From the review of the other issues, it has also been seen that at CBO level, some groups may need more information and skills on how to run the business that was initiated (e.g. the agricultural models promoted, marketing of bananas).

#### 6.4. Lessons learned

Normally the phase-out stage is a gradual process, also in financial terms, meaning that support decreases gradually, thus allowing partners to adapt to the new situation. Often a responsible phase-out period may take between two and four years. In the case of CASI, the phase-out took two years and support to strategic partners declined gradually (although in the case of CIRUM it actually increased between 2015 and 2016). In any case, all three partners are very strong and have many more donors. CASI support constituted between 7% and 20% of the partner's budget in 2017, and all partners see there are good perspectives for obtaining support from new donors.

The following lessons can be learned for use by other programmes:

- *The CASI exit strategy has been a good lesson for CARE and its partners, and may be used in other programmes:* The outlined elements for an exit strategy have in general been very relevant and some of them may be used in similar situations.
- *Artificial, donor-driven advocacy platforms should be avoided.* The principle of not setting up specific donor-driven advocacy platforms (such as a “CASI-platform”) seems to be a sound principle to be used in other contexts as well.
- *Organisational development is of critical importance during a phase-out:* The principle of agreeing on a process of continued capacity-building and specific support to organisational development during an exit phase may likewise be used. In the phase-out period CARE built on the organisational development achieved during the CASI programme and contributed to transform its partners. What was achieved through the support provided has helped to ensure sustainability and expand impact. Organisational development was based on the long-term visions and strategic objectives of the three strategic projects.
- *Building networks is a way to engage partners at national level.* Strengthening key networks for learning, sharing and advocacy as part of any exit strategy has proven relevant.
- *Defining key activities is important in an exit strategy.* The principle of defining what activities should and which should not continue after CARE funding comes to an end would also normally be part of a phase-out period, as it would offer greater clarity on which issues to prioritise when searching for new funding.

Other lessons learned related to CASI:

- *Specific fundraising is important.* More emphasis should be placed on fundraising, not only in terms of training, but also the mapping of key relevant donors.
- *Phasing out civil society programmes may be combined with phasing in and linking up with production and value chain programmes.* There may be other competences that need attention or when connection to allied can be built. For example, the CBOs supported by CIRUM and by ADC will need strong support on how to market their products. While ADC and CIRUM can do a part of this work, there may be need for other inputs if the CBOs are going to have long-term success in the market.

- *Joint fundraising between CARE and its partners is innovative and positive.* CARE is already considering entering into an alliance with some of the stronger partners which would help CARE and partners to be even better positioned vis-à-vis larger international donors (e.g. P4EM project).

## 7 PERSPECTIVES FOR CIVIL SOCIETY SUPPORT

By the early 2000s observers in Vietnam noted there were greater numbers and a larger variety of organisations, more discussion of civil society in the media, and less state repression<sup>16</sup>. However, although they engaged in some forms of advocacy, it took place within bounds set by state authorities.<sup>17</sup>

As the Asia Foundation stated in 2013, the “*rapid expansion of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Vietnam in the early 2000s was intertwined with the country’s opening and reform process. A decade on, CSOs number around 2000, but few have been able to establish a sustainable funding base, strong financial and organizational systems and innovative research and programming.*”<sup>18</sup>

The nature of civil society in Vietnam is muddled by complex regulations and quasi-governmental organizations claiming to be, and sometimes behaving like, independent CSOs. The Asia Foundation’s survey from 2013, carried out in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, excluded officially-sponsored mass and professional organizations, and focused on gathering data on Vietnam’s centres, institutes and community-based organizations.

They found that CSOs are relatively young organizations working in a challenging environment. CSOs complained of restrictive regulations and limited understanding of their work by officials and the public. The lack of predictable funding was another dominant concern. Only 10% had an annual budget of over USD 300,000.00. More than half operated on under USD 50,000.00, and almost 10% stated that they hadn’t bothered to make an annual plan because they felt closure was imminent.

Financial insecurity leads to a limited ability to plan strategically and develop new program areas and approaches. Organizations run the risk of becoming overly responsive to donor demands. At the same time, the RT noted that donors are in the process of leaving Vietnam.

In spite of this challenging context, CSOs are emerging that are able to maintain committed staff, raise funds and carry out innovative programs. However, their number remains small and much remains to be done to support civil society development and a more enabling regulatory environment. Still, by building on the experience of successful CSOs in collaborating and connecting to other stakeholders in society, there is potential for CSOs to have a real impact on Vietnam’s development.

CASI has only supported few CSOs. However, it has been able to link up these organisations with both local CBOs and provincial and national networks. Further, the three strategic partners have in fact grown in capacity and represent an additional contribution to creating a civil society which – notwithstanding a more difficult context – is growing stronger each day. Both CARE and its partners can be satisfied with the achievements. Although these are only the first steps in the long journey of constructing a civil society that contributes actively to Vietnam’s development, they are important and relevant steps, especially since they increase the capacity of previously marginalised groups such as the EM.

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<sup>16</sup> As referred to by Andrew Wells-Dang in “Civil Society Networks in China and Vietnam”2012, originally quote taken from Luong 2003, Kerkvliet 2003: 15–16, Gray 2003

<sup>17</sup>Ibid; original quote in Hannah 2005: 109

<sup>18</sup> Civil Society in Vietnam: William Taylor, Nguyễn Thu Hằng, Phạm Quang Tú, Huỳnh Thị Ngọc Tuyết A Comparative Study of Civil Society Organizations in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City.

## **8 FINAL REMARKS**

Ten conclusions can be extracted from the four core issues discussed in this document, as follows:

1. CASI's partnership approach with support to strategic partners – instead of to components – has been effective.
2. Some good advocacy work has been carried out regarding legislation and policies. Key examples include CIRUM's influence on the forestry law; iSEE's promotion of the anthropological approach within CEMA and state institutions; and ADC's advocacy regarding the use of Indigenous Knowledge in relation to Bac Kan's Action Plan as concerns climate change.
3. All three strategic partners have developed an advocacy approach which suits them and is, to some extent, workable. ADC has been successful in using data, research and examples from the field as evidence-based inputs for its advocacy efforts. CIRUM has underscored the need for "quiet advocacy," meaning that the organization which carries out advocacy work should not focus only on what it wishes to achieve but also on the duty-bearer's need for information. By gaining the trust of key governmental advisers who are interested in the organisation's advocacy topics, the chance for success increases. iSEE agrees with the need for finding a "champion" within the state system that is interested in its advocacy topics. However, iSEE has also found that "less quiet" advocacy can be effective. Instead of using informal channels and only working with duty bearers, iSEE has used the media or issued publications to position its advocacy issues in public so that more stakeholders know about and debate the issues. iSEE has been closely watched by the government. All three ways of doing advocacy work are good, because they each suit the capacity and style of the respective partner. CARE has respected and supported different ways of carrying out advocacy initiatives.
4. While partners have had success influencing plans, legislation and policies, implementation of legislation and policies still poses a challenge. As one partner stated, the change will not "come overnight," but there may be a need to exert pressure in some areas in order to achieve implementation. For example, Bac Kan's provincial Action Plan on Climate Change had a budget allocated to it, but this was more than two years ago and it has yet to be executed. .
5. The CASI programme has been successful in strengthening civil society, and its strategic partners in particular, but also networks at national level (PPWG, EMWG) and CBOs at local level. Organisational development, including the promotion of gender equity, has been an important element in this strengthening process, which is taking place while the general CSO space seems to have shrunk since 2016.
6. Regarding the CBO/Ethnic Minority led network level, organisations and individuals have been empowered and many group members are now able to speak out, although their influence is still low and impact – in the form of economic and social change – has yet to be achieved. The partners' promotion of specific economic models are good steps towards supporting economic changes. Examples are CIRUM's models regarding the selling of traditional medicine; ADCs support to the group of women banana growers (so they can sell quality banana for processing to chips and thus obtain a larger share of the banana value chain). However, new alliances with organizations that have more knowledge on marketing issues and commercialization are still needed. Put otherwise, a civil society programme like CASI can only do so much in terms of encouraging voices to claim rights. Economic progress as such will need other types of support.

7. CASI's approach in support of ethnic minorities has been good. The three partners' different approaches (e.g. on forestry/EM groups' rights; socio-economic development and cultural/anthropological approach) supplement each other. Through its support to strategic partners, CARE has been able to reach CBOs as well as local and national networks. This multi-pronged approach has meant that for advocacy, partners and CARE have been able to benefit from local examples and knowledge at the provincial and national levels. Further, CASI's profile of promoting social inclusion, self-articulation and giving voice to EMs has helped many CBOs to strengthen capacity and likewise has supported strategic partners in assisting the CBOs. Finally, CARE has deliberately – and successfully – selected different types of strategic partners: CIRUM works with forestry issues and EM rights; iSEE works with a cultural/anthropological approach; and ADC has a more socio-economic profile in its support to banana women and other EM groups.

8. The lack of joint advocacy among strategic partners is understandable due to differences and CARE has done well to respect this situation. Interestingly, the learning spaces have permitted the strategic partners to get to know each other better and gradually there has been more collaboration. For example, iSEE has an ADC staff member who is learning about co-research activities, and this person is applying the recently acquired knowledge. CIRUM shares information with ADC as well. Gradually, the strategic partners' methods can be distributed to and used by more persons.

9. The CASI phase-out was good. A clear exit strategy was prepared, maintaining objectives and results areas. The strategy included: i) tailor-made support to organisational development in order to prepare each partner; ii) training in fundraising techniques; iii) it was decided not to have a "CASI-platform" once CASI ends; instead it was decided to iv) continue supporting the network. In general, partners have been happy with the support provided. In fact, the exit strategy has been relevant, especially as regards organisational development (OD).

10. The strategic partners are now in contact with other donors, meaning that CASI activities can be continued going forward. Joint fundraising between CARE and partners may be a next step in their collaboration. It seems possible to continue all or most of the activities once CASI finishes, since all partners have good donor relations and have already obtained support to continue part of the CASI work. In fact, CASI is not a crucial part of any of the partners' budgets. Some of the CBOs supported by the partners (and CASI) need support other than "civil support strengthening." CBOs such as the banana women and the forest groups, which intend to sell traditional medicine, need more assistance related to marketing and commercialization, among other things. Other types of programmes or new alliances are needed to supplement a programme such as CASI. Partners mentioned that they want CARE to provide specific fundraising support (e.g. donor mapping). CARE has responded by providing contacts to donors and has invited partners to be part of joint fundraising proposals, which is both innovative and interesting.

In addition to the ten conclusions, the review team would like to present some considerations on how the CASI programme related to CARE International's strategies, values and promotion of added valued.

### **Use of CARE International's civil society strategies.**

CASI is very much in line with CARE International's overall strategic framework for civil society, as expressed in the organisation's "Civil Society Resource". CARE International has prepared a quite visionary and comprehensive content on "Key Roles for CARE" regarding "Opening spaces and creating an enabling environment for civil society" as well as being a "relationship builder" and an

investor in organizational development. The Review Team has also tried to indicate how CASI has contributed to the different roles.

#### **Box 11: Key roles for CARE regarding civil society**

CARE's role as suggested by CARE International	General profile	CARE and CASI's contribution in Vietnam
<b>1. OPENING SPACES FOR CSOs</b>		
<b>Advocate for civil society</b>	CARE should use its leverage to monitor national NGO legislation and make authorities open to recommendations from CSOs.	CARE is active in the PPWG and EMWG, groups that lobby on CSO/EM issues. CARE also promotes that CASI partners are active in these spaces.
<b>Political protector</b>	CARE should offer “an umbrella when it rains” and advocate on behalf of local civil society, for example in relation to the private sector, mining companies and the like (e.g. in cases of land rights disputes).	CARE supports CIRUM’s work on land rights but could maybe have played a role as CARE to support EM forest groups when they have conflicts with mining companies. <u>However, iSEE has also found that “less quiet” advocacy can be effective. Instead of using informal channels and only working with duty bearers, iSEE has used the media or issued publications to position its advocacy issues in public so that more stakeholders know about and debate the issues.</u>
<b>Fellow advocate</b>	CARE should be willing to stand side-by-side with partners to advocate on sticky issues.	CARE is part of PPWG and EMWG as a fellow advocate. Also, CARE/CASI helped partners to connect to governmental agencies through the so-called P4M Project, which was developed based on CASI results. This may also be a “door opener” function (see below).
<b>Convener of meeting spaces</b>	CARE has a role to play in creating formal and informal spaces for CSOs to meet with each other and with duty bearers.	CASI has promoted learning events to let partners meet.
<b>Conflict mediator</b>	As an international, non-partisan organization, CARE should sometimes play a mediator role.	There are no examples that CASI has done this in the case of Vietnam.
<b>2.RELATIONSHIP BUILDER</b>		
<b>Connector</b>	CARE should continue to enter alliances and network to amplify voices on key issues. CARE can strengthen both horizontal and vertical linkages to increase the role of civil society. CARE can be a broker for CSOs.	CASI’s EM approach has supported creation of both horizontal and vertical linkages. CASI has entered some alliances and also promoted that partners joint some of these.
<b>Door opener</b>	CARE develops relations with authorities	CARE/CASI has worked as broker

	and the private sector. These relations should benefit our CSO partners. We should work as door openers for our partners.	with other private and public donors, helping to position the partners towards EU, Irish Aid and other agencies such as the Vietnam National Women's Union.
<b>Public support mobiliser</b>	CARE should mobilize public engagement on issues such as rights, gender equity and creating solidarity with vulnerable groups.	CASI/CARE has promoted EM events, such as " <i>I believe I can</i> ," creating awareness on EM issues. Maybe trade of products from EM groups could be a way of mobilizing issues. Other CASI partners like the NGO Northwest sells products from EM groups. Also, CARE/CASI has promoted that CASI partner iSEE supports EM groups in their participation in the competition of community-based initiatives for sustainable poverty alleviation organized by the National Office of Poverty Reduction.
<b>3.INVESTOR IN ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT</b>		
<b>Capacity builder</b>	CARE should try to connect partners in need of capacity building with relevant providers.	CASI/CARE has had a very comprehensive and well-acknowledged support to the Organisational Development of strategic partners. Also, the flexibility in programme management has helped to increase capacity.
<b>Knowledge broker – learning facilitator</b>	CARE should try to share new knowledge with partners and be a learning organization.	CASI/CARE has promoted learning events where partners share their different knowledge, thus contributing to each of the partners' new knowledge. CASI has promoted new information on gender (e.g. how internal staff regulations and financial management can have a gender approach).
<b>Civil society grant manager</b>	CARE can manage funds from other donors and can add value as an alternative grant manager because of its context analysis and knowledge of civil society.	CASI/CARE has already initiated a dialogue regarding positioning both CARE and CASI with other donors. CASI has likewise accumulated experience funds management by creating a mechanism for small grants attached to the CASI programme, which has received a positive evaluation.

This overview illustrates that CARE/CASI has been active in most of the strategic fields indicated by CARE international. It also illustrates the CASI programme's **added value**, since CASI has been doing more than only supporting its partners with funds. There may have been areas where CASI/CARE

could have done more or do more in the future. For example, maybe there could be a fellow advocate or mediator I order to focus more the rubber companies' invasion of EM communities' forest land.

Having said that, CASI has been able to do a great deal in relation to the different roles that CARE International has suggested, and a foundation has been laid here so in the future it can act further as a "door opener" to donors, a connector, as well as a fellow advocate to some of the strategic partners that have been supported by CASI/CARE. Recently, CASI/CARE has been able to establish a strategic partnership with MOLISA and the National Office for Poverty Reduction which can be used to open the doors for cooperation with other key institutions. CARE/CASI has already managed to establish a good relationship with CEMA and the Vietnam National Women's Union. However, MOLISA can be a strategic governmental agency which will help CARE and partners to open doors to new donors.

In addition to the added value mentioned above, it should be stressed that the strategic partners in CASI have highlighted other issues such as added value, namely the partnership approach itself (including respect, trust and continued support), the flexibility related to this approach in how programmes can be implemented, the use of Organisational Development in a more comprehensive manner than other donors have done and support to fundraising both through training and linking up with the strategic partners in new alliances.

The CASI partnership approach is also in line with CARE International's wish to promote increased sharing of power and influence with partners. It is said that this is the most difficult but also the most important step towards genuine partnerships: being ready to invest in partners and to cultivate trust in partnerships. It is also crucial to promote genuine joint decision-making, as CASI has been doing when taking decisions together to provide inputs to CASI's advocacy plans. . The Review Team has indeed found that the flexible and responsible partnership approach is based on a good relationship with partners. CASI staff has been able to engage in an ongoing dialogue on areas related to cooperation, capacity building and financial support. CASI staff has done this in a respectful manner.

CARE and its partners can be satisfied that they have managed to come a long way in fulfilling the strategic roles that CARE International has defined and which are also relevant to the Vietnamese context.

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## **ANNEXES**

## **Annex 1: Terms of Reference (TOR)**

### **TOR for the final learning review and documentation of the Civil Action for Socio-economic Inclusion (CASI) Programme Vietnam**

#### **Background**

##### **1.1. The CASI programme**

In Vietnam, CASI is one of the pioneering initiatives in the field of civil society strengthening for increased rights and voice of marginalised people within ethnic minorities in the Northern areas. Since 2010, it is also part of CARE's national Ethnic Minority (EM) programme which contains a number of separately funded initiatives that share the common overall objective of *enabling remote ethnic minorities who are land poor, have weak resilience to hazards and shocks, and in particular women, to participate equitably in the economy and have legitimate and respected voice.*

The CASI programme, funded by Danida through CARE Denmark, is implemented by CARE International in Vietnam in the northern mountainous areas over an eight-year period, until the end of 2017. It has been decided by the CARE Denmark Board to close down the CASI Frame Funded project by end of 2017, and all remaining activities by the end of 2018. The sole exception to this is the potential for continued activities in Vietnam which form part of a regional programme or potential business partnership initiatives.

The CASI programme has developed during its existence in response to; programme learning, shifting context and the development of the overall approaches and strategies of CARE International in Vietnam and CARE Denmark. An extensive programme formulation process for CASI was undertaken at the outset of the programme in 2009, building on previous phases of the programme. In 2012 a mid-term review provided the conceptual basis for a re-design of the programme. The re-design sought to focus the programme more firmly towards *civil society strengthening* where *core partners* are supported to fully take on their role as *change agents for ethnic minority inclusion* in line with their own strategic plans and mandates. It also sought to simplify the implementation structure and better link the partners horizontally towards strengthened rights and voice of marginalised people among ethnic minorities. An external evaluation was carried out in 2015, with a focus on documenting programme achievements while at the same time providing suggestions and a framework for a two year phase out of the programme during 2016 - 2017.

The CASI programme has been well documented through comprehensive annual reporting, outcome mapping, studies and external evaluations.

The programme objective of CASI is that:

Civil society organisations and representatives of those who are at risk of socio-economic exclusion among Northern ethnic minorities are increasingly involved in setting the agenda for more inclusive development approaches and policies.

There are three main result areas for the CASI programme, corresponding to the main partner groups that the programme will directly support or work to influence:

Result area 1: Partner VNGOs gain influence and recognition as effective and legitimate change agents for rights-based ethnic minority inclusion in line with their strategic plans and mandates.

Result area 2: Ethnic minority-led civil society groups and EM leaders networks are empowered to systematically feed information into decision-making processes at different levels and benefit from programme-wide learning through enhanced links and networking with other civil society actors,

Result area 3: Policy-makers, planners and other key stakeholders increasingly get timely access to accurate, relevant and peer-reviewed evidence on key issues that can improve development effectiveness for CASI target groups.

## **1.2. The programmatic context**

The space for civil society engagement on the rights and voice of marginalized people among ethnic minorities has gradually widened in Vietnam as INGOs and VNGOs have gained legitimacy through their hands-on support to communities and engagement with local stakeholders and planners. Yet ethnic minority-led civil society has been virtually non-existent as is the concept of constituency-based representation and engagement in local planning processes, despite the intentions in the governments Grassroots Democracy Decree. Moreover, many of the established VNGOs now face the challenge of shifting from delivering services at community level to engaging more strategically with communities, officials and stakeholders to make sure that sustainable systems for gradual rights fulfilment are left behind, and that evidence and lessons are informing national policy.

Government policies and programs intended to improve the situation of remote ethnic minorities have often been inappropriate or ineffective, adopting a ‘one-size fits all’ approach to policy and service delivery, often with fragmented roles and blurred responsibilities when it comes to programme delivery. As a result, development initiatives by government agencies – including the implementation of national targeted programmes such as P135 and 30A – do not produce the intended poverty reduction results they were designed to deliver, leaving some population groups systematically behind in national development.

Poverty analysis points to a divide in poverty reduction rates between the majority ethnic group and the other 53 ethnic groups in Vietnam over the last decades. Prevalence and causes have been well documented, but a more nuanced understanding of non-economic factors for social equity and dignity is just starting to emerge. This was explored during the first part of the CASI programme.

The Committee on Ethnic Minority Affairs (CEMA), the main government agency for ethnic minorities acknowledges these weaknesses and increasingly sees the VNGOs and representative organisations of ethnic minorities as central players and partners in finding sustainable solutions for ethnic minority inclusion and development.

A major challenge for civil society development and sustainability is that international donor funding for civil society has been steadily declining in recent years, while no national sources have been able to take over as funder of civil society initiatives.

## **2. Main purpose of the evaluation**

The main purpose of this learning review and documentation is to draw out, synthesize and document in an accessible way the major achievements and learnings of the CASI programme on support for development of Vietnamese ethnic minority civil society organisations.

## **3. Scope of work**

The focus of the learning review shall be on the results and learning from the CASI program with a main emphasis on the post 2013 period. The learning review shall be based on the documented results from monitoring data, reviews, evaluation of CASI, combined with field work and interviews undertaken by the Review Team.

The learning review will not repeat data collection and analysis but identify information gaps at the outset and analyse and reflect on results documented and strategies applied. The learning review will reflect on strategic choices made in operationalizing the project at the community level, and national level as well as at the organizational level (partners and CARE).

Rather than aiming at being comprehensive it shall provide documentation on representative yet unique and interesting result, approaches and learning on working with civil society/ethnic minority civil society.

Tentative issues include, but are not limited to:

- CASI approach and added value to civil society strengthening, partner's networks, working groups; achievement and challenges – major lessons learned.
- Comparative study on different approaches to Ethnic Minority lead CBOs and networks, and capacity building of networks; achievements, what worked – what not, major lessons.
- Partner driven and programme driven advocacy – lessons learned from the use of diverse approaches to advocacy.
- Approaches to advocacy and lessons on advocacy in the Vietnamese context
- Experiences and lessons from a planned phase out from long term civil society partnership – the case of CASI 2015 - 2017.

The learning review and documentation team shall as part of the preparation and initial literature review process draw up a list of studies to be developed. The list shall be presented to CARE Vietnam and Denmark and agreed/modified prior to the departure of the international consultant to Vietnam

#### **4. Outputs**

The evaluation results shall be presented in a form that is accessible, and capture major learnings from the support to civil society in Vietnam..

The output could take the form of a series of small studies/cases (tentatively 5 – 7 studies/cases) on core issues where achievements are documented and major lessons are analysed and shared. The form and format might vary but should in general be short 5- 10 pages, with sufficient background and clear observations on lessons to be comprehensible for development practitioners and other stakeholders with an interest in the thematic area. While maintaining a light form, the basis for the main findings shall be substantiated and fulfil conventional standards for reviews.

#### **5. Approach and methodology**

The evaluator will refine the approach and methodology based on a review of existing documents and the needs for further information. The methodologies shall be presented to the evaluation managers before commencing the fieldwork.

#### **6. Evaluation management and implementation**

The evaluation will be supervised by the CARE Denmark program coordinator for Vietnam, Flemming Gjedde-Nielsen (based in Copenhagen) with co-supervision from Nguyen Duc Thanh, Portfolio manager, based in Vietnam. For logistics and support during the field work, the evaluator will be in direct contact with the CASI team.

#### **7. The evaluation team**

The evaluation team will consist of:

Mr Finn Hansen, Senior Consultant, HN Consultants, team leader

Mrs Pham Thi Thuy, Consultant, IRC Consulting

The team leader will be responsible for the overall planning planning and implementation of the project learning review. Including the use of time of Pham Thi Thuy Chi.

## **8. Timing and reporting**

An Initial desk study concluding with an inception report will be carried out. Start October 15, and with submission of Inception note by November 5 outlining methodology, key lessons/cross-cutting issues (i.e. for example the tentative issues mentioned above) according to material and a format/structure for presentation of cases, including lessons learnt from each case. Typically, each case will include information on problem addressed, strategy used, changes promoted (impact) and possible continuation of activities after project ends (sustainability)

Local consultant can – if possible- initiate visit to 2-3 cases from Mid-November (possibility due to the time-constraints) and using agreed format for presentation of cases.

Finn Hansen and Pham Thi Thuy will work together from November 27 to December 13 where a Draft will be handed over. Key informants will be interviewed in relation to tentative issues and cases.

Draft Report: Approximately 50 pages with introductions, cases and learning as main element.  
(alternatively: 30 pages with cross-cutting /general conclusions and appendices with all cases)

Number of days: 4 days of desk study to each consultant

17 days of field work where consultants work together (preparing 4 cases+overall content)

8 additional field work days for local consultants before arrival of international consultants (preparing 2 cases)

3 additional days for international consultant for travel and finalisation of report

Total: 24 days (international consultants) and 29 (local consultants)

## **9. Key documents**

Key documents include, but not limited to:

- ✓ CASI program document and other project briefs, built on CASI, and contributing to the CASI results (R&V, L&R, I2I, WEAVE )
- ✓ CASI partnership and CASI leaflet
- ✓ End-line survey
- ✓ Annual progress reports
- ✓ Annual financial reports
- ✓ Outcome surveys
- ✓ Mid-term review report
- ✓ Monitoring framework

These will be made available to the evaluator by CARE in due time before the evaluation work is to commence.

06.09.2017

## Annex 2: The Consultants' Programme for the visit

Interview/Meetings	24 Nov	27 Nov	28 Nov	29 Nov	30 Nov	1 Dec	2 Dec	3 Dec	4 Dec	5 Dec	6 Dec	7 Dec	8 Dec	9 Dec	10 Dec	11 Dec	12 Dec	13 Dec
Chairman PPWG Mr. Le Binh	2 – 4 PM																	
CASI Team Mr. Nguyen Duc Thanh and team members		9-12 AM																
TienPhong Network <sup>19</sup>		4 – 7 PM																
ADC leaders and key staff			AM															
CARE Gender Specialist			Evening															
Commune Committee (a member of TienPhong Network)			PM															
Commune Women Union			PM															
EM CBOs/Groups supported by ADC				8.30 AM														
Bac Kan DARD (Agriculture Extention Center)					13.30 PM													
Bac Kan Provincial WU					15.00 PM													
Landnet (including EM –lead CBO representative)						AM												
CIRUM leaders and key staff						PM												
SRD Leader and CASI focal person							9.30 AM											
Action for Hmong Development (AHD)							PM (Sat)											
Oxfam								2.00 PM										
ISEE Leaders and key staff									AM									
EMWG (Ms. Hoa – coordinator) <sup>20</sup> (Finn to meet)										10.00 AM								
Lao Cai – Provincial Authority (Forestry Administration Office) (CHI)										PM								
Lao Cai: CBOs in Sả Duǎn, Phìn Ngan (CHI)											PM							
NorthWest Development Center Ms. HuyỀn - Director (FINN)											PM (2.00)							

<sup>19</sup> Observing their training at Lake Side hotel, 23 Ngọc Khánh (Mr. Giang brief 30 minutes; interview representatives of TP Network;

<sup>20</sup> EMWG office: at NGO Resource Center – Diploma Compound Address: 6 Đặng Văn Ngữ

Interview/Meetings	24 Nov	27 Nov	28 Nov	29 Nov	30 Nov	1 Dec	2 Dec	3 Dec	4 Dec	5 Dec	6 Dec	7 Dec	8 Dec	9 Dec	10 Dec	11 Dec	12 Dec	13 Dec
NorthNet (CCD)																		
NA's Ethnic Council (Mr. Tien) at CIRUM office													9- 10.00 AM					
VN dministration of Forestry (Mr. Binh) at CIRUM office													10.00 - 11.00					
CEMA										2.00 PM								
MOLISA (Mr. Ngo Truong Thi)																200.P M		
VUSTA												11.00 AM						
Vietnam Women Union Ms Tran Thanh Thuy (Co-research)															5.00 PM			
Debriefing CARE																	AM	

### Annex 3: Persons Met

Number	Full name	Organization
1	Mr Nguyen Duc Thanh	CARE, CASI Manager
2	Mr Ho Ngoc Son	ADC, Vice Director
3	Ms Ha Thi Hoa	ADC, former CASI Manager
4	Mr Nguyen Van Dap	ADC, CASI focal person
5	Mr Vu Dang Hung	ADC, CASI staff
6	Mr Do Xuan Viet	Bac Kan Extension Centre, Director
7	Ms Nguyen Thi Thao	ADC staff, engaged in co-research with iSEE
8	Mr Thanh	ADC staff, in charge of I2I Project
9	Mr Vu Dinh Loi.	Centre for Community Development (CCD), Director, Member of NorthNet
10	Mr Ha Van Huong	Chairman of Thanh Van Commune Committee, Cho Moi, Bac Kan
11	Ms Tong Thi Van	Thanh Van Woman Union, Chairwoman
12	Mr Nguyen Dinh Toa	Thanh Van Commune Committee, Member of banana group
13	Ms Tong Thi Van	Thanh Van Commune Committee, Saving group, banana group
14	Ms Ha Thi Xuyen	Thanh Van Commune Committee, Saving group, banana group
15	Ms Ha Thi Thoa	Thanh Van Commune Committee, Saving group, Team lead, banana group
16	Ms Ha Thi Si	Thanh Van Commune Committee, Saving group Team lead, banana group
17	Ms Pham Thi Quy	Thanh Van Commune Committee, Saving group, banana group, member of bee group (supported by Denmark)
18	Ms Tran Thi Hoa	Thanh Van Commune Committee, Saving group, Vice Lead, banana group
19	Ms Hoang Thi Cuu	Thanh Van Commune Committee, Saving group, banana group
20	Mr Hoang Huu Hoi	Thanh Van Commune Committee, banana group
21	Ms Dinh Thi Thu	(VSLA) Saving group, banana group
22	Ms Nguyen Thi Tiem	(VSLA) Saving group, banana group
23	Ms Tran Thi Hoa	CIRUM, Director
24	Mr Nguyen Van Su	CIRUM, Vice Director, in charge of fieldwork
25	Mr Vu Van Thai	CIRUM, Land Allocation Program
26	Mr Phan Dinh Nha	CIRUM, Policy Analysis and Policy Advocacy
27	Mr Nguyen Ba Tham	CIRUM, CASI focal person
28	Mr Pham Van Dung	CIRUM, Customary Law and Forest Reservation
29	Ms Ha Thi Van	LandNet, Nghe An Province
30	Ms Ho Thi Kon	LandNet, Quang Binh Province
31	Ms Sam Thi Tien	LandNet, Nghe An Province
32	Mr Vi Dinh Van	LandNet, Nghe An Province
33	Mr Be Xuan Lap	LandNet, Lang Son Province
34	Mr Lo Van Tien	LandNet, Dong Van commune, Que Phong District, Nghe An Province
35	Mr Le Van Toan	LandNet, Que Phong District, Nghe An Province
36	Mr Vu Hong Diep	Lao Cai Forestry Administration Office, Vice Head
37	Mr Tran Manh Tuong	Lao Cai Forestry Administration Office
38	Mr Tran Manh Dang	Lao Cai Forestry Administration Office
39	Mr Nguyen Cong Tuong	Lao Cai Forestry Administration Office
40	Mr Tue	District Division of NRE – Bat Xat District, Vice Head
41	Mr Nguyen Van Ha	Lao Cai College, Director
42	Mr Tran Xuan Truong	Lao Cai College, Vice Director

<b>Number</b>	<b>Full name</b>	<b>Organization</b>
43	Mr Binh	Lao Cai College, Division of Training Head
44	Ms Nag	Lao Cai College, Agriculture and Forestation Faculty, Head
45	Ms Xuan	Lao Cai College of Agriculture and Forestation Faculty, Vice head
46	Mr Tran Ngoc Binh	Forestry Administration Office, MARD
47	Mr Nguyen Van Tien	NA Office, Ethics Council, Member of CIRUM Council
48	Mr Tan Lao Ta	Chairman – Phin Ngan Commune, Bat Xai, Lao Cai, Commune People Committee
49	Ms Chao Coi May	Sai Duan Village, Phin Ngan Commune, Lead of the Community Group
50	Mr Chao A Phin	Sai Duan Village, Phin Ngan Commune, Secretary of the Community Group
51	Ms Tan Su May	Sai Duan Village, Phin Ngan Commune, Member of the Community Group
52	Ms Tan Kho May	Sai Duan Village, Phin Ngan Commune, Member of the Community Group
53	Mr Chao Lao Lu	Sai Duan Village, Phin Ngan Commune, Member of the Community Group
54	Ms Luong Minh Ngoc	ISEE, Director
55	Mr Truong Minh Giang	ISEE, in charge of TienPhong Network
56	Ms Truong Thi Thuy	TienPhong Network, Member of Board of Execution
57	Mr Ma Van Hung	TienPhong Network, Member of Board of Execution
58	Mr Ma A Phor	TienPhong Network, Member of Board of Execution
59	Ms Ha Thi Lieu	Bac Kan Women Union, President
60	Ms Be Thi Hong Van	CEMA, Policy Department, Vice Head
61	Ms Giang Thi Dinh	AHD Member
62	Mr Vua A Ly	AHD Member
63	Ms Giang Thi Minh	AHD Member
64	Mr Khang A Tuba	AHD Member
65	Ms Nguyen Thi Hoa	SRD, Vice Director
66	Ms Pham Le	SRD, Former staff
67	Mr Le Binh	PPWG, Chairman
68	Mr Pham Quang Tu	Oxfam in Vietnam, Specialist Civil Society and Advocacy
69	Mr Andre Dang	Oxfam in Vietnam
70	Ms Hoa	EMWG, Coordinator
71	Mr Huyen	Northwest Development Centre
72	Ms Tran Thuy Thuy	Vietnam Women Union, Head of Department of Ethnics and Regions
73	Ms Linh	VUSTA, Policy Research
74	Mr Ngo Truong Thi	Director, National Coordination Office of the NTP on Sustainable Poverty Reduction



## Annex 4: status for indicators of the CASI programme, 4<sup>th</sup> quarter 2017.

Indicator		2015	2016	2017	Remarks
<b>Result 1: Partner VNGOs gain influence and recognition as effective and legitimate change agents for rights-based ethnic minority inclusion in line with their strategic plans and mandates.</b>					
Number of partner's staffs were provided capacity trainings		42	41	82	Law and Policy formulation in Viet Nam and advocacy strategy development Fund raising Leadership coaching Communication skills MEL basic and MEL in Advocacy, WEAI Enterprise leadership skill TOT training Finance management skill Co-research approach Gender and diversity, gender tools: SAA, GALs Value chain analysis
<b>Result 2: Ethnic minority-led civil society groups and EM leaders networks are empowered to systematically feed information into decision-making processes at different levels and benefit from programme-wide learning through enhanced links and networking with other civil society actors</b>					
Number of groups supported by partners (please mentioned which type of groups supported by which partners)		28	37	68	ADC: livelihood community based groups ISEE: EM youth, AHD, Tien Phong CIRUM: Landnet
Number of people directly reached	Female	547	1011	2329	Including EM beneficiaries, journalists, policy makers, development workers, and people joining public activities (exhibitions, art performances, etc.)
	Male	139	1359	3773	
Number of people or groups who collect and use information to influence service providers, policy makers or other power holders (this can also include environmental and social impact assessments with community participation)	Female	131	168	193	
	Male	20	20	100	
Number of EM people, from the groups supported by the partners, participated in technical trainings	Female	542	699	1158	
	Male	132	209	577	
Number of EM-led organizations or groups that are regularly reached through program activities	Female	19	43	51	New EMCBO groups are reached and provided supports more regularly
	Male	12	11	57	
<b>Result 3: Policy-makers, planners and other key stakeholders increasingly get timely access to accurate, relevant and peer-reviewed evidence on key issues that can improve development effectiveness for CASI target groups.</b>					
Number (and types of) joint advocacy initiatives coming out of strategic alliances /networking/coalition initiatives supported by the programme		5	8	9	
Number of articles on EM issues in the partner's project sites		2	28	63	
Number of policies/programs are amended and developed that targeting on EM people which partners 'efforts contribute to the change process.		5	7	9	



