



CIVIL ACTION FOR SOCIO-ECONOMIC INCLUSION (CASI)

# Civil Society Partnership





## Civil Action for Socio-economic Inclusion(CASI)

**GOAL:** Sustainable improvements in livelihood security for natural resource-dependent people in ethnic minority communities who lack access to resources and have limited opportunities to influence decision-making. Representatives of marginalised and excluded groups and civil society organisations are involved in setting the agenda for more inclusive development approaches and policies.

**LOCATION:** 9 provinces in Vietnam  
**TIME FRAME:** 2002 to 2017  
**BUDGET:** US\$12 million, from 2002 to 2015  
**DONOR:** DANIDA, Denmark's development cooperation

**IMPACT GROUP:** Ethnic minorities in Northern Vietnam: Those who are poor and food insecure, lack economic opportunities, live in remote areas, face language and literacy barriers and are excluded from decision making, in particular women and girls.

**MAIN PROJECT PARTNERS:** CASI consists of a network of four main civil society partners. The partners have been chosen to complement each other in terms of supporting the selected advocacy themes.

- **iSEE** promotes ethnic minority inclusion in media and public awareness.
- **CIRUM** specialises in forest management, in particularly ethnic minority lands rights.
- **SRD** focuses on sustainability and livelihood improvement.
- **ADC** works on climate change adaptation.

CASI is also cooperating with the Vietnam Union of Science and Technology (VUSTA). VUSTA is a semi-independent organisation with a government mandate for NGOs – therefore functioning as a valued entry-point into government policy processes.

## Civil society from grass roots to national level

“We went from: ‘How can we help the farmer to raise pigs?’ to: ‘how can we help the group of farmers make a plan to raise their income?’”

Pham Thi Le, SRD

Civil Action for Socio-Economic Inclusion (CASI) in sustainable development for northern ethnic minorities in Vietnam supports civil society organisations and people in remote ethnic minorities. By working directly with local communities, strengthening civil society and fostering advocacy efforts.

When CASI began in 2002, civil society was a relatively new concept in Vietnam. To lay the foundation for the CASI project, CARE conducted capacity assessments of local organisations and facilitated discussions among Vietnamese non-governmental organisations (VNGOs) and government agencies.

In 2004, after two years of dialogue, research and evidence gathering, CASI started supporting community based organisations (CBOs) at grassroots level, involving local partners such as the Women’s Union. In 2013 CASI’s partners became the primary implementers, nurturing the development of the CBOs. **Now, representatives of ethnic groups are no longer seen as beneficiaries. They are seen as partners.**



### CARE’s role in CASI

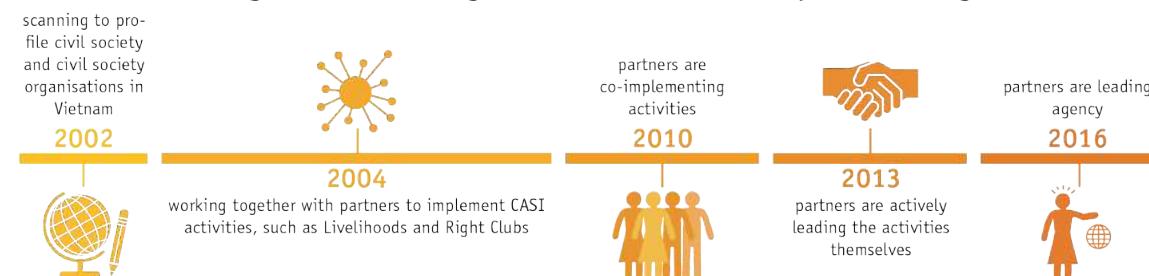
**Door opener:** CARE actively links partners with policy makers such as the Committee for Ethnic Minority Affairs and relevant working groups including the Ethnic Minority Working Group

**Knowledge broker:** Facilitates access to training and a space to share and exchange knowledge among civil society organisations and networks.

**Fellow advocator:** Supports partners in advocacy processes and facilitates linkages to policy makers and fora.

**Funder:** Promotes and supports newly emerging CBOs or ethnic minority groups through small grants.

During the different stages of CASI, the role of our partners changed.





## GATHERING EVIDENCE

To strengthen the voice of civil society, CASI involved local partners, like TUSTA (Thanh Hoa Union of Science and Technology Associations) and the Women’s Union, and worked to establish CBOs at grassroots levels, such as Livelihood and Rights Clubs (LARC)s-voluntary associations of women in ethnic minorities. LARCs create spaces to connect, share information, analyse problems, network and work together to improve their livelihoods.

The first phase of CASI resulted in more than 300 CBOs, VNGOs and their networks having better access to information, improved capacity and improved organisational strategies.



## MULTIPLYING IMPACT

To have a greater impact at national level, CARE partnered with national-level VNGOs in addition to its local partners. Upon an assessment of options for long-term collaborations, CARE invited four key partners to join the project.

“When CIRUM entered CASI we wanted to contribute our experience on land rights and we wanted to gain skills on lobbying and networking via CASI.”

Tran Thi Hoa, CIRUM.

During this stage, CASI supported partners to implement core project activities, engage in policy dialogue and to strengthen civil society by working together. To achieve this, CARE created a learning space, where partner staff can share and talk about different issues. Partners participated in training on diverse subjects, ranging from advocacy to building and replicating various project models.

“Learning space is about bringing up issues. So we can adjust and improve our work at the local level.”

Nguyen Thi Hoa, SRD.

## NETWORKING AND ADVOCACY

From 2012 to 2015, VNGO partners have actively led project implementation, and supported the establishments of CBOs at grassroots level. While CARE is providing technical and organisational support, CASI’s partners are promoting the voice of people from ethnic minorities. This phase of CASI focuses on partners advancing their advocacy and networking skills, their organisational capacity, their relationships with government agencies and policy makers and on supporting ethnic minority representatives in addressing their issues.



CASI’s allies work in different communities and areas in Vietnam and ethnic minority networks have been established to link these communities together. Representatives of ethnic minority networks have gained increased skills to deal with issues of their communities, so that eventually these representatives are recognised by the government and can advocate themselves.

VNGO partners focus on evidence based and joint advocacy. **CASI is a start-up point for CSOs to collaborate with peers and influence policies.** CIRUM for instance, created LISO; an alliance network that advocates ethnic minorities communities’ right to use forests.

“CIRUM works closely with LISO alliance partners. In April 2015 the Forestry Department of MARD requested CIRUM and LISO to draft a chapter on community forest law for the upcoming Forest Law revision. This shows an increased cooperation between us and policy makers at national level.”  
from a case study of CIRUM.

## SRD on working with peers

“It took us a while to start working with the other partners. When SRD started cooperating with CASI, partners were all working on their own thematic areas and we didn’t realise what we would gain from working together. During the quarterly meeting we were sharing information about each other’s work and we realised that we weren’t connecting with each other. We might all have different issues as organisations but ultimately we all try to help ethnic minority groups. So after that meeting we started to involve each other in our projects. We still work on our own thematic areas, but we also cooperate with each other. **SRD can’t conduct policy advocacy alone, iSEE can’t conduct advocacy alone, no organisation can conduct advocacy alone. The only way is to work together. Together we have a bigger voice, so we can make a bigger impact.**”



The most important skill we got from the CASI project is in the policy advocacy process, how do we deal with advocacy and how do we identify the issue? But also how to work with policy makers to finalise the policy we want to influence?”

## GENDER EQUALITY

Supporting women’s empowerment is an important part of CASI. CARE supports CASI’s partners to promote gender equality throughout their organisations and work. CASI supports partners in gender training activities and with tools and materials that are needed. Three of CASI’s partners have already completed policies on gender integration at organisational and/or program level and developed statements, handbooks and guidelines which integrate gender equality. The fourth partner is likely to finalise their gender integration policies soon.

In the communities where CASI operates, relationships between wives and husbands involved in the CASI project have shown positive changes. Positive results in family income and more confidence and self-esteem among ethnic minority women have led to greater respect between husbands and wives. Project evaluations have shown that female participants have more decision-making power at household and community levels.



“Earlier my wife would take care of all things related to the household. Now when we both have more work to do in the fields, so we share more of the tasks”  
Husband of woman in CBO group, Bac Kan.

Livelihoods and Rights Clubs members have demonstrated high levels of confidence, improved household incomes and they enjoy greater respect from their husbands. As a result women are recognised by the local government, are increasingly taking on leadership positions and have increased asset ownership.



“We found that men play a role in women’s leadership-often women in leadership roles have support from their husband. Men and women can benefit from working together.”  
Anita Afford, CIRUM.

### CIRUM on gender equality

One of CASI’s partners CIRUM has been working to promote gender equality. “CIRUM spends a lot of time in communities trying to understand the culture and traditions. Only then can we gain trusts and understand the roles between men and women.”

“Gender equality is not only about evolving culture and traditions and changing men’s view on women. It is also about changing women’s view on women’s roles. Through CASI’s LandNet, meetings and workshops are held with representatives from different ethnic minority groups. Members learn and discuss different issues regarding various subjects such as land rights and gender equality, but they also tell each other about the customs and tradition in their area. This leads to quite interesting discussions that shows that culture and traditions can evolve.”



### CLIMATE CHANGE

Vietnam is highly vulnerable to climate change, in particularly to drought, salt-water intrusion, cold spells, long term temperature increases, typhoons, floods, inundation, and changes in seasonal weather patterns.

CASI mainstreams climate change adaptation and response through its interventions and supports its partners to integrate climate change. Focusing on climate change in advocacy and organisational change has led to improved awareness and understanding of climate change issues and increased capacity within CARE, its partners and local authorities.

“When we talk about agriculture, we don’t talk about normal farming, we talk about agriculture that adapts to climate change.”

Ho Ngoc Son, ADC.



CASI applied different methodologies for climate change adaptation, including climate resilient livelihoods, landscape management and agro-climate information services. CASI helped to improve communities’ ability and adaptive capacity to handle natural disasters like drought, cold spell, and gradual changes in temperature and seasons.

“Through our partners CASI builds the capacity of CBOs, empowering them economically and socially, so they have the skills to identify and practice climate resilient livelihoods and to speak out for themselves.”

Luu Thi Thu Giang, CARE in Vietnam.

### ADC and Climate Change

CASI increased the capacity and strengthened the position of ADC. The NGO is seen as a strong local organisation when it comes to climate change.



Through CASI, CBOs and ADC have identified a number of climate resilient livelihoods that are adapting to climate change using indigenous knowledge. Examples of good practices are farming bananas intercropped with ginger/medicinal plants and local green beans when it’s too dry to plant rice. The evidence ADC presented using a combination of traditional techniques and scientific knowledge has been incorporated into numerous (climate change) action plans at provincial and local level, showing that provincial authorities and participants trust ADC.

### ETHNIC MINORITY NETWORKS

“The establishments of ethnic minority networks is a big achievement of CASI. Our goal is to make the networks bigger. We can’t represent ethnic groups or farmers ourselves, but we can support them, so they can represent themselves.”

Nguyen Thi Hoa, SRD.

The ethnic minority network was established in 2011 to represent ethnic minorities at the ASEAN People’s Forum. iSEE suggested to invite members of different ethnic groups so they could represent themselves. CASI’s partners introduced key ethnic minority representatives and formed a small network, which eventually led to the start of ethnic minority networks.

In 2015 iSEE’s ethnic minority network represented 13 different provinces and ethnic groups throughout Vietnam. The group comes together five or six times per year to address issues affecting their communities and discuss how to advocate for changes and represent themselves at important national gatherings.

“People start to see the importance of having representatives from the grassroots providing input and want to get in contact with the ethnic minority network. We tell everybody to contact the management team directly.”

Luong Minh Ngoc, iSEE

Other partners of CASI have also established networks; CIRUM's LandNet for instance, which focuses on land rights. LandNet includes more than 120 ethnic group representatives. Over the past years CASI and partners have provided these networks with training on e.g. coordination, planning and presentation skills. The groups now represent themselves at events, conduct research and organise training for people in their communities. **CASI and partners are no longer service providers, but are supporting the network.**

As a result of CASI, eight ethnic minority and VNGO networks were created. iSEE is responsible for linking all ethnic and VNGO networks during the next stages of CASI, to build a platform where ethnic group representatives can share their experiences and where evidence can be collected to influence policies and laws.

### iSEE on ethnic minority networks

The ethnic minority network works together to influence laws that affect the lives of members and their communities and improves the understanding of ethnic minority culture in Vietnam. "The network started focusing on human rights. Members learn about the topic and discuss what they can do about it. They are working together to influence the new Law on Anti-Discrimination and they conduct research to present to law makers at policy forums. **When the ethnic minority network was consulted about the constitution and about the Laws on Family and Marriage, it was the first time disadvantaged people got consulted about such issues.**"



The ethnic minority network also engages in other activities, one-on-one exchanges. "One of the local initiatives is literacy promotion, a participant received a small grant to battle illiteracy among women in his community and teach them how to write. Members are also exchanging livelihood methodologies and seedlings and information about traditional medicines people can grow in their gardens for instance."

### RECOGNITION OF CIVIL SOCIETY BY AUTHORITIES

CASI's partners created 3,284 community based organisations, where participants seek to become self-reliant and build better lives and brighter futures. CASI helped to strengthen and increase the capacity of 336 VNGOs. These organisations are now legitimate agencies and are recognised by communities, peers and authorities.

"In the past local government tried to reduce poverty, but failed because of their top-down approach and lack of resources and coordination. Thanks to SRD, they use a participatory approach now and come to villages to define the local communities' needs. This is more effective. The poverty rate was 38% before, even 90% in some places. This is now reduced to 20% and 50%.

People are confident to give feedback, disagree or suggest other options, rather than following what the authorities say. For instance in Gia Hoi commune, villagers and communities actively proposed the needs for different tea plants. Villagers of this commune live in a high land area; the low land tea varieties that were being used were therefore not successful. After some research different tea models were identified and the district has grown into a tea area with two tea factories."

Nguyen Hop Doan – Former Vice Chairman of Van Chan District's People's Committee (DPC) – Yen Bai province

### EXIT STRATEGY

CASI IV will serve as a two year exit period, during which CARE will work with partners to ensure the sustainability of project results achieved to date. During this phase, CASI will pay special attention to supporting partners to be strong organisations with clear identities and strategies who are able to effectively secure future resourcing independently. It will also work to ensure that partners and communities are well-positioned to continue to be heard by policy makers.

An important part of CASI IV will be the active role of CASI partners in providing continued support for ethnic minority networks to grow and develop as independent forums that provide a valuable and effective space for ethnic minority people to exercise their voice and promote their own interests

"CASI provided iSEE with support and understanding, a chance to work with different partners, a flexible framework in policy making, training on diverse subjects, research skills to collect evidence and a good background to advocate. As a result, iSEE has an advantage over many other NGOs."

Luong Minh Ngoc, iSEE

### REMAINING CHALLENGES

As Vietnam is emerging as a middle-income country, traditional donors are shifting their focus to other priorities, which means that there is less available funding for NGOs. CASI's partners are therefore seeking new resources from the public and private sector to maintain their activities. CASI is supporting partners to adapt to this situation by focusing on organisational development.

Even though poverty is decreasing in Vietnam, pockets of poverty remain. The poverty gap is widening between ethnic minorities and the rest of Vietnam. Work is needed to ensure that all men and women benefit equitably from poverty reduction and economic growth. The expectation of the ethnic minority networks is that representatives can develop skills in order to eventually be able to address their barriers to development themselves.

**"When ethnic people and groups are able and confident enough to raise their voice, to facilitate their community, to advocate for themselves and are recognised by the government, our work is done."**

Nguyen Thi Hoa, SRD

During the different stages of CASI, the main activities changed

CASI I: 2002-2003

 research civil society in Vietnam

CASI II: 2004-2009

 gather evidence for civil society

 set up community based organisations (CBO) at grassroots level and empower women in rural areas

CASI III: 2010-2012

 begin partnership with strategic partners and building their technical capacity

 CSOs work together to strengthen civil society and advocacy

CASI III: 2013-2015

 strengthen VNGO partners' organisational capacity

 focus on advocacy and networking

CASI IV: 2016-2017

 Focus on sustainability to prepare for exit



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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We express our thanks to partners and CARE staff for supporting the development of this booklet. Photographs by Cathrine Dolleris/CARE (pages 1, 4 and 6), Silja Thøgersen/CARE (page 2), CARE staff (pages 3 and 4), Bui Thi Hoa/iSEE (page 6) and Giang Thi Phuong/iSEE (page 6).

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