Vietnam Development Report 2010—Modern Institutions

Preparation, Dissemination, Reaction

Vietnam Development Report 2010—Modern Institutions emphasized the need for new forms of accountability as Vietnam devolves responsibilities to service providers and lower levels of government. The final installment in a series of four VDRs corresponding to the four pillars of Vietnam’s Socio-Economic Development Plan 2006-2010, this VDR focused on governance. The report covered civil service and public financial management, geographical decentralization, functional devolution to service providers, legal and judicial reform, and external oversight by executive, elected, and nongovernment bodies. After summarizing achievements in institutional reform, and the prospects for further devolution and accountability, the report concludes by challenging reformers: What will the next decade look like?

Coordination Among Donors

The VDR is an annual report organized by the World Bank and released at the time of the Consultative Group meeting each year. As a multi-donor report, the VDR provides the donor community with an opportunity to collectively identify and communicate the central challenges for Vietnam. Indeed, one of the key benefits of the multi-donor approach to production of the VDR is that it helps the donor community to exchange ideas and to harmonize their views upstream, providing a less chaotic set of analyses and recommendations for counterparts. The VDR on Modern Institutions was co-signed by 14 donors, including the Asian Development Bank, Australian Agency for International Development, Canadian International Development Agency, Denmark, Department for International Development of the United Kingdom, European Commission, Finland, Japan International Cooperation Agency, Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation, Sweden, Swiss Development Cooperation, the United Nations, the United States of America, and the World Bank. Oxfam GB also contributed to the preparation of the VDR. In addition to the intellectual contributions of participating donors, significant funding for the production and dissemination of the VDR was provided by the World Bank and by UK-DFID, through the GAPAP trust fund.

Interactive Approach to Dissemination

A concerted effort was made to disseminate the VDR widely and in a manner that would maximize impact. In addition to dissemination of hard copies in both Vietnamese and English at the Consultative Group meeting in Hanoi in late 2009, nearly 4,000 hard copies (2/3 of which were in the Vietnamese language) were distributed to government agencies, the media, participants at related events, and to 64 provincial libraries, universities and institutes. New websites were also established in both English (www.worldbank.org/vn/vdr) and Vietnamese (www.worldbank.org/vietnam/baoaophattrien).

A central part of the dissemination strategy was the use of interactive workshops. Nine workshops and launch events were held across the country, in Hanoi, Hue, Hai Phong, Ho Chi Minh City, Da Nang, and Dien Bien. The dissemination strategy also brought Vietnamese institutions directly into the dialogue as co-sponsors. The workshops were organized by Vietnamese institutions such as the Vietnam Fatherland Front (VFF), the Center for Community and Development Support (CECODES), the Institute for Legislative Studies (ILS) of the National Assembly, the Training Center for Elected Representatives (TCER), which provides training for the National Assembly and for the locally elected People’s Councils, and for the Party’s Central Council of Theory.
To make the dissemination truly interactive, commentary was commissioned from Vietnamese officials and researchers and provided at the interactive dissemination workshops. Having commentary from well-known figures helped to draw attention to the ideas of the report and to spark discussion.

In addition to the interactive workshops, the VDR was presented at events such as the semi-annual Anticorruption Dialogues, co-hosted by the Government Inspectorate and the Embassy of Sweden, as well as at related events sponsored by Towards Transparency, a local affiliate of Transparency International. These presentations focused on specific sectors such as education and health.

Reactions

The VDR dissemination events were widely covered in the press, as well as on a large number of government web-sites, including those of ministries, provincial governments, the National Assembly, and the Party. The findings have also been referred to by others in interviews and used for various other opinion pieces in the press.

While the VDR covered a broad range of topics, some seemed to resonate, arising repeatedly during discussions and in media coverage:

- **Decentralization.** Many comments provided both at the workshops and in the press argued that geographical decentralization has proceeded too fast and that many provinces either don’t have the capacity or the will to exercise their new responsibilities appropriately. Others argued that the central government provided insufficient support to the provinces. Similarly, the problems associated with “dual state management”, whereby a state body reports to a ministry and the provincial People’s Committee at the same time, was the subject of some discussion.

- **Land.** In several discussions, concerns about the use and allocation of land were raised. Indeed, although 10 pages of the report covered land, some asked why there was not even more attention paid to this important issue. (The forthcoming VDR on Natural Resource Management will have a chapter on land.)

- **Information and oversight.** The need to strengthen access to information was a central message of the VDR, and some commentary echoed this view. The need for stronger, independent oversight, was also noted by some.

- **Role of the state.** Some argued that while the role of the state is shifting, it has not gone far enough. Although the number of state bodies has been reduced in recent decades, it has been merely the amalgamation of the some state agencies together, thus the range of activities and interventions of the state has not been reduced. State owned enterprises continue to play an excessively large role in the economy, with a large economic cost.

- **Concepts.** The VDR distinguished between upward accountability through the hierarchy and downward accountability to clients, and argued that the latter is in short supply in Vietnam. Many were intrigued and energized by the notion of accountability to the citizens directly, rather than only to the state. And while the concept of state management is well understood in Vietnam, the broader term governance, which gives a role also to non-state actors, piqued the curiosity of many. Another concept that sparked discussion was conflict of interest. Three of the interactive workshops with National Assembly and People’s Councils deputies focused specifically on conflict of interest and access to information, and while there was general agreement on the importance of access to information, the very concept of conflict of interest was interpreted in a variety of ways. As the VDR remarks, “the concept of ‘conflict of interest’ … is not well understood.”