

Independent Evaluation of SDC's Bilateral Engagement in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) Process

Part 2: Case Studies

VIETNAM

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We would welcome any further corrections to errors of fact or interpretation or additional information.

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Executive Summary

1. The PRSP is known as the Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy (CPRGS) in Vietnam.
2. The CPRGS is a strong, government owned action plan in the context of a centralised state. The lead Ministry for the CPRGS is the Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI)
3. It was developed by the Government of Vietnam and influenced by the Poverty Task Force (government led but with members from the bilateral and multilateral donor and international NGO communities) which also managed aspects of consultation.
4. The process of development of the CPRGS included gender perspectives, gained through the National Committee for the Advancement of Women (NCAFW) consultation process funded by the World Bank.
5. Consultation at commune and village level was conducted by international NGOs and financed by the World Bank.
6. Vietnam received US\$1.4b in ODA in 2001. Of that \$822m was bilateral - 56% of it from Japan. The World Bank provides just under half of multilateral ODA. Switzerland provides 1.3% of bilateral ODA.
7. The LMDG (Like Minded Donor Group), of which SDC is an active member, has a common commitment to using the CPRGS and improving the quality of aid. It is an influential player in policy dialogue both with the government and with other donors.
8. International NGOs provide about \$100m of assistance a year. A small group of policy-active international NGOs have been engaged in the CPRGS process. There is not a strong Vietnamese NGO sector independent from Government.
- 8 The current status of the CPRGS is that:
 - It is widely perceived to be government owned
 - It is widely perceived to be based on a consultative process
 - It is widely perceived to have good content and reasonable priorities
- 9 But there are different views/assumptions about the location of the CPRGS in the policy making process.
 - It operates in the context of the 10 year socio-economic plan – which runs up to 2010, compared with the CPRGS covers the period up to 2005
 - An orientation not an instrument and certainly not the only instrument. Ministry and overall annual budgets are key instruments

- Not comprehensive – ODA financed activities outside the CPRGS take place - most notably in infrastructure; Some ministry plans more comprehensive and poverty oriented than the CPRGS
 - Some see it only as a framework only for donor coordination
- 10 It is not seen by anyone as a single plan leading to ONLY budget support for an overall CPRGS programme (as in PRSP ‘theory’)
- 11 Swiss involvement has taken place bilaterally and through the LMDG
- 12 SDC has taken on a major programme of work on urban poverty. It set up the Urban Forum in the Ministry of Construction and worked to get urban poverty and governance included in the CPRGS through research, project funding, workshops and advocacy.
- 13 It is widely acknowledged that Swiss work on urban issues led to the inclusion and full integration of urban poverty into the final draft of the CPRGS.
- 14 The process strengthened Vietnamese government processes – particularly Ministry of Construction. Switzerland recognises that getting urban poverty recognised in the CPRGS and working to enhance capacity in the MoC are just a start – there is a question of the degree of real ownership/internalisation of the urban content by the Ministry of Construction; the political weight of the MoC and therefore its impact on their programme. SDC is currently laying the groundwork for provincial activity to implement the CPRGS urban poverty agenda.
- 15 SDC's new phase of its Social Forestry Support Programme explicitly follows the priorities in the CPRGS. SDC is responsible for results in one sector of the Forestry Sector Support Programme and Partnership.
- 16 Although it is a small donor, SDC has acted in a way which has mobilised other resources.
- 17 Switzerland is perceived to have created a climate of confidence of urban issues leading to investment by other larger donors. It has done this by its commitment and promotion of the concept of urban poverty reduction to other donors along with the provision of management tools, approaches, pilot projects – intelligent use of its limited finance. Building even stronger relationships with such other larger donors has potential.
- 18 Membership of the LMDG (Like minded donor group) has been an important tool in SDC's work in Vietnam. The LMDG
- provides a common analysis
 - is empowering and does not inhibit bilateral relations
 - gives small donors increased bargaining power
 - allows association with broader range of key issues – such as the analysis of the Public Investment Programme
 - SDC has a comparative advantage in participation in such groups in that it has decentralised authority and can therefore be flexible, responsive and quick.

- 19 The LMDG has been a particularly important vehicle for the harmonisation agenda. Switzerland is a team player but also an opinion leader. Switzerland's role on harmonisation within Vietnam has been strengthened by the leading role that SDC-Berne has taken in the DAC Task Force on Donor Practices.
- 20 SDC is perceived to have a comparative advantage at sub-national level in both knowledge and capacity. This is particularly important in the current and coming phases of the CPRGS and SDC is working on a number of initiatives at provincial level such as the City CPRGS. It is expected that Switzerland will be increasingly engaged in the 'roll-out' of the CPRGS to local level over the next two years.
- 21 SDC activities and programmes are now all aligned with CPRGS. SDC projects contribute to central planks of the CPRGS: public administration reform, legal reform and pro-poor good governance. The choice of geographical areas (Uplands) is led by the poverty reduction strategy.
- 22 SDC has opted for a mix of financial instruments that allow co-funding and project funding that will have multiplier effects and accelerate progress on the CPRGS.
- 23 The CPRGS has led to big changes in the work pattern for SDC in Hanoi. Policy dialogue is labour intensive; meeting intensive; software intensive.

1 Introduction

The Vietnam case study is part of larger effort to evaluate SDC's involvement in the processes of elaboration of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs).

SDC has commissioned an independent evaluation of its bilateral engagement in PRSPs. The evaluation is being carried out by Judith Randel and Tony German of Development Initiatives (UK) www.devinit.org and Richard Gerster and Sonja Zimmerman of Gerster Consulting (Switzerland) www.gersterconsulting.ch.

The evaluation comprises three major elements:

- An SDC-wide survey of SDC's experience of PRSPs to date;
- Case studies in four SDC partner countries (Kyrgyz Republic, Burkina Faso, Nicaragua, Vietnam) to look in detail how SDC, government, other bilaterals, multilateral agencies, NGOs and civil society interact on PRSP processes;
- A synthesis report, prepared based on the survey and the case studies, making recommendations to SDC on how to improve its role in the PRSP processes.

The **terms of reference** for the overall evaluation are described in SDC's approach paper. Concerning the case studies the approach paper mentions more specifically

- Detailed case studies of SDC engagement in the PRSP process in Nicaragua, Vietnam, Burkina Faso and the Kyrgyz Republic consisting of interviews with key actors, surveys of processes, interactions, results achieved and lessons drawn based on the key questions. Identification of successes and shortcomings. Interpretation of key determinants (analysis), recommendations.
- Interviews with similar bilateral donor COOFs in the four case study countries to determine what other similar donors are doing. Review of readily available information on donor practices in the PRSP context. Comparison with SDC activities and recommendations.
- End-of-Mission Workshop in each country conducted by the evaluator with the SDC evaluation officer, COOF staff, government representatives, NGOs, and representatives of like-minded donors.

In the case of **Vietnam** the mission took place between 17 and 21 February 2003. Its members were Judith Randel of Development Initiatives, Dr Dang Kim Son, Director of Information Center for Agriculture and Rural Development, Ministry of Agricultural and Rural Development assisted by Pham Thi Ngoc Linh.

The **methodology** of the evaluation in Vietnam was as follows:

- Preparation of the evaluation by analysis of relevant project documents and related studies (see references in Annex 3)
- A series of interviews in Vietnam. Interviewees included officials from the Ministries of Planning and Investment and Construction, governments of Canada, Japan, Netherlands, Norway, and the UK; the World Bank; UNDP; informal discussions with other members of the Like Minded Donor Group including Denmark and Sweden; a half day focus group discussion with international NGOs;

a specific discussion on gender with the Director of the Coordinating Center for Poverty Reduction. SDC staff were not present during the interviews. In addition discussions were held with the SDC Coordinator and SDC staff to draw on their expertise.

- An End-of-Mission briefing was given to SDC to feed back major points and get comments but a full workshop was unable to be held because of competing events in Hanoi.

2. Context

2.1 Trends and Challenges

Geography

Vietnam is a country of 79 million people. Covering the eastern part of Indochina along the Gulf of Tonkin and the South China Sea, it is a long, narrow country bordering China to the North and Laos and Cambodia to the West. Terrain and climate vary from North to South. The North is more mountainous, colder and has mineral resources. There are two river deltas, the Song Hong in the North and Mekong in the South.

The Capital, Hanoi, is based in the far North. Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon, the capital of what was South Vietnam), Haiphong and Danang are among the other major cities. 30% of the population live in urban areas.

While most of the population is native Vietnamese, there are mountain groups of different ethnic origins and people of Chinese descent. Ethnic minorities are reported to face the greatest difficulties in overcoming poverty.

Economy

Vietnam is an agrarian society, with 70% of the workforce in agriculture and forestry. However agriculture accounts for only 25% of GDP. Growth (of around 5% pa) has been most rapid in industrial crops - rubber, coffee and sugarcane. The rice yield has steadily increased enabling Vietnam to become the world's second largest rice exporter after Thailand.

Industrial growth has been strong, and particularly rapid in garments and footwear. The oil and gas industry accounted for 16% of industrial activity in the mid-nineties, but growth has slowed as new fields have failed to come on stream.

Vietnam's major exports are oil (19.5% in 2002), textiles and garments (16%) and marine products (12%). Imports are (cloth 15%, Refined petroleum 11% and steel 7%). In 2002 there was a merchandise trade deficit of US\$2.8b, compared with \$1b in 2001, however export growth is reported to be strong.

Japan is the most important market for Vietnam followed by Australia, China and the US. Leading suppliers are Singapore, China and Japan.

Political and Social Environment

For much of its existence, Vietnam has been fighting off domination by external powers. The Vietnamese War of Independence ended in 1975 with victory for the North. However the Vietnamese involvement in Cambodia three years later led to more than a decade of isolation from the West and dependence on the Soviet Union. This ended with the Cambodian Settlement of October 1991 which allowed Vietnam to implement the policy of economic renovation or *doi moi* which had been proclaimed in 1986. This marked the transition from a centrally planned economy to a more market oriented economy in the state, private sector and civil society.

Vietnam has a unitary state structure with all political power concentrated in the National Assembly and the one-party political system. The Communist Party in Vietnam is the force leading state and society.¹ The dominant feature of the political environment is seen as centralisation.

Following *doi moi*, the political framework has undergone considerable change in support of the rule of law and to increase representation and accountability. The 1992 constitution provides legal recognition of the need to respect human rights, an independent judiciary bound to the rule of law, private ownership or property and the private sector economy. Since 1992 the government has been positively encouraging private sector development with new laws in 1999 and 2000 and a Vietnam-USA trade agreement ratified in new millennium.

Civil Society and the political framework

In 1998 the government passed the Grass Roots Democracy Decree. The fundamental principle of this is that Commune-level administrations have the responsibility of ensuring that citizens can exercise their rights. The decree is also directed at improving the transparency of local government and providing people with more information about local government activities and finances.

The CPRGS restates this commitment, promoting participation through the application of the Grass Roots Democracy Decree at district and commune levels and turning it into "permanent practice at the grass roots level".

While participation is thus being institutionalised, there is not a well-developed independent NGO sector in Vietnam. There are 'mass organisations', which are quasi-state organisations but there is also a growing number of professional and social organisations which, whilst not entirely independent, nonetheless face little interference from the state. Recent reports suggest that there may be over 100 organisations of this type in both Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City.

¹ See 1992 Constitution

Development Challenges

Since 1990, Vietnam has had an average economic growth rate of 7.5% and has halved the poverty rate. Its HDI rating improving from 120th to 101st over the decade. During the nineties, life expectancy rose by four years to 68, child malnutrition fell from 52% to 33% and the under-five mortality rate fell from 81 per thousand live births, to 42 per thousand live births. The percentage of the population with access to safe water has doubled. Primary enrolment is at 95%.

Along with stable economic growth, Vietnam has gradually brought inflation under control.

Nonetheless **Vietnam remains a poor country**. GNP per capita is US\$420². US\$ 2,230 in purchasing power parity terms.³ The percentage of poor households in Vietnam is relatively high with 2.8 million household below the poverty line developed by the National Poverty Reduction Programme.⁴

90% of the poor live in rural areas and the majority depend on agriculture, their income is unstable and they are vulnerable to shocks. While growth rates in agriculture and increases in per capita food production (303kg in 1990 to 444 kg in 2000) have contributed to poverty reduction, **a majority of the rural poor are barely above the poverty line**.

Income inequality is widening - the rate of increase of the incomes of the poor is lower than that of other groups with the gap between the top and bottom quintiles increasing from 7.3 times in 1996 to 8.9 times in 1999.

Poverty is concentrated in areas with poor natural resources such as the upland areas, remote and isolated areas and those with extreme climatic conditions.

Land rights, both urban and rural are critical to the poor. There has been progress in land use rights for agriculture but more needs to be done in the case of forest-land which remains largely owned by the State and State Forest Enterprises.

Maintaining stable and strong growth is seen as the essential factor in poverty reduction. Targets are for GDP in 2010 to be double its 1990 level. But the key concern is that the growth is **broad-based and pro-poor** and that the public investment programme reflects the priorities of the CPRGS in this regard.

² In 2001

³ Economist data

⁴ Vietnam has now established a new poverty line for the period 2001 - 2005, with difference levels for different areas. For instance it is VND 80,000 a month for island and rural mountainous areas compared with \$150,000 a month in urban areas.

Along with deepening economic reform and fighting increasing inequality is the development challenge of **governance**. Although progress has been made, the development of improved governance is seen as a critical condition for progress in other areas as well as essential in its own right. Key challenges within the area of governance are the **strengthening of civil society and tackling corruption**.

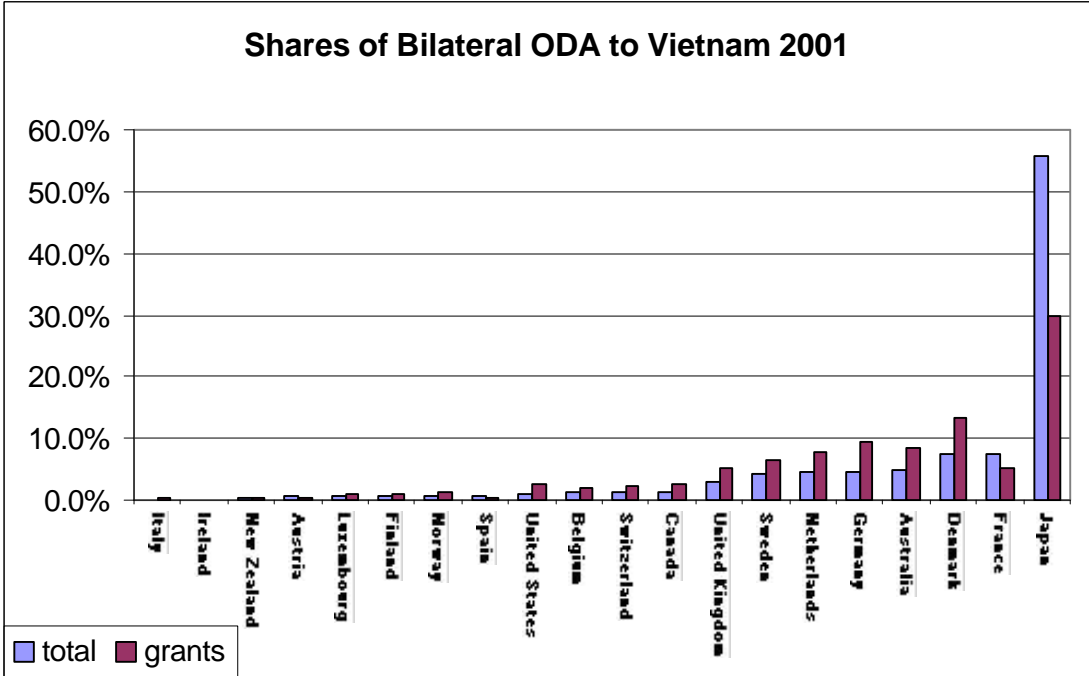
Public administration reform is a major pre-occupation for donors and there is concern about the slow pace at which policy is being translated into action and the lack of progress at local levels.

2.2 Overview on the Donor Community

In 2001, Vietnam received \$1.4b in ODA. Of that \$822m was bilateral ODA from DAC donors, \$36m came from outside the DAC and \$576m was from multilateral donors - just under half of the multilateral ODA was provided by IDA (\$276m) and a further 30% by the Asian Development Fund (\$175m).

By far the biggest bilateral donor is Japan providing 56% of bilateral ODA in 2001 - followed by France and Denmark with around 7% each.

If loans are excluded the picture changes, but Japan is still the dominant donor financially, supplying 30% of bilateral grant funding. Denmark is the next biggest donor followed by Australia, Netherlands and Sweden.



The Like Minded Group as a whole, contributes 30% of bilateral ODA.

Switzerland provided \$10.8m in 2001, all as grants. Its share of total bilateral ODA is 1.3%.

Broadly speaking, donors are confident in the CPRGS - both its principles and its priorities. Many are taking actions to make their programmes more supportive of the content and process. Most see it as a useful framework to guide spending and policy.

The LMDG (Like Minded Donor Group)

The LMDG defines itself as:

"an ad-hoc grouping of Hanoi-based bilateral donors (Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands, Canada, Germany, Finland, Norway, Switzerland and the United Kingdom⁵) who are drawn together by a common commitment to: (1) Use the CPRGS as a framework for our ODA planning and delivery; and (2) Improve the quality of aid in Vietnam. The LMDG is not an exclusive group and aims to promote change through the demonstration effects of practical actions that have concrete, measurable results. "

The LMDG are committed to improving the quality of aid in Vietnam through harmonisation, joint activities, promoting the use of government systems, introducing new aid instruments that lower transactions costs and improve effectiveness.

There is evidence that the LMDG is an influential player in policy dialogue in Vietnam, both with the government and with the World Bank.

Activities of the LMDG have included:⁶

- Common analysis of the CPRGS
- A cofinanced harmonisation project that will provide resources for the Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI) to carry out a capacity building programme (in progress)
- Continued advocacy and action on harmonisation with other donors, the government and capitals
- Glossary of common language for ODA management
- Multi donor arrangements in public finance and public administration
- Several LMDG members are financing the PRSC; others have co-financing programmes

By December 2003 LMDG aims to have

- a common framework for monitoring implementation of the CPRGS
- A second PRSC agreed and financed, more closely aligned with the CPRGS
- LMDG support to the Public Finance Modernisation Programme
- A common assessment of the first year of the Public Administration Reform (PAR) programme

⁵ Other donors, such as Germany, take part in some but not all LMDG activities

⁶ Source: Combined LMDG statement for CG 2002.

- Multi agency, Government of Vietnam (GoVN)-Donor working groups on procurement, monitoring and reporting
- Progress on sectoral approaches in forestry, basic education, natural disaster management, PAR and rural transport.

World Bank

The World Bank and the LMDG are very supportive of the CPRGS process - both have a lot invested in its success and Vietnam has been widely spoken of as being in the vanguard of progress on poverty reduction strategies.

The bedrock of Bank policy based lending in Vietnam is the Poverty Reduction Support Credit (PRSC). Release of the first tranche was based on 12 prior actions already in the CPRGS. For PRSC-2 the Bank will agree on new areas of reform, based on the CPRGS. So far these have generated a set of specific reforms in the areas of State Owned Enterprises, banking, trade, public expenditure management and private sector development. There will be more focus on overall progress than on detailed conditionalities. Thus the Bank expects to engage in broad policy dialogue on progress in the areas of reform noted, but not to be in a position where release of funds can be held up by relatively small failures to meet specific conditions.

LMDG members - notably UK and Netherlands - are financing through the PRSC.

Japan

Japan is different. It sees the government's original Ten Year Plan as being 'more balanced' than the CPRGS, particularly because of its attention to infrastructure. Rather than seeing the CPRGS as a framework for all development, Japan sees the CPRGS only as a mechanism to manage aid. However, despite this, Japan is making efforts through the Consultative Group (CG) first mention process to get the CPRGS amended with a new chapter on infrastructure.

United Nations agencies

The UN has put the Millennium Development Goals at the apex of its policy making and has assisted Vietnam to contextualise them into the Vietnamese Development Goals (VDGs) through initial work prior to the completion of the CPRGS.⁷

In their statement to the 2002 CG, the UN agencies referred to both the Ten Year plan, the Five Year Plan and the CPRGS but their measure of success is the extent to which the implementation of these plans leads to achievement of the VDGs.

NGOs

There is not really a Vietnamese NGO sector (see political environment above). There are a series of quasi state/quasi NGO "mass organisations"

⁷ See United Nations in Vietnam, "Brings MDGs Closer to the People" November 2002. Evaluation of SDC Engagement in the PRSP Process; Vietnam Case Study 6 April 2003

representing particular interests such as the National Committee for the Advancement of Women (NCFAW) and the Farmers Union. There are also now some 'private NGOs', social and professional organisations who are in the early phases of development capacity in their fields of operation.

While there are around 400 foreign NGOs in Vietnam, there is a small group of active, large international NGOs in Vietnam. These include Plan International, CRS, ActionAid, SCF UK, Oxfam GB.

These international NGOs recognise the leverage that the CPRGS offers to increase governmental and donor focus on poverty. Their input up to now has been on pro-poor and participatory policy making, however the next phase of work is focusing much more on delivery, especially public investment and the varied approaches of different ministries.

NGOs and donors share a concern about independent monitoring and evaluation of progress under the CPRGS.

Their critique of the CPRGS includes the failure to accept gender as a problem, issues around corruption and transparency.

One strand of work which features strongly in international NGO programmes and also with Helvetas is building capacity at the local level through training and awareness-raising work with local officials.

International NGO spending is estimated to be around \$100m a year (around half the LMDG).

In 2000, Switzerland reported activities of 17 Swiss NGOs⁸, totalling CHF 4.5m (\$2.7m). The largest were HEKS/EPER, the Swiss Red Cross and World Vision.

How is Switzerland Perceived?

- Switzerland is well regarded and visible, particularly for its urban inputs. Interviewees displayed quite detailed awareness of Swiss inputs citing specific workshops and interventions.
- The small scale of the Swiss programme is not a problem. Switzerland is perceived as able to leverage other funds.
- Swiss commitment to an issue is valued. SDC is seen as a reliable partner that is persistent and which follows up.
- Switzerland is recognised as having influenced the content of the CPRGS and has done this in a way which strengthens local ownership. This is widely acknowledged and respected.

⁸ These are: HEKS/EPER, Schweiz Rotes Kreuz, World Vision Schweiz, Nouvelle Planete, Helvetas, Terre des Hommes Lausanne, Caritas Schweiz, Terre des hommes Schweiz (BS), Mediswiss, Children Action, SOS Kinderdorfer, St Petrus-Claver-Solidaritat, CSS Deutsche Schweiz, Freres de nos Freres, Kloster Baldegg, Task Force Sight and Life, Assoc. Enfance du Vietnam, MIVA, Verein Leprahilfe Vietnam.

- Swiss are perceived as having valuable contributions to make in methodology, approaches and policy and sub-national level work.

2.3 The Swiss Cooperation Programme

Swiss cooperation with Vietnam is part of the Mekong Regional Programme - a joint SDC-seco programme. Overall, it aims to contribute to an equitable and participatory society, an open and market oriented economy and sound natural resource management.

Swiss Development Assistance to Vietnam was reported to the CG in 2002 to be focused on two strategic orientations:

- Good Governance including Public Administration Reform
- Human and Institutional Capacity Building

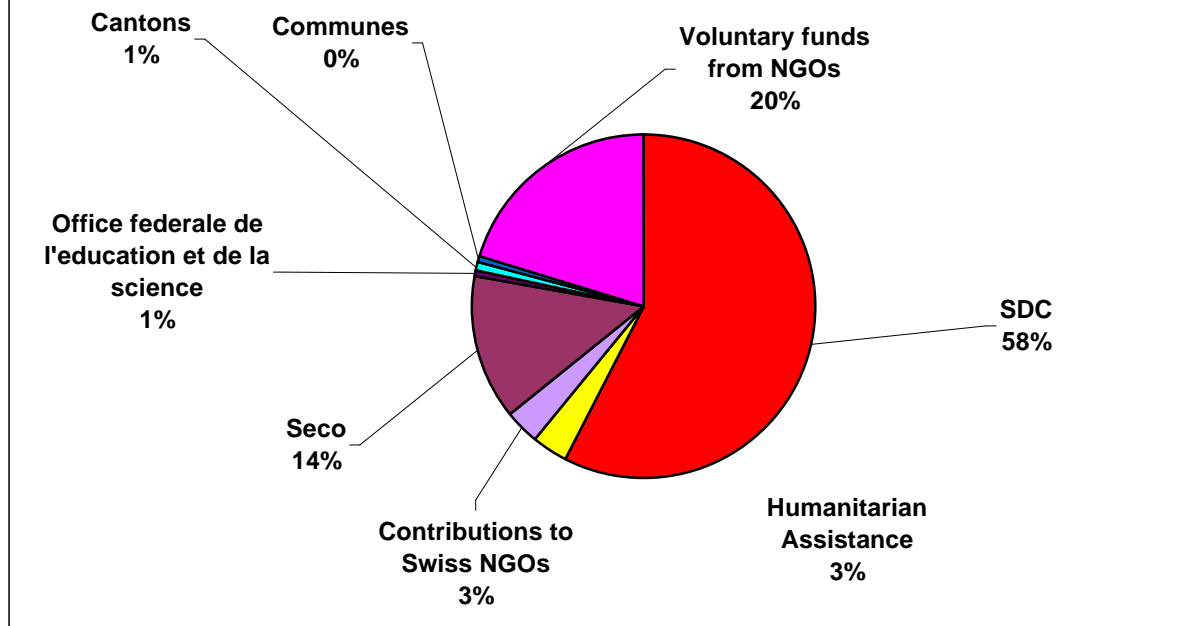
SDC and seco have specific projects and programmes in four fields of cooperation:

- Urban Governance and Infrastructure;
- Natural Resource management;
- International Trade Integration;
- Private Sector Promotion.

Discussions in Vietnam for this evaluation did not cover trade integration or private sector promotion issues, which are mostly dealt with by seco. However, seco is reported to contribute to sustainable economic growth by supporting the development of the private sector, the strengthening of the financial sector, the improvement of social infrastructure and the environment and Vietnam's integration in to the world trade system. Seco's activities address the central Bank and commercial banks (and Japan particularly noted Switzerland's contributions to banking), the IFIs and the domestic and foreign private sector.

In the approved Mekong Regional Programme (MRP) 2, expenditures were planned to grow to around CHF39m in 2006 of which CHF34m would be from SDC and around 5 - 6m from seco (but in practice this is more likely to be about CHF 25 m due to cuts made in Parliament and SDC internal distribution)

Total official and voluntary assistance from Switzerland to Vietnam in 2000



Between October 2002 and February 2003, over CHF13m of new funding proposals have been made. Three of these are cost sharing proposals:

- Support to the Strategic Management of the Public Administration Reform Master Programme (PAR MP) with CHF 1m in year one and further support possible for 2003-2005. Costsharing with UNDP
- Strengthening the Capacity of People's Elected Bodies in Vietnam with CHF 2.25m over three years costsharing with UNDP
- Mainstreaming prevention of domestic violence in UNFPA programmes with CHF 430,000 costsharing with UNFPA

These demonstrate the way that Switzerland is choosing to engage on the framework issues of public administration and governance

Forestry has been a major sector for Switzerland. A framework credit to the value of CHF 8.75m for the development of forestry work in the Uplands has been submitted.

3. The PRSP

3.1 Key Issues of the CPRGS

The Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy formulated by the Government of Vietnam is composed of six parts:

- Part I: Socio-Economic Setting, Current Poverty Situation, Achievements and Challenges
- Part II: Objectives and Tasks of Socio - Economic Development and Poverty Reduction for the Period up to 2005 and 2010
- Part III: Create Environment for Rapid and Sustainable Growth, and for Poverty Reduction
- Part IV: Major Policies and Measures for the Development of Sectors and Industries to Ensure Sustainable Growth and Poverty Reduction
- Part V: Mobilisation of Resources for Growth and Poverty Reduction
- Part VI: Organisational Arrangements for and Monitoring and Evaluation of the Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy

Achieving the objectives is estimated to cost around \$60b over five years.

3.2 The CPRGS Process

The CPRGS builds on the interim strategy (I-PRSP) presented to the Boards of International Development Association (IDA) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in March 2001. Subsequently the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) was presented to the Boards of the IDA and the IMF.

The CPRGS was wholly drafted by the government (Ministry of Planning and Investment - MPI). Consultants, most of them local experts and researchers, were mobilised to assist in the drafting process and to write background papers where necessary. Four drafts were translated into English and circulated to the international community for comments and suggestions.

A wide range of stakeholders was involved in the process. The inter-ministerial task force engaged national government agencies and their input was reinforced by four consultation workshops held at national level. These workshops also included international and local civil society organisations. A number of line ministries established cross-departmental poverty taskforces to coordinate their input into the CPRGS. In addition, four regional workshops also were organised and mobilised contributions and comments from participants.

International NGOs took an active role in the consultation process for the CPRGS, as part of the Poverty Working Group and commissioned/funded by the World Bank to get civil society input into the process through six village and commune and one urban (in Ho Chi Minh City HCMC) level workshops and consultations.

The government – donor – NGO Poverty Task Force has been the main point of interaction between the CPRGS drafting team and the international development partners. An early draft of the CPRGS was discussed at the Consultative Group Meeting in December 2001.

CPRGS also distributed to the Economic and Budget Committee of National Assembly for comments.

3.3 Gender and the CPRGS process

The process of the development of the CPRGS included gender perspectives. There were village, provincial and national level consultations and the National Committee for the Advancement of Women (NCFAW) and the Women's Union played an active part involving all line ministries. This consultation process was funded by the World Bank. It is questioned whether, had it not been supported by the Bank, a gender perspective would have been included in the CPRGS. Unlike the CPRGS, gender is not addressed in the government's ten year Socio Economic Plan - despite a UNDP funded effort to incorporate gender issues.

The engagement of the NCFAW and the Women's Union in the CPRGS development process raised awareness of gender issues - at least on the drafting committee and in the MPI. However in Line Ministries it is suggested that it had little impact.

In the context of the CPRGS, the LMDG (Canada, Netherlands, SDC) are facilitating a process of follow up on the gender issues. Terms of reference have been discussed and, as at April 2003, a good Vietnamese consultant was being selected. For those working on gender issues such as Tran Thi Van Anh Director of the Coordinating Center for poverty Reduction at the National Center for Social Sciences and Humanities, the key issue (as for much else) is how the line ministries will incorporate gender issues. All ministries have their own Committee for the Advancement of Women (CAFW) with a staff member full time in a secretariat role and membership drawn from different departments. The functioning of these units will have a major impact on the ability to achieve gender mainstreaming. CAFWs at provincial or ministerial level could get donor funding direct for projects, but few of them do.

Donors could work with line ministries to facilitate the process of getting gender reflected in their five year plans and then in Annual Plans with targets and measurable indicators. Key parts of this process are increasing the understanding of the importance of gender in the specific context of that ministry - very much on the model of the Urban Forum and the MoC - and technical assistance to help staff with gender analysis and techniques to incorporate gender issues. It is also necessary to assess the impact of such training – the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) for instance has had a lot of gender training input but there has been no assessment of what, if anything, has changed as a result.

Nationally, the each Ministry is represented on the NCFAW (usually at Vice Ministerial Level). NCFAW has a ten year strategy for the Advancement of Women and an action plan with measurable indicators. They are therefore in a position to

monitor progress. Ministries want to be seen as good performers so there is some incentive to engage.

Donors also need to look to their own gender inputs – a larger number of donors in Vietnam have less than half a person year on gender issues.

All provincial governments have a CFAW of their own. They have regular reporting mechanisms and assessment and planning meetings for all 61 provinces and the CFAW groups in each ministry.

On gender, as on much else, it is seen as important to have policies AND projects and in particular to document GOOD PRACTICE so that it can be replicated. Donors are strongly urged to publish good practice on how gender can be incorporated.

3.4 The CPRGS and other government planning processes

The diagram below shows some of the linkages between the CPRGS and other government planning processes.

To summarise, the government has a ten-year Socio Economic Development Strategy that pre-dates the CPRGS and has the objective of maintaining rapid and sustainable economic growth and implementing the policy on poverty reduction. In addition, the government developed strategies for sectoral or industrial development in the fields of health, rural water and sanitation, reproductive health, population, nutrition, children, public administrative reform, advancement of women, education, technology and environmental protection.

The CPRGS was developed after the 10-year socio-economic Development Strategy and sectoral strategies. On the one hand, the CPRGS in some degree is a synthesis of all these strategies and in theory the CPRGS could co-ordinate and ensure synergy among these strategies as well as to making their orientation more pro-poor. On the other hand, there is also a danger that line ministries and other sectoral agencies will only give lip-service to the CPRGS while continuing to follow-up to their own strategies. It may require more time for the CPRGS to have impact/influence on the planning process.

There are different views on the linkages between the CPRGS and other government strategies and the public investment programme (PIP).

The CPRGS itself states that it is the action plan and road map for implementation of the 10-year plan. However, some people see it as "an orientation" for any development programme or ministry. They make only a tenuous link between ministry plans and budgets and the CPRGS.

Other people see the CPRGS primarily as a means of coordinating donors. They argue that the CPRGS is not the main strategy; that the backbone of policy making is the finance and the finance will be allocated through the ten and five-year strategies.

In his statement to the Consultative Group in December 2002, H.E. Vo Hong Phuc,

Minister of Planning and Investment, tried to clarify this:

" The [CPRGS] is linked to the PIP. Both are in the 10-year socio-economic development strategy (2000-2010) of Vietnam and the 5-year socio-economic development plan (2001 - 2005)....In fact the CPRGS was based on the 10-year socio-economic development strategy, and CPRGS is part of this strategy. I would also like to repeat that the CPRGS is linked to the PIP. Those are the two unseparatable parts of the content. The two papers enjoy the same legal status, are linked to and interdependent on each other. "

Different interests also influence views about the status of the CPRGS. Some ministries value a diversity of funding streams and bilateral relationships which give them more room for manoeuvre than negotiating with a single, unified donor bloc. However, officials implementing an agreed programme would prefer the lower transaction costs of working with a harmonised group.

For government at sub-national level, totally harmonised donor support would lead to further centralisation. Their current access to a diversity of funding - NGOs, donors, UN etc - would be reduced.

Japan, which provides a third of the total aid coming into Vietnam (and 56% of bilateral) the CPRGS does not reflect their priority sector of infrastructure and they rate the Ten Year Plan and line ministry plans as more significant than the CPRGS.

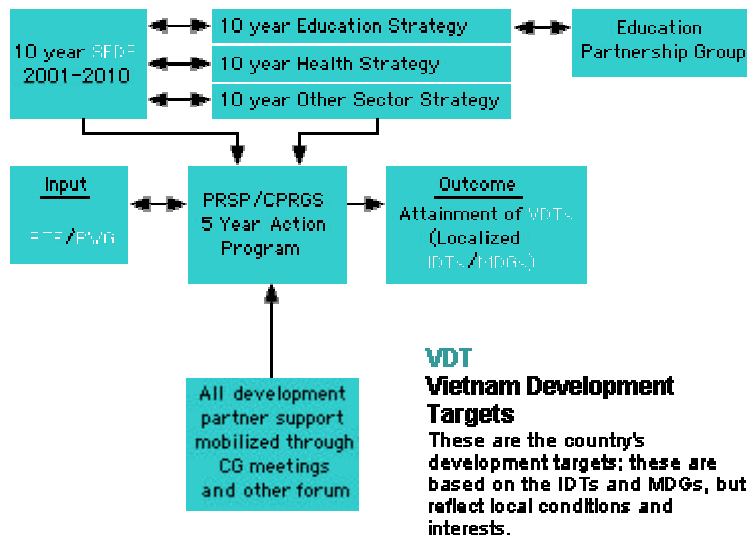
Switzerland has chosen to position itself as aligning both with the CPRGS and with the ten-year strategy and taken up the challenge – with the LMDG – to facilitate the future merger of the two.

It has also recognised the gap between Hanoi and the field in the attention given to the CPRGS and the need for awareness raising and capacity building at sub-national level if the CPRGS is to be implemented. It is argued that officials at provincial and commune level have a much stronger incentive to deliver since affected people are on their doorsteps and can get exert some accountability from them.⁹ Activities that empower people and officials at this level may be particularly important for the implementation of the CPRGS.

⁹ Examples of this were given in interviews: In 1988 land was redistributed to relieve starvation and in a later crisis, bureaucratic barriers to the movement of food from the South to North were lifted to enable food supplies to get through.

Diagram 1. CPRGS process and linkages

(Touch the white text for an explanation)



4. Mapping of the Swiss Involvement in the PRSP-Process

4.1 Motivation

SDC's Strategy-2010 committed SDC to support and promote its partners' own initiatives in reducing poverty. This provided the context for the strategy of full engagement with the PRS process in Vietnam. For a small donor, seeking to impact poverty in Vietnam, the CPRGS process offered the strongest opportunities.

Since 2000, the development context in Vietnam has changed. Easy gains in poverty reduction are over. Income inequality is rising more rapidly than expected. The country needs a to make greater efforts in reducing poverty. This explains the current motivation for engagement.

4.2 Activities and Instruments

Activities: Urban Forum and CPRGS¹⁰

Since 2000, Switzerland has been an active player on urban issues, participating and hosting workshops, commissioning research and engaging with national and local government, NGOs and other donors. Some of its specific activities and their outcomes include:

Activities	Outcomes
SDC statement to the CG 2000 meeting on urban issues, supporting the establishment of an urban forum - government-donor partnership on urban development.	Chairman's closing statement considered urban development a "missing pillar".
Meetings with donors and government to establish commitment to an Urban Partnership	Government "warmly welcomes" establishment of Vietnam Urban Forum
SDC support unit to Vietnam Urban Forum operational May 2001	SDC mandated by donors to facilitate and finance the urban forum.
Supported, facilitated and cofunded three workshops, four sets of urban research with the Cities Alliance, 3 regional and 1 national workshop on enhancing access of the urban poor to basic infrastructure and housing, Poverty mapping and preparation for urban upgrading in 4 cities, Workshop on policy building.	MoC approved as the Ministry to coordinate the Urban Forum World Bank considers Urban Upgrading project in four cities; Urban upgrading and housing for the urban poor expected to be included in Urban Development Policy.
Integrated approach to poverty reduction in Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) promoted and research on consultation on the CPRGS undertaken. Urban Task Force established in March 2002 and three meetings	MoC took account of the Urban Task Force comments in drafting its own submission to the Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI) in letter commenting on urban issues and the CPRGS. Urban issues included in the

¹⁰ A full chronology of the SDC involvement in urban issues and the CPRGS is given in Annex 4 Evaluation of SDC Engagement in the PRSP Process; Vietnam Case Study 6 April 2003

help to develop comments on the CPRGS. Comments made orally and in writing to the government drafting team.	CPRGS re-draft and the final official CPRGS report substantively integrated urban poverty agenda.
Participation in urban group discussion on Public Investment Programme (Nov. 02)	Urban issues expected to be better stated in 5-year plans. PIP includes CPRGS costings
Promotion and development of City Development Strategy - CPRGS at city level. Switzerland is promoting urban initiatives with other donors on land management, water supply and waste management	City Level CPRGS is under consideration. An outcome is that cities are expected to have a clearer view on city development and poverty reduction.

There was a lack of attention to urban poverty and urban development in the CPRGS early draft. SDC, through the Urban Poverty Taskforce of the Urban Forum, has brought a whole agenda on urban poverty and development into the CPRGS.

Forestry Support

Switzerland's new phase of its Social Forestry Support Programme deliberately and explicitly follows the priority stated in the CPRGS to focus agriculture and forestry extension on disadvantaged areas to ensure that poor and ethnic minority people will benefit from services.

The project is designed to directly support the implementation of the Forest Sector Support Programme and Partnership (FSSP) which brings together government ministries, non-governmental actors and foreign donors. In particular the project will play a leading role in facilitate FSSP Result Area 8 - which is concerned with the development and implementation of an integrated system of demand-driven and appropriate research, extension, education and training.

The plans include opportunities to capitalise on the Swiss input. Plans include opportunities for policy makers from MARD and other ministries to review field practice and consider approaches and technical content in their policy.

The programme will be implemented by Helvetas. Helvetas also sees itself as aligning with the CPRGS, particularly because of the inclusion of poverty, democracy, and public administration.

Use of the Consultative Group Mechanism:¹¹

At the CG in 2000, Switzerland raised the issue of the urban poor, and urban-rural linkages in poverty reduction.

¹¹ See Switzerland's statements to the CG
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At the CG in 2001, welcomed the CPRGS but highlighted inequality and urban poverty. It called for the process of issuing land certificates to the poor to be speeded up.

At the CG in 2002, SDC argued that the Government's Public Investment Programme (PIP) should be aligned with the objectives of the CPRGS to ensure that that public investment was pro-poor. SDC also called for support for the Public Administration Reform process to create good governance for the poor.

Sub National activities

De-centralisation is set out in Decree 17, which gives approval authority to line ministries or to local level within centrally determined policy.

Because of the stage in the PRS process in Vietnam, key issues are about implementation and capacity, rather than only policy. Implementation for many aspects of the CPRGS has to take place at local level. Switzerland is perceived by other donors and government departments to have good local knowledge.

CPRGS related activities at provincial level include the proposals for city-level CPRGS that would build ownership and accountability at local level and work with provincial officials as part of the Public Administration Reform programme.

Use of Projects/methods and approaches

Switzerland has promoted the idea of One-Stop Shops to enhance equitable access for poor citizens to effective public services. One Stop Shops are mentioned in the CPRGS and the PAR Master Programme. These experimental projects are now being replicated in five provinces and the government is preparing a decision of the Prime Minister for replication of the model in all 600 districts and small towns.

Adapting Financial Instruments to the PRSP context

All of Swiss aid is in **grant** form (except some seco credits like the mixed credits). This gives opportunities to finance riskier investments where the government may be unwilling to borrow. Switzerland can therefore test and develop approaches using its grant funding and then expect other funders to finance implementation.

Since the advent of the CPRGS SDC has adopted new financing mechanisms which simplify donor procedures and enable government agencies to manage the pool of ODA resources independently.

Co-funding and trusts: Switzerland has not given budget support as yet and is cautious about budget funding. The LMDG is seen as forward looking in its firm intentions to offer budget support (and Netherlands and UK are doing so) while at the same time working on building capacity to manage that form of assistance in government.

Trust funds are a tool for pooling funds. Traditionally they are held either by UNDP or the World Bank. Under the CPRGS in Vietnam however, the aim is to achieve more government ownership. Two funds are therefore being created, one with Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI) for the harmonisation programme and one with the Ministry of Finance for Public Financial Management Reform. SDC and the Netherlands have already signed up to the trust fund for the Forestry Partnership with MARD (Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development). It plans to create a trust fund with MoC for the Urban Forum. All these Government managed funds will test the ground for future SWAPs and budget-like support options.

Cost sharing is when a group of donors decide to contribute to the costs of project managed by an agent, say UNDP. Donors can either contribute to the overall budget without earmarking to a particular budget line, OR donors may select a budget line to finance (eg the TC component or some other discrete areas of the programme). The reporting is all within country.

Levering in resources: This is a significant factor in Vietnam. Switzerland is clearly seen by the MoC and the World Bank as creating a climate where others are likely to invest. It may have only a few million dollars to spend in the urban sector, but the World Bank and others may have \$1.5b.

MoC argues that by its commitment and the promotion of the concept of urban poverty reduction to other donors, combined with the provision of management tools, approaches and pilot projects it has generated new resources for urban poverty.

The Bank acknowledges how much has been done by Switzerland with limited, but grant, funds, in terms of research, analysis, preparation work and workshop financing.¹² This has creating a climate where bigger funds can come in with greater assurance.

4.3 Partners

Connections are strongest with donors, government and provinces in Vietnam.¹³

NGOs

SDC's connection with NGOs could be stronger - and SDC intends to make it stronger. There is some partnering with international NGOs - ActionAid for

¹² Citing in particular the Nam Dinh Urban Development programme which may be scaled up to national level.

¹³ The seco representative was away during the mission to Hanoi so perspectives from seco-Vietnam have not been able to be completed.

instance on the city level CPRGS programmes - but little strategic engagement with Helvetas or other Swiss NGOs. This is particularly notable in the context of the similarity of programmes and interests.

Helvetas is working on institutional capacity building through training in participatory techniques at provincial and local level - which is also a main plank of the PAR programme. But also more broadly, Helvetas is concerned to understand national frameworks and how to link with work at the commune level. Helvetas work shows for example that there is awareness at commune level of the Grassroots Democracy Decree of 1998. , But people were unclear on how to implement the decree, so Helvetas opened discussion with the authorities to see how they could assist progress. While both Helvetas and SDC are aware that they are working on similar objectives but at different levels, it seems that more might be made of the link. In other sectors, that is already happening. SDC has invited Helvetas to be part of the one-stop-shop replication in mountainous, poor provinces.

LMDG

Switzerland is a strong and active member of the LMDG. It is perceived as leading opinion on harmonisation issues and, through its intensive sector work on urban issues, it has gained access and credibility on the broader issues around the CPRGS.

Switzerland's participation in the LMDG appears to be a win-win situation. It does not inhibit bilateral dialogue but adds credibility and through the LMDG, Switzerland can participate in a more issues and add weight through joint lobbying. For instance the LMDG analysed the Public Investment Programme against the objectives of the CPRGS - something that might have been difficult for SDC to find the resources to do individually and where lobbying from the group is likely to be more effective.

Switzerland is well placed to be an active member. The relative autonomy of the COOF enables quick and flexible decision-making.

While some LMDG members are clearly headed down the route of budget support (through financing the PRSC), SDC has currently opted for co-funding as a means of pooling resources. Currently, seco reports and a proposal from SDC to co-finance the PRSC would not respect the "kompetenzaufteilung" between seco and SDC. However, seco also notes that it might consider contributing to the PRSC in future in the context of its own activities in the financial sector.¹⁴

It has also taken a pro-active role; for instance proposing a joint project to improve governance and capacity at local level directly linked to the national reforms.

¹⁴ Personal communication, Ivo German, 28 March 2003
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Partners on the urban agenda

Switzerland's major governmental partner has been the Ministry of Construction - responsible for urban issues.

The primary activities of the MoC are in infrastructure and urban development - urban poverty and urban governance are not their main work and there is not strong institutional pressure to deliver on these goals.

SDC has therefore had to work to develop understanding of the issues in MoC and much of the work of the Urban Forum has been about awareness raising within the Ministry and to demonstrate the linkages between Ministerial interests and poverty. It has had to select the individuals who may champion urban poverty within the ministry.

The MoC was appointed by the government as a coordinator for the Urban Forum from the government side. However, urban development is a transectoral issue involving other government ministries and agencies, as well as municipalities, private sector and civil society. On the one hand, SDC is trying to convince the MoC to expand its perspective on urban development beyond its traditional one, which has focused only on infrastructure and physical aspects. On the other hand, SDC is also trying to involve other actors as noted earlier in the activities of the Forum.

A concern is the extent to which the MoC has really taken on board the issues promoted by the Urban Forum. Switzerland has tried to strengthen the Ministry by ensuring that the MoC itself developed and sent the comments of the Urban Forum on the CPRGS to the MPI. However, concern remains about how much the MoC has really taken on board the issues of urban poverty and governance. Nonetheless, some interviewees were very positive about "the degree of enlightenment" in the MoC which had been "given voice" by the Urban Forum.

4.4 Institutional issues

While there are strong sector/theme-based linkages with the World Bank in Washington, there does not appear to be much real dialogue between SDC in Vietnam and Executive Directors in Washington. While SDC supply information on request to Bern (to be combined with other remarks from seco and SDC which are then transmitted to Washington), there is little sense of a shared agenda or recognition of the value of that activity. On the side of the Bank there is a frustration with lack of depth of information.

4.5 SDC and Gender

The inclusion of gender in the CPRGS provides a lever to influence other government actions. The COOF has improved its own gender balance and has issued guidelines for the region on gender. The guidelines are regarded as a first

step "to measure SDC's contribution to the reduction of gender inequality in Vietnam".

One of the new Swiss credit proposals takes up the concern with domestic violence in the CPRGS through a cost sharing programme with UNFPA on mainstreaming the prevention of domestic violence. This follows earlier Swiss support for efforts by a Vietnamese NGO and the Women's Union to raise awareness and pilot training programmes. This is seen as a contribution to the broader goals of improving womens' reproductive health and their status in society.

5. Effects of Swiss Interventions

Please note, details on the outcomes from Swiss actions are included in the previous section - this section summarises the main effects

5.1 Effects on the CPRGS contents

It is widely acknowledged that Swiss work on urban issues led to the inclusion and full integration of urban poverty into the final draft of the CPRGS (see previous section for details)

Although the resources of SDC (both of capital and human resources) are not large in comparison with another donors, SDC made a remarkable effect, both directly and indirectly into CPRGS process, especially in the field of urban poverty.

Based on its comparative advantage, SDC has chosen urban issues as one of the strategic priorities in Vietnam. Setting up the urban forum was a key initiative. In the Forum, SDC has a prominent position, taking the initiative, maintaining active contact with its Vietnamese counterpart (Ministry of Construction - MoC), following up on proposed initiatives (for instance carrying out research, contributing ideas to documents, taking part to workshop as detailed in section 4). As a result of these contributions, most donors and partners recognise the positive contributions of SDC in the CPRGS process.

In addition to its direct influence on the treatment of urban poverty in the CPRGS, SDC also influenced the process via the (then seven member) LMDG. Key Swiss interests were reflected strongly in this input - for instance issues related to unregistered urban migrants). Switzerland also fed in comments on environment (particularly in reforestation), gender balance and human development but these are not clearly distinguished from the input of other donors.

5.2. Effect on CPRGS process

In the process of formation of the CPRGS, SDC worked to ensure that its input strengthened Vietnamese government bodies. It worked with the MoC on urban poverty, assisting it to reach a position and to feed its comments into the central Ministry of Planning and Investment. MoC is not a particularly powerful ministry; neither does it see its main job as to do with urban poverty and governance. It was therefore important to use the CPRGS process as far as possible to help the MoC to take poverty issues fully on board. MoC's inputs into the process were applauded

and backed up by the World Bank thus reinforcing its role in urban poverty.

SDC brought its comparative advantage in to play in CPRGS building progress, and now urban poverty issues are continuously given attention. SDC is now contributing to the process through inputs at municipal level - for examples on urban upgrading, a (study on urban transition, quite big (with Urban Forum partners, including UNDP) and on rural-urban linkages, some technical assistant projects, planning and pilot projects for some poor areas. SDC and the World Bank are also promoting in particular the elaboration of City Development Strategies and the report card system that will allow customers to report on public services.

A key part of the process now is to build stronger ownership in the provinces and individual Swiss inputs are planned for that with the proposed city level CPRGS.

As part of the LMDG, Switzerland will be helping the CPRGS process by helping to build capacity in government to manage budget support and through its support for the Public Administration Reform Programme.

It is worth noting that the SDC programme in Vietnam is entirely oriented around the CPRGS - both alignment of programmes and projects, but also influencing the framework, policy and institutional capacity to deliver. As such, both bilaterally and as part of the LMDG, SDC is and will be affected by the process of development and implementation of the CPRGS. Within the LMDG, SDC has been asked to facilitate the "roll-out" of the CPRGS at the local level through participation at one of the regional poverty assessments linked to the new planned LMDG Governance programme proposed by SDC.

6. Repercussions of the CPRGS for SDC in Vietnam

6.1 Repercussions for the Swiss Cooperation Programme

Cooperation with Vietnam is part of the Mekong Regional Programme (MRP). The strategic vision governing this programme has changed substantially between two 5-year plans (MRP1 1995 - 2000 and MRP 2 2002 - 2006).

MRP 1 was focused strongly on supporting reform and transition processes leading to more open economies and ecologically sustainable development. It had little explicit reference to poverty.

MRP 2 takes an explicitly pro poor approach within the frameworks of the PRS processes: "For the Mekong Region governments as well as the ODA partners, the Poverty Reduction and Socio-Economic Strategies are emerging as agreed orientations and processes.... For MRP 2 these Government-owned strategies represent the overall framework and strategic orientations to which all its programmes will be related".

The result of this is that all new projects have to be designed in line with CPRGS objectives and contribute to the CPRGS implementation process. Switzerland now feels that good working relations with the World Bank, UNDP and other donors are essential. It is no longer an option to be running

'independent' projects out of aligned with the main forces in government or donors. It is interesting to note, that Switzerland did not have an overall agreement with the government until 2002 - up to then all relations had been on a contract basis.

Four new SDC projects contribute to central planks of the CPRGS: public administration reform, legal reform and pro-poor good governance:

- Support to strategic management of the PAR master programme
- Strengthening the capacity of the people's elected bodies,
- Phase two of work on capacity building for public management training
- Public Financing Management support.

A second outcome for Swiss programming is the focus on upland areas, which have a higher proportion of poor and very poor people. In particular the Social Forest Support Programme, which will focus on extension and training support for forestry and agriculture in the Uplands, will contribute to this, and Switzerland is also planning to co-finance a study on Forestry Poverty Reduction and Rural Livelihoods in Vietnam.

SDC support for the prevention of domestic violence fits with the CPRGS objective of reducing the vulnerability of women to family violence.

Urban development is a dominant feature of the Swiss programme - and two new phases of the urban projects in Nam Dinh and Dong Hoi are being developed within the policy framework of the CPRGS. This is in addition to the advocacy role that Switzerland is playing on the treatment of urban poverty and urban governance within the mainstream of government programmes. Switzerland is also developing the City level CPRGS process which will both increase ownership of the CPRGS process at sub national levels of government and promote the rights of the urban poor.

Institutional Implications

The emphasis on policy dialogue, engagement, advocacy and leverage within the Swiss programme in Vietnam makes specific demands of the COOF. It is labour intensive, meeting intensive and knowledge intensive. While the balance of staffing in the COOF now reflects this more, two issues arise.

First, whether the mechanisms are in place in SDC to support this type of work in-country. Do they access to the information, skill and experience mix that they need? Do the organisational demands for reporting and accountability fit with this type of work where tracing impact is very difficult?

Second, what systems need to be in place for the work in-country to have a wider impact, both on Swiss international policy dialogue and on learning within SDC? This is an important issue if Switzerland is going to translate grassroots experience into policy influence.

6.2 Repercussions of the CPRGS process on Switzerland's role within the donor community

Work within the LMDG is an essential plank of the Swiss strategy in Vietnam. While it is not one of the larger donors in the LMDG (7th out of 9) influence in the group is based more on effort and willingness to take responsibility for pushing issues forward than on spending power. Switzerland does not see the LMDG as a constraint on bilateral action or dialogue - partly because the LMDG is genuinely like minded.

Participation in the LMDG also enables Switzerland to be visibly involved in areas which it would not have the capacity to pursue on its own. The LMDG for instance has done an analysis of the Public Investment Programme and monitors the take up of its recommendations by government.

Switzerland has a comparative advantage in participation in such groups - it is not hamstrung by central positions or the need to refer back to Berne. It can therefore be responsive, flexible and quick.

Harmonisation

"Switzerland is an opinion leader on harmonisation in the LMDG"

CPRGS described as "a gravitational force" for the donors. Harmonisation issues easier to deal with under a strong framework than in the context of narrow procedural changes.

There are different views in government about the value and meaning of harmonisation - it is not considered by anyone as unification. There are harmonisation initiatives between subgroups of the donor community - the UN agencies, the EC and EU, the LMDG or bilateral ad hoc alliances.

Harmonisation has been a key area for SDC. It has affected its role in the LMDG and donor group more widely, because of Switzerland's involvement in the DAC Task Force on Donor Practices.

Thinking has developed around harmonisation over the past three years and the initial focus on alignment or donor procedures has given way to a much more holistic approach which is led by the wish to align behind the CRPGS and to understand and work within government systems. To quote the LMDG, "harmonisation is much more than just a technical agenda".

The collective work on harmonisation has changed the dynamics of donor-government and donor (main aim of LMDG harmonisation is to change Government procedures) relationships. The donor missions have been empowered by their collaboration with the LMDG and that has led to a change in the relationship between capital and country-mission. A good example is the paper sent by the LMDG which asks the DAC to influence their capitals. To quote: "Field level requests for adjustments to our donor procedures met with resistance from our central HQ departments. We realise that a higher level mandate for change is needed is this agenda is to progress. We hope the

Rome meetings - and the DAC High Level Meetings in April this year - will provide such a mandate".

7 Concluding Observations

The CPRGS is a strong, government-owned framework in the context of a strong and unitary state. This framework makes it easier for donors to coordinate and harmonise, both with government and with each other.

By setting out an action plan on poverty reduction and growth, the CPRGS has defined space for donors to support progress through aligning their programmes. But equally important, the defined plan means that all stakeholders have a role to play in keeping progress on track through advocacy and leverage. In other words, by committing itself to the CPRGS, the government has created space for donors and others to hold it to account.

The CPRGS has created a situation where small donors can work very effectively, and SDC in Hanoi has taken advantage of the opportunities created. For example:

- The urban content of the CPRGS appears to be clearly a result of Swiss work
- The way SDC has engaged has strengthened the Vietnamese government's own processes – particularly the Ministry of Construction.
- Building a reputation on urban poverty issues has had a positive knock-on effect, enhancing Swiss credibility more widely and earning SDC influence with other ministries and donors.
- On the harmonisation agenda, Switzerland is a team player, but it is also in the vanguard of the move towards a more holistic approach. Bringing the DAC Donor Practices component to Vietnam has strengthened the process.
- Sub-national level knowledge has been an important asset to SDC in Vietnam. In the implementation phases, work at provincial level will be even more important.

Although Switzerland is a very small donor by comparison with others, this has not been a notable constraint on its influence. Switzerland is seen to have created a climate of confidence on urban issues leading to investment by other larger donors. It has done this by its commitment and promotion of the concept of urban poverty reduction to other donors, along with the provision of management tools, approaches, pilot projects – intelligent use of its limited finance. Building even stronger relationships with larger donors has further potential.

While Swiss choices on programming and financial instruments are strongly influenced by the wish to align with the CPRGS, this has not meant the abandonment of projects. Rather, Switzerland has seen project financing as an opportunity to test strategies for wider replication. It notes the need to guard against endless pilot projects. As the MPI said "we want implementors, not explorers".

Although it is a strong policy document, the status of the CPRGS in the context of other government plans and budgets is contested. This means that activity takes place outside the bounds of the CPRGS and (some) donors need to make sure that their own commitment to the CPRGS does not mask the fact that it is one plan among several for the government.

It is also clear that different interests in government have a different perspective on the value of harmonisation (of funding and approaches). Some benefit from a series of bilateral relationships offering greater political room for manoeuvre and spin offs. Others feel that transaction costs would be lowered by stronger harmonisation. For provincial governments, harmonisation may mean more centralisation and less access to diverse sources of finance and assistance - more limits on their ability to mobilise resources. Understanding these different interests is a precondition for good choices on financing mechanisms. Switzerland has a comparative advantage in the flexibility of its financial mechanisms and the autonomy of the COOFs.

It is clear that the existence of the CPRGS does not mean automatic coherence with either overall government expenditure plans or line ministry budgets and plans. While SDC has been very successful in engaging the Ministry of Construction in urban poverty and urban governance, it has major challenges ahead if these issues are to become major concerns in a ministry focused on growth and infrastructure. SDC will need to ensure that its dialogue does not become a series of project-led discussions. Sustaining commitment to poverty issues in the MoC may also be more difficult in the absence of a full donor-government task force in the Ministry.

Work at municipal and provincial level is clearly crucial to the implementation of the CPRGS. Switzerland seems well placed to develop effective approaches to institutionalise the CPRGS at sub-national levels and can build on its existing reputation in this area.

Donor dynamics have changed with the advent of the CPRGS. The type of work has altered: policy dialogue is labour intensive; meeting intensive; software intensive. Knowledge of and coordination with other donors is no longer optional. Financial mechanisms have to be adapted. Donor-donor alliances within country appear, on some issues, to be stronger than donor links with their own capitals.

An issue for many donors, including SDC, must be whether the mechanisms are in place to SUPPORT this type of work – knowledge and learning? Information mechanisms? Staffing? Skills and training? Decentralisation of authority.

To a considerable extent, the SDC programme in Vietnam could be described as advocacy-led. Its objectives are as much about influence and multiplier effects as they are about direct impacts from its funding. This may have implications for SDC more widely. In particular, how can SDC put itself in a position to make the most of this work beyond Vietnam - taking the lessons and methods and applying them in other contexts; linking to international advocacy and dialogue (both official and non-governmental); making the experience that Switzerland gains at the grass roots count in different policy environments.¹⁵

¹⁵ This issue of de-compartmentalisation, including links to the political environment in Switzerland, will be covered more in the synthesis report.

At the moment, connections are strongest with donors, government and provinces in Vietnam. There is a question about the capacity that would be needed in-country and in Berne, to ensure that Switzerland can have an influence, for instance through its ED at the World Bank, and to ensure that knowledge is capitalised for the whole agency. Connections with NGOs (inside and outside the region) could also be stronger and more strategic with mutual benefit. There may also be a case for engagement with the political and opinion forming establishment in Switzerland.

The Mekong Regional Programme is described as a joint seco-SDC programme. We were not able to assess this during the mission, but it is a crucial issue, particularly in the context of budget support. We will be seeking input on this point for the next draft of the report.

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Annexes

Abbreviations

List of people consulted

Selected References

ODA flows to Vietnam

Summary of SDC involvement in the CPRGS in Vietnam

Abbreviations

CFAW - Committee for the Advancement of Women (Ministerial or provincial level)

CG - Consultative Group

CHF - Swiss Francs

CIDA - Canadian International Development Agency

CPRGS - Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy (CPRGS)

CRS - Catholic Relief Services

DAC - Development Assistance Committee of the OECD

FERD - Foreign Economic Relations Department

FSSP - Forest Sector Support Programme and Partnership

GDP - Gross Domestic Product

GoVN - Government of Vietnam

HCMC - Ho Chi Minh City

IDA - International Development Association of the World Bank

IMF - International Monetary Fund

I-PRSP - interim poverty reduction strategy

IUED - Institut universitaire d'etudes du developpement

JICA - Japanese International Cooperation Agency

LMDG - Like Minded Donor Group

MARD - Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development

MDGs - Millennium Development Goals

MoC - Ministry of Construction

MPI - Ministry of Planning and Investment

MRP - Mekong Regional Programme

NCAW - The National Committee for the Advancement of Women

NGO - Non Governmental Organisation

ODA - Official Development Assistance

OECD - Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

OECD - Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

Oxfam GB - Oxfam Great Britain

PAR - Public Administration Reform programme

PAR MP - Public Administration Reform Master Programme

PIP - Public Investment Programme

PMU - Project Management Unit

PRSC - Poverty Reduction Support Credit

SCF -Save the Children Fund

TC - Technical Cooperation

UNDP - United Nations Development Programme

VDGs - Vietnamese Development Goals

List of people consulted

(NB An external end-of- mission workshop was not possible during this mission, owing to pressure of other meetings. A feedback session was held with SDC at the end of the mission and an informal dinner provided some opportunity for feedback to other participants).

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Summary of SDC involvement in the CPRGS

SUMMARY OF SDC INVOLVEMENT IN CPRGS IN VIETNAM

Time	Urban issues and activities	SDC/SUF involvement	Outcomes
1998	The Government Decree on Grassroots Democracy issued	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promoted the grassroots democracy in SDC urban projects for Nam Dinh and Dong Hoi 	Participation consultation allowed
1999	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Report on Vietnam Attacking Poverty A Tale of Two Cities in Vietnam: towards a strategy for growth, poverty and environment in the cities and regions of Vietnam. Research carried out by the WB A participatory poverty assessment in Ho Chi Minh City made by the Save the Children UK and funded by the WB & DFID Research on Poverty and Social Issues in Hai Phong by the National Institute of Sociology, funded by the WB Urban Poverty chapter of the World Bank source book on poverty to address the understanding of urban poverty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participated and made speeches in a number of workshops and discussions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Urban poverty started to be addressed 1999 CG meeting did not mention about urban issues
2000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> HCMC ODA (Official Development Assistance Partnership) established funded by the WB, ADB, JBIC, UNDP, FINIDA Workshop sponsored by the WB & DFID in Sapa to contribute to the development of the CPRGS PTF (Poverty Task Force) established by the World Bank and the MPI New World Bank Country Development Framework developed Vietnam Development Report "Vietnam Attacking Poverty" by the Poverty Task Force comprising the Government, the donors and NGOs The Vietnam Development Report for the CG-2000 meeting: "Vietnam Entering the 21st Century" has an Urban Sector included in the Infrastructure Chapter but not as a Pillar of Development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participated and made speeches in a number of ODAP and other donors'/government workshops and discussions SDC Statement on Urban issue at the CG-2000 meeting on supporting establishment of an Urban Forum Carried out and facilitated a number of meetings with the donors and government on urban issues and on promoting the establishment of an Urban Partnership SDC Support Unit to Vietnam Urban Forum (SUF) operational from May 2001 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Start of an urban partnership July 2001 – The I-PRSP issued, with an absence of urban as a major issue 2001 - The Government approved the 10-year Strategy on every-2-year Multi-Purpose Household Survey for poverty data funded by the WB, UNDP, DFID, SIDA CG-2000 meeting's Chairman Closing Statement considered the urban development a "missing pillar" The Government warmly welcomes the establishment of the Vietnam Urban Forum

<p>2001 - 2002</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May 2001 – First workshop to launch the establishment of the Urban Forum • Oct 2001 – Urban Forum workshop on water supply • Jun 2002 – Urban Forum workshop on water supply • The Cities Alliance funded for 4 urban researches: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Constraints in housing & infrastructure faced by the urban poor – Review of recent & on-going upgrading programs – applying appropriate techniques – Can Tho Action Plan – applying appropriate techniques at city level – An indicative national strategy, program, budget and policy reform agenda for enhancing access to basic infrastructure services and housing to the urban poor • 3 regional and 1 national Urban Forum's workshops on enhancing access of the urban poor to basic infrastructure and housing • Poverty mapping and preparation for urban upgrading project in 4 cities including Hai Phong, Nam Dinh, Can Tho and Ho Chi Minh city • Workshop on policy building for upgrading infrastructure and housing for the urban poor by the MoC and the WB 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SDC appointed by the donors and the MoC to facilitate and finance of the Urban Forum's activities • Supported in funding, facilitating and organising all the Urban Forum's workshops • Co-funded, participated and made speeches on a number of other workshops to discuss urban issues • Disseminated information on urban activities • SUF gave consultancy on urban issues to donors coming missions and domestic organisations • Promoting the urban partnership to a wider range of partners • Organised and participated in a number of formal and informal discussions on urban poverty and urban development policy framework 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Government Office approved the MoC to coordinate, from the government side, the Urban Forum • The WB considering Urban Upgrading Project in 4 cities focusing on providing tertiary infrastructure to the urban poor • Urban upgrading & housing for the urban poor expected to be included in the urban development policy
	<p>Poverty reduction issues in HCMC brought together for the first time all directly relevant departments, donors and organisations by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 25.04.2002 DAP workshop No. 6 on Poverty Reduction in HCMC • 18.10.2002 ODAP workshop No. 7 on Housing for the poor in HCMC 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participated in the ODAP workshops on urban poverty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The integration at national level on CPRGS

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2001 - Research on Consultation on the CPRGS in HCMC by the Save the Children UK and funded by the MPI and the WB • Regional consultations on CPRGS drafts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dong Hoi 28 Feb-1 March 2002, MPI - Can Tho 19-20 March 2002, MPI - HCMC 20-21 March 2002, MPI • March 2002 The WB consultant team to work on costing the CPRGS including urban issues • 04.03.02 WB comments & poverty matrix on urban issues of the CPRGS • 04.03.02 TOR on establishing an Urban Poverty Task Force drafted and distributed • 13.03.02 Urban Poverty Task Force meeting No.1 on CPRGS • 19.03.02 Urban poverty task force meeting No.2 on CPRGS • 28.03.02 Urban poverty task force meeting No.3 on CPRGS • 28.03.02 - 10.04.02 Urban Poverty Task Force comments on CPRGS drafted and sent out to urban partners for reviewing • 11 - 22.04.2002 comments of donors on Poverty Task Force comments on CPRGS received • 22.04.02 - 02.05.02 Official comments of Urban Poverty Task Force and urban partners on the draft No.4 of CPRGS sent to the government drafting team • 03.05.02 Urban Poverty Task Force's speech at CPRGS workshop in front of government drafting team and other donors • 04.05.02 Additional urban comments on CPRGS by the Urban Poverty Task Force sent to the government drafting team 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 18.01.02 Urban Forum (SDC, WB, UNDP) met with MoC to discuss the I-PRSP and suggested comments on urban issues to the MoC • SUF made TOR for the Urban Poverty Task Force, coordinated, organised, facilitated Urban Poverty Task Force and government meetings on CPRGS, finalised and distributed comments, made speeches on government CPRGS workshops. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 30.01.02 First draft of CPRGS sent out by the government drafting team • 31.01.02 The Ministry of Construction sent Letter No. 177/ BXD - KTOH to the Ministry of Planning and Investment to comment on urban issues of CPRGS paper • Urban issues has appeared in the following drafts of the CPRGS • Official CPRGS issued May 2002 with the urban poverty agenda well integrated in
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 26.08.02 Preparation meeting for Hai Phong CPRGS workshop of Poverty Task Force (WB&MPI one) organised by the World Bank and the Government in Hanoi • 08.10.02 Preparation meeting for CPRGS workshop in Hai phong between the Urban Forum, the WB and the MoC to contribute to the urban topics at the workshop 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SUF participated in urban group discussion at CPRGS workshop in Hai phong and the workshop on Public Investment Program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Urban issues expected to be better stated in the 5-year plans • Public Investment Program includes CPRGS costing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 18.11.02 Workshop on Public Investment Program by the MPI • Promotion and preparation for implementing City Development Strategy for a number of cities of Vietnam which is CPRGS at city level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepared extraction of the CPRGS for urban projects • Promote urban initiatives with other donors on land management, water supply, waste management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City-level CPRGS under consideration • Cities expected to have clearer view on city development and poverty reduction
<p>From May 2002</p>		

ODA FLOWS TO VIETNAM

