Role of Non-governmental Organisations under Vietnam's Union of Sci-Tech Associations in Projects on Community

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Received on 12 October 2020. Revised on 29 October 2020. Accepted on 31 October 2020.

Abstract: In Vietnam, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), especially those related to science and technology under the Vietnam Union of Science and Technology Associations (VUSTA), are increasingly implementing community research and development projects. Survey findings, which are based on the segregation and analysis of data of the state-level scientific research project entitled "Improving the state management of associations and non-governmental organisations to meet the requirements of building a socialist rule of law state" hosted by the VUSTA for the period 2018-2020, show that many diverse practical models are being researched and piloted in practice by NGOs. The organisations not only play a role in technical assistance, but are also sometimes responsible for "free" services that provide practical benefits to the community. The article also focuses on clarifying the strengths, advantages, contributions, difficulties, and limitations of the NGOs under the VUSTA as a case study for community research and development and sustainable development in different regions of Vietnam at present.

Keywords: Non-governmental organisations, non-public science and technology organisations, community development.

Subject classification: Sociology

1. Introduction

The term "non-governmental organisations" was first used by the United Nations after the Second World War to refer to private organisations helping to heal war wounds, i.e. millions of homeless people, orphans, and those affected by high unemployment rates [1, p.5]. The number of non-govern-mental organisations (NGOs) in the world is increasing rapidly. According to the data registered in OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) countries, the number of international NGOs increased from 1,600 in 1980 to 2,970 in 1993 [9]. As of 2012, the United Nations

recorded approximately 40,000 international NGOs, and millions of domestic NGOs operating in countries [1, p.5].

Their operations around the world are diverse, including human rights, environment, women, youth, peace movement, poverty reduction, international aid, relief for refugees, people with disabilities, anti-corruption, social justice, social welfare, and consumer interests. Activities of NGOs have recently shifted towards reducing humanitarian aid and increasing aid for community development and sustainable development. In addition, NGOs play an increasingly important role in the socioeconomic domain, education, health, and environment in many countries, while also participating in hunger eradication, poverty reduction, supporting women, child relief, family planning, environmental protection, service provision, needs monitoring and assessment, policy advocacy, training, education, coordination, funding, policy evaluation, campaigning, recommendations, and policy advocacy [10].

The role of NGOs in community development is confirmed in some studies by Dhakal, Tek Nath [7], Park [11], and Nicola Banks et al. [6]. Their contributions are important to capacity building and technical assistance for people and partners in the project area, such as efforts to improve knowledge and professional skills, increase the ability for problem awareness and identification, planning and implementation activities, management improvement, and monitoring and supervising activities for locals and partners. In addition, NGOs maximise community participation in a project's process and mobilise local authorities to create suitable cooperation mechanisms and optimise resources for community development purposes [7], [4], [3], [2], [8, pp.24 - 36].

In Vietnam, the most popular roles of NGOs are community research and development projects. The Vietnam Union of Science and Technology Associations (VUSTA) is the largest governing body of the system of non-governmental organisations in the country. As of the beginning of 2019, a total of 533 organisations had been established, out of which 487 are currently still operating legally, with the remaining 46 organisations being subject to dissolutions or suspension of operations [5].

These NGO's activities under the VUSTA are characterised by science and technology and governed by the conditions laid out in Decree No.08/ND-CP (before 2014, it was Decree Decision No.81/ND-CP) of the government. Unlike public science and technology organisations that often carry out basic research, NGOs focus more on development research, application, and experimental modelling. Independent from the State's budget, NGOs find domestic and foreign funding sources to carry out programmes and projects primarily aimed at community development and have established their role in science and technology as well as community development with successes in many sub-fields.

The analytical points in this study are based on semi-structured statistics, which are one of two basic methods (together with a questionnaire) of the state-level scientific research project "Perfecting state management of associations and non-governmental organisations to meet the requirements of building a socialist rule of law state" (coded KX01.32/16-20). For the semi-structured

statistical forms, the research project selected random samples in the VUSTA system with a sample size of 25% on a total of 487 institutions. After collecting the statistical forms, the research project identified 112 valid forms out of 121.

2. Current situation of non-governmental organisations under the VUSTA in implementing community research and development projects

According to statistics of 112 NGOs under the VUSTA, community research and development projects are diverse, with 83.1% of organisations implementing research projects in specialised areas and fields, of which 55% give priority to the activities. Ranking second among the activities conducted is the provision of consulting, science and technology, and social services to the community with 58.8% of organisations implementing this activity, and 34.9% considering this a priority. There is also a high percentage of organisations that attach importance to technology application and transfer to the community (47.3% implementing such activities and 22.3% considering them priority), and participate in socio-economic development in the locality and community (43.1% implementing such an activity and 20.5% considering it as a priority). Meanwhile, the lowest ratios are with development modelling (with 35.7% having activities and only 20.5% considering these a priority.

Following the principles of research and development), development modelling is relatively difficult in types of community development, requiring large investments and high amounts of time. One example is the Eco-Village Model implementing by the organisation titled "Eco-Eco" under the VUSTA, which has carried out many projects for more than ten years, ranging from establishing villages in harsh, uninhabited natural areas, to researching land improvements, water sources, and mobilising a large number of people to live in those areas, while services have been provided and livelihoods supported, with people engaging in production under the technical support of scientists until those villages become ecological villages. As such, this project is one of the successful and internationally renowned ones of Vietnamese NGOs in general and those under the VUSTA in particular.

Although the proportion of NGOs involved in activities of research associated with development is not high, at least more than one third of organisations are implementing activities and more than one fifth are considering these their priority. This is the fundamental difference between public science and technology organi-sations and NGOs. The former organi-sations often give priority to basic research, serving political missions, and developing science, while the latter often focus on applied research, associated with community development.

For the capacity to host and implement community projects of research associated with development, the majority of organisations have been or are implementing these, with 85.2% of organisations doing so, while only 14.8% organisations never implemented such projects. Regarding the capacity to host projects (i.e. taking legal responsibility

for the entire project), a relatively high proportion of organisations (61.1%) have been doing that (44.4% of organisations have already hosted and 16.7% of organisations are currently hosting projects). Out of the 14.8% of organisations that have never hosted or implemented any projects, up to 13.9% intend to host or participate in projects.

Analysis of the implementation of community development projects and the registered domains of 112 organisations shows that projects on environment and climate change response are the most implemented by organisations, accounting for 52.9%. Next, more than 30% of organisations selected the fields of education, training, communication; 42.7% selected improving people's knowledge; 33.7% selected building sustainable liveli-hood models for the community; and 31.4% selected intervention and support for disadvantaged groups in society. In addition, the other sectors accounted for less than 30% (see Table 1).

Thus, the survey results show that community research and development projects of NGOs are rich and spread across many fields, with the most implemented projects reaching rates of more than 50%.

The interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, and cross-sectional nature applied by the non-governmental science and technology organisations is shown in Table 1 by comparing the correlation data between the project's sub-sector and the operation area of organisations.

For example, organisations operating in the main field of specialisation (under a license registered with the Ministry of Science and Technology) have a relatively high rate of implementing projects in that field (all organisations operating in the field of agriculture and rural areas implemented projects on hunger eradication, poverty reduction, and agricultural and rural development; 90.5% of organisations operating in the field of environmental protection carried out environmental protection projects and response to climate change; and 87.5% of organisations operating in the health sector implemented projects related to healthcare and improvement thereof).

However, many organisations implemented indirect technical projects, as in the case with organisations operating in agricultural and rural development which implemented hunger eradication and poverty reduction projects. Meanwhile, up to 80% implement projects on the environment; 60% implemented projects related to building community livelihoods; 60% implemented projects on natural resource management and conservation of biodiversity protection; and 60% implemented humanitarian and charity projects.

Besides this, there is a relatively high rate of organisations implementing projects which are inconsistent with their main areas of activity such as 40% of organisations implementing gender equality projects; 40% of organisations providing vocational training and job creation; and 40% of organisations supporting disadvantaged groups. In addition, there are areas that do not belong to the strong specialisation of organisations, in which 50% of them implemented gender equality projects, 35.7% implemented healthcare projects, and 21.4% implemented projects on cultural conservation.

Table 1: Sub-sectors of Implemented Projects and Areas of Activity of Organisations

Unit: %

Sub-sectors of projects	Main registered areas of operation of organisations									
	Socioeconomic development, hunger eradication and poverty reduction	Environmental protection, climate change response	Public health, healthcare	Law, institutional framework	Education, communication	Science, technology, engineering	Agriculture, rural areas	Cultural and social affairs	General
Environmental protection, climate change response ***	50.0	90.5	25.0	16.7	31.2	66.7	80.0	30.0	52.9
Education, training, communication	50.0	33.4	37.5	33.3	68.8	23.3	0.0	60.0	42.7
Building community livelihoods **	57.1	23.8	25.0	16.7	37.5	33.3	60.0	20.0	33.7
Supporting disadvantaged groups	57.1	28.5	12.5	33.3	43.8	0.0	40.0	20.0	31.4
Hunger eradication and poverty reduction, agriculture and rural areas ***	57.1	19.1	25.0	0.0	31.2	0.0	100.0	20.0	29.2
Healthcare***	35.7	9.6	87.5	16.7	31.2	11.1	0.0	50.0	29.2
Natural resource management **	28.6	52.4	0.0	0.0	6.3	44.4	60.0	10.0	27.0
Humanitarianism, charity	28.6	14.3	12.5	33.3	25.0	22.2	60.0	30.0	24.7

Sub-sectors of projects	Main registered areas of operation of organisations									General
	Socioeconomic development, hunger eradication and poverty reduction	Environmental protection, climate change response	Public health, healthcare	Law, institutional framework	Education, communication	Science, technology, engineering	Agriculture, rural areas	Cultural and social affairs		
Gender equality*	50.0	14.3	12.5	0.0	31.2	11.1	40.0	40.0		25.9
Vocational training, job creation ***	57.1	20.0	0.0	0.0	18.8	0.0	40.0	10.0		20.2
ultural preservation *	21.4	19.0	0.0	16.7	18.8	11.1	0.0	60.0		20.2
Clean water and environmental sanitation *	35.7	23.8	25.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	20.0	0.0		14.6
Prevention of crime and social evils *	21.4	4.8	0.0	33.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	20.0		9.0
Infrastructure development *	28.6	4.8	0.0	16.7	6.3	0.0	20.0	0.0		9.0
Other	0.0	4.8	0.0	16.7	0.0	22.2	0.0	10.0		5.6

*Note: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.*

Source: Survey data set of Research Project KX01.32/16-20, segregated and processed by the author.

To learn in-depth about the implementation of community development projects by NGOs, organisations were asked to describe in detail three projects that they have carried out in the last three years that are considered typical, most successful, and prominent being ranked in order of priority from 1 to 3. The statistical results show that all of the projects that were listed and carried out by organisations are those linking with development and community development. No projects belonged to either basic or specialised research domains.

Regarding the sub-sectors and areas of the projects, according to Table 2, there are a relatively high proportion of projects focusing on education, health, culture, and society (45.1% of projects 1, 39.4% of projects 2, and 43.6% of projects 3). In addition, accounting for the second-highest proportion of projects implemented by organisations is the field of environmental protection and climate change (31.0% of projects 1; 30.3% of projects 2, and 22.2% of projects 3). Other areas account for a lower proportion.

Table 2: Typical Sub-Sectors and Areas of Projects Implemented by NGOs over the Last Three Years

Unit: %

Sub-sector / area	Project 1	Project 2	Project 3
Poverty reduction, livelihoods	5.6	3.0	5.6
Education, health, culture, society	45.1	39.4	43.6
Science and technology	5.6	10.6	11.1
Environment, climate change	31.0	30.3	22.2
Other	12.7	16.7	18.5

Source: Survey data set of Research Project KX01.32/16-20, segregated and processed by the author.

Regarding the type of projects, there are a high percentage of organisations implementing the model of practical improvement and intervention model in the community (71.2%). Meanwhile, the rate of types research associated with development is lower (59.1%). Table 3 also shows major differences in organisational models in the implementation of projects. Research institutes have a higher rate of research associated with development, research, and evaluation than centres, given the three typical projects. In contrast, the rate of centres implementing community-based intervention and improvement projects is much higher than those implemented by institutes (Table 3). Thus, research institutes are inclined to be academic, while the centres are inclined to the practical applicability in the model of NGOs.

For funding sources, according to the data shown in Table 4 below, the proportion of projects receiving domestic funding is higher than those receiving international funding (57.8% of projects 1; 54.5% of projects

2, and 64.4% of projects 3). In correlation analysis of variables, there are differences in the data when comparing funding sources with the organisational foundation model and the year the organisation was founded (Chi-square test $p < 0.05$).

Table 3: Typical Projects Implemented by NGOs over the Last Three Years

Unit: %

Project type / category	Having at least one project in its category		
	Institute	Centre	General
Research associated with development, evaluation	77.4	45.5	59.1
Community intervention and improvement	61.4	81.8	71.2
N	53	59	112

Note: $p < 0.05$;

Source: Survey data set of Research Project KX01.32/16-20, segregated and processed by the author.

Also according to the data, the majority of projects hosted by institutes had a high level of domestic funding (75.8% of projects 1; 69.0% of projects 2; 79.2% of projects 3), while projects hosted by centres had a high level of international funding (65.0% of projects 1; 66.7% of projects 2; 55.6% of projects 3). In addition, units established over the last five years also have a higher proportion of domestic funded projects compared to those established long before (75.8% of projects 1, 87.5% of projects 2, 83.3% of projects 3 of organisations established over the last five years compared with 48.5% of projects 1, 50% of projects 2, and 64% of projects 3 of organisations established over ten years ago).

As for the project implementation budget, according to Table 4, approx. 50-59% of organisations implemented their projects with less than VND 1 billion (53.6% of projects 1; 57.4% of projects 2, and 58.5% of projects 3). However, there are a relatively high proportion of other organisations implementing projects with funding levels over VND 1 billion. Specifically, projects with funds from over VND 1 billion to less than VND 3 billion account for 23.3% of projects 1, 23.6% of projects 2, and 31.9% of projects 3. Projects with funds from over VND3 billion account for 23.4% of projects 1, 19.0% of projects 2, and 9.6% of projects 3.

Based on the interval scale of funding, the statistics show a huge difference in funding for the implementation of projects by organisations. In projects 1, the median cost of the project is VND 882 million, the lowest is VND 80 million, and the highest is over VND 26,207,000,000 (the difference between the lowest and the highest is 325.09 times). In projects 2, the median

cost of the project is VND 780 million, the lowest cost of the project is VND 30 million, and the highest is VND 46 billion (the difference between the lowest and the highest is 1,533.3 times). In projects 3, the median cost of the project is VND 695 million, the lowest cost of the project is VND 20 million and the highest is VND 15 billion (the difference between the lowest and the highest is 750 times).

Thus, the statistics of three typical projects implemented by NGOs show that many organisations are implementing projects with low and medium budget levels (with equivalent funding allocated for projects at the grassroots' or ministerial level in state agencies). Meanwhile, many NGOs implement projects with large funds, including some projects with funding up to several tens of billions of Vietnamese *dong*, which is also very rare even for science and technology organi-sations in the state sector.

Regarding the implementation duration of projects, the data in Table 4 show that among the three typical projects, the most successful ones are short-term projects in the range of less than one year (42.4% of projects 1; 42.9% of projects 2, and 47.8% of projects 3). In addition, more than a half of organisations are implementing projects longer than a year. Also, according to statistics, on average, project implementation duration is 2.48 years (± 2.22 years) for projects 1, 2.04 years (± 1.67 years) for projects 2, and 2.92 years (± 2.59 years) for projects 3. The statistics also shows that, unlike science and technology organisations in the state sector, many projects of non-governmental organisations on community development are implemented according to a long-term model with project components and phases depending on the number of expected activities.

Many models need long time from research design to realisation in practice as well as evaluation of the actual effectiveness. Therefore, the longest-running projects implemented by organisations in the past three years are those with more than ten years (12 years with projects 1; 11 years of projects 2, and 12 years of projects 3). Regarding the scope of impacts of projects, statistics in Table 4 shows that most NGOs focus their projects in a specific locality, which is geographically defined in a province (62.3% of projects 1, 66% of projects 2, and 62.5% of projects 3 are implemented by organisations in one locality). The fact that the majority of organisations implement three typical projects in a specifically defined locality shows that many projects currently focus more on expertise resources, finance, model building, practical improvement in a specifically defined community or locality than spreading thin of the model implementation in many localities.

Among the main activities of projects, the highest proportion is for research and evaluation activities, accounting for 63.5% in projects 1, 60.3% in projects 2, and 73.5% in projects 3. The rates of all three projects with activities in education and training to improve community capacity are quite high, namely, 52.4% of projects 1, 62.1% of projects 2, and 44.9% of projects 3. For the activities of intervention and building models, the rates of implementing organisations are 33.3% of projects 1, 36.2% of projects 2, and 40.8% of projects 3. Project-based communication activities of the organisations are 28.6% of projects 1,

17.2% of projects 2, and 20.4% of projects 3, respectively. The activities with the lowest rates are policy criticism and advocacy accounting for 7.9% of projects 1, 5.2% of projects 2, and 4.1 of projects 3, respectively.

Table 4: Key Descriptions of the NGOs' Three Typical Projects Implemented over the Last Three Years

Unit: %

No.	Key project description		Project 1	Project 2	Project 3	All projects
1	*Source of funding*	Vietnam	57.8	54.5	64.4	65.6
		International	42.2	45.5	35.6	50.0
2	*Funds*	Under VND 1 billion	53.6	57.4	58.5	70.6
		VND 1-5 billion	33.0	33.6	31.9	46.5
		More than VND5 billion	23.4	19.0	9.6	32.7
3	*Number of implementation years*	1 year	42.4	42.9	47.8	57.4
		2 to 3 years	27.2	41.1	41.3	52.9
		4 to 5 years	19.7	9.0	8.7	26.5
		Over 5 years	10.7	7.0	2.2	17.7
4	*Scope of impact*	One locality	62.3	66.0	62.5	79.7
		Many localities	37.7	44.0	47.5	48.4
5	*Main activities*	Research, evaluation	63.5	60.3	73.5	76.1
		Education, capacity building	52.4	62.1	44.9	67.2
		Intervention, modelling	33.3	36.2	40.8	55.2
		Communication	28.6	17.2	20.4	35.8
		Policy advocacy	7.9	5.2	4.1	7.5
		Other	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

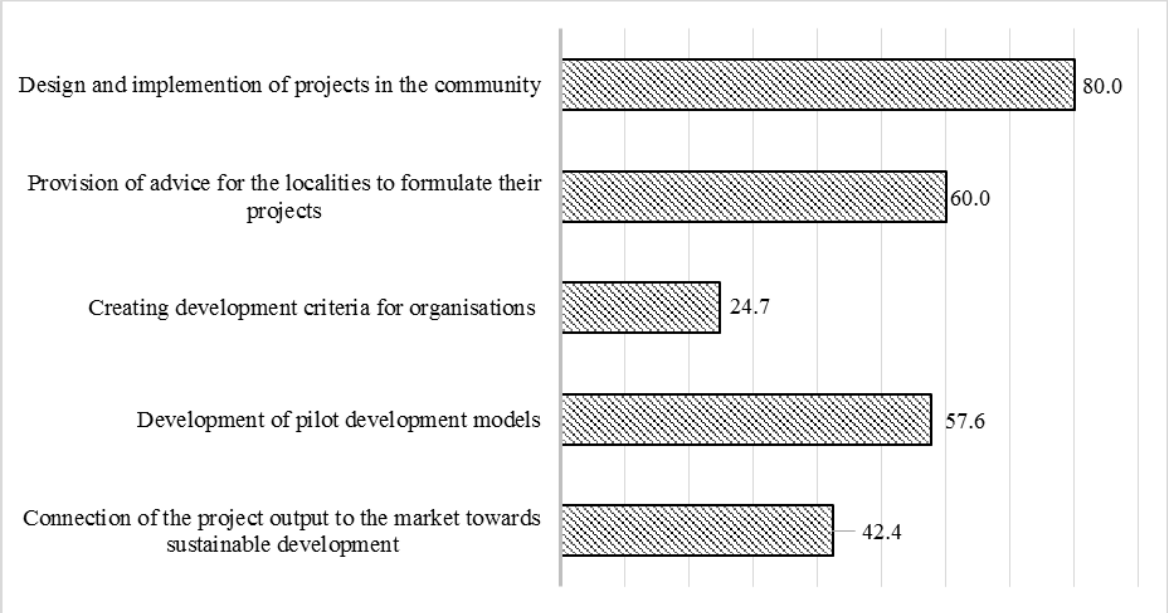
Source: Survey data set of Research Project KX01.32/16-20, segregated and processed by the author.

Regarding the role of organisations in activities of research associated with development via implementation in the community, Figure 1 shows a relatively high percentage of organisations implementing most of the lead activities of the project, from the design stage to its implementation, accounting for 80% of the organisations in

the survey sample. Among the participatory activities according to the components and stages of the project, 60% of organisations participate in the technical phase, providing advice for the localities to formulate their projects, 57.6% support in the formulation and development phase of pilot models, 42.4% support to connect the project output to the market towards sustainable development, and 24.7% develop technical and professional criteria for organisations implementing projects.

Figure 1: Roles of Organisations in Community Research and Development

Unit: %



Source: Survey data set of Research Project KX01.32/16-20, segregated and processed by the author.

Thus, the survey data shows that the capacity to "directly" implement projects (i.e. from beginning to end of the projects) and to "indirectly" participate by performing one or some stages in the projects is quite clear. While there are many difficulties in mobilising project funding and bidding for project holding, the fact that many organisations participate in providing technical assistance in various stages of other projects, especially those many projects implemented by ministries, sectoral agencies, and local authorities, is an important affirmation of the role of non-governmental organisations, while at the same time contributing to the overall success of community development projects.

In performing their role through projects of research and development, with 28 operational criteria, most of the

organisations rate their activities to be at level 2 (i.e. "relatively effective"), and only one third of them assessed that they had attained the highest level of the evaluation criteria, namely level 1 (i.e. "very effective") (as shown in Table 5). If aggregating and adding both level 1 and level 2 to evaluate the effectiveness, the rates that saw the highest consensus (over 80%) include the criteria of the expertise and technical resources of the organisation, such as project design ideas (92.2%); project planning and implementation (88.5%); using project funds (84.5%); and community awareness before and after the project (80.6%).

Table 5: Evaluation of Effectiveness of Organisation's Performance in Research Associated with Development

Unit: %

Organisation's type	Very effective	Effective	Average	Not very effective	Ineffective
Project design ideas	27.3	64.9	5.2	1.3	1.3
Project planning and implementation	24.4	64.1	11.5	0.0	0.0
Using project funds	23.9	60.6	12.7	2.8	0.0
Community awareness before and after the project	9.0	71.6	17.9	1.5	0.0
Project technical indicators	14.5	63.8	17.4	4.3	0.0
Project management and supervision	16.9	60.6	21.1	1.4	0.0
Coordination of experts and organisations	28.0	48.0	24.0	0.0	0.0
Positive change with the community	22.1	51.5	20.6	4.4	1.5
Leaders' awareness before and after the project	3.1	68.8	20.3	7.8	0.0
Sustainability of the project model	19.7	52.1	26.8	1.4	0.0
Capacity building activities	12.9	58.1	25.8	3.2	0.0
Project's social indicators	13.8	55.4	29.2	1.5	0.0
Creative ideas realised	25.4	43.3	26.9	4.5	0.0
Community response and participation	10.8	56.8	21.6	9.5	1.4
Ability to mobilise resources after the project	13.7	52.9	31.4	2.0	0.0
Ability to replicate the project model	10.4	50.7	34.3	4.5	0.0
Community ownership after the project	9.2	50.8	33.8	6.2	0.0
Compilation and distribution of books and documents	11.7	46.7	38.3	3.3	0.0

Organisation's type	Very effective	Effective	Average	Not very effective	Ineffective
Technology application and transfer	6.7	50.0	36.7	6.7	0.0
Mainstreaming the dissemination of law	6.8	49.2	33.9	10.2	0.0
Change in community status	11.5	44.3	36.1	8.2	0.0
Finding and mobilising for continued funding	7.0	43.7	26.8	16.9	5.6
Local government support	16.7	31.9	40.3	9.7	1.4
Support from ministries and agencies	9.7	33.3	33.3	16.7	6.9
Impact on local policies	1.6	35.5	46.8	14.5	1.6
Impact on national policies	1.8	24.6	36.8	35.1	1.8
Administrative procedures for project implementation	2.8	22.5	46.5	28.2	0.0

Source: Survey data set of Research Project KX01.32/16-20, segregated and processed by the author.

The criteria with a relatively high rate of consensus (70-80%), which also belong to the group of professional technical implementation and community interaction, are project technical indicators (78.3%), project management and supervision (77.5%), expert and coordination of experts and organisations (76%), positive changes with the community (73.6%), leaders' awareness before and after the project (71.9%), sustainability of the project model (71.8%), capacity building activities (71%), and project's social indicators (70.2%).

Criteria with above-average consensus rate (50-70%) belong to the group of project implementation results and some technical and professional criteria, including realisation of creative ideas (68.7%), community response and participation (67.6%), ability to mobilise resources after the project (66.6%), ability to replicate the project model (61.1%), community ownership after the project (60%), compilation and distribution of books and documents (58.3%), technology application and transfer (56.7%), mainstreaming the dissemination of law (55.9%), change in community status (55.7%), and finding and mobilising for continued funding (50.7%).

The group of criteria with the proportion of organisations agreeing on the poorest effectiveness (below 50%) is related to the support of central and local agencies and the policy advocacy process, such as local government support (48.6%); support from ministries and agencies (41.3%); impact on local policies (37.1%); impact on national policies (28.3%); and administrative procedures for project implementation (25.4%).

If considered at the very efficient level, Table 5 also shows that there are some criteria that assess the level of "very effective" of the project as quite low (less than 10%) such as support from ministries

and agencies (9.7%); community ownership after the project (9.2%); community awareness before and after the project (9.0%); finding and mobilising for continued funding (7.0%); mainstreaming the dissemination of law (6.8%); technology application and transfer (6.7%); leaders' awareness before and after the project (3.1%); administrative procedures for project implementation (2.8%); impact on national policies (1.8%); impact on local policies (1.6%).

On the contrary, at the level of evaluating some criteria and ineffective operation, there are some criteria with a quite high consensus rate of organisations in the sample that should be noted, such as 36.9% of respondents think that the impact on national policies is ineffective, and 28.2% say that administrative procedures for project implementation are ineffective. In addition, 23.6% of organisations assess the support from ministries and agencies as being ineffective, while 21.1% said local government support and 16.1% said impacts on local policies are so. This shows that in the time to come, there should be policy adjustments and more commitment from ministries, agencies, and local authorities in creating more favourable conditions for NGOs when they implement community-based development projects.

Regarding the contents of organisations performing well in community development, the results of surveyed staff show that the contents with higher consensus rates (over 60%) are developing models of environmental protection and response to climate change (73.5%), creating general development models in the community (70.3%), water supply and environmental sanitation (64.9%), and improving and enhancing the quality of healthcare services (63.8%).

In addition, four models with over 50% of respondents assessing them to be positive include sustainable livelihood (59.5%); scientific research, practical application (55.1%); improving the quality of education and training (54.1%); and the protection and management of community values (50.3%). The remaining four models all have evaluation rates lower than 20%, including technology application and transfer (49.2%); management of forest and marine resources (44.3%); prevention of crimes and social evils (31.3%); and implementation of public services (27.6%).

Assessing the strengths and advantages of non-governmental organisations in community research and development with 18 criteria set out in the toolkit, according to the statistics, the rating rate is quite spread in the middle above and less than 50% of organisations and the highest level only reached a rate of about three fourths of the organisations in the sample. At a high level of appreciation by organisations with 50% or more consensus, including the strengths and advantages in terms of the expertise, techniques, project implementation processes and community coordination such as project staff equipped with good knowledge, skills and professionalism (75.3%); practical effective-ness of project implementation (71.9%); transparent and efficient use of funding (67.4%); community support and participation (65.2%); good ideas, professional project design (58.4%); and being well-funded (52.8%) (Table 6).

A relatively low percentage of organisations consider policy advocacy as their strength, while this is a rather important content. The success of a research and development project is not only about implementing the model well but also creating a sustainable and long-term effect.

Thus, a successful policy advocacy process after each project will be a premise for creating opportunities to replicate the development model in many other localities, while attracting resources for further research and settlement of relevant problems in practice. This is also an issue that needs to be researched and solutions need to be found and included in the criteria of future projects of research associated with development.

Table 6: Interrelation between Assessing Strengths and Advantages of NGOs in Community Research and Development and The Numbers of Years since Their Establishment

Unit: %

Strengths and advantages	Number of years since establishment			General
	Under 5	5 to 10	Over 10	
Project staff equipped with good knowledge. skills and professionalism	82.6	65.4	77.5	75.3
Practical effectiveness of project implementation	65.2	80.8	70.0	71.9
Transparent and efficient use of funding	65.2	61.5	72.5	67.4
Community support and participation	60.9	65.4	67.5	65.2
Good ideas. professional project design	43.5	73.1	57.5	58.4
Being well-funded	39.1	50.0	62.5	52.8
Project sustainability	43.5	50.0	50.0	48.3
Solving local pressing issues	30.4	53.8	52.5	47.2
Attention and support of local authorities	30.4	53.8	50.0	46.1
Good management and monitoring of project indicators	43.5	50.0	45.0	44.6
Learning and application of good international experiences and practices	30.4	50.0	47.5	43.8
Participating in and coordination with many organisations and networks	30.4	50.0	42.5	41.6
Proving the community's advantages	26.1	46.2	37.5	37.1
Piloting of new ideas, innovative activities	17.4	34.6	35.0	30.3
The community's creativity	30.4	26.9	15.0	22.5
Learning and application of good experiences and practices of other localities	13.0	34.6	15.0	20.2
Adoption by policy makers	4.3	19.2	10.0	11.2
Other	4.3	3.8	0.0	2.2

*Note: (*p < 0.05)*

Source: Survey data set of Research Project KX01.32/16-20, segregated and processed by the author.

Table 7: Difficulties and Limitations of Organisations in Performing Their Roles for Community Research and Development Projects

Unit: %

Difficulties and limitations	Number of years since establishment			General
	Under 5	5 to 10	Over 10	
Shortage/Being without funding for project implementation	52.2	65.4	50.0	55.1
Lack of attention by local leaders	43.5	38.5	32.5	37.1
Failure to attract donor's interest	39.1	30.8	22.5	29.2
Insufficient adoption by policy makers	26.1	30.8	25.0	27.0
Issues arising in the project	26.1	23.1	30.0	27.0
Sustainability and ownership of the community after the project	17.4	19.2	25.0	21.3
Insufficient participation in and coordination with many organisations	21.7	19.2	20.0	20.2
Staff's levels of expertise uneven and not appropriate	21.7	15.4	15.0	16.9
Having not taken advantage of the community's strengths and advantages	26.1	15.4	5.0	13.5
Lack of new ideas of creativity and flexibility	17.4	3.8	7.5	9.0
Project being not effective in practice lack of "addresses" (to apply	8.7	3.8	10.0	7.9
Lack of community support and participation	8.7	3.8	10.0	7.9
Management and use of funds being not good	8.7	7.7	7.5	7.9
Poor monitoring of indicators	4.3	3.8	5.0	4.5
Failure to deal with the urgent issues of local attention	8.7	0.0	2.5	3.4
Failure to apply local experiences and practices	0.0	0.0	7.5	3.4
Failure to apply international best practices	4.3	0.0	2.5	2.2
Other	8.7	3.8	2.5	4.5

*Note: (*p < 0.05)*

Source: Survey data set of Research Project KX01.32/16-20, segregated and processed by the author.

Along with the strengths and advantages, the research project also provides criteria to evaluate difficulties and limitations of organisations in performing their roles for community research and development projects. Contrary to the assessment of advantages, with 20 criteria for assessing difficulties and limitations statistically, most of the evaluation rates are spread and the consensus rates are not high. The difficulty agreed by the organisations for the highest percentage is the lack of funding for project implementation, accounting for 55.1%. Next is the lack of attention by local leaders, which accounts for 37.1% (Table 7).

3. Conclusion

Community research and development is the most fundamental activity in the role of NGOs under the VUSTA today. These activities are often linked to the input of scientific research and the output of practical pilot models in the community. They are also considered the backbone activity in community development projects, which are being implemented by organisations. Survey findings show that many diverse practical models are being researched and piloted in practice by NGOs, including issues such as livelihood, poverty reduction, healthcare, education, and culture. NGOs not only play a role in technical assistance, but are also sometimes responsible for "free" services that provide practical benefits to the community.

In the process of researching, finding development models, implementing ideas, and translating these into practice, NGOs have attracted the attention of donors and received funding to implement their projects. There are general criteria established by scientists in the process of research and implementation of a development project, but, at the same time, each project has its unique and innovative model that create rich experiences in activities for environmental protection and sustainable development. Many successful and effective models have been recognised by the community and society, and at the same time continue to be researched and replicated by agencies and organisations in both state and non-governmental sectors in all regions of the country.

Thus, the current NGOs not only play a role in creating scientific knowledge and contributing to the development of scientific and theoretical disciplines with experimental and applied research models, but also serve as an important bridge between science and the application of socioeconomic development in communities.

Note

[1] The paper was published in Vietnamese in: *Xã hội học*, số 2, 2020, then developed into this English version. Translator: Luong Quang Luyen. Language editor: Etienne Mahler.

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