



An Roinn Gnóthaí Eachtracha agus Trádála
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

EVALUATION OF VIETNAM COUNTRY STRATEGY PAPER 2011-2015 Final Report



Evaluation and Audit Unit

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Contents

Acronyms	iii
Acknowledgements.....	v
Executive Summary.....	vi
1. Introduction	8
1.1 Background to Evaluation and Methodology	8
1.2 Limitations.....	9
2. Recent Country Contextual Developments.....	9
2.1 Political.....	9
2.2 Economic.....	10
2.3 Development.....	11
2.4 Regional Issues.....	13
2.5 Relevant Policy Developments in Headquarters	13
3. Overview of the CSP.....	13
4. Summary of CSP Results.....	17
5. Summary of Evaluation Findings.....	18
5.1 Relevance and Coherence of the Strategic Plan in Guiding Delivery.....	18
5.1.1 CSP Design and Implementation	18
5.1.2 Coherence and Synergies	21
5.1.3 Irish Aid’s Crosscutting Issues	22
5.2 Results Achieved by the CSP	22
5.2.1 Ethnic Minority Poverty	24
5.2.2 The Vietnam Civil Society Fund (VCSF)	27
5.2.3 IDEAS	29
5.2.4 Irish Aid’s engagement with One-UN plan	30
5.2.4 Multi-Country Engagement	31
5.2.5 Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment	32
5.2.6 Policy influencing and knowledge transfer	33
5.3 Effectiveness and Appropriateness of Mix of Modalities and Mix of Partners	35
5.4 Coherence and Effectiveness of the Whole of Embassy Approach Across Development Cooperation, Trade and Political Objectives.....	39
6. Conclusions	43
7. Issues for Consideration.....	46

7.1 Future Strategy	46
7.2 Whole of Embassy.....	48
Bibliography	50
List of Annexes	52
List of Boxes	
Box 1: IDEAS	20
Box 2: Key Achievements Of The Vietnam CSP 2011-2015	27
Box 3: The Vietnam Civil Society Fund	27
Box 4: Examples of Policy Influencing & Knowledge Transfer	34
Box 5: Key Characteristics of Irish Aid Support	34
Box 6: Organisational Capacity Assessment	36
Box 7: Feedback on Irish Added Value.....	38
List of Figures	
Figure 1: Ireland’s Trade Figures with Vietnam (2010-2014)	11
Figure 2: Vietnam HDI progress (2010-2014)	11
Figure 3: Vietnam CSP Logic Model	14
Figure 4: Vietnam Actual Programme Spend.....	15
Figure 5: Key achievements of the Vietnam CSP 2011-2015.....	17
List of Tables	
Table 1: Socio-Economic Indicators, Vietnam.....	9
Table 2: CSP Objectives.....	16

Acronyms

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CBI	Central Bank of Ireland
CEMA	Committee for Ethnic Minority Affairs
CPV	Communist Party of Vietnam
CSP	Country Strategy Paper
ERAV	Electricity Regulatory Authority of Vietnam
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute
FTA	Free Trade Agreement
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GoV	Government of Vietnam
HQ	Headquarters
IDEAS	Ireland Development and Experience Sharing
LGBTI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender. Intersex
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MOLISA	Ministry of Labour - Invalids and Social Affairs
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MPI	Ministry of Planning and Investment
MTR	Mid Term Review
NCSEIF	National Centre for Socio-Economic Information and Forecast
NFSC	National Financial Supervisory Commission
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NLD	National League for Democracy
NTP SPR	National Targeted Programme for Sustainable Poverty Reduction 2012-2015
ODA	Overseas Development Assistance

P135	Programme 135
PRPP	Poverty Reduction Policies Programme
SAV	The State Audit of Vietnam
SEDP	Socio Economic Development Plan
SMG	Senior Management Group
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	The United Nations Children's Emergency Fund
UXO	Unexploded Ordnance
VCSF	Irish Aid Vietnam Civil Society Facility
VIBE	The Vietnam Ireland Bilateral Education Exchange

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Background

The Country Strategy Paper (CSP) for 2011-2015 is Ireland's second CSP for Vietnam. It was built on the learning and experience from the first CSP period as well as the end-of-CSP evaluation that took place in 2010. The budget for the CSP was €12 million per annum and the four objectives were to:

- improve sub-national ability to plan and adapt public investment resources to the needs of marginalised groups;
- strengthen policy formulation and delivery at central level in addressing poverty and marginalisation;
- strengthen capacity of central level government, research agencies and private sector in economic management; and
- contribute to reduced vulnerability and increased resilience of marginalised communities in the sub-region (Cambodia, Lao PDR, Vietnam, Myanmar).

This evaluation of the second Vietnam Country Strategy Paper (2011-2015) was led by the Evaluation and Audit Unit with the support of an external consultant. The purpose of the evaluation was to provide an independent assessment of Ireland's development cooperation programme in Vietnam and the region for 2011-2015 and provide accountability to the governments and peoples of Ireland and Vietnam for the funds expended during the period.

Findings and Conclusions

The main findings and conclusions of the evaluation are:

- The CSP was strongly relevant in its design and continued to be so during the implementation period. It was founded on rigorous analyses of context, modalities, results and outcomes and coherence and linkages were clear and well-articulated throughout the CSP. There was, however, room for it to be less detailed in design to allow more flexibility in implementation.
- The evidence reviewed consistently supports that the CSP has been very effective, meeting many of its targets, and performing well beyond what was planned in a number of areas.
- The CSP clearly identified gender as a priority, in particular the linkages between poverty and gender. While the CSP has resulted in some positive gender outcomes, results have not been consistently captured and there is some room to further advance the gender equality agenda.
- The programme has clearly added value and been cost-effective in the delivery of results. With an annual budget of €12 million, the CSP has leveraged more-than-expected results, and considerable influence.
- There have been unanticipated results and outcomes which have contributed to the CSP being more than the sum of its parts, including the establishment of new initiatives such as the Vietnam Ireland Bilateral Education Exchange and influencing other donors' priority setting (e.g. leveraging additional donor funding for the P135 programme for ethnic minorities).
- The CSP choice of modalities and partners has generally been very effective, building on prior experience working across a range of partners, bringing together local and national level work, and enhancing this with engagement in regional activities.

- The CSP has developed strong synergies between the areas of work of the embassy. The embassy in Vietnam has been an early adopter of the whole of embassy approach, with results and outcomes that have been beneficial to both the aid programme and to emerging trade relations with Vietnam.

Issues for Consideration

The evaluation identified the following issues for consideration for the future Country Strategy.

1. The next strategy should adopt a longer term vision of Ireland's engagement through the whole of Embassy approach. It should be light in detailed programming and its funding instruments should cover both the trade and aid mandates.
2. The next strategy should consolidate areas of the portfolio that have been successful, ethnic minority poverty reduction, civil society support and IDEAS, as well as the regional engagement.
3. The engagement in ethnic minority poverty should be informed by further evaluative work on P135. This should provide recommendations on strategic and funding priorities for the embassy.
4. The country strategy should reflect a more strategic engagement through the Vietnam Civil Society Fund. This should include inter alia better integrating the advocacy work of CSOs with the priority areas of the portfolio; providing core funding to certain CSOs; and reviewing the engagement with the external consultant to enhance the relevance of the support.
5. Under the next strategy IDEAS should: include a broader group of Irish institutions with clearer upfront identification of expectations in terms of inputs, outputs and outcomes; explicitly seek opportunities to move towards a co-funding model for the scholarships; and broaden the list of courses eligible for scholarships.
6. The next strategy, should continue to engage in the broader region. This should be done through a series of discrete interventions, focussed on demining and nutrition (given their success to date).
7. The next strategy should integrate gender concerns in a more systematic way. A gender audit of the Embassy should be conducted and incorporate the recommendations into the next strategy.
8. In engaging with partners under the next CSP, the Embassy should make sure that there is clarity at the outset on all aspects of expectations around each of the interventions.
9. The Embassy should be supported to document the Whole of Embassy approach. This should include an analysis of the processes and structures as well as challenges and implications.
10. Continued attention to structures and staffing will be important under the Whole of Embassy approach. Working across political, trade and aid agendas requires having people in the right place with clear understanding of their roles and with capacity to work across different areas. (HQ issue)
11. The Department should more explicitly share information on the objectives and strategies of the aid programme in Vietnam under the Whole of Embassy Approach, through written material developed for sharing with the trade and economic partners. (HQ issue)
12. The Department should develop written guidance to support Embassies on dealing with potential conflicts between the aid and trade agendas. This should draw on existing OECD DAC guidance, on experience from Vietnam and other countries, as well as on dialogue with like-minded countries who are also developing their programmes in a broader direction. (HQ issue)

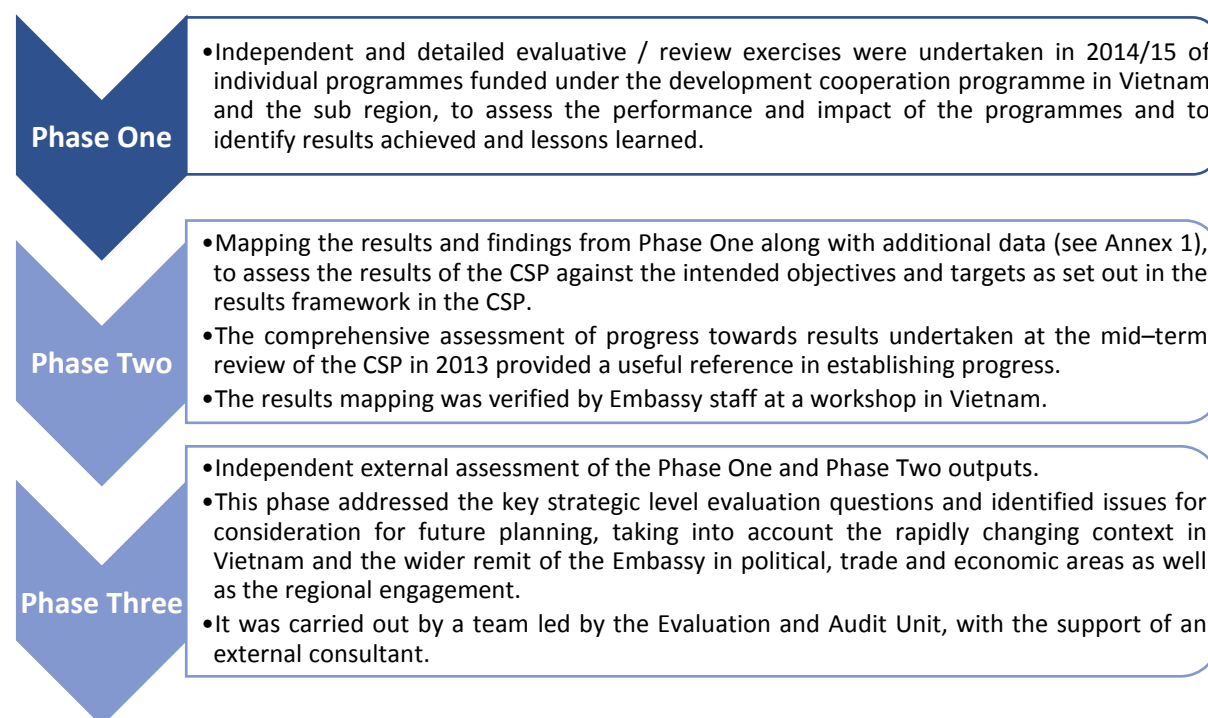
1. Introduction

1.1 Background to Evaluation and Methodology

The purpose of this evaluation is to provide an independent assessment of the overall performance of Ireland's development cooperation programme in Vietnam and the sub-region (Cambodia and Laos PDR) for 2011-2015 and provide accountability for the funds expended during the period. The Myanmar / Burma programme was not formally included in the evaluation given the short period of time it has been in operation.

The evaluation has a strong focus on lesson learning and the evaluation process aims to help inform future decisions with regard to Ireland's support to Vietnam and the sub-region. The evaluation also aims to inform the wider policy and programming considerations for Ireland in an emerging middle income country context, embracing a wider range of development related issues, including bilateral, economic and trade relations.

The evaluation was undertaken in three phases (described in detail in Annex 1) as follows:



The four headline questions addressed by the evaluation were:

1. To assess the relevance, coherence and effectiveness of the strategic plan in guiding the delivery of development cooperation by Ireland and the evolution of the strategy over time.
2. To assess the results achieved (intended and unintended), particularly for poor people but also in relation to policy influencing and knowledge transfer, through Ireland's development cooperation programmes in Vietnam (and the sub Region) in the period 2011-2015.
3. To assess the effectiveness and appropriateness of the mix of aid instruments (government systems, projects, knowledge transfer) and mix of partners (government, national and local, donor, United Nations (UN), civil society), employed to achieve results, including consideration of the flexibility to respond to opportunities as they arise.

4. To assess the coherence and effectiveness of the ‘whole of embassy approach’ in fostering synergies, complementarities and coherence between Ireland’s development cooperation, trade and political objectives in Vietnam for broader development outcomes.

1.2 Limitations

The main limitation of the evaluation is that its findings and conclusions are mainly based on secondary sources. The evaluation sought to address this limitation by ensuring that only reliable and valid secondary sources were included, and by developing a strong framework for analysis of the documentation based on the evaluation questions.

In addition, the evaluation took care to share key findings from the secondary data through a workshop at the end of Phase Two, and sought further validation of the findings and conclusions through a series of targeted interviews with key stakeholders in Phase Three. The evaluation has also sought to clearly identify those areas of the portfolio where further evaluation work will be necessary for more conclusive evidence (discussed in the recommendations).

2. Recent Country Contextual Developments

2.1 Political

The political situation in Vietnam has remained stable over the CSP period, with the ruling Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) maintaining a firm grip on power. In the 2011 elections for National Assembly delegates, only 42 of the 500 delegates elected were non-CPV members.

The 12th National Congress of the CPV took place in January 2016 and the Party Chief, Mr Nguyen Phu Trong, was re-elected for a further term, although he may not serve the full five years. A slightly enlarged Politburo of nineteen members was elected, including for the first time Irish alumni Deputy Prime Minister Hoang Trung Hai.

He was also appointed Secretary of the Hanoi Communist Party Committee in February 2016.

Key Indicators	2010/11	2015/16
Population (2010; million)	86	92.5
Life expectancy at birth (2010; years)	72	75.8
GDP per capita (2010; USD)	1,160	
Human Development Index Rank (2010)	113	116 (2015)
Size of economy (2009; USD billion)	92.6	
GDP Growth (2010; %)	6.78	
Projected GDP Growth (2011; %) ¹	7.0-7.5	
Inflation (2010) %	11.75%	2.05% (2014)
Total external debt (2010; USD billion)	42	
Total external debt (2010; %GDP)	42.2	

Table 1: Socio-Economic Indicators, Vietnam

¹ World Bank staff estimates in Q1 2011 have lowered the growth forecast to 6.3% in 2011 and 6.7% in 2012; GoV have not revised the estimates in the SEDP approved by National Assembly.

The new 27-member government led by newly elected Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc was appointed in April 2016 by the former National Assembly. The cabinet consists of three new deputy prime ministers, 18 new ministers and senior officials.

The new National Assembly, elected in May 2016, includes 86 ethnic minority, 133 female, 21 non-CPV member deputies. Madam Nguyen Thi Kim Ngan was elected the chairperson of the National Assembly.

The past number of years have seen a period of reform in Vietnam, including reform of the Constitution in 2013 and of a number of key laws, including on the penal code and temporary detention, as well as on the family, including recognition of the right to have a gender reassignment recognised. While reform continues in a number of areas, notably widespread reforms in the justice sector including to legal aid, the months leading up to the 2016 Party Congress were marked by a slowdown as the government consolidated its position ahead of elections.

It is anticipated that the key theme of the government will remain a steady continuation of the policy of reform with particular emphasis on delivering economic growth, improving living conditions and ensuring social stability. However, it is uncertain whether there is an appetite to take the necessary steps to speed this up. The appointment of Deputy Prime Minister M Hoang Trung Hai, who is part of a small but significant cadre of leaders who have studied abroad and are capable of delivering on Vietnam's global integration aspiration, is taken as a signal that economic reform will continue.

2.2 Economic

Since 2011, Vietnam has had an average real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth of 5.9% per annum, with the rate increasing to 6.7% in 2015, predicted to slow slightly to 6.3% in 2016². Vietnam has, from 2011, prioritised stabilisation of the macro economy and control of inflation maintaining growth at a reasonable level. Inflation has been brought under control, from over 20% in 2011, to around 2% in 2015³. However, it has struggled with the fall in oil prices, as it relies on oil revenues to fund a significant share of the budget and continues to face problems with inflationary pressures and macroeconomic instability, particularly in the banking sector.

Historically an agrarian economy, Vietnam is moving rapidly towards an industrialised and service based economy, and is an export-led economy. While 50% of employment remains in agriculture, 22% is in industry and 28% in services⁴. There is also significant outward economic migration.

Vietnam has been making steady progress in improving the business environment and this progress is expected to continue in the coming years. However, Vietnam is ranked 112 on Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index 2015 and perceived corruption, lack of accountability and transparency as well as bureaucracy all impact the effectiveness of the Government in formulating and implementing its industrial policy, often a source of criticism by foreign investors.

Vietnam's main export partners are China, the US, EU, Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Japan, and South Korea. Vietnam and the EU concluded negotiations on a Free Trade

² Economic Intelligence Unit May 2016

³ Ibid.

⁴ CIA Factbook

Agreement (FTA) in December 2015, which is expected to enter into force in early 2018. Vietnam has been ramping up efforts to conclude trade agreements more broadly and is also a member of the Trans Pacific Partnership which was agreed in 2015.

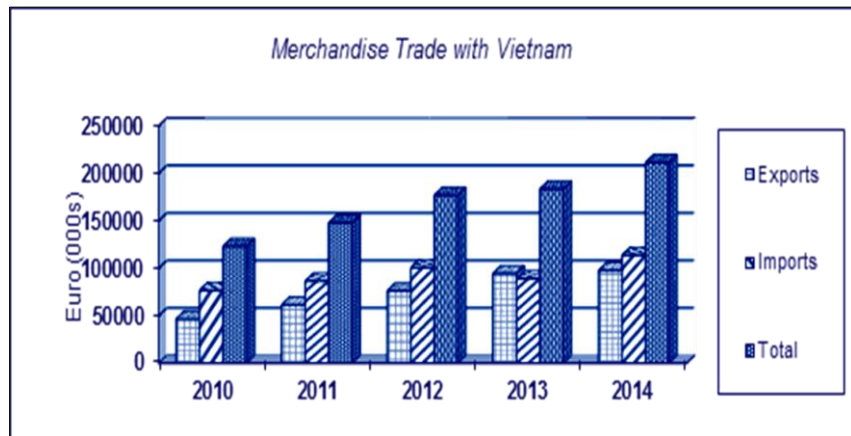


Figure 1: Ireland's Trade Figures with Vietnam (2010-2014)

Vietnam is showing increased interest in importing agricultural produce from EU countries in parallel with the negotiation of the FTA, including creating opportunities for dairy and meat imports from Ireland. Irish milk products have been available in Vietnam since August 2015, and the dairy products on offer are expected to increase in 2016⁵. In 2014 Vietnam was ranked as Ireland's 45th largest trading partner. Key exports from Ireland to Vietnam include essential oils/perfumery as well as medical and pharmaceutical products. Key imports into Ireland from Vietnam include footwear; clothing; and furniture. Figure 1 illustrates Ireland's increasing trade with Vietnam over the period of 2010-2014.

2.3 Development

Vietnam ranks 116 out of 188 countries on the 2015 UN Human Development Index. Figure 2 illustrates Vietnam's steady progress on the Human Development Index from 2010-2014.

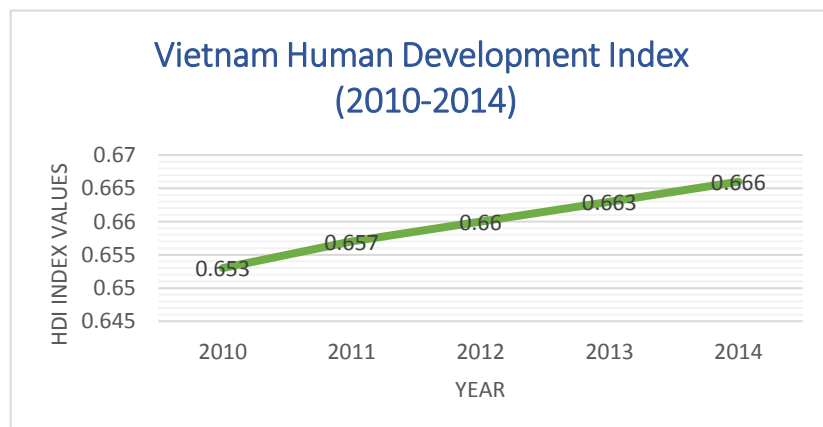


Figure 2: Vietnam HDI progress (2010-2014)

The country has achieved the MDG goals in the areas of poverty reduction, education, gender equality and maternal health and has partially achieved the remainder⁶.

Rising levels of education and diversification into off-farm activities, such as working in construction sites, factories or domestic work have also contributed to reducing poverty in the country.

⁵ Figures for Ireland are sourced from the Department of Finance and the CSO. Figures for Vietnam are sourced from the EIU. GDP per capita (US\$ at PPP) 5,181 Exchange rate 18/02/15 €1= USD.

⁶ Vietnam Country MDGs Report, 2011.

National poverty rates have fallen consistently from 58% in 1993 to 13% in 2012⁷. These development gains, however, remain vulnerable to reversal. The context for poverty reduction in Vietnam is changing, with the rate of poverty reduction slowing down and inequality on the rise.

Some 12 million people still remain in chronic poverty and below the official poverty line (living on less than \$1.25 a day) with a further 7 million people estimated to be 'near poor' (living on less than \$2.25 a day). Furthermore, the nutritional status of children is poor and the rates of child malnutrition in predominantly ethnic minority districts remain considerably higher than the national average (+20 per cent).

Economic growth is not benefiting the population equally, with progress uneven between groups and between regions. The poverty rate in rural areas is considerably higher than that of the urban areas (18.7% compared to 3.3%). Almost 87% of Vietnam's population lists their ethnicity as Kinh (or Viet). However, ethnic minority groups (54 different ethnic minority groups live in Vietnam) have been among the last to reap the rewards of Vietnam's prosperity. Ethnic minority poverty in 2012 was 50.6%, against the majority rate of just 7.5%⁸. The remaining poor are harder to reach; they face challenges of isolation, limited assets, vulnerability to shocks, low levels of education and poor health conditions.

The Government of Vietnam has made some significant strides in advancing gender equality. The National Policy Framework for Gender Equality was approved for the period 2011-2020 with the goal of highlighting the importance of gender equality for the socio-economic development of the country⁹.

Although there is strong commitment from the Government, gender inequality remains a determinant of poverty in Vietnam. Despite having one of the highest labour force participation rates of women over 15 (72.6% in 2011), women continue to earn less than men across economic sectors. While this differential has improved from an average male to female wage ratio of 115% in 2011 to 107% in 2014, the average masks disparities by region and by education level¹⁰.

Violence against women and girls is a serious issue in Vietnam. The Government released a 'Study on Domestic Violence against Women in Viet Nam', which indicates that women are three times more likely to be abused by a husband than by any other person. It is estimated that 34% of Vietnamese women experienced at least one or all types of domestic violence during their lifetime¹¹.

Vietnam is becoming increasingly vulnerable to economic and climatic shocks. This is as a result of the global economic volatility that has affected the country since around 2007, as well as the effects of increased climate variability resulting from climate change. Such economic and climatic shocks disproportionately affect those groups in Vietnam already living in vulnerable situations.

These changes and emerging challenges are taking place within a context of increasing resource scarcity for the Government of Vietnam, with declining state revenues. At the same time, funds available for poverty reduction from Development Partners are also reduced, partly as a result of changing aid budgets and priorities.

⁷ Vietnam MDGs Report, 2011.

⁸ Vietnam Country MDGs Report 2015.

⁹ <http://www.genderindex.org/country/viet-nam>.

¹⁰ Vietnam Country MDGs Report 2015.

¹¹ Ibid.

2.4 Regional Issues

Vietnam, together with Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Myanmar/Burma are the poorest members of the ASEAN. All these countries suffered serious economic losses from war and are still in the process of developing their economies and societies.

While the Vietnamese economy has made real progress, economic growth is fragile and poverty rates among ethnic minorities remain high. Cambodia, while making slow progress, has high levels of inequality and a very poor and marginalised rural population.

Lao PDR's relatively small economy is also not benefitting rural communities and state services are extremely weak. Myanmar is one of the poorest countries in the world with very low development indicators and, with ongoing conflict in a number of regions, the country faces multiple humanitarian challenges. Myanmar has experienced a major political turnaround over the last year, and now for the first time in 50 years has a newly elected government from the National League for Democracy (NLD), with a civilian leader and executive. This has changed the political, social and economic space in Myanmar.

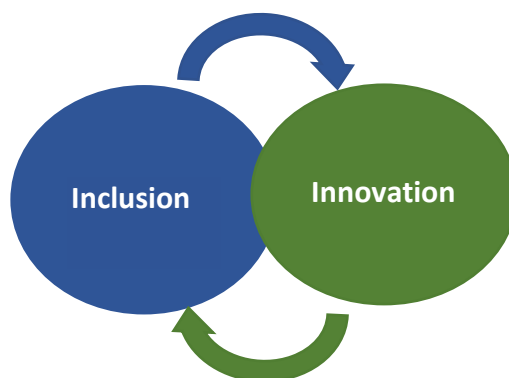
2.5 Relevant Policy Developments in Headquarters

The Country Strategy for Vietnam also has to be understood within the context of policy developments at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Central to these is the new Foreign Policy *'The Global Island: Ireland's Foreign Policy for a Changing World'*. The policy sets out four priorities for external engagement: our people, our values, our prosperity and our place in Europe.

Ireland's Policy on International Development *'One World One Future'* and the associated Framework for Action set out the key development priorities and the actions to be taken to implement them.

Other key foreign policy issues relevant to the Irish Aid programme include alignment with the changing global framework for development, in particular the 2015 Sustainable Development Goals, and increasing pressure to respond to global humanitarian crises.

3. Overview of the CSP



The Country Strategy Paper (CSP) for 2011-2015 is Ireland's second CSP for Vietnam. It was built on the learning and experience from the first CSP period as well as the end of CSP evaluation that took

place in 2010. The CSP has two broad and interlinked themes: inclusion and innovation, recognising that Vietnam’s transition to lower middle income country status still has the twin challenge of sustaining growth sufficient for poverty reduction to reach the most vulnerable and marginalised groups; and realising economic growth that is more inclusive and resilient to shocks. These themes of ‘Inclusion’ and ‘Innovation’ are articulated through the four CSP objectives.

The focus on **inclusion** sought to reach people who have not benefitted from Vietnam’s rapid development to date. It also involved seeking to include the voices, views and realities of all citizens in policy-making and decision-making at all levels of government. The CSP has focused on the most marginalised, in particular ethnic minorities, the disabled and LGBTI populations, through supporting the Government of Vietnam’s Programme on Ethnic Minority Poverty (P135) in 1,800 of the poorest communities and through supporting civil society organisations.

The **innovation theme** involved generating ideas and experience to contribute to Vietnam’s reform and modernization agenda. The programme continued from the previous CSP in supporting national poverty programmes, civil society projects, research, conferences, study grants and sharing Ireland’s domestic development experience with the intention of stimulating and informing the debate in Vietnam.

A detailed description of the programme is set out in the CSP 2011-2015 document and summarised in the logic model below.

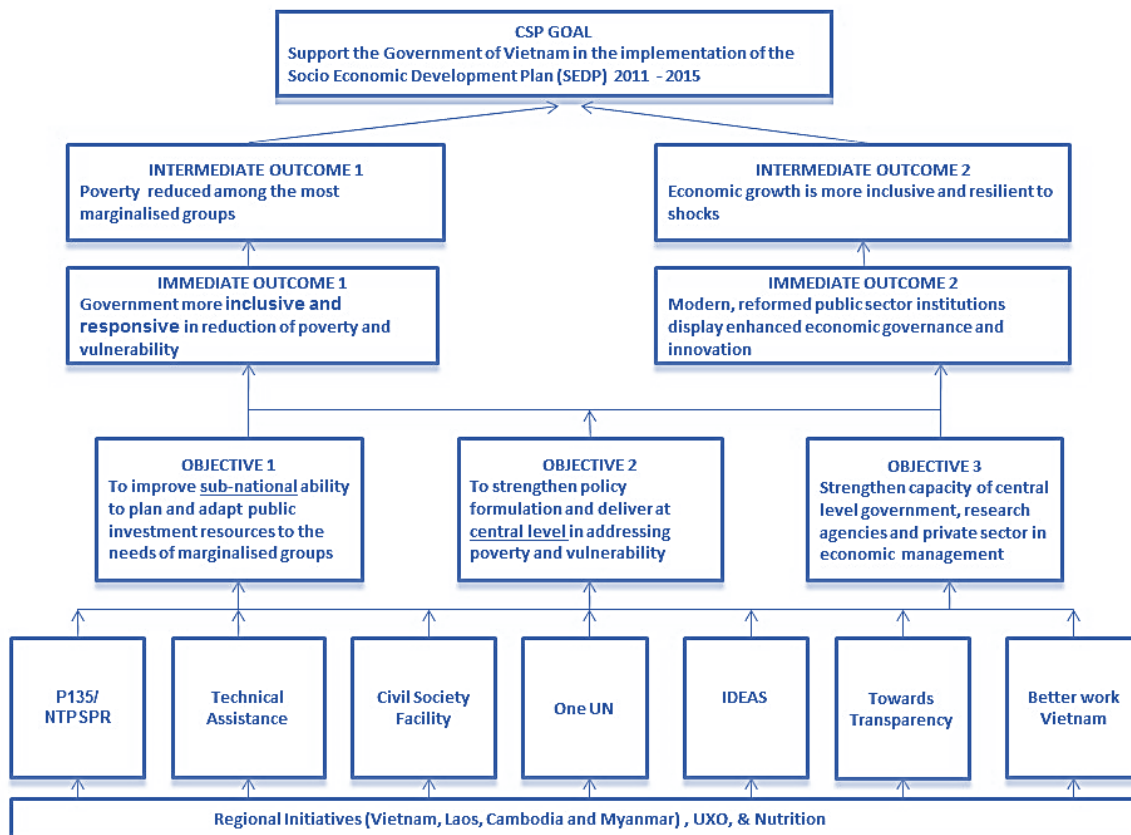


Figure 3: Vietnam CSP Logic Model

The CSP programmed a budget of €60,750,000 over the five years (see Annex 3). Actual expenditure over the period was €60,784,321. Figure 4 illustrates the key areas of expenditure over the CSP period.

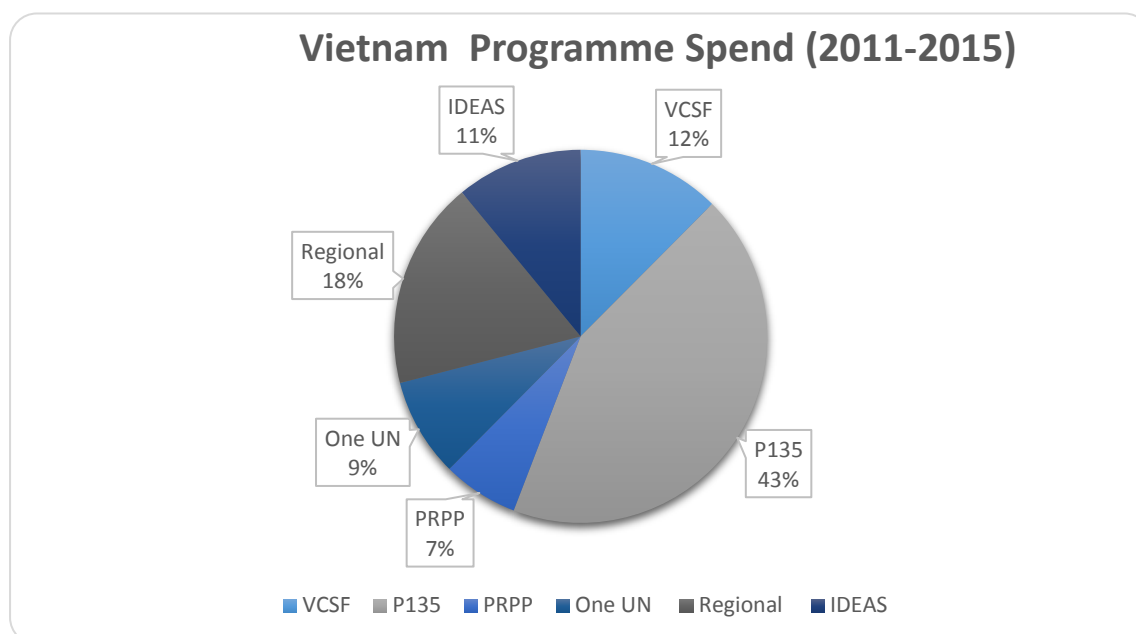


Figure 4: Vietnam Actual Programme Spend

The following table provides an overview of the CSP programme, its objectives and partners.

Objective 1: To improve sub-national ability to plan and adapt public investment resources to the needs of marginalised groups	
P135 Programme to support poverty reduction for marginalised ethnic minorities through improved basic infrastructure and building capacity of communities and local officials in planning and investment management at local level.	Ministry of Finance / Committee for Ethnic Minority Affairs,
Technical assistance facility to strengthen implementation of P135 at central and local level to selected government ministries.	UNDP / Poverty Reduction Policies and Programmes (PRPP)
Objective 2: To strengthen policy formulation and delivery at central level in addressing poverty and marginalisation	
Support Delivering as One UN reforms under UN System-Wide Coherence framework.	UN One Plan Fund - UNDP (on-granted to other UN agencies)
Civil Society Facility to strengthen voice and capacity of poor communities and community based organisations, focusing on vulnerable groups (disabled, ethnic minorities, LGBTI).	Grants to local & international civil society partners (15 in 2015)

Objective 3: Strengthen capacity of central level government, research agencies and private sector in economic management	
IDEAS programme: Vietnam-Ireland Exchange to build economic management capacity; MBAs and fellowships; peer-to-peer exchange visits; institutional links with Irish institutions.	UCD Smurfit School, Economic & Social Research Institute, direct spend by Embassy and HQ, Central Bank of Ireland, Commission for Energy Regulation.
Governance Programme and anti-corruption initiatives	Towards Transparency
Objective 4: Regional Support: contribute to reduced vulnerability and increased resilience of marginalised communities in sub-region (Cambodia, Lao PDR, Vietnam, Myanmar)	
Clearance of mines and unexploded ordnance in Vietnam, Laos PDR and Cambodia.	MAG, UNDP, Halo
Regional Initiatives (Vietnam, Laos PDR, Cambodia) to address hunger, under-nutrition and stunting.	Partners include Save the Children, WHH, Alive & Thrive
Myanmar/Burma: partnerships to support transition process, including water, demining, food security	Partners include: Plan; MAG; LIFT multi-donor trust fund

Table 2: CSP Objectives

4. Summary of CSP Results

The figure below provides an overview of the main results of the CSP. These are discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

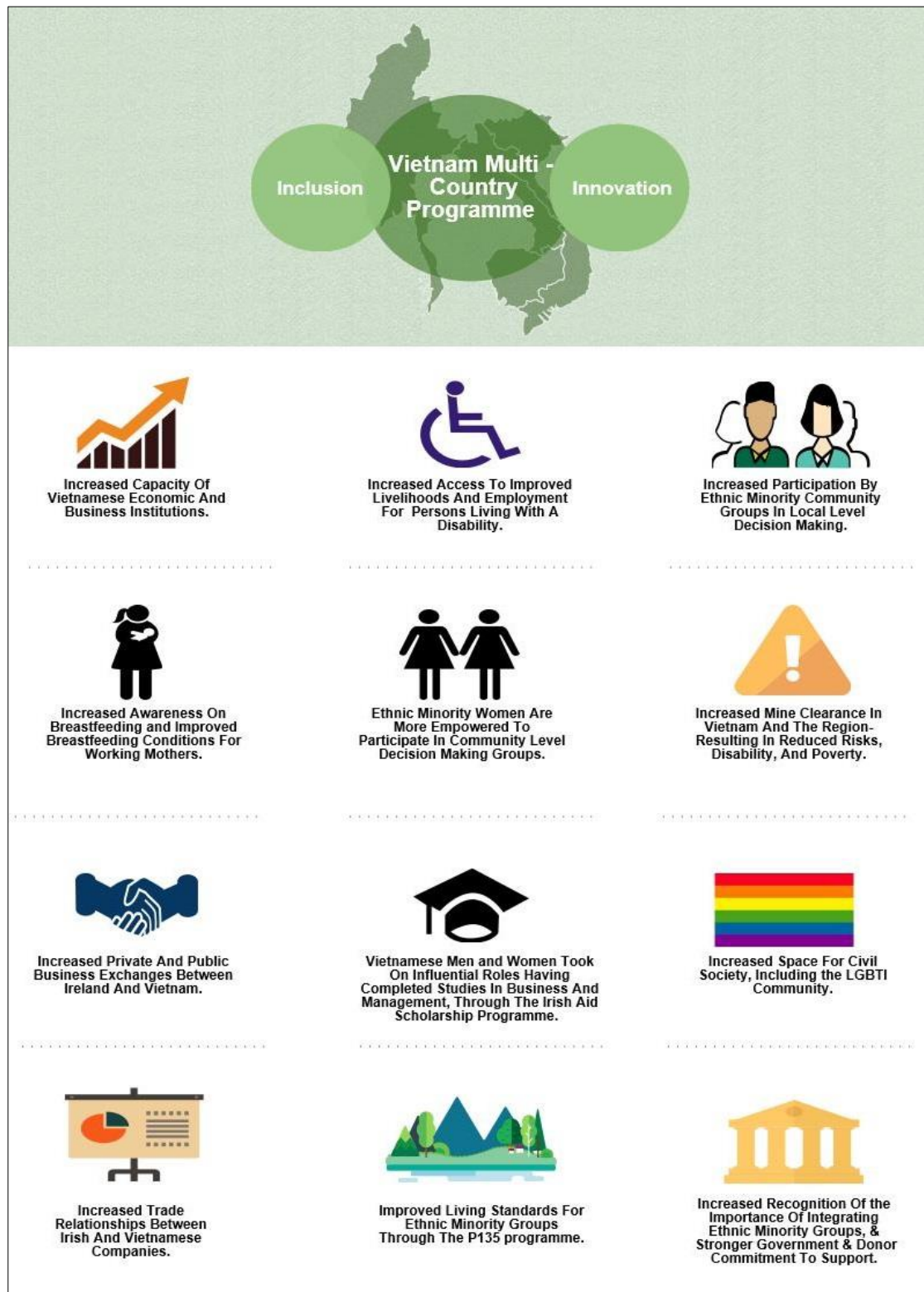


Figure 5: Key achievements of the Vietnam CSP 2011-2015

5. Summary of Evaluation Findings

This chapter presents the findings of the evaluation, under each of the four evaluation questions. In line with good evaluation practice and, unless otherwise indicated, the below findings reflect a careful process of triangulation of evidence from secondary sources (including a large number of evaluations of sub-components of the programme, see bibliography), which were validated through the interviews and stakeholder discussions in Phase 3 of the evaluation.

5.1 Relevance and Coherence of the Strategic Plan in Guiding Delivery

The first evaluation question assessed the (extent of) the relevance and coherence of the strategic plan in guiding the delivery of Ireland's development cooperation in Vietnam, and examined the evolution of the strategy over time.

Summary of main findings on relevance and coherence of the CSP in guiding delivery

- The CSP was founded on rigorous analyses of context, modalities, results and outcomes.
- The CSP was well aligned with and relevant to the priorities of the Vietnamese National Development Plan and with Ireland's development policy 'One World One Future'.
- The CSP was implemented flexibly to respond to the transitioning nature of Ireland's relationship with Vietnam and hence has accommodated emerging opportunities.
- The CSP was strong on lesson learning which provided opportunities to make some of the more minor adjustments that were necessary to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of the programme.
- The CSP is perceived as having been less relevant in guiding implementation due to its detailed planning down to output/activity level.
- Coherence and linkages were clearly present and well-articulated throughout the CSP document.
- The coherence between the CSP and the Embassy's Annual Business Plans has been good.
- The CSP made strategic decisions to mainstream some of Irish Aid's cross cutting issues such as gender.

5.1.1 CSP Design and Implementation

Key finding 1: The CSP was founded on rigorous analyses of context, modalities, results and outcomes.

The documentary evidence highlights that the CSP period was preceded by a long period of preparation. The CSP document, as well as the background analysis, provide a detailed justification

for the choices that were made during the CSP design¹². Interviews with key stakeholders highlight that it made strong sense to do so given that the previous CSP had been the first and that it had been experimental in its engagement.

The CSP was appropriately drafted and designed at the time to take account of the fast changing context in Vietnam, a country on the cusp of achieving lower middle income status but where poverty is still prevalent among the many ethnic minority communities, and becoming more difficult to tackle.

Key finding 2: The CSP was well aligned and relevant to the priorities of the Vietnamese national development plan and with Ireland’s development policy ‘One World One Future’, in particular around poverty reduction.

The CSP was strongly relevant to the Vietnamese government’s priorities. The twin focus on poverty and economic development had a clear match with the priorities of the Government of Vietnam as formulated in its *Socio-Economic Development Plan (SEDP)*¹³. The CSP provided a strong framework for learning and sharing of experience from the Irish economic management experience which was an area of expressed interest of the Vietnamese government under the first CSP.¹⁴

The CSP was also very clearly relevant to Ireland’s development policy at the time, as formulated in the 2006 White Paper on Irish Aid¹⁵, which had a strong focus on reducing poverty, hunger and exclusion in developing countries.

The CSP continued to be relevant, as noted in the Mid-Term Review¹⁶, following the adoption of Ireland’s new Development Policy ‘*One World One Future*’¹⁷. The new policy also took account of the addition of responsibility for trade promotion to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The Vietnam CSP was highly relevant to this, as it had already explicitly planned for a transitioning relationship between Vietnam and Ireland, moving towards a relationship built on a more equal partnership, with a stronger trade component and stronger integration with the political work of the Embassy.

Key finding 3: The CSP was implemented flexibly to respond to the transitioning nature of Ireland’s relationship with Vietnam and hence has accommodated emerging opportunities.

¹² The CSP design process took place over a period of one year from May 2010 to May 2011. It built on the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the CSP evaluation (Mokoro, 2010), and included the drafting of a concept paper, various visits for specific parts of the programming (IDEAS and the Civil Society Fund), drafting of an options paper, a programming workshop, a results workshop, and drafting and finalization of the strategy itself

¹³ Vietnam’s overall socio-economic development goal is to become a modern, industrialised country by 2020. The government prioritizes education, designing an affordable social protection system and improving health care, clean water, transportation, environmental protection and climate change mitigation, and urban development. The Government of Vietnam is also providing support to vulnerable groups and poorer regions.

¹⁴ Through the IDEAS programme, which was a core element of the CSP feeding into important development objectives of building capacity, transferring knowledge and ideas (all of which ultimately feed into the CSP Goal of reducing poverty and inclusive economic growth).

¹⁵ Government of Ireland (2006). White Paper on Irish Aid.

¹⁶ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade & Embassy of Ireland in Vietnam (2013). Vietnam CSP Mid-Term Review.

¹⁷ Government of Ireland (2012). One World, One Future. Ireland’s Policy for International Development.

The evaluation team also noted that the CSP as a framework has accommodated the emergence of new initiatives, such as the Vietnam Ireland Bilateral Education Exchange (VIBE), as a pilot under the IDEAS programme. VIBE was not planned in the original CSP but followed the same logic of maximizing synergies to achieve the objectives of the CSP, and provided an opportunity for beginning to engage in a more dynamic relationship in higher education.

The same flexibility is also reflected in the manner in which the regional activities have taken shape. Much

of this flexibility came from the strong relationship between the mission and the desk, which allowed the desk a greater understanding of the context in Vietnam. This relationship allowed the mission to make adjustments as were necessary.

IDEAS

Launched as a pilot during the first CSP, IDEAS became a stand-alone project and a major focus of the current CSP as follows:

- A higher education component - providing technical and business scholarships
- Support to economic management and governance through high level exchange visits by MPI, support to socio-economic analysis and forecasting through a partnership between ESRI and NCSEIF
- Support to monetary policy and regulation (collaboration between the Central Bank of Ireland and its Vietnamese equivalent the NFSC), and support in the area of electricity regulation (CER-ERAV)
- Private sector development through Vietnam Chamber of Commerce & Industry.

Box 1: IDEAS

Key finding 4: The continuous focus on lesson learning provided opportunities to make some of the more minor adjustments that were necessary to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of the CSP.

As noted in the MTR, the effectiveness of the support through the Vietnam Civil Society Facility (VCSF) was enhanced by focussing the support to Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) around a selection of key themes, namely: disability, ethnic minority poverty, and participatory local government, all of which remain highly relevant. This enhanced the relevance of Irish Aid work vis-à-vis population groups not directly covered by the Government's programmes. Coupled with this, a strong element of innovation was also introduced.

Key finding 5: The CSP is perceived as having been less useful in guiding implementation due to detailed planning down to output/activity level.

At a broad level, the CSP document continued to guide the overall implementation of the programme and to present a coherent set of objectives and synergies. The design and analysis phase provided a good framework from which to make informed decisions on modalities. However, evidence from interviews indicate that the CSP document was too detailed at the output/activity level to be effective in guiding implementation.

In practice, once implementation started, much of this design work was not directly applied because of changes in context and in emphasis. For example, the context in Vietnam changed quite quickly after the CSP was approved in ways that could not have been anticipated, including a large number of donors reducing funding, in some cases exiting the country, or changing their priorities.

5.1.2 Coherence and Synergies

Key Finding 6: Coherence and linkages were clearly present and well-articulated throughout the CSP document.

The detailed preparation process for the CSP as well as the lessons learnt from the first CSP (2007-2010)¹⁸ were noted as key contributory factors to the coherence of the current CSP. This CSP, therefore, sought to focus more specifically on areas where Irish Aid had made a difference, deepening engagement rather than broadening it, reducing the number of partners, and focusing on two key themes which reflect the combined priorities of the Vietnamese and Irish Governments, namely inclusion and innovation.

- The CSP articulated a clear focus on linking the commune level with central government and national institutions, to strengthen research and policy.
- The CSP also envisioned the civil society grants would serve as an entry point for increasing understanding across all sectors of the role that such organizations can play, and their potential as development partners.
- The CSP foresaw synergies between engagement at the country, regional and headquarters levels with the UN. This involved a particular focus on the UN One Plan. The evaluation found that the focus areas were aligned with those supported by the CSP, namely: social protection systems, performance of public institutions, and participation of civil society in decision making for vulnerable and disadvantaged groups.
- The regional work in South East Asia (developed mostly after the approval of the CSP) also ensured coherence and synergies. The work on unexploded ordnance and disarmament was designed to provide a key entry point for addressing poverty, while ensuring that the approaches were specific to each of the countries as well as straddling political priorities. The work on unexploded ordnance and disarmament was also strongly aligned with the wider Department's disarmament agenda.

The evaluation team reviewed the CSP document and did a detailed analysis of its contents. This analysis found that the CSP document specifically and effectively highlighted the various expected synergies between the development assistance, promotional and trade roles of the Embassy.

An example of this is the IDEAS programme, which in the second CSP moved from a pilot to a full programme, and as well as its centrality to the development programme, has more recently, been a key vehicle for linking governance and trade, promoting knowledge sharing, including knowledge and understanding of Ireland (see Box 1)

¹⁸ Visser-Valfrey, M., Minford, M. & D. Cronin (2010). Evaluation of the Irish Aid Country Strategy in Vietnam (Mokoro).

Key Finding 7: The coherence between the CSP and the Embassy’s annual business plans has been good.

The evaluation found that the Embassy’s annual business plans directly speak to the priority outcomes of the CSP and, in a concrete manner, plan for how the various functions of the Embassy (consular and political) can ensure that the CSP results and outcomes are achieved.

The coherence between the plans is the result of a broader reform/review of ways of working (discussed in Section 6.4) that has been essential to the coherence between the Embassy’s business plan and the CSP in practice.

5.1.3 Irish Aid’s Crosscutting Issues

The CSP took a strategic approach to addressing Irish Aid’s cross-cutting issues. Mainstreaming was taken as an approach for gender equality. A decision was made not to have a standalone programme rather to ensure the inclusion of gender issues (where feasible) throughout the CSP. The mission carefully analyzed where they could add value and based their choices on this analysis (outlined below).

- **The CSP did not explicitly mention the need to focus on human rights and corruption:** These issues were, however, part of the analysis and were reflected in its choice of partners and approaches which recognized the need to continue to broaden the space for discussion and debate in Vietnam.
- **The CSP committed to working on better understanding the linkages between poverty, gender, ethnicity and disability:** The CSP document made reference to some of the pervasive gender inequality issues present in Vietnam. The CSP document made a commitment to working on the linkages between poverty and gender and to further improve the collection and analysis of sex-disaggregated data. The CSP had limited gender sensitive indicators to capture and measure its gender activities and mainstreaming.
- **Climate change was specifically not integrated into the programming within the CSP:** Climate change and deteriorating natural resources were mentioned as a threat (and continue to be a threat in Vietnam which is one of the most vulnerable countries in the Asian region to rising sea levels)¹⁹ and, in particular, to the livelihoods of ethnic minorities. However, in the interest of a focussed approach and given the work of other partners, a decision was taken not to focus on these issues in programming.

5.2 Results Achieved by the CSP

The second evaluation question asked for an assessment of the results achieved (intended and unintended), particularly for poor people but also in relation to policy influencing and knowledge

¹⁹ Among Asian countries, Vietnam will be one of the most severely impacted by Climate Change, because of its long coast which is vulnerable to storms and seas, and because of its large low-lying areas in the southern Mekong Delta, which is the country’s largest rice-producing area.

transfer, through Ireland’s development cooperation programmes in Vietnam and the sub-region over the evaluation period.

A visual summary of a selection of CSP results is presented in Figure 5 above. This covers the development cooperation and trade dimensions of the CSP, and reflects the Whole of Embassy Approach (see section 5.4). A detailed presentation of the results and outcomes of the CSP is provided in the “CSP Results Mapping Report”, which drew on evaluations of various components of the programme over the CSP period (Annex 2).

This section of the report captures the high level results and outcomes of the CSP. It draws from the Phase two report and from additional analysis that the evaluation team did in Phase 3 including in-depth interviews in Vietnam and Ireland to further triangulate the findings. For a detailed presentation of specific results and outcomes the interested reader is referred to Annex 2.

Summary of findings of the CSP results

The CSP has performed well against its targets across all areas. It has also produced unanticipated positive results and outcomes, without additional resources:

- **P135:** Effectively contributed to the increased living standards and reduced poverty of women, men and children among ethnic minority groups in Vietnam.
- **Unanticipated results:** Ireland helped leverage additional resources for P135 through its positive engagement with donors who subsequently decided to support the Programme.
- **VCSF:** Increased voice for civil society, stronger capacity and a modest increase in space for CSOs, steep increase in participation in decision making by poor people, increased involvement of women in community level decision making processes and increased access to livelihoods for people with disabilities.
- **IDEAS:** Contributed to establishing linkages between Vietnamese and Irish institutions leading to: building capacity, stimulating and informing policy dialogue in Vietnam, facilitating high level access for Ireland to the Government of Vietnam, and furthering of trade between the two countries.
- **Policy Influencing:** Programmes have contributed to the development of macro-economic management models (IDEAS), priority setting for ethnic minorities (P135), promotion of breastfeeding (regional engagement), and opening up of space for civil society (VCSF).
- **Challenges:** Expectations around access to policy dialogue with the UNDP partnership were not met. Given the change in context over the CSP period the relevance of continued funding for One UN at country level was questioned. Minor challenges exist around gender mainstreaming.

The CSP has performed well against its targets, across all areas. It has also produced unanticipated positive results and outcomes, without additional resources. This is supported by a systematic comparison undertaken by the evaluation team for each of the programme areas between the planned results and outcomes and what was achieved, as reflected in CSP reporting.

It is also supported by the accumulated body of evaluations that have taken place during the CSP period (see bibliography), by the results mapping report from Phase 2 (see Annex 2), and by

confirmatory interviews and analysis by this evaluation. This section outlines the major achievements and outcomes of the CSP and some of the challenges faced in achieving the results.

5.2.1 Ethnic Minority Poverty

The CSP has had a very strong poverty focus (in particular around ethnic minority poverty) with 80% of total funds directly supporting poverty reduction and the inclusion of marginalised groups. The biggest element of the programme in terms of direct support for poor people in Vietnam has been the Programme 135 on Ethnic Minority Poverty, amounting to 43% of Irish Aid's expenditure over the CSP period. P135 is managed and implemented by the government body CEMA (The Committee for Ethnic Minorities Affairs).

The Poverty Reduction Policies and Programme Project (PRPP), the regional engagement in nutrition and demining and the support to civil society organizations, have also been part of the poverty focus and together represent an additional 37% of the spend.

Programme 135:

Key Finding 8: Programme 135 has very effectively contributed to increased living standards and reduced poverty.

The evidence reviewed during this evaluation confirms that Programme 135 has very effectively contributed to increased living standards and reduced poverty for targeted ethnic minority groups.

Between 2011 and 2014, Irish Aid's P135 funding supported 66 communities in 9 provinces, which have implemented a total of **249 small scale infrastructure projects**. This has included establishing rural road connections to improve access to markets, constructing/rehabilitating irrigation canals, building commune centres, refurbishing/ building school rooms and establishing clinics. Priorities for these rural projects were identified by the communities themselves which has resulted in their taking increased ownership of projects. **An additional 140 projects** are being implemented in 2015 and 2016 and are expected to enhance the results and outcomes.

The evaluation team's assessment, based on interviews and review of documentation²⁰, is that **it is likely that the outcomes identified through the 2012 impact assessment of Programme 135 have been sustained in the subsequent period (2013-2015)**. The national statistics show that poverty among the most marginalized groups has continued to decline at an impressive rate.²¹

Field visits by this evaluation team, as well as earlier independent evaluation work of P135, have confirmed the importance of the programme in terms of supporting incomes and creating jobs, and that the Irish Aid supported P135 projects have led to:^{22 23}

²⁰ Pham Quang Hao (2013). Report on the Review of P135 Infrastructure Projects; CEMA (2015). Implementation progress of the Government of Ireland's grant of €4.43M to extremely difficult communes under Programme 135 in 2014.

²¹ Poverty measures, using the "basic needs" poverty line agreed in the 1990's, has fallen from 14.2 percent at baseline in 2010 to 8.2% in 2014.

²² Pham Quang Hao (2013). Report on the Review of P135 Infrastructure Projects.

²³ For example, irrigation projects were found to provide water to double rice crops on 20 hectares of terraced rice fields which were used to have one crop fed by rain water. Besides one more crop of rice, local farmers are also able grow vegetables, maize, soybean for family use and for selling. Without the irrigation work, local farmers could produce only one rice crop annually (Pham Quang Hao, 2013).

“the creation of numerous jobs and cash income for farmers (through) manual works ... as well as income for local farmers, men and women alike, because they help local farmers to cultivate at least one more crop”.

Key informants on the Irish and Vietnamese side highlighted the **importance of the Programme 135 achievements in bringing about progress towards inclusive economic growth**, as more marginalized communities are lifted out of poverty and able to participate in the country’s economic development.

Regular audit and evaluation work of Programme 135 has also ensured that challenges with the implementation of community projects are identified and addressed as part of the regular dialogue and coordination with the Committee for Ethnic Minority Affairs (CEMA), the main partner in the Vietnamese government.²⁴

The support to Programme 135 has brought about **strong community involvement, linkages and synergies with other Irish Aid CSO activities, increased participation and empowerment of women, and emerging government commitment to providing funding at decentralized levels**. Capacity building of the direct implementing partner (CEMA) has been an important contributing factor. Over 60 CEMA staff were trained on anthropological approaches to development which has led to enhanced planning and implementation and to a formal adoption of the approach by CEMA in 2014²⁵.

Key Finding 9: Programme 135 has contributed to significant policy and institutional reform.

Documentary evidence and interviews show that the involvement of Irish Aid in Programme 135 has contributed to significant policy and institutional reforms. This has included increasing the resources and capacity for local level participatory planning, putting in place better systems for procurement and financial management at national and decentralized levels, and strengthening approaches to improving school and educational quality.²⁶

At a general level, there is clear evidence from this evaluation and the secondary data that **the CSP focus on ethnic minorities has helped maintain poverty and exclusion on the national agenda**. The programme helped achieve this by calling for the establishment of an Ethnic Minorities Working Group, which Irish Aid has been successfully co-chairing with UNDP. This platform helped leverage support from other donors and has worked with the Government of Vietnam to adopt a set of concrete actions on ethnic minority poverty reduction at the 2013 Vietnam Development Partnership Forum. It also continues to inform thinking about future priorities.

It is relevant in this context to note that in the future CEMA would like to see a stronger focus on gender and on climate change as part of P135. Interview evidence highlighted that Ireland’s support to P135, and its broader participation in dialogue structures, has contributed to Ireland being seen as a development partner that is firmly committed to poverty, ethnic minorities and disability.

²⁴ For example, in one case a community project failed to use technologies that were appropriate to the context which resulted in environmental damage. According to interviews by this evaluation, Irish Aid has sought to incorporate the lessons from such experience in future programming.

²⁵ Irish Aid (2016), Vietnam Results Mapping Report.

²⁶ Interview evidence, and Embassy of Ireland Annual report 2015.

Key Finding 10: Unanticipated results of P135-Ireland's continued support to P135 helped leverage additional resources for P135

Ireland continued to support P135 after 2010 when other donors decided to exit. This allowed the P135 programme to continue to contribute to poverty reduction and to renewed interest and commitment by other donors for supporting P135. Ireland was thus credited in interviews with having leveraged additional resources for P135 through its positive engagement with donors who subsequently decided to support the Programme.

Key Finding 11: Ireland's work with the Committee for Ethnic Minority Affairs has strengthened the standing of CEMA within government

There was also evidence from interviews that Ireland's continued support to the Committee for Ethnic Minority Affairs has strengthened the **standing of CEMA within government** and enhanced the level of recognition by the Government of issues that contribute to marginalization of ethnic minorities. The Vietnamese government accords a high level of priority to the relationship with Ireland, through its continued engagement with P135. This is perhaps best illustrated by the fact that CEMA conducted a self-financed visit to Ireland in 2015 to learn from the Irish experience of dealing with marginalised and excluded groups²⁷.

The Poverty Reduction Policies and Programme Project (PRPP):

In tandem with the P135 programme, Irish Aid has supported **the Poverty Reduction Policies and Programme Project (PRPP)** implemented by UNDP, which has focussed on strengthening capacity to implement poverty reduction strategies at local level through training, capacity building and technical support.

Key Finding 12: There have been positive synergies between PRPP and Programme 135.

The PRPP covered many of the same provinces where Irish Aid has supported P135 projects. The evaluation established that working across both programmes provided a holistic approach to addressing ethnic minority poverty. However, the project has faced some challenges in coordination which have been significant obstacles to the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of the programme. The final evaluation of PRPP is still outstanding and, therefore, its contribution to poverty reduction

²⁷ The delegation sought to learn about Ireland's experience in addressing poverty reduction in marginalized communities such as the Travelling community and the Roma community and to learn about the preservation of the national language and the protection of and access to Irish culture, heritage and resources. An Aide Memoire was signed by the CEMA Minister and Irish Aid's Director General (Embassy of Ireland Annual report 2015).

cannot be fully captured at present. Sustainability so far is not guaranteed as the level of replication of innovation projects has been low.²⁸

The project was less successful at bringing about stronger linkages with the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA) and thus **did not provide the policy influencing entry point that Ireland had anticipated**. Both Irish Aid and UNDP expressed to the evaluation team that, with hindsight, there should

Findings of Independent Evaluation of PRPP

1. Moderately successful in bringing about a positive trend in participatory planning at commune level.
2. Contributed to building capacity (some results hard to see given the small scale and spread over a large area).
3. Successful in supporting strategic decision-making on policy reduction policies in Vietnam.
4. Has gone some way to increasing transparency and accountability.

Box 2: Key Achievements Of The Vietnam CSP 2011-2015

have been more clarity on these additional expected outcomes at the outset, and on the level of involvement and engagement of Irish Aid in the project management.

5.2.2 The Vietnam Civil Society Fund (VCSF)

Support to the VCSF started in 2007 and continued under this CSP. It had the overall objective of strengthening engagement of CSOs in poverty issues and policy formulation, and promoting acceptance and empowerment of people with disabilities, by increasing their social and economic integration. Over the evaluation period, the VCSF has provided between 12-15 grants per year on a competitive basis with a focus on three themes, namely: local governance, disability, and capacity building.²⁹

The independent evaluation of the VCSF³⁰ established that the **VCSF has been largely successful on many counts** and that support to

The Vietnam Civil Society Fund

This evaluation found that the capacity of CSOs to engage in policy dialogue with government has improved over the CSP period, evidenced by the following:

- The number of policy briefings/recommendations proposed by CSOs to Government rose from 4 at baseline to 43 (cumulative) in 2015.
- The number of recommendations introduced by VCSF grantees to local authorities increased from 5 at baseline to 48 (cumulative) in 2015.
- Vietnamese NGOs actively lobbied for the amendment of Decree 93 on the Utilisation and Management of INGO funding.

Box 3: The Vietnam Civil Society Fund

CSOs has resulted in some positive outcomes for increased community participation in local planning and increased livelihoods for persons living with a disability (see Box 3).

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Around two-thirds of overall funding 2011-2014 went to VNGOs, with the proportion increasing over this period. Activities have been carried out in 26 of Vietnam's 63 provinces and cities, with a fairly even distribution throughout the country (Payne et al, 2015).

³⁰ Payne, D, Tran Nam Binh, Nghiem Ba Hung (2015). Strengthening the capacity of civil society organizations in Vietnam.

Key Finding 13: There is evidence that Ireland through the VSCF granting process, has increased the capacity of its CSO partners.

The evaluation interviews with the CSOs suggest that the granting process has increased capacity of the CSOs through a focus on organizational reviews, lesson learning, sharing of good practices and working with a consulting partner to support monitoring and provide a level of organizational support. The evaluation noted that the consulting partner was contracted by the embassy to ensure accountability compliance and regular monitoring of the grantee partners.

The perception of the utility of the consulting partner differed between the embassy and the VSCF partners themselves. The Embassy was largely happy with the level of accountability the consultants provided them with, but some of the partners did not see the value in using a consulting partner. Some of the VSCF partners informed the evaluation team that the exercise was very much a 'tick the box' and that the visit from the embassy staff were of more value to them in terms of providing technical support.

The independent evaluation of the VCSF found that key characteristics of Irish support have included:

“the combination of grants and capacity building assistance, Irish Aid’s nurturing approach and support for innovation, the opportunities for CSO networking and exchange, the flexibility and engagement of the Irish Aid team, the appropriateness of the VCSF objectives and focus areas, the opportunity to work regionally (for example with CSOs in Laos and Myanmar), the opportunity to engage in government programmes and the lack of micro-management or imposed agendas.”

Key Finding 14: Increased space for Civil Society.

The evaluation interviews supported the aforementioned independent evaluation which stated that while much of the VCSF impact is small in scale, it has still been significant in the context of Vietnam. **There is also consistent anecdotal evidence from the interviews by this evaluation team that there has been some increase in the space for and recognition of civil society.** A key example of this was the exchange visit of an LGBTI group to Ireland, which subsequently contributed to the removal of a prohibition on same sex marriage.

Challenges for the future:³¹

Challenges for the future include how to work at a larger scale (sub-granting via larger CSOs could reduce the burden for the Embassy of managing the smaller more time consuming projects) and beyond small pilots, and in order to encourage further learning on advocacy and lessons learning amongst CSOs and amongst regional networks.

³¹ Ibid.

Civil society groups expressed that they would like Irish Aid to involve them more with their central level work, and that Irish Aid is in a position to better link them to key decision makers. CSOs also expressed an interest in other aspects of Irish Aid’s work in Vietnam and at the global level.

5.2.3 IDEAS

IDEAS has consisted, as highlighted in Box 1 , of scholarships, high level exchange visits and twinning arrangements between Irish and Vietnamese institutions, and a collaboration with the Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VCCI).³²

Key Finding 15: IDEAS has contributed to building the capacity of Vietnamese government for policy making.

The evaluation found consistent evidence that the IDEAS programme, while not directly targeting poor Vietnamese, has, as intended, contributed to building the capacity of Vietnamese government for policy making, and has been essential to strengthening the relationship between Vietnam and Ireland and in promoting the aid and trade agendas of Ireland.³³

The findings and results (below) identified in the Phase 2 mapping report were verified by the evaluation team through interviews in Ireland and Vietnam.

- **Improved capacity of Vietnamese institutions** (Electricity Regulatory Authority of Vietnam (ERA), Vietnam’s National Financial Supervisory Commission (NFSC), National Centre for Socio-Economic Information and Forecast (NCSEIF)) through collaboration with Irish institutions including the Central Bank of Ireland, the Economic and Social Research Institute, and Electricity Supply Board International.
- Development of an **economic model** for medium-term economic forecasting by the NCSEIF.
- Establishment of a **financial model** with forecasting that integrates probability, risk and impact by the NFSC.
- **An increasing number of skilled Vietnamese** male and female scholars, with 105 scholarships awarded (2011-2015) to persons from influential public and private sector institutions.³⁴
- Establishment of an **Irish alumni association** in Vietnam, promoting Ireland as a higher level education destination and also contributing to a better understanding of Irish culture.
- **Increased private and public business exchanges between** Enterprise Ireland, Bord Bia, the Department of Education and Science, Higher Education Institutions and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine about the potential for trade with Vietnam (i.e. education, aviation and food and beverage).

³² This third component was largely unsuccessful and was discontinued (Payne et al., 2015).

³³ This was consistently mentioned by senior level decision makers across the various stakeholder groups.

³⁴ Vietnamese scholars have excelled at their studies in Ireland with an average GPA of 3.51 – all have been awarded honors degrees.

- **Increased opportunities for trade dialogue between Vietnam and Ireland**, which played a role in Vietnam recently opening its market to Irish pork meat imports.

Scholarships have been an important part of the IDEAS programme. The evaluation established that it may be too **early to expect an impact from fellows** because of the relatively short duration of the programme (the first graduates date back to 2010) and the fact that graduates typically return into middle management positions and will generally take time to be promoted to positions at a level to influence policy.³⁵ The review of IDEAS noted that the choice to focus on Masters in Business Administration (mainly) and some Masters in Science has been an expensive option and that there are opportunities, as highlighted by the Embassy and Government informants, to move **towards a co-funding model for the scholarships and to consider other courses for eligibility**.

5.2.4 Irish Aid's engagement with One-UN plan

The One UN Plan is the common programmatic framework for UN agencies in Vietnam. The One Plan sets out a joint programme of work for all UN agencies to support Vietnam in addressing its development priorities. The Plan has three focus areas: inclusive, equitable and sustainable growth; access to quality essential services and social protection; and enhanced governance and participation. The plan is partly donor supported, although this support has declined over the course of the plan due to the changing context in Vietnam.

Key Finding 16: The One-UN Plan largely delivered on its intended objectives, with questions arising around the sustained financing of the plan and the role of the UN in the rapidly changing Vietnamese context.

Irish Aid supported the second phase of the One-UN (2012-2016) plan through annual unearmarked contributions.³⁶ The main results achieved under the plan are as follows:

- Support to the drafting process of seven laws (on Environmental Protection, Local Governance, Civil Code and Civil Status, Family and Marriage Law)³⁷.
- Support to national dialogues: a) between persons with disabilities, CSOs, MOLISA and the National Assembly which led to the 2014 ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with disabilities; and b) between LGBTI groups who made recommendations which led to the removal of same sex marriage from the prohibited forms of marriage.³⁸

³⁵ Based on results from the Embassy of Ireland survey of IDEAS scholars which found that: "most of the alumni are working in mid-management level ... while few are working at strategic level of corporate to have contribution to policy development" (p.3).

³⁶ Ireland has been one of the largest in-country bi-lateral contributors to Delivering as One in Vietnam providing over €4.1 million of un-earmarked funds to the current the UN One Plan Fund (2012-2016) (Embassy of Ireland Annual Report, 2015).

³⁷ Indochina Research and Consulting (2015). Independent Mid-Term Evaluation (MTE).

³⁸ Arbulu, A, Lindström, J. Pham Quang Nam Le & Thi Mai Huong (2016).Independent Review of the One Plan (2012-2016) between the Government of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam and the United Nations in Viet Nam.

There is also evidence that the UN One Plan has delivered on its expected outcomes for better coordination between UN agencies. Evidence suggest that some efficiency gains have already been made and that gains can be expected from the closer planning and collaboration between UN agencies.³⁹

A key challenge has been the phasing out of Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) from Vietnam, and a corresponding reduction in interest and commitment for the One-Plan (the Plan is currently funded at 10% of the budget). This is compounded by challenges for the United Nations itself to reformulate its own role in the changing middle income Vietnamese context.

5.2.4 Multi-Country Engagement

The regional engagement has consisted of interventions in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Vietnam and Myanmar. The interventions aimed to contribute to the reduced vulnerability and increased resilience of marginalised groups through projects which focus on addressing under-nutrition, improving livelihoods and mine clearance.

Key Finding 17: The multi-country engagement delivered significant results (the below results from the Phase 2 mapping were verified by the evaluation team through a process of triangulation).

The results and outcomes from this engagement include.

- Irish Aid supported a pilot project where micronutrient powders (Bibomix) were locally, affordably and sustainably produced and reached a total of 24,000 children, to increase their nutritional intake. Given the pilot's success, **Vietnam's Ministry for Health endorsed micronutrient powders as a prevention method for micronutrient deficiency** and Bibomix has been introduced by the National Institution of Nutrition in Vietnam.
- Irish Aid supported Save the Children to deliver better Infant and Young Child Feeding counselling services to increase breastfeeding practices and reduce stunting in some remote ethnic minority areas. The results indicate that, in project areas, there was a **36 percent increase in the number of infants from 0-6 months being exclusively breastfed**.⁴⁰
- Irish Aid also supported UNICEF and Alive and Thrive to advocate for policy changes that encourage breastfeeding and promote women's rights. Most significant results include **changes to Vietnam's labour laws which now extend paid maternity leave from four to six months**. Advocacy efforts also resulted in the National Assembly **banning the advertisement of breast milk substitutes for infants from 6-24 months** and for complementary feeds for children under six months⁴¹.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Wirth, J. (2015). Review of Irish Aid's nutrition-related projects in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Lao PDR (2011-2014).

⁴¹ James Wirth, (2015), 'Review of Irish Aid's nutrition-related projects in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Lao PDR (2011-2014)', Ground Work LLC.

- Irish Aid support to demining across the region has resulted in the destruction of over 146,630 mines and unexploded ordnance in Laos and Vietnam and the destruction of over 11,581 explosive remnants of war in Cambodia. This has resulted in a **reduced number of explosive related casualties in the region**, clearance of land for agricultural use, poverty alleviation and the reduction of fear amongst communities, all of which has led to **increased livelihoods** in project areas⁴².
- Irish Aid support in Myanmar through the Livelihoods and Food Security Trust Fund and through the non-governmental organisation (NGO) METTA Development Foundation has resulted in **more sustainable livelihoods for farmers in project areas**. The support has contributed to 583 farmers benefiting from education on improved farming technologies and over 180,000 households in project areas benefiting from increased incomes and diversified and/or increased food consumption.

5.2.5 Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

Programmatic:

The Vietnam Country Programme has had some very positive gender equality outcomes. The programme's work has resulted in an increase in women's participation in village meetings, advocacy work that led to an increase of paid maternity leave from 4 to 6 months and the development of infant and young feeding safe spaces, to name but a few.

Key Finding 18: The CSP has resulted in some positive gender outcomes, however there is room for improvement for further advancing the gender equality agenda.

The evaluation found that there are limited gender sensitive indicators and limited collection and analysis of sex-disaggregated data⁴³, all of which limit reporting on possible gender outcomes. There are opportunities for the embassy and its partners to develop gender sensitive indicators to further capture and capitalize on the positive outcomes for women, men and children.

As evidenced by the evaluators' field visit, P135 and the work of CSO partners has led to the empowerment of women in some areas, for example, women self-identifying as being more confident to speak up in group meetings. Evidence from embassy interviews and CEMA interviews indicate that there is an increased appetite to work more closely on gender equality within the ethnic minority agenda. The embassy's future work on gender could be more strategic by having a greater women's empowerment and participation focus within the ethnic minority work. This would help further capitalize on some of the positive changes in gender dynamics at the community level.

⁴² Irish Aid (2015). Evaluation of Irish Aid Support to the Landmine and Unexploded Ordnance Clearance Programmes in Cambodia, Lao PDR and Vietnam for the period 2012 – 2015.

⁴³ Disaggregating target groups by sex and committing to the collection (where possible) of sex disaggregated data can help ensure that the programme is working to understand some of the barriers women and men face in access to services, opportunities, and alternative livelihoods.

In relation to the wider portfolio of work, there was a recognition from the Embassy that there may be room to mainstream gender equality across the political and trade portfolios of the Embassy's work. This is an area where headquarters (HQ) can provide some guidance.

Organisational:

It is evident from the evaluation interviews that there is a strong commitment from senior management to work on gender equality and women's empowerment issues, and this is a strength that can be utilised by the embassy.

In terms of organisational culture, there have been some awareness raising events in the embassy to promote staff thinking on gender. Interviews with staff highlight that there are varying degrees of knowledge and/or commitment to work on gender issues across the embassy's work. The embassy has a gender focal person. However, evidence suggests that the responsibility for gender mainstreaming lies with individuals rather than it being a responsibility of the whole team.

5.2.6 Policy influencing and knowledge transfer

Policy influencing and knowledge transfer have been interwoven into the interventions supported by Irish Aid as is clearly evidenced from the results and outcomes that have been presented above.

Key Finding 19: The evaluation found consistent evidence of influencing policy discussion and policy making in Vietnam (see text box below).

The evaluation team found that the combined elements of the CSP have allowed Ireland and its partners to play a crucial role in policy dialogue and knowledge transfer. This has played a strong role in contributing to the programme being more than just the sum of its parts.

Examples of policy influencing

- Ireland has carved out a niche area as the main champion and ‘go-to’ development partner on ethnic minority poverty in Vietnam.
- Ireland’s support to P135 has positively influenced the standing of CEMA and the level of attention to ethnic minority and disability issues by Government amongst the members of the Vietnam Development Policy Forum.
- NCSEIF capacity development has provided inputs in terms of studies on labour patterns and education and this has been fed into the drafting of the government’s new social and economic development plan.
- Policy influence in different sectors e.g. nutrition and reforms in legislation which has resulted in the establishment of spaces that allow women to breastfeed.

Examples of knowledge transfer

- Submission of research findings to international journals has put Vietnam in the international arena. Joint research has benefitted both sides of the partnership.
- Vietnamese scholars in Ireland have brought back to Vietnam an understanding of Irish culture and values.
- Exchange visits between Vietnam and Ireland have promoted cross learning both in the area of social protection and rights (e.g. learning visit from CEMA on ethnic minorities in Ireland and LGBTI exchange).

Box 4: Examples of Policy Influencing & Knowledge Transfer

The evaluation found that the below key characteristics of Irish support facilitated the high levels of influencing.

A strong focus on flexibility, both in terms of the guidance from the department to the Embassy, as well as in the way of working at local levels.
A decision to focus on areas where the previous CSP had highlighted added value. This is the cumulative results of a careful design and a strong understanding of where Ireland can contribute in highlighting agendas such as inequality and disability.
A consistent effort to feed experience from the local to the national level which has facilitated engagement in dialogue and has brought a better understanding of the challenges to central level decision makers.
Working with mix of modalities has allowed Irish Aid to use its reputation as a neutral partner and bring together different stakeholder groups.
A strong focus on a whole of Embassy approach which has seen, for example, Ambassadors conducting in-depth field work in remote areas and bringing high level Vietnamese officials along for exposure to the work and issues that Irish Aid is promoting.
Consistent messaging and a clear identification of priority agendas for Ireland, in particular ethnic minorities, poverty and disability, all of which are areas that Ireland is strongly associated with.

Box 5: Key Characteristics of Irish Aid Support

Through its commitment to these issues, both financially and intellectually, Ireland continues to be well placed to advance dialogue and influence other partners.

5.3 Effectiveness and Appropriateness of Mix of Modalities and Mix of Partners

The third evaluation question examined the effectiveness and appropriateness of the mix of aid instruments and mix of partners that were employed to achieve results under the CSP. The evaluation was asked to look at the flexibility to respond to opportunities as they arise as part of this question.

Summary of findings on mix of modalities and partners

- The CSP included a **well-considered mix and range of partners** and modalities, which complement each other to work in the delivery of planned results.
- By supporting civil society Ireland has sought to **build capacity**, open a broader space for dialogue and debate and enhance the civil society space.
- IDEAS has been of **high value**, leading to partnerships between Irish and Vietnamese institutions and playing a key role in high level access to Government.
- The regional engagement has had added value in terms of exposure, experience and working across different areas of engagement (political and development agendas).
- The evaluation identified some key characteristics that contributed to Ireland's successful engagement in Vietnam: neutrality, openness, working across different stakeholder groups, lesson learning and policy dialogue, working through a mix of modalities and partnerships, working across aid, trade and political agendas (the whole of Embassy approach), as well as consistent messaging and a clear identification of priority agendas.

The current CSP continued its engagement with a range of partners, working with Government at central level (through P135 and IDEAS); and at decentralized levels (through P135 and support to CSOs); with central government institutions on governance and economic forecasting (through IDEAS); and with the United Nations through support to the One-UN Plan and the PRPP.

The CSP has combined programmes which involved direct implementation management by the Embassy (IDEAS and the VCSF) with programmes for which funding is provided through other institutions by the Embassy (P135, the One-UN, PRPP, agreements with international NGOs such as Alive and Thrive for the nutrition work).

Key Finding 20: The CSP included a well-considered mix and range of partners and modalities which complement each other to work in the delivery of planned results.

The evaluation interviews and documentary evidence show that the CSP reflected a considered choice of partners which was well aligned with the objectives that Irish Aid set out to achieve. Engaging with Government has continued to be a strategic part of the portfolio aimed at further consolidating the relationship with government, and at influencing policies and priority setting.

The range of partners and mix of modalities allowed Irish Aid to make linkages between key stakeholder groups such as government, UN, civil society and other development partners.

Through IDEAS, the focus has been to respond to Vietnam's expressed interest in learning from the Irish economic and economic governance experience, as well as providing a vehicle to allow Ireland to engage on trade.

Support to the United Nations allowed Ireland to continue its commitment to the UN and to the reform processes that were targeted through the UN One Plan. It was also a critical part of the mix because at the time of the CSP design there was still a strong focus on harmonization and alignment among development partners.

In the choice of partners an effort was made to reduce the number of partners to a more manageable level at the start of the current CSP.⁴⁴

The Embassy has carefully monitored the choice of partners and of modalities in various ways, including through the MTR, annual reporting as well as through external evaluations of programme components. While no far-reaching decisions were taken in terms of changing course, the fact that these relationships have been carefully monitored means that the Embassy has a strong understanding of what has worked and what has not worked which can feed into the next CSP design.

The **Organizational Capacity Assessment (OCA)** which the Embassy introduced under this CSP aimed at ensuring that funding was provided only to strong and credible partners. The OCA was introduced to help identify areas that needed strengthening and is reported to have enhanced lesson learning on all sides.

The Irish support to strengthening CSO capacity has also, unexpectedly, enabled some of the Vietnamese CSO to obtain funding from other donors.

Box 6: Organisational Capacity Assessment

Key Finding 21: By supporting civil society Ireland has sought to build capacity, open a broader space for dialogue and debate and enhance the civil society space.

VCSF is one of two initiatives that is directly managed by the Embassy. Box 6 provides an example of some of the capacity building measures undertaken by the embassy in order to strengthen the role of CSOs.

In the case of the VCSF, a choice was also made to engage a consultancy company to support the selection of VCSF proposals and to build organizational capacity.

In feedback to the evaluation team, **there were differing views between embassy staff and CSO partners on the added value of the consultancy agency.** Embassy staff saw the agency as helping ensure they were monitoring projects effectively given the geographic spread and as a means of ensuring that compliance objectives were met⁴⁵.

The group of CSOs consulted by this evaluation had somewhat different views, some expressing that the intervention of the agency required inputs in terms of time and effort but that the results (including the reports) were of limited use to them and that there was little learning.

⁴⁴ A key issue that was raised by the 2010 CSP evaluation was that the Embassy was overstretched to engage with so many partners, and in particular for engaging with the large number of CSOs.

⁴⁵ However, the evaluation also noted from a review of the Terms of Reference of the consultancy company that these include tasks that extend beyond compliance objectives to strategic issues.

CSOs reported valuing Irish Aid field visits much more as Irish Aid staff asked the right questions and were able to make linkages to the overall programme. The evaluation also noted that the consultancy team itself does not represent a proper gender balance as it reportedly consists of an entirely male team.

Key Finding 22: IDEAS has been of **high value**, leading to partnerships between Irish and Vietnamese institutions and playing a key role in high level access to Government.

The other directly managed initiative has been IDEAS. **IDEAS has been low budget (excluding the scholarships⁴⁶) and has reportedly been of high value.⁴⁷** IDEAS has led to the establishment of partnerships between Irish and Vietnamese institutions and has generated considerable goodwill and understanding of Ireland in Vietnam and the values it stands for.

Interviewees consistently flagged that **IDEAS has played a key role in the high level access that Ireland has with Government of Vietnam** which is the source of some envy by other donors

who do not have the same level of access or of potential influence. Visits by senior Vietnamese officials to Ireland have, for example, informed discussion and debate in Parliament.

A potential challenge is that **some of the relationships, both on the Vietnamese and on the Irish side, have been the result of strong personal engagement**, which may run the risk that a relationship is not always institutionally sustainable⁴⁸.

Not all of the costs of IDEAS have been calculated, as the project budget does not include the considerable time invested by the Embassy and the Desk in establishing links between Vietnamese and Irish organizations and in organizing high level visits. It is the view of this evaluation that it is unlikely that this role can be effectively outsourced given the value of the direct engagement with the Government.

The other important finding of the IDEAS engagement which relates to the mix of partners is that **the level of capacity and/or the interest may not always be equal on both sides of the relationship**. This is illustrated by the fact that the ESRI and ESBI have both taken the decision not to continue their engagements and there are some reservations about continued work between Vietnam and the Central Bank of Ireland (CBI).

There was also a clear view, however, that the partnerships between Irish and Vietnamese institutions do not necessarily need to be continued over extended periods as long as they are guided by a prior definition of the expected outcomes and outputs of the engagement.

“There may be significant added value to engaging with different institutions for the Vietnamese side, as there is significant potential added value to the Irish institution of engaging with different countries in addition to Vietnam (Key Informant).”

⁴⁶ Scholarships have accounted for approximately 70 percent of the IDEAS budget (under component 1 of the project). Component 2 (Economic Management and Governance) has amounted to 280.000 Euros per year (Fitzpatrick, 2015).

⁴⁷ Interview evidence from interviews in Vietnam and Ireland with the full range of stakeholders that IDEAS has engaged with (see Annex 4).

⁴⁸ Dr Jim Fitzpatrick, (2015), ‘Review of Irish Aid Fellowship/scholarship programmes in Vietnam’. Fitzpatrick Associates Economic Consultants, Dublin.

Key Finding 23: The regional engagement has had added value in terms of exposure, experience and working across different areas of engagement (political and development agendas).

The evaluation found that the regional engagement has had a particular value for the CSP in different ways. It has provided an opportunity for learning from other contexts which has been of value to the Embassy team and to partners of Irish Aid such as the CSOs. It is also reported to have provided an opportunity for professional development of local staff and it has provided a way of working across different agendas – political, trade and development.

Key Finding 24: The evaluation identified some key characteristics that contributed to Ireland’s successful engagement in Vietnam, in particular around policy dialogue.

An important form of engagement has been the Irish involvement in **dialogue fora** and **working groups**. This has included participation in the Vietnam Development Policy Forum and using this group as a forum to highlight the issues around ethnic minorities and poverty; active participation in (and currently as co-chair) of the working group on ethnic minority poverty with Government; participation in the informal Ambassador’s group as a forum for drawing attention to ethnic minority poverty issues (including to disability) which has also served as a platform for dialogue with the government; joining the local trade officers’ group as well as the education and scholarship group.

The view of key stakeholders is that the **engagement across different partners and through different modalities has allowed Irish**

Aid to continue to “punch above its weight” – a characteristic that was also noted in the 2010 CSP evaluation. The evaluation team found that this is not only the result of the choice of partners and modalities but also of a number of key characteristics of the Irish engagement which are highlighted in Box 7, and which are further elaborated on in Section 6.4 below.

- “Irish Aid have a strong sense of who they are and what they represent and where they fit. They promote strong Irish values with a strong partnership approach. This makes Ireland stand out from other development partners”
- “National staff are well able to articulate Irish value added.”
- “The embassy over the years has had staff with different levels of development experience, some more experienced than others. However, the quality of staff (especially current) has helped leverage Ireland’s interest and work.”
- “Irish Aid have good transparency with government, they can often do more work with civil society with less sensitivities than there is with other donors. For example; raising voices on the ground.”

Box 7: Feedback on Irish Added Value

5.4 Coherence and Effectiveness of the Whole of Embassy Approach Across Development Cooperation, Trade and Political Objectives.

The final evaluation question looked at the coherence and effectiveness of the whole of embassy approach in fostering synergies, complementarities and coherence between Ireland's development cooperation, trade and political objectives in Vietnam and for broader development outcomes.

Summary of findings on the Whole of Embassy Approach

- The whole of Embassy approach has contributed to further cementing the relationship with the Vietnamese government, to enhancing the visibility of Ireland in Vietnam, opening up trade relations, and to consolidating linkages between Vietnamese and Irish institutions.
- Challenges include potentially conflicting agendas across different government departments as illustrated by the promotion of infant formula through the trade relations and promoting breast feeding to address malnutrition on the aid side.
- The whole of embassy approach has been effective as a result of the high calibre and mix of skills of international and national staff, coupled with staff working fluidly across different areas.
- Other factors that contributed to the whole of embassy approach include: revision of staff functions and job descriptions, introduction of Senior Management Group meetings and other internal structures, the development of a communication strategy, more integrated business planning and a more integrated Embassy annual report in 2015.

The “All of Government Approach” as outlined in “One World, One Future”⁴⁹, aims to promote a more coherent approach to delivering on Ireland's development, political, trade and economic relations in partner countries. It seeks to engage departments across government in the development programme, by putting greater focus on using Irish institutional experience to add value and visibility and build relationships.

In Vietnam the whole of Embassy approach pre-dates the approval of One World One Future, having started taking form under the previous CSP. The 2010 CSP evaluation specifically highlighted how the “interaction and synergies between diplomatic and development sections of the Embassy have contributed to ... strong performance”.⁵⁰

Key Finding 25: The whole of Embassy approach has contributed to further cementing the relationship with the Vietnamese government, to enhancing the visibility of Ireland in Vietnam, opening up trade relations, and to consolidating linkages between Vietnamese and Irish institutions.

⁴⁹ Government of Ireland (2012). One World, One Future. Ireland's Policy for International Development.

⁵⁰ Visser-Valfrey, M., Minford, M. & D. Cronin (2010). Evaluation of the Irish Aid Country Strategy in Vietnam. Mokoro, p. 23

The IDEAS programme has been the embodiment of the whole of Embassy approach in working across the development cooperation and trade and political areas of the Embassy. It is also aligned with the priorities of Ireland’s Africa Strategy where cross-departmental input is envisioned as part of a whole of Government involvement in the aid programme.

IDEAS explicitly responded to the view that in emerging middle income countries the importance of the financial transfer in ODA diminishes and the importance of the transfer of knowledge increases.

Interview and documentary evidence collected by this evaluation highlight that the whole of Embassy approach has been critical in the following ways:

- Beginning to **open up areas of trade between Ireland and Vietnam**. These have seen a modest but important increase (the value of exports from Ireland approximately doubled between 2009 and 2013 – from €75 million to just under €140 million)⁵¹. As noted earlier in this report, the Embassy’s good relations with Vietnam through IDEAS and other programmes have contributed to this although no direct link can be established.⁵²
- **Enhancing the visibility of Ireland in Vietnam**. There is evidence of increased interest and level of enquiry about Ireland. Scholarships, but also media engagement and promotion events, have been critical to this.
- Developing **institutional linkages between Irish and Vietnamese institutions** involving government and other public sector institutions as well as the private sector. This has been a key focus of IDEAS.
- Gradually **working towards a more mature relationship where Irish skills and technology are accessed through cost sharing** e.g. in the future with scholarships, as well as in other institutional relationships.

Key Finding 26: The whole of Embassy approach is challenged by conflicting agendas across different government departments as illustrated by the promotion of infant formula through the trade relations and promoting breast feeding to address malnutrition on the aid side.

The evaluation also identified potential challenges to coherence, in particular, in reconciling trade and aid agendas. Under the aid programme, one of the key regional interventions has been the focus on nutrition and, in particular, on promoting breast feeding. This is an important regional agenda and also a key international agenda that Irish Aid engages in through its Hunger agenda and its support to the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) movement. Important progress both in terms of policy and breast feeding rates have been achieved during the CSP.

However, as part of its trade portfolio, the Irish Embassy has also been supporting a developing trade relationship between Vietnam and Ireland involving dairy products, which has included an agreement signed between Kerry and Anova Milk for the marketing of infant formula (“ANKA Milk”). The Embassy

⁵¹ Fitzpatrick Associates (2016). IDEAS Programme Vietnam - Main Achievements.

⁵² Ibid.

has supported the establishing of trade relations in this area. But there is clearly potential for tension between this trade engagement and the Embassy's aid focus on breastfeeding.⁵³

The Embassy acknowledges this and has sought to highlight the importance of breastfeeding, and to call attention to Vietnam's legislation and laws on advertising in a speech at the press conference launching ANKA Milk's traceability system in August 2015. However, there is room for being more explicit in the annual reporting on the challenges of reconciling these two agendas, for making more explicit how the Embassy has sought to address these contradictions and for making the trade partners aware of the work that Ireland does on the development side.

Key Finding 27: The evaluation identified a number of key factors that contributed to the effective implementation of the Whole of Embassy Approach.

A number of factors were identified through the evaluation interviews and review of documentary evidence by the evaluation team as having contributed to making the Whole of Embassy approach function.

- **Explicit recognition at senior department level that Vietnam is at a different stage of development compared to other of Ireland's Key Partner Countries**, that the relationship is evolving and that this requires a differentiated approach. This recognition has given the Embassy the latitude to consolidate the gains that were made during the earlier period and to be an early adopter and experimenter with the Whole of Embassy approach.
- **Strong calibre and staff capacity (national and international) with the ability to work across different areas, as well as forward thinking about staff development.** Individuals are critically important for change processes. The specific personalities in key positions have also played a role. The fact that staff have the capacity to flexibly work across different areas and are willing to do so has clearly been essential. Revised terms of reference and titles have helped keep the job attractive and retain staff. Staff members all work across the different areas, in some cases dividing equal amounts of time between aid and trade (this includes heads of programme as well as the head of development). Having the mixed roles has contributed to making the linkages between the different areas of work more explicit.⁵⁴
- **Using the regional engagement as an incentive and learning opportunity for both local and international staff.** This was reported to have provided a professional incentive and to have helped retain staff who might otherwise have looked for other opportunities.
- **Formalization of structures to enable working and efficient decision-making across the different areas the Embassy, and to ensure a smooth flow of communication as well as adequate attention to risk management.** This has included:

⁵³ It should be noted that OECD/DAC has produced guidelines on this issue which can be found at: <http://www.oecd.org/pcd/50461952.pdf>.

⁵⁴ A staff survey as part of the MTR indicated how staff divide their time across the Embassy's Business Plan goals. It was noted that the promotion of Ireland's economic interests is seen as the primary and second most important work task for 9 of the 13 Embassy staff. This demonstrates a high level of understanding of the Department's overall priorities.

- I. Establishment of the Senior Management Group (SMG): The SMG advises and supports the Head of Mission in providing effective leadership and ensuring coherent and effective delivery of the results in both the Annual Business Plan and the CSP.
 - II. Quarterly programme management meetings provide a specific opportunity to review progress in development cooperation and budgets as well as risk management as well as any necessary planning revisions.
 - III. Annual planning workshops as well as periodic thematic meetings which are open to all staff and provide an opportunity to discuss current issues.
- **Strong management skills** have been a key factor in ensuring that the different sections of the Embassy work together and that lines of responsibility and accountability are clear. Interviewees highlighted that this has clearly also been important in lesson learning from the aid, political and trade elements of the portfolio.
 - **The annual business plan has underpinned the whole of embassy approach.** The annual business planning process has been carefully organised and documented, has involved all staff planning together for all the embassy's areas of activity together and the plan itself has been used as a "live" management tool throughout the year, strengthening the whole of embassy approach.
 - **One report for all of the Embassy activities.** The Whole of Embassy approach has been reflected for the first time in the 2015 Annual Report which presents an overview of all activities of the Embassy, including the development cooperation programme.
 - **Ensuring that promotion of Ireland is mainstreamed and institutionalised across all areas of the Embassy's work.** Promotion of Ireland has been an integral part of the Embassy business plan which uses the Irish Aid programme as a key tool and resource for this. The approach has included having a specific Embassy focal point (a local staff member) who is responsible for visibility and promotion within the Embassy. It has also included training of staff on promotion work. The Embassy has secured budget allocations for promotional activities in order to be able to implement activities in a more programmatic manner and has been drawing on its own existing sources.
 - **Developing a communication strategy about Ireland's work in Vietnam "Ireland in Vietnam – Visibility and Communication Plan".** The document identifies concrete strategies for enhancing visibility as well as key messages, including the 'origin green' initiative, use of media, Facebook and Ministerial visits, and fostering an Alumni network (now more than 150 members).

Challenges

While these are all positive developments, it was highlighted through the interviews that they require strong institutional commitment to be sustained. A challenge in this context has been that while the CSP provided a framework for a broader focus on trade, it **did not provide the financial means for funding some of the key activities**. As a result, effort had to be spent securing funds from other budget lines at HQ for key activities related to the promotion of trade with Ireland.

Another area that the evaluation team noted which will require attention is that of human resource allocation. The 2010 evaluation had noted that staff were stretched to cover the broad range of activities that the Embassy was engaging in at the time. For the period under review by this evaluation, informants from the Embassy stated the balance has improved but that resources are still stretched.

It was clear from the evaluation interviews that **a lot hinges on strong staff, sufficient staff time and continuity as well as staff retention** and that it will be key that institutional commitment and efforts are made to maintain the same high calibre and level of staff. This is the case, for example, with the junior professional intern post on the Vietnam Desk at HQ level, which was consistently credited in interviews as having played a critical role in the linkages between the Embassy and the Desk.

6. Conclusions

- **The CSP was strongly relevant and continued to be so during the CSP implementation period.**

A careful CSP design, based on lessons learnt from the first CSP and a thorough process of analysis, ensured that the choices that were made were highly relevant not only to the priorities of the Irish Government and the Vietnamese Government, but to those of the Vietnamese people.

These included promoting a more open society with a stronger human rights base. It was highly relevant in the rapidly changing context of Vietnam to continue to engage with a mix of partners and to combine national level engagement with practical implementation on the ground.

The strong CSP design ensured that relatively few changes had to be made during implementation, and even with the introduction of the new Irish development policy, the CSP continued to be relevant. The regional programme, which took form during implementation, was relevant to the overall mandate of the Embassy including the political agenda, but also fits well with the poverty focus of the development cooperation programme.

It has also been very relevant to the whole of Embassy approach (bringing political and development work together) and linking to wider department priorities (e.g. political, security).

The CSP was less relevant to the Embassy in guiding implementation because of its high level of detail and the changing context. It also did not specifically guide the Embassy in integrating gender, climate change and human rights in its approach.

- **The CSP has been very effective, meeting many of its targets and, in a number of areas, performing beyond what was planned.**

Some interventions have been more effective than others. Through P135 Ireland has contributed effectively to increased living standards for ethnic minority groups, where there have been improvements in livelihoods and enhanced income. It has also effectively influenced Government commitment to ethnic minorities, as well as donor priority setting in this area.

The VCSF contributed to enhancing community involvement, capacity development of CSOs and improved livelihoods / employment for persons with disabilities. The regional nutrition and demining activities have had direct benefits for poor people in the region.

IDEAS, while not directly focussed on poverty reduction, has contributed to building the capacity of Vietnamese government for pro-poor policy making and has been essential to strengthening engagement with the Vietnamese government and consolidating Ireland's relationship with Vietnam, including in emerging areas of trade.

The partnership with UN has delivered on some results. However, expectations around access to policy dialogue were less well met. Changes in the Vietnam context have meant that aspects of the UN One Plan are less realistic and relevant to the context.

- **Throughout the CSP, there have been a number of unanticipated results and outcomes.**

The evaluation found evidence of a number of unanticipated results which have contributed to the CSP being more than the sum of its parts. This has included the introduction of new initiatives such as the Vietnam Ireland Bilateral Education Exchange (VIBE), influencing of other donors in terms of priority setting (e.g. World Bank returned to funding P135) as well as policy influence across a range of sectors including nutrition, macroeconomic planning and funding for ethnic minorities.

The CSP has also successfully brought about closer contact between the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, other Irish Government Departments and Irish institutions. However, incentives for engagement have not always been clearly identifiable.

- **The evaluation identified a number of enabling factors in the Irish support that have contributed to policy influencing and knowledge sharing but also to results across the portfolio.**

The enabling factors include: flexibility in terms of approach; a focus on areas of Irish added value; linking experience from local to national levels as an input into dialogue; working through a mix of modalities and partnerships; working across aid, trade and political agendas (the whole of Embassy approach); as well as consistent messaging and a clear identification of priority agendas, including with respect to Ireland and Irish values.

- **Progress has been made in terms of addressing gender equality in the programme, but results have not been consistently monitored and captured.**

The CSP has had some positive results on reducing gender inequalities, but has limited gender sensitive indicators and sex-disaggregated data. There have been some challenges in integrating gender across the wider embassy activities and around the more complex gender issues. There is a strong commitment and appetite from senior management to work on gender equality, creating a strong enabling environment for engaging in future work on gender equality.

- **The CSP has also clearly added-value and has been cost-effective in delivering results.**

With an annual budget of €12 million the CSP has leveraged more-than-expected results and considerable influence, with a relatively modest budget. The CSP engaged strategically across a range of partners and has sought to consolidate relationships and effectively created synergies.

Ireland has leveraged funding from other donors for key poverty related priorities very effectively, as was illustrated by the P135 examples.

IDEAS continues to be very innovative with a little money going a long way, although challenges in terms of incentives and human resources capacity on Irish institutions' side will need to be given consideration in any plans for expanding IDEAS.

The VCSF has become more streamlined, gradually focussing more on Vietnamese CSOs. There is room to think about working with fewer partners and bigger grants to enhance the advocacy work and for integrating the CSO work better with other areas of engagement of the country strategy.

- **The CSP choice of modalities and partners has generally been very effective.**

The CSP built on the prior experience of working across a range of partners, bringing together local and national level work, and enhanced this with engagement in regional activities. There have been positive results from the engagement with other departments in Ireland and with other institutions.

Some challenges have related to the intensive time and human resource investment in specific parts of the portfolio – such as VCSF and IDEAS. In other areas, synergies have clearly been present, with both international and local staff working across the aid and trade areas, in a manner that has contributed to promoting a stronger understanding of Ireland and producing an efficient integration of work.

Throughout the period, Ireland has continued to have a lot of influence for a small donor. Ireland continued to build a strong and respected relationship with the Government of Vietnam over the CSP period. Ireland's decision to continue to support P135 when other donors left has been critical in cementing the relationship with Government. P135 continues to be a strong banner for the priorities that Irish Aid seeks to promote.

Ireland is generally perceived as having punched above its weight. In the view of this evaluation team this is a particular achievement in the fast changing context and it contrasts with the challenges that some other development partners have had in adjusting their programmes.

- **The CSP has developed strong synergies between the various areas of work of the Embassy in Hanoi. It has become a very practical example of the Whole of Embassy Approach and provides a firm basis for continued work along this line.**

Considerable work has gone into this from the management staff – how to keep staff motivated, how to create new incentives and ideas; and a clear brief from HQ contributed to the successful implementation of the Whole of Embassy Approach.

The Vietnam experience represents a valuable opportunity for the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to learn from the experience in Vietnam in terms of what can be achieved as well as in drawing attention to some of the challenges related to resources, staffing and potentially conflicting agendas.

- **The CSP has been strong in lesson learning during implementation with some adjustments made based on experience.**

The monitoring of the relationship with various partners during CSP implementation means that the Embassy is in a strong position to assess what relationships can work well in the next strategy which will be a Whole of Embassy Strategy for the South East Asia region.

7. Issues for Consideration

7.1 Future Strategy

1. The next strategy should be based on a longer term vision of Ireland’s engagement in Vietnam which encompasses the whole of Embassy approach.

It should provide strong guidance on strategy, but be light in detailed programming. The lighter approach will allow for more flexibility in such a dynamic and fast changing context. The next strategy should include funding instruments that correspond to the broader trade and aid mandate.

(Target: Embassy)

2. The next strategy should consolidate the work in the areas that have been successful – ethnic minority poverty reduction, civil society support, IDEAS, and the multi-country component, rather than taking on new areas.

In the lower middle income country context of Vietnam, continued engagement with the dual agendas of poverty reduction and inclusive economic development continues to be relevant to the priorities of the country, as well as to Ireland’s policy priorities. Areas of work and partnerships that were shown by this evaluation to have been less successful should be reconsidered, in favour of a more concentrated programme.

(Target: Embassy)

3. The Embassy should consider carrying out a follow-up piece of evaluative work of P135 to cover the period from 2013-2016, in conjunction with the Government of Vietnam and other stakeholders.

The evaluation should take a broad view on ethnic minority poverty and provide recommendations on strategic and funding priorities for the Embassy moving forward.

(Target: Embassy)

4. The next strategy should consider further streamlining the VCSF and making the grants more strategic.

This could include more focus on Vietnamese CSOs. The option of using Vietnamese CSOs for onward granting should be considered as this would enable the embassy to reach more organisations. Strategies should be sought to make the VCSF grants more strategic, including by better integrating the advocacy work by CSOs with the priority areas of focus of the portfolio and by providing core funding to certain CSOs.

(Target: Embassy)

5. The Embassy should review the engagement with the external consultant under the VCSF in light of the findings of this evaluation, with a focus on reducing the burden on CSOs and enhancing the understanding of the consultant’s role and the relevance of the support provided.

This should include reviewing the terms of reference for engagement with the external consultant and a clarity about the roles that the Embassy itself will need to have, including the human resource implications of this.

(Target: Embassy)

6. The Embassy and HQ should consider commissioning a study to look at the options and modalities for IDEAS.

IDEAS has been a key element of the Whole of Embassy approach. However, the experience has also shown that partnerships between Vietnamese and Irish institutions may need to be based on a more explicit up front dialogue and agreement about the nature of the relationship and the expectations in terms of inputs, outputs and outcomes. Consideration should also be given to looking beyond the currently involved Irish institutions.

Moving forward into a new Strategy, opportunities to move towards a co-funding model for the scholarships elements should be considered as well as adding to the list of courses eligible for scholarships beyond the currently-funded Masters in Business Administration and MScs.

Expanding the number of countries that are engaging with Irish institutions would provide a more diverse pool of experiences for the Irish institutions but would put a heavier burden on the Department in terms of management and on Irish institutions in terms of demands on their time and resources. Should the Department consider replicating elements of IDEAS in other countries, the evaluation team’s findings suggest that it should commission a study that looks specifically at the options and modalities for doing so, at strategies for managing expectations, and at the resources that are needed to do so.

(Target: Embassy and HQ)

7. The next strategy should continue its multi-country engagement as it is relevant from both the political and aid perspective.

The regional engagement has provided Ireland with exposure, with experience and has allowed Ireland to further its aid agenda. It has also given Vietnamese counterparts an opportunity to engage in the region. However, given the limited budget it would make sense to continue the engagement as a series of interventions – focussed on the themes of demining and nutrition (given their success) – rather than trying to develop a fully-fledged regional programme which runs the risk of becoming managerially heavy.

(Target: Embassy)

8. The Embassy should consider conducting a gender audit of the Embassy and including the recommendations from this audit in the planning, implementation and monitoring of the next strategy.

There are opportunities for the embassy to strengthen their work on gender equality. The next Strategy should continue its efforts to mainstream gender using the key entry points (such as the Civil Society Facility, the work in nutrition). The Embassy's work on ethnic minority poverty could benefit from having more of focus on empowering women, with the possibility of making it a key objective of its work going forward.

The Embassy should identify in what specific areas its gender equality work can add value and bring this to the forefront in the different components of the portfolio. The Embassy should consider a formal engagement with a strong technical gender counterpart to ensure that the approach becomes more systematic and better mainstreamed across the portfolio

(Target: Embassy and HQ)

9. The Embassy and HQ when engaging with partners, should make sure that there is clarity at the outset on all aspects of expectations around each of the interventions.

Expectations should be made explicit and be discussed and include ways of communication, ways of working as well as expectations around the level and type of involvement of the Embassy in the management, monitoring and decision-making.

(Target: Embassy and HQ)

7.2 Whole of Embassy

10. The Embassy should be encouraged and supported in documenting the process of implementing the Whole of Embassy approach.

This should include an analysis of the processes and structures (and sharing some of the details of planning and structuring through annexes to the report), as well as a critical analysis of some of the challenges and implications.

The Embassy should continue to use the annual reporting to reflect the implementation of the Whole of Embassy approach, including in this potential challenges, highlighting – where relevant - how these have been dealt with.

(Target: Embassy and HQ)

11. HQ should provide means for the Embassy to continue its investment in human resources.

Implementation of a Whole of Embassy approach requires careful attention to structures and staffing. Working across political, trade and aid agendas in this manner requires a considerable investment in staffing – having people in the right place with clear understanding of their roles and with the capacity

to work across different areas. Leveraging this kind of relationship will need continued investment in human resources.

(Target: HQ)

12. The Department should consider a more explicit sharing of information and dialogue with other departments of the Irish Government and with the Irish businesses on the objectives and strategies of the aid programme in Vietnam, as part of the Whole of Embassy (Government) approach.

This could include written material on the aid programme developed for the purpose of sharing with the trade and economic partners, but also more explicit strategies of engagement, for example, through encouraging corporate social responsibility programmes.

(Target: HQ issue)

13. The Department should consider developing written guidance to support Embassies on dealing with potential conflicts between the aid and trade agendas (drawing on existing OECD DAC guidance).

This should draw on experience from Vietnam and other countries and provide guidance on how to monitor such issues. It may be worthwhile basing this guidance on dialogue with other likeminded countries who are also developing their programmes in a broader direction (Sweden, Finland, Netherlands, etc.) to bring in the experience from these programmes and to enhance joint learning.

(Target: HQ)

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List of Annexes

- A.** Vietnam Evaluation Plan
- B.** Vietnam Results Mapping Report
- C.** Vietnam Programme Spend
- D.** List of Interviewees
- E.** Vietnam MDG Report

Annexes can be found in separate document