

SOME NGOS/NPOS' CONTRIBUTIONS IN PROMOTING LIBRARY ACTIVITIES AT DISADVANTAGEOUS AREAS IN VIETNAM - AN ANALYTICAL STUDY

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Abstract: *This paper presents how some national and international NGOs/NPOs contribute to increase literacy and lifelong reading habits among the Vietnamese, especially school goers, by supporting and promoting school and community library activities through building and renovating libraries, providing books and training librarians. Results show that respondent NGOs/NPOs built and renovated around 750 libraries; and provided the participating libraries, mostly school libraries, with over two million books and non-book materials.*

Introduction

Libraries have been identified as one of the key elements for open access to information/knowledge, which is crucial to democratic information society development. "A library is an instrument of self education, a means of knowledge and factual information, a centre of intellectual recreations and a beacon of enlightenment that provides accumulated preserved knowledge of civilization which consequently enriches one's mental vision and dignifies his habit, behavior, character, taste, attitude, conduct and outlook on life" (Islam, 2004). Moreover, library services improve knowledge and skills for

positive productivity as a tool for national development. Consequently, besides institutional education, libraries have significant contributions in creating literate and lifelong learners.

Lifelong learning is the development of human potential through a continuously supportive process which stimulates and

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This is an abridged version of the one being approved to publish in the e-journal "Library Philosophy and Practice", University of Nebraska Lincoln (USA). The author would like to thank Prof. Mohammad Alam, Nguyễn Thị Minh Trung, M.A., and Dr. Anita C. Oblina for their valuable comments and advices during the writing of this version of the article.

empowers individuals to acquire all the knowledge, values, skills and understanding they will require throughout their lifetimes, and to apply them with confidence, creativity and enjoyment in all roles, circumstances, and environment. Libraries have contributed to support those who find reading more of a challenge, encouraging them to take their first steps towards reading for enjoyment through lifelong learning programs. The educational role of libraries in promoting lifelong learning has been emphasized by both UNESCO in its Manifest and IFLA (International Federation of Library Associations). IFLA even issued Guidelines for Information Literacy for Lifelong Learning in which it emphasizes that information literacy, including the possibility of access, search, use and evaluation of information, is a necessary pre-condition and a key factor for making lifelong reading culture in a society today.

Understanding the contributions of libraries in promoting lifelong learning as well as national development in general, many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and non-profit organizations (NPO) are working to enhance the role of libraries. Nowadays, numerous libraries are built and patronized by NGOs or NPOs throughout the world. NGOs and NPOs act as windows on applied knowledge and provide links to sources of information; therefore, these organizations are collaborating to provide essential services that revolve

around the creation, storage and dissemination of knowledge, and contribute to the development of lifelong learning.

NGOs/NPOs and Library Activities in Vietnam

The principle "people know, people discuss, people execute and people supervise" which has been repeatedly mentioned in documents and policies of the Communist Party of Vietnam reflects the wish of the Government to encourage every social organization and citizen to participate in formulating, implementing and monitoring policies. Private, nonprofit development organizations began to emerge in Vietnam following a 1993 decree on 'Science and Technology Associations'. The government at that time wanted to see what innovations could emerge in rural development through private initiatives. At the same time, a new agenda was emerging among international donors to support 'civil society organizations' such as development-oriented NGOs and NPOs. Indeed, there are many examples of good cooperation between Vietnamese NGOs and governmental structures especially at the local level (PRSP, 2000). According to the VUFO-NGO Resource Center –Vietnam, besides hundreds of National NGOs/NPOs, there are about 128 international NGOs (INGOs) working in Vietnam (*). Vietnamese NGOs, community based organizations and other groups emerging

(*) Available at
<http://www.ngocentre.org.vn/ingodirectory>

in Vietnam are active in various sectors. Many of them are concerned with development issues and providing services to poor and disadvantaged people.

According to the World Bank (2010), the dropout rate after fifth grade is almost 50% in Vietnam, especially in rural and mountainous area since most students cannot afford to attend secondary school or university. Hence, most of those students do not get the opportunity of lifelong learning due to the lack of libraries and information services. In such a situation, NGOs/NPOs in Vietnam are performing a crucial responsibility to continue informal education through providing various facilities in order to increase literacy and lifelong learning.

At present, the network of information agencies and libraries of Vietnam comes under the control of the State. It possesses a remarkably sophisticated library system in which more than 23,000 state funded libraries and over 25,000 people are working to provide different kinds of library services (National Library of Vietnam Report, 2009). The five major library systems in Vietnam are as follows:

- Public Library System, headed by the National Library of Vietnam, consists of 63 city and provincial libraries, 582 district libraries and nearly 7,000 commune and village libraries,
- Academic Library System: 353 libraries,
- School Library System: 17,459 libraries,

- Special Library System: 60 research libraries run by research institutes and 218 libraries and information centers under ministries and other governmental agencies, and

- Military Library System: 2,740 libraries and reading rooms.

Apart from those government funded library systems, there exist thousands of communities and private libraries, reading rooms, book stacks operating in various forms such as international information centers, boat libraries, communal cultural post offices, border posts, books cafés, etc. It should be noted that some of those are funded by national and international NGOs/NPOs through different types of library activities in order to increase lifelong reading habits. After April 2012, the Vietnamese government approved a draft law, stating: “Foreign individuals and organizations would have the right to establish libraries in the country” (Discussed at the 7th session of the National Assembly Standing Committee). It would be considered a milestone in the history of library sector in Vietnam.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to show how a number of NGOs and NPOs contribute to make literate and lifelong learners by building, renovating or patronizing libraries, providing books and other library resources, including training librarians throughout Vietnam. In this paper, the author explores the comprehensive insight of some NGOs/NPOs regarding school and

community library activities for increasing lifelong learners in Vietnam. The aims of this study are to show how NGOs/NPOs enhance lifelong reading habits of Vietnamese young generation through their library projects and to explore the impacts of NGOs/NPOs library activities in Vietnam.

Study Methodology

In order to get information for this paper, several methodologies have been used. Most of the NGOs/NPOs primary data was collected from VUFO-NGO Resource Center Vietnam and then from email questionnaires. The study questionnaire was sent to 21 selected NGOs/NPOs while 14 out of them responded. The response rate is 66.6%. After having the responses, the collected data has been analyzed. Four questions (SQs) guiding the study are:

SQ1. How many Libraries has your organization built/renovated in Vietnam?

SQ2. How many Books has your organization donated?

SQ3. How many Library personnel have been trained by your organization?

SQ4. What is the number of beneficiary of your library programs/activities?

Originality of Data and Limitations

Most of the data for this paper was collected from the respondent NGOs/NPOs while a small number of data was collected from the respondents' websites. Few respondents were unable to provide the exact number of beneficiary related to their library programs. It should be noted that the

author could not physically visit the areas where NGOs/NPOs work.

Results and Discussions

Geographic Location of Respondent NGOs/NPOs Library Activities/Programs

This figure shows the geographic location of where respondent NGOs/NPOs work. Among 8 regions listed, the Mekong Delta gets the most library activities/programs from respondent NGOs/NPOs (22%), followed by South Central Coast areas (5 respondents). 4 respondent NGOs/NPOs work at Northeast and North Central Coastal areas, being equal to the number of NGOs/NPOs working nationwide whereas no respondents are working in the Northwest part of the country.

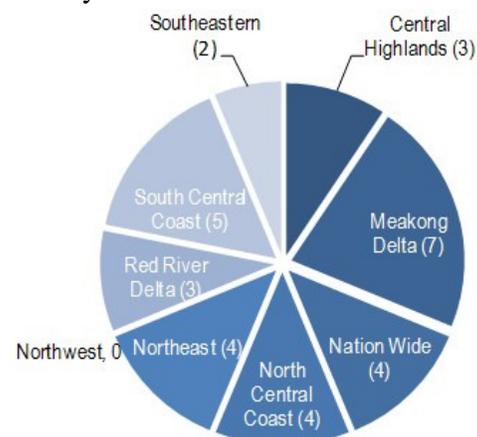


Figure 1: Geographical locations of respondent NGOs/NPOs library programs/activities (up to July, 2012).

Number of Libraries Established/Renovated by Respondent NGOs/NPOs

Table 1 shows that Room to Read (RtR), an INGO, established 667 school libraries, counting for about 90% of the

total libraries built/established, whereas AFK, HSBC Vietnam and SIFBW have special kind of library activities, namely Toy library, Audio library and Mobile library respectively. LVP, PTV and VDS have built new school and community libraries at several provinces such as HCMC, Quảng Ngãi, Quảng Trị, Thái Bình, Vĩnh Long and in Mekong delta.

Table 1: Number of Libraries Established/ Renovated by Respondent NGOs/NPOs

Name of NGOs/NPOs	Acronym	Type	YoE	Working areas	Total Library established/rebuilt
Room to Read	RtR	NGO	2001	Cần Thơ, Hồ Chí Minh City (HCMC), Long An, Thái Nguyên, Tiền Giang, Trà Vinh, Tuyên Quang, Vĩnh Long	667
The Library Project	RTR	NPO	2006	HCMC and Mekong Delta	17
Aid for Kids	TLP	NGO	2005	Hội An, Cù Lao Chàm and Cam Ranh	03 (1 toy library)
Peace Trees Vietnam	AFK	NGO	1995	Quảng Trị	12
Vietnam Fund for Education, Music and Infrastructure	PTV	NPO	2011	Kon Tum	11
Singapore International Foundation for a Better World	VFEMI	NPO	1994	Hanoi	01 (mobile library)
Vietnam Dream for Success	LVP	NGO	2001	Huế, Đà Nẵng and Ninh Bình	06
Highland Education Development Organization	VDS	NGO	1997	Cao Bằng, Gia Lai and Yên Bái	03
HSBC Vietnam's Future First program	HEDO	NGO	2011	Nation wide	01(Audio Book Library)
Library of Vietnam Project	SIFBW	NPO		HCMC, Quảng Ngãi, Quảng Trị, Kiên Giang, Thái Bình, Vĩnh Long	22

Number of Books Distributed by Respondent NGOs/NPOs

Books are the principal material of a library and obviously the main source of knowledge. Books of all kinds play a critical role in a child's development. Unfortunately, in many countries in Asia, most children do not have access to books beyond basic school textbooks. Having fun educational books available helps to encourage independent learning, intellectual curiosity, and a lifelong passion for reading.

HSBC has developed over 17,000 audio books for their Audio library through the HSBC Future First 2011 program in order to help the visually impaired people.

The role of librarians is currently changing from being that of "keeper of books" to "information specialist". School librarians nowadays are actively taking part in acquiring quality reading and learning materials, lesson planning and providing students with necessary information skills. "School libraries help

Table 2: Number of Books Distributed by Respondent NGOs/NPOs

Name of Organization	Acronym	YoE	Types	Working Areas	Total Books
Room to Read	RtR	2001	NGO	Cần Thơ, HCMC, Long An, Thái Nguyên, Tiền Giang, Trà Vinh, Tuyên Quang, Vĩnh Long	1,294,696
The Asia Foundation	TAF	1993	NGO	Countrywide	400,000
Global Village Foundation	GVF	2006	NPO	Hội An, Quảng Nam Province, Đà Nẵng	57,000
The Library and Education Assistance Foundation for Vietnam	LEAF-VN		NPO	Hanoi, HCMC, Huế, Vĩnh Phúc, Thanh Hóa	26,697*
The Library Project	TLP	2006	NPO	HCMC and Mekong Delta	2,000
Aid for Kid	AfK	2005	NGO	Hội An, Cù Lao Chàm, Cam Ranh	1,000
Good Books Educational and Cultural Project	GBECP	2007	NGO	Countrywide	10,150 (approx)

Table 2 shows that the RtR has distributed more than 1,000,000 books whereas the Asia Foundation, in its collaboration with such publishers as McGraw Hill, Pearson, etc., disseminated over 400,000 books.

teachers teach and children learn. Children and teachers need library resources - especially books - and the expertise of a librarian to succeed.

(*) The information is taken from the website www.leaf-vn.org.

Books, information technology and school librarians who are part of the schools' professional team are basic ingredients for student achievement” (Laura Bush ^(*)). It is estimated that in Vietnam, among nearly 25,000 employees working in information and library agencies, only about 3,275 graduates from professional training courses in information, library and documentation (NLV report, 2008).

Table 3: Number of Librarians Received Trainings by Respondent NGOs/NPOs

Name of the NGOs/NPOs	Total Trained Librarians
Aid for Kid	05
The Library Project	25
The Asia Foundation	385
The Library and Education Assistance Foundation for Vietnam	316

To overcome this professional shortage, some respondent NGOs/NPOs offered several training opportunities to the Vietnamese library professionals especially school librarians. In 2009, The Asia Foundation started a project, supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, to strengthen the public library institutions by creating a more welcoming and accessible library environment in select pilot sites in Thái Nguyên, Nghệ An, and Trà Vinh provinces. In cooperation with different

projects, they had trained about 400 librarians throughout the country by 2011. The LEAF-VN also arranged a number of trainings, workshops and seminars in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City related to DDC and LC classifications, AACR2, MARC21, development of Subject Heading List, etc. in order to share the modern and technical knowledge of librarianship with Vietnamese librarians.

Impact of NGOs/NPOs Library Programs in Vietnam

Research in the area of library programs and their impacts upon students' achievement has consistently shown the importance of libraries, especially school libraries, with an end in view to create lifelong learners. Voluntary reading helps develop reading skills and mastery of language; extends students knowledge; and assists them in their academic work. Students and youths who read are likely to have background knowledge, familiarity with new topics or subjects, and thus, find learning easier and interesting.

Mobile Library Project by Global Village Foundation (GVF) in Vietnam brings library facilities to rural areas. Each of their Portable Mobile Libraries (PML) is a portable wooden box containing 200 to 250 books; novels, comics, short stories, appropriate for the grade levels of the schools. After a few months, the mobile library got enormous response by the users. Consequently, the authority decided to extend its activities in Hội An city and Quảng Nam Province. The estimated beneficiaries,

^(*) Former First Lady of the US.

accordingly GVF, are more than 21,000 students.

Singapore International Foundation Mobile library (SIF) is the first mobile library (another name “Words on Wheels”) in Vietnam that not only brings books, educational games and toys, but also provide access to the Internet and multi-media facilities. *“The majority of the 27% of Vietnamese who use the Internet are located almost exclusively in the big cities. Words on Wheels, we hope, will help bridge the digital divide and inspire the young to a culture of reading and self-learning”* said Ms. Jean Tan, Executive Director of the SIF. By promoting a culture of reading and self-learning, SIF hopes that “Words on Wheels” will inspire the young towards brighter dreams for the future.

Vietnam Toy Library (VTL) began in Hội An by Aid for Kid (AfK) with support from the local government in 2007 and since then, it has offered books and other non-book materials to the children and general public in the area. Thanks to its lending policies, around 4,500 people to access books for education and enjoyment.

In 2001, in cooperation with the Mission Office of the Archdiocese of Washington, Sr. Cecilia Nguyen and the archdiocese, Vietnam Dream for Success (VDS) built and stocked the first full-size Lavang Library in the vicinity of Phú Cam Cathedral in Huế. In 2002, through the same Missionary Cooperation Plan, the second full-size

Lavang Library was built in the vicinity of Thanh Đức Parish in Đà Nẵng. In 2003, the third full-size Lavang Library was built in the vicinity of Phát Diệm Cathedral. Through individual donors, two Lavang Mission Libraries were established in the Diocese of Đà Nẵng in 2003, and one Lavang Mission Library was established in the Diocese of Huế in 2004. These libraries now provide reading resources to thousands of children, young adults, and adults in North and Central Vietnam.

Room to Read (RtR) built/renovated 667 school libraries, donated over 1,294,696 and printed 49 books for the participant school libraries while over 364,000 children are benefited towards lifelong learning (RtR annual Report, 2011). Moreover, in 2011, RtR Vietnam School Libraries program provided training to 52,160 participants that made substantial progress toward completing and distributing global guidelines on professional development for educators and school librarians.

Another respondent NGO, namely Highland Education Development Organization (HEDO), built one library for ethnic minority at Yên Bái Boarding High school which is being used by more than 1,500 ethnic students. Another 2 libraries were established for teacher training colleges in Cao Bằng and Gia Lai provinces where more than 2,300 beneficiaries can access them.

HSBC Vietnam developed over 17,000 copies of cassettes and computer discs to help the visually impaired people to

understand the surrounding world and to raise their knowledge through the products of the Audio Books such as the text books of all subjects from primary school to high school, reference books, literature, history and fundamental sciences through a program namely Future First Program. Those copies were distributed to Sight Impaired Associations (SIA) nationwide, serving a total 1.2 million people. Good Books Educational and Cultural Project (Sách Hay Project) was founded in 2007 and with more than 10,000 books shared and recommended by 30,000 readers/members, 200 experts, 60 publishers and 35 news outlets, GoodBooks.vn or SachHay.org is widely recognized as the largest book-sharing forum in Vietnam.

Library services already provide a comprehensive information service that gives a good coverage to employment, learning and skills, health, housing, childcare, tourism, travel, etc. But this is not enough to promote and disseminate lifelong learning services in Vietnam. Much more should be done to develop and formulate an 'information offer' in the same way libraries have developed a sophisticated 'reading offer' over the last decade. Librarians in Vietnam tend to focus only on those people who specifically request their services, rather than proactively reach out to the general public. In addition, though many Vietnamese librarians are well-trained in library sciences, they are not skilled enough to relate them with their clients and reach out to new groups in the community such as school dropouts,

pensioners, housewives, the unemployed, household businesses, and farmers. The fact that Vietnam's extensive public library system is seriously underused suggests a significant lack of public awareness about the system's resources and potential contributions. In order to overcome these all shortcomings, some respondent NGOs/NPOs such as The Asia Foundation, The LEAF-VN have arranged different trainings and workshops for Vietnamese librarians. Therefore, Vietnamese librarians have an ample opportunity to provide assistance to the development of library collections and to adequately support the learning, teaching and research functions of educational institutions in order to promote potential lifelong learners.

Conclusion and Brief Recommendation

Vietnam is facing major challenges in its efforts to get ready for the fast-approaching Development Goals, especially in education and technology. There is no doubt that libraries will be playing a very important role to this national endeavor. All effective school library programs are capable of producing an intended result of increasing students' achievement across the country in order to make good contributions to the national economic and educational development. Therefore, Vietnamese libraries should have the right tools to organize their collections for effective retrieval and exchange of knowledge. For such progress to occur, library standardization is crucial. As for Ogunsola (2011), "The development of

education may be said to be synonymous with the development of libraries and the library services within a given community. But libraries can only help about social development if and when the people within communities make regular use of them” (p.5). Until now, there has been no unified policy for the development of information and library personnel in Vietnam, and there lacks a coherent policy for the training of information and library staff, and the employment of these trained staff at the different levels. There is also no policy to encourage this group to use their capacities to the maximum. There is no official standard regulation for the running of libraries. Consequently, each library works autonomously.

In this regard, the NGOs/NPOs, especially INGOs/INPOs, can greatly contribute to develop a standard library and librarian policy in collaboration with the government and the Library Association of Vietnam. The government should encourage Library and Information Science (LIS) education by opening new LIS departments in the tertiary institutions throughout the country. Besides, more research should be done from gathering substantial data, evaluating theory and generating original arguments regarding a significant library and information management, and development issues. It is because without any doubt, how libraries and librarians nowadays are creative, informed and knowledgeable, etc. will be shaped by the boundaries of the contents of the library resources

available within their environments or organizations. Results from Room to Read (2011) show that students’ reading behavior positively relate to the presence of a full-time librarian, library support, parental support for reading and an emphasis on reading in teachers’ instruction. Moreover, government should encourage and collaborate with large INGOs/INPOs such as Action Aid, CARE, Oxfam, Plan International, UNICEF, etc. in promoting library projects to increase literacy and lifelong learners. In addition, the concerned authority should create some pre-conditional frameworks for either national or international NGOs/NPOs, for instance, they should work more or less for educational development, so at least one project for each is related to the development of library and librarianship activities throughout the country.

Similarly, the State may serve to ensure that NGOs/NPOs activities remain supportive of national objectives. The State's infrastructure resources and political power combined with the participatory strategies and specialized knowledge of NGOs/NPOs can make for a reliable development model. Thus, an improved communication between the State and non-governmental organization would promote NGOs’ and NPOs’ working conditions in Vietnam. On the other hand, NGOs/NPOs should keep training people to make them active and efficient. They should also be encouraged to seek local inputs into whatever they are doing for a community. Finally, education

development should be focused on lifelong learning through promoting library activities in order to make a literate, peaceful and prosperous Vietnam.

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